

OP ED
Funding for I-295 Link
from US 401/Ramsey Street to the All-American Freeway

Recently, the funding and need for the I-295 link from US 401/Ramsey Street to the All-American Freeway has been called into question. From Fort Bragg's position, this link is vital to accomplishing our mission of rapidly deploying America's forces.

This highway project was first programmed in the NC Statewide Transportation Improvement Program in 1978, to serve traffic demands and to provide direct access from I-95 to Fort Bragg. The project has had the support of every governor and state Secretary of Transportation since then.

On 5 May 1986, the XVIII Airborne Corps and Fort Bragg's commander, Lt. Gen James Lindsay, first officially endorsed the project, writing, "...is important because it provides another link to the state ports in Wilmington and Morehead City, and gives ready access to Norfolk via existing U.S. 13." Every Corps commander since LT. Gen. Lindsay has endorsed this highway and ensured the land to be used for it remained undeveloped.

Fort Bragg is the premier power projection platform for the Army and with the scheduled movement of both the US Army Forces Command and the US Army Reserve Commands here, our need to rapidly reach our ports and those along the east coast will grow. The I-295 link will give us a direct route to our alternate departure airfield, Seymour-Johnson Air Force Base in Goldsboro.

Though we are home of the Airborne, Fort Bragg moves the majority of its personnel and equipment by road; yet we are the only installation of its size without a direct link to the interstate system.

Since 2001, Fort Bragg has moved more than 34,000 tractor trailers (18-wheelers) carrying more than 745 million tons of cargo to these ports. In 2008 alone, more than 10,000 Soldiers have ridden buses from here to destinations beyond, including home. Additionally, more than 480 military convoys, carrying troops and supplies, have departed Fort Bragg using Fayetteville city streets to access I-95 to drive to other North Carolina posts, airfields and ports and along the east coast.

But this link is not only vital to Fort Bragg's ability to deploy worldwide, it is vital to our ability, and to FEMA's ability, to assist in disaster relief operations. During the hurricane season, Fort Bragg is a FEMA staging base for equipment and supplies. FEMA's success depends on their ability to rapidly move these trucks to areas hit by disasters. The I-295 link will enable both FEMA and Fort Bragg to increase their ability to save lives and reduce hardships.

Because of our need to rapidly deploy, in December 1989, the Department of the Army granted approval for Fort Bragg to deed the land on post to the state of North Carolina for this project, thus saving the state \$26.5 million. Since then, we have been preserving this land; only recently, when funding for this project was approved this year, did we start clearing the land needed.

Besides increasing our ability to rapidly deploy and move equipment, supplies and Soldiers, the I-295 link is vital to the security of Fort Bragg.

Since 9/11/2001, Fort Bragg has been improving the security of the installation. One of the major parts of this improvement is the closing of HWY 87/Bragg Blvd. to thru traffic and re-routing traffic to Murchison Road. The construction of the I-295 link between the All-American Freeway and US 401/Ramsey Street is a critical link between HWY 87/Bragg Blvd and Murchison Road. This link is directly related to widening Murchison Road and improving the quality of life along its surrounding neighborhoods and businesses. Congress recognized this need and has already passed legislation directing \$21.8 million to the widening of Murchison Rd in order for it to handle the increased traffic.

The need for the I-295 link between US 401/Ramsey Street and the All-American Freeway has increased significantly since it was first programmed in 1978 and it will continue to do so. The Department of the Army has clearly recognized just how critical this link is, having already invested \$48.5 million for this project. I strongly urge the state of North Carolina, the "most military friendly state in the nation," to support funding of this critical highway, not only for the sake of Fort Bragg but for the 11 counties surrounding our post.