

# Alexandria Site Picked For 6,400 Army Jobs

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Army officials announced yesterday that thousands of jobs originally destined for Fort Belvoir will be moved to an office complex to be built off Seminary Road in Alexandria, despite objections from state and [Fairfax County](#) officials who said that the plan will worsen traffic in the area.

After a year-long study of three locations in Alexandria and Fairfax, Army officials decided to put 6,400 workers at the Mark Center, a private development near Interstate 395 but miles from the nearest Metro station. It will save the federal and state governments hundreds of millions of dollars on construction, relocation and transportation improvements that would have had to be spent if either of the other sites had been chosen.

"It's the best value for the Army when we take into account its cost, its schedule, getting people into secure office space sooner and saving the government some money," said Assistant Army Secretary Keith E. Eastin. "And we're talking about millions of dollars."

Army officials said they would purchase the Mark Center by December and begin construction in January. The final cost will approach \$1 billion, they said, about the same as the other sites.

The decision was lauded by Alexandria city officials, who said it will boost the local economy. They said it will also help offset the 7,200 jobs the city expected to lose under the Fort Belvoir realignment plan. U.S. Rep. [Tom Davis](#) (R) said it will relieve traffic around Fort Belvoir and the nearby Engineer Proving Ground, where 8,500 jobs are still headed.

Fairfax and state officials had been sharply critical of the Mark Center, which they said was the least preferable of the three sites. It is about five miles away from the nearest Metro stations. They, along with state and congressional leaders, had lobbied for the office complex to be built in Springfield, on federally-owned land within a half-mile of Metro and Virginia Railway Express.

[Gerald E. Connolly](#) (D), chairman of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, said the Army has missed an opportunity to make the best decision for encouraging transit and also spurring an economic revival in downtown Springfield. Connolly also noted that Fairfax will feel the brunt of the new traffic, particularly on the interstates.

"Many if not most of these workers will be coming from the south," he said. "That means they can't access this site by the VRE, and it means they're going to be in their

automobiles driving across our county and [Prince William County](#). The two big losers in terms of congestion are Prince William and Fairfax, and we get none of the benefit."

But a [General Services Administration](#) warehouse sits on the Springfield property. The 1.2 million-square-foot wooden structure was built in 1953 and holds a myriad of items -- including hard-copy patents and spare windows for [the Pentagon](#) -- for a half-dozen federal agencies. GSA officials have said it could take years and more than \$100 million to move the warehouse's contents.

The jobs are being shifted as part of a larger plan by Congress and the Army to move 20,000 Washington area workers, some of them in sensitive positions, to secure job sites outside the Capital Beltway. Most of the jobs will be shifted to Fort Belvoir and the nearby Engineer Proving Ground in southern Fairfax.

When the plan was announced in 2005, Virginia officials decried the likely adverse impact on traffic if thousands of motorists -- many of whom currently take mass transit to jobs in [Arlington County](#) -- piled onto interstates 95 and 395 and the Beltway.

Army officials agreed to consider other sites for at least a few thousand of the workers. Another location in the mix was the Victory Center, off Eisenhower Avenue in Alexandria. Fairfax officials had said this was the second-best option because one office building was already under construction and the site is about a half-mile from the Van Dorn Street Metro station.

Peter Scholtz, a senior vice president for Duke Realty, which owns the Mark Center, said the property offered several key advantages. Because the land is unoccupied, the Army can construct the offices to its own specifications. It is adjacent to a large hotel and convention center, and it is within walking distance of homes and restaurants.

Eastin disagreed with Fairfax officials that the Mark Center is the least desirable spot regarding traffic management.

The Mark Center is adjacent to I-395, and the Army, together with Alexandria officials, is planning for buses to ferry commuters from parking lots, the King [Street Metro](#) station and VRE stations in the mornings and afternoons. They also are planning for a new exit from I-395 to Seminary Road only for high-occupancy vehicles, he said.

Eastin also cited the ability of Mark Center's developers to turn over the property in time for the Army to meet its September 2011 deadline. That factor has drawn criticism from local and state officials, who say the deadline could have been shifted to accommodate the best site.

Eastin countered that the deadline was a financial issue, too: Every month that the 6,400 jobs remain in leased office space, the Army is spending \$2 million on rent, he said. The GSA warehouse site would have been ready 33 months late, costing the Army \$66 million in additional rent, he said.

Some officials said anything is better than the original destination, Fort Belvoir, which even the Army agreed would not have been able to handle such an onslaught of traffic.

## Va. Takes Stock of Army's Decision

Officials See Ways To Ease Job Site's Effect on Traffic

By Sandhya Somashekhar  
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Virginia officials said yesterday that the Army's decision to put 6,400 defense workers in Alexandria was a blow to efforts to cluster development around mass transit, but they expressed hope that the impact on traffic could be minimized with stepped-up bus service and road improvements.

The owner of the Mark Center, the private development on Seminary Road where the office complex will be built, said it will invest as much as \$10 million to improve intersections and expand lanes in the area. The company, Duke Realty, also plans to create a transportation hub on the site, with local bus service and shuttle service to the King [Street Metro](#), which has a Virginia Railway Express depot.

The site will also benefit from the proposed widening of Interstate 395 to provide high-occupancy toll (HOT) lanes, state officials said.

Still, officials expressed disappointment that the Army did not choose to build the office complex on federally owned property in Springfield.

Northern Virginia officials have sought to focus development in areas with mass transit as a way to relieve debilitating traffic congestion. The Springfield location would have been within walking distance of Metro and VRE. Army officials ruled out that site because of cost and time constraints.

"I'm very disappointed," [Rep. James P. Moran Jr. \(D-Va.\)](#) said. "It belonged at the Springfield site. The problem was the Army was under the gun. [But] I think if we emphasize bus service and van and carpooling, we could make the best of this situation."

The Army's decision is part of a larger base realignment plan announced by [the Pentagon](#) in 2005. The plan calls for moving nearly 20,000 Washington area defense jobs, most of them in [Arlington County](#), to more-secure locations. Most of the jobs will go to Fort Belvoir and the nearby Engineer Proving Grounds, but Army officials agreed to shift 6,400 of the workers to a third location to reduce the likely adverse effect on traffic at Belvoir.

"We would have needed hundreds of millions of dollars in traffic improvements" if the Army had pursued its original plan of putting all the jobs at Fort Belvoir and the Engineer

Proving Ground, said Assistant Army Secretary Keith E. Eastin in an interview Monday. "Without those kinds of improvements, the area just couldn't take it."

On his monthly call-in show on WTOP (103.5 FM) yesterday, [Gov. Timothy M. Kaine \(D\)](#) said he would have preferred the Springfield location because of its proximity to transit. However, he said he was relieved that the jobs were being shifted away from Fort Belvoir.

"I don't think it's optimal," he said. But "putting the jobs right on the Belvoir footprint . . . would have been, I think, nearly a disaster in terms of transportation infrastructure."

Jim Curren, a transportation consultant for the Army, said the effect on traffic would be negligible with enough planning -- an assertion that was met with skepticism by some state and [Fairfax County](#) officials.

Nearly 20 percent of the workers who would be heading to Alexandria live in [Prince William County](#), Fredericksburg or [Stafford County](#), according to Army statistics, and most of the 6,400 being moved now commute to Metro-accessible office buildings in Arlington. As a result, Curren said, many of the workers will have similar commutes, not longer ones.

The Army wants as much as 40 percent of the workforce at Mark Center to use alternative forms of transportation, including ride-sharing and VRE, to get to work, Curren said. He estimated that 1,500 cars would be added to area roadways around rush times.

If the bus and road improvements are in place, "we should maintain the level of service, and you shouldn't see things getting worse," said Curren, senior program manager with the transportation consulting firm PBS&J.

Fairfax officials, who have been critical of the Army's choice of the Mark Center, said many riders would be discouraged from using Metro or VRE because they would have to take a shuttle bus to get to and from the station.

Fairfax Supervisor [Jeff C. McKay](#) (D-Lee) said I-395 is already congested during rush periods. "I don't think 395 can take one more car, let alone 1,500," he said. "And I can tell you that transit only works if it is convenient. The more times you force a commuter to change modes, the less likely they are to do it."

Virginia Transportation Secretary [Pierce R. Homer](#) said one long-term way to reduce congestion would be to bolster bus service along the I-395 corridor and south of Alexandria, where many of the employees live. Although the Springfield location was preferable from a transportation perspective, he said, the Mark Center will be workable.

"We are going to try and make the transit and highway improvements necessary to serve the Mark Center," he said. "I do think we can work with them."