

Action Committee for Transit

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Navy's Bethesda Plans Yield Unnecessary Traffic Jams

The Navy's design for an expanded Bethesda Navy Hospital represents a monumental planning failure, the Action Committee for Transit charged today. According to the Environmental Impact Statement just released, transit usage at the facility will be sharply reduced while auto commuting will increase.

Ignoring the legal requirement to study alternatives with reduced environmental impacts, the Navy studied two alternatives that both add 1800 heavily subsidized parking spaces, far more than the 2200 new employees (many working weekends and shifts) and new hospital visitors will need. The Navy refused to analyze a no-added-parking alternative proposed by ACT and endorsed by the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Chamber of Commerce. "1800 and 1800 is not two alternatives," commented ACT Vice President Ben Ross. "This ignores the basic purpose of an EIS, which is to look at alternatives with less environmental impact."

According to the EIS (Appendix C, page 50), if new employees generate commuting and visitor trips at the same rate as existing Bethesda Naval employees, the proposed 2200 new employees would put 418 cars on the road during the most congested 60 minutes of the evening rush hour. The ACT proposal would further reduce this number by clustering buildings near Metro and making transit more accessible. But the EIS projects 921 auto trips during that hour - more than double the number generated by an equal number of current employees.

"The predicted BRAC transportation disaster is entirely avoidable," Ross commented. "The Navy needs to bring its transportation planning into the 21st century."