



4 Toyota SUVs are EPA estimated over **20 MPG HIGHWAY**



RAV4



HIGHLANDER 4x4



4RUNNER



FJ CRUISER

EPA ESTIMATED HIGHWAY MPG FOR 2006 RAV4S, HIGHLANDERS, 4RUNNER V6 MODELS, AND 2007 FJ CRUISERS. ACTUAL MILEAGE VARIES.

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Fort Lee growth boom is seen

Base's population will grow, and major effect on Tri-Cities is likely

BY JULIAN WALKER
TIMES-DISPATCH STAFF WRITER

Oct 5, 2006

TO COMMENT The public has 45 days to comment on the environmental-impact draft. A public meeting on the plan is scheduled for 7 p.m. on Oct. 25 at Union Station in Petersburg, 103 River St.

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Fort Lee is preparing for a growth boom that will be detailed in a 483-page report to be released tomorrow. The Tri-Cities area, while pleased, is also bracing for growing pains.

As a result of the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission recommendations, the military base will gain more than 7,700 permanent personnel, putting the population at 20,703 by 2011.

Student soldier population will increase from 33,976 to 60,885, and other training programs and military operations will relocate to Fort Lee in coming years.

To make room for these changes, the report states, an additional 4.1 million square feet of building space will be required at the 5,500-plus acre base in Prince George County.

While growing pains are likely for the area, the response of local elected officials has been generally positive.

"If the BRAC 2005 had announced either a closure . . . or a major reduction at Fort Lee, I opine that the book value or value of the land mass of Prince George County may well have been devalued by 30 percent," said Joseph Atkins Leming, chairman of the county Board of Supervisors. "This would not have been problematic -- it would have been disastrous for Prince George County at best."

Leming said Fort Lee annually pumps \$1 billion into the economy. He expects that figure to more than double as the base grows.

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Chesterfield County Board of Supervisors Chairman R.M. "Dickie" King Jr. also welcomes its growth, but he noted it comes with consequences.

"It's a double-edge sword. Fort Lee is an incredible economic engine for the region, and we can't afford to lose it," he said. "We have a great county with a great school system and great public safety. But we also get criticized for our growth, and essentially this is growth we don't control."

Dinwiddie County public schools Superintendent Charles Maranzano Jr. said more than \$620 million is needed to construct county schools for the estimated 4,000 to 6,500 new students that growth at Fort Lee will bring to the region.

"This is a huge, \$2 billion national problem, and the clock is ticking," he said.

Dinwiddie is part of the Seven Rivers National Coalition, which counts as members communities from 11 states that expect to be affected by BRAC recommendations.

Maranzano said coalition members are lobbying the federal government to come up with funding for impacts to schools.

"Dinwiddie clearly has the most potential for growth of all the counties, and we're trying to deal with that," he said. "Once growth starts, you can't stop it."

Fort Lee spokesman Paul Sweeney said, "We really encourage public participation in the comment period and in the public hearing. The more people that voice their comments and opinions, the better."

Fort Lee isn't the only Virginia base bracing for growth.

Anticipated expansion at Northern Virginia's Fort Belvoir as outlined by BRAC elicited concerns from some officials about the impact on Fairfax County's already congested roads.

With 22,000 jobs scheduled to be shifted to that base, officials say at least \$626 million in area transportation improvements are needed.

The most significant impact at Fort A.P. Hill in Caroline County would appear to be the proposed construction of an explosives demolition range about 4 miles from the Port Royal community. The draft report characterizes the potential noise as minimal.

Ken Perrotte, a base spokesman, says specifics, including the size of the range and the timetable for construction at the 76,000-acre installation, have not yet been determined. He said a public meeting is planned for this month.

The report estimates the direct economic benefits of planned construction, including income from as many as 80 new jobs, at about \$4 million to \$10 million. Secondary job creation, income and spending would be minor.

Fort A.P. Hill, which already trains an estimated 80,000 troops per year, also is expected to see additional trainees from Fort Lee. The report mentions a scenario of 800 troops arriving for four days of training. Perrotte said he does not expect transporting more troops will cause local traffic headaches.

"It will be pretty well coordinated," he said.

Contact staff writer Julian Walker at jwalker@timesdispatch.com or (804) 649-6831.

Staff writer Kiran Krishnamurthy contributed to this report.

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