

Testimony for the MTA Hearing on
the Proposed Changes to the ICC commuter bus routes
June 6, 2013

My name is Ilaya Hopkins. I am a residential representative on the Western Montgomery County Citizens Advisory Board and Chair the Walter Reed BRAC Integration Committee and am here representing those groups. For six years, we have been working on ways to mitigate the traffic impact of BRAC and we believe it is short sighted for the MTA to propose eliminating an important piece of this puzzle – commuter bus routes that travel on the ICC.

Two things will stay the same:

- 1) Bethesda will be a job growth area
- 2) Desirable housing (big yard, two car garage, affordable mortgage) will not be easy to find

Not everyone is going to live where they work.

The area in and around Bethesda cannot handle more single occupancy vehicles which is why we have been promoting a wide variety of strategies to mitigate the traffic impact of growth, among them enhanced intersections, an improved metro station, better pedestrian and bike connectivity and promoting public transit useage.

It is true that you are trying to change behaviors and get people out of their cars. That is a hard job and it takes time. At the Walter Reed campus, they too are trying to change behaviors with very limited staff parking and many incentives and information for alternate ways to get to work.

Rather than propose eliminating Route 203 and other important routes, it is important to understand what is not working and try new approaches. In fact, that is what is happening with the ICC. The number of vehicles traveling on the ICC has not yet reached the projections. And yet, rather than propose closing the road to save on maintenance costs, there are actually proposals to reduce the toll to get more people to drive on the roadway.

What are some things the MTA could do? Be creative in thinking about alternatives to eliminating routes.

- Survey employees at Walter Reed and NIH to determine required arrival and departure times and other needs of the target commuting group
- Adjust schedules to accommodate those work shifts
- Examine pick up and drop off locations. Is there adequate parking for those who drive to the station?
- Advertise the route's availability more widely in Bethesda and Columbia

- Stick with it knowing that it takes time. Even the threat of eliminating routes proves the skeptics right – that public transit is not reliable.

BRAC was implemented in 2011 but the Navy stated publically at that time that its work was not done. The Navy understands that it will take time to adjust commuting patterns and shift behavior as parts of the projects inside and outside the fence are implemented and the workforce grows and changes.

We need that same commitment from our state and the MTA that public transportation options will be available to serve this job center now and into the future. The mission of Walter Reed, the viability of the business community and the quality of life of the residents depends on it.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak.