

## **Base Realignment and Closure: Road projects under way as post grows**

### **Fort Knox to Fort Benning moves should be completed by September**

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By the time more than 28,000 soldiers, civilian workers and their family members move to Fort Benning, many Columbus roads will be improved or under construction, city officials said.

“I think we are making tremendous progress,” Deputy City Manager David Arrington said.

Many road projects have been on the planning books for years, but the Base Realignment and Closure was considered in the process to get them completed. Moving the U.S. Army Armor School and Center at Fort Knox, Ky., to Fort Benning will be completed by September 2011 to form the Maneuver Center of Excellence.

Area planners and other city officials said the widening of Interstate 185, the Whittlesey Road projects and widening of Veterans Parkway are among some of the largest projects addressing traffic congestion.

The widening of Interstate 185 between St. Marys Road and the entrance of Fort Benning should be completed during the spring.

“That is going to be a major project in getting traffic in and out of Benning and into the community,” said Rick Jones, director of the city’s Planning Department.

In addition to the road widening, \$6.8 million will be spent at Victory Drive and I-185 to build an impressive gateway into Fort Benning. The Gateways Foundation raised public and private money to landscape some 56 acres at the interchange with fountains, flags and four 50-foot high monuments.

Jones said the landscaping construction should be completed by the fall.

To ease traffic in one of the busiest sections of Columbus, Jones said the widening of Whittlesey Road from Rollins Way to just past Veterans Parkway is one of the first projects to get under construction in the new year. The \$29.1 million project will widen the one-mile stretch of road from two to four lanes.

“We are at the stage now where we are close to finalizing all the right-of-way,” Jones said.

The Department of Transportation could send out bids for the widening by late spring, Arrington said. “That will be a major improvement there,” he said.

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With more development already approved and traffic problems growing on Veterans Parkway, Jones said much needed improvements are required in widening the highway between Old Moon Road and Turnberry Lane. Acquiring of right-of-way could start early next year.

“Veterans is a busy roadway,” he said. “We are going to start seeing those kind of things take place.”

Along with the major road improvements, Ron Hamlett of Traffic Engineering said intersection improvements are planned along Benning and Cusseta roads, Macon Road at Lynch Road and on South Lumpkin Road at Walker Street.

Residents will also see more roundabouts like the one at Warm Springs and Blackmon roads, a road design where traffic enters an intersection and yields to oncoming traffic before turning right in a circular direction.

Another roundabout is planned at Transport and Cargo drives in northeast Columbus, Hamlett said. People like them because they slow down traffic in neighborhoods and don't require a signal at the intersection.

“They make such a nice entrance features,” he said.

Many of the projects will be funded through the Local Option Sales Tax. Arrington said the city is ahead a bit on some projects because Columbus Council allowed design work to move forward before tax money was available.

“We are making progress and we will continue to move forward with those projects and additional ones in the future,” Arrington said.