



# Base Realignment and Closure

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## Post, community prepare for BRAC

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Fort Sam Houston leaders took their first step toward preparing the post and local community for the impacts of the upcoming base realignment and closure with its first two “scoping meetings” Tuesday at St. Patrick’s Church.

Scoping meetings provide a forum for two-way communication between agencies and the public and are an early stage in the development of an Environmental Impact Statement, a detailed study that analyzes the environmental impacts of a proposed action and its alternatives.

“Meetings like this one give the public the opportunity to have a voice in the BRAC process and help the post leadership develop strong recommendations,” said Col. Wendy Martinson, U.S. Army Garrison commander. “The government wants the community to be informed; BRAC is, after all, impacting your community.”

Post, state and federal agency representatives were on hand at the meetings with informational displays to explain the impacts of BRAC, which include everything from waste and noise to land use and traffic. Community leaders, business owners and concerned citizens were invited to ask questions and provide input.

“The BRAC decisions have been made; it’s now up to us to accommodate the requirements,” said Martinson.

A common theme for the local community was gate entry, a long-standing topic of discussion for the post and a pressing concern with a future BRAC-related population increase of 17,340. A representative from the Texas Department of Transportation reassured people that there were plans in the works to ease potential congestion at the heavily frequented Walters gate, which already has more than 40,400 visitors each week.

To minimize traffic jams, “We’re teaming with the city of San Antonio and the Metropolitan Planning Organization to add four inbound lanes and two outbound lanes to Walters Street by September 2007,” said Jonathan Bean, of Texas DOT. The road will include bike and pedestrian lanes and a new bridge over Interstate Highway 35.

The plan seemed to appeal to attendees but a few had additions of their own. “I’d like to see some landscaping near the Walters gate,” said Florence Alcoser, who attended on behalf of the conservation society and South Fort Sam Advisory Board. “It’s the main entry to the post and I think it should be more appealing for all the visitors that come through. I hope they add some trees or plants to the area.”

Other concerns centered on the types and number of incoming organizations and the impact on the San Antonio housing market.

All input is welcome and will be considered in the EIS, Martinson said, along with other topics of consideration to include utility requirements for gas, electricity and sewers; water resources; cultural resources; planning; socioeconomics, such as the affect on medical services and schools; traffic patterns; air quality; hazardous material; and biological and water resources.

“BRAC will affect just about every function on post,” Martinson said, “which, of course, impacts life off post.”

The task of drafting the comprehensive EIS document will fall to MACTE Engineering and Consulting Inc. “We will take the data provided by the post and input from the community and prepare statements about the impact of different courses of action,” said Ching Wu, MACTEC EIS project manager.

Wu said the first EIS draft will be done in October. At that time, another, more formal, meeting will be held in November to solicit the public’s comments. The final draft will be submitted to the Department of the Army in March 2007.

The process is unusually quick, according to Bob Morris, Army Corps of Engineers BRAC program manager for the Fort Worth District. “An EIS process that typically takes 18 to 24 months has been accelerated to 12,” said Morris.

The speed is a by-product of BRAC deadlines, he said. “We have to have BRAC work done by 2011 and we can’t „turn dirt“ until the EIS is done.”

With \$1.54 billion in construction, “We have our work cut out for us,” Morris said.

Community leaders also hope for a speedy resolution. “BRAC will be a tremendous economic advantage for the San Antonio community,” said Bill Mock, vice president of economic development for The Greater San Antonio Chamber of Commerce. “I’m anxious to see everything that is proposed come to fruition.”

With the first two scoping meetings complete, Martinson said the future looks promising.

“This is the first step of many, but each step is important,” she said. “We’re grateful for all the community support and will take all issues into consideration.”

For more information, call the Environmental and Natural Resources Division, at 221-5419.