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## BRAC raises commuting issues in Mid-Atlantic region

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**BALTIMORE** ([Map](#), [News](#)) - Spending an hour in traffic or riding mass transit is considered normal for the average [Maryland](#) worker.

Not counting accidents and congestion, that's about the time it takes to travel 25 miles beltway-to-beltway between [Baltimore](#) and [Washington](#). Those two metropolitan centers have grown as more workers take jobs in the suburbs and commute from adjoining counties.

It adds up to two hours a day commuting time, or about 500 hours a year of dodging unsafe drivers and sitting in lines of fume-spewing stop-and-go traffic. It's about

three weeks of a driver's life spent on exhaust-filled highways each year.

So some commuters have turned to trains.

"I used to drive," said [Gallaudet University](#) employee [Dierdre Mullervy](#), who takes the MARC commuter train from Baltimore to Washington. "It was horribly congested. Now I take the train."

Mullervy spends most of the journey reading or watching movies on her [iPod](#).

"I take the train because of the bad traffic, the cost of gas, and because the service is easier and cheaper," said [Zarica Whalen](#), who takes the MARC from Baltimore to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) in [Hyattsville](#).

[Kristi Ford](#) said it takes her only about 20 minutes to get to her job in downtown Baltimore via the MARC train from Dorsey Station near [Columbia](#). "I had to drive into work once last month because the train was delayed," Ford said. "It took me two hours just to wind down, it was so stressful."

"Ninety percent of the time it is great on time and everything," said [Richard Greenlee](#), who has taken the MARC for the last four months while his girlfriend drives their shared car. "Only about 10 percent of the time do we experience delays."

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More and more, Baltimore-area commuters are taking long commutes toward Washington's suburbs in southern Maryland and [Northern Virginia](#). But planners are hoping that growth tied to military bases near Baltimore and suburban [Virginia](#) will reverse some of those trends.

The number of workers commuting from the Baltimore area to the Washington area grew 26 percent between 1990 and 2000, according to the most recent commuter census data available.

Of the Maryland commuters who cross state lines on their way to work, 62 percent go to Washington. The next-largest share goes to Virginia, which gets about 116,400 Maryland workers every day.

Most of the Virginia-bound drivers are from Prince George's, [Montgomery](#) and [Frederick](#) counties, but about 13,017 workers come from Baltimore and its surrounding counties.

The outcome is a long and inefficient commute for some, according to [Hani Mahmassani](#), who holds the Charles Irish Sr. Chair in Civil and Environmental Engineering at the [University of Maryland](#).

"The fraction of people who work where they live is very small, despite the number of jobs in this region," Mahmassani said, pointing out that since the last census, new jobs have moved north toward Baltimore. But those have drawn commuters from farther away instead of reclaiming local workers, he said. "At this point, it's becoming like one big megaplex."

The result is an ever-increasing commute and more traffic along the region's main corridors.

[Prince George's County](#) had the longest the average commute time at about 35 minutes. That includes those who live and work in the county, according to 2005 census estimates. In the Baltimore region, Carroll and Harford counties have the longest drive times, averaging 33.2 and 30.6 minutes, respectively.

Mahmassani said growth in information technology companies around [Tysons Corner](#) and south drove the commuter exodus to Northern Virginia between 1990 and 2000.

The Baltimore area has grown recently, but that has spread out among the suburbs such as Howard and Carroll counties, he said.

"If you look at where the job growth has been in the Baltimore area, a lot has been outside of the city limits," Mahmassani said. "On the one hand, you do have growth of the job base, but you have more people who work in the Maryland suburbs and live elsewhere. It's really flowing in all directions. What strikes me is all the inefficiency from a transportation standpoint. It contributes especially to traffic and sprawl."

[Anirban Basu](#), an economic analyst and consultant, said the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure Act is expected to bring a net gain of 9,448 on-base jobs to [Aberdeen Proving Ground](#) in [Harford County](#) and 5,717 jobs to [Fort George G. Meade](#) in [Anne Arundel County](#), plus some 30,000 jobs for contractors and support staff the Baltimore area. That could recapture some of the workers it has lost to Washington, he said.

"My hope is that BRAC will help reduce commutes, and the state can do much to leverage this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity into support for mass-transit projects," Basu said.

Anne Arundel County is seeking an extension of Metro's Green Line to [Baltimore-Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport](#), where commuters could connect to Baltimore's light rail system.

As part of its BRAC preparations, Harford County has received state funds for a new MARC station at Edgewood, near the southern part of the base, and it has proposed a transit station near [Aberdeen](#) that would bring together trains, cars and bus routes.



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Maryland is trying to stay flexible when deciding which areas will need road and rail improvements because of BRAC, said [Sam Minnitte](#), Department of Transportation Director. "Flexibility is going to be very important in the first three to four years," he said. "There's not a stone we'll leave unturned."

According to a study of workers living near Aberdeen Proving Ground conducted by the Susquehanna Workforce Network, 90 percent who responded to a random survey said they would rather take a job in their own county, and 25 percent said they'd do so even with a 5-percent salary cut.

"Ultimately, the people are coming," Basu said. "The question is, where will they live?"


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