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## New JBLM entrance to help ease congestion

Washington State Department of Transportation

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Ingrid Barrentine

Traffic heads northbound on a recent morning past the I-5 Mounts Road Exit.

A new location for personnel to enter Joint Base Lewis-McChord could help ease congestion on northbound I-5 from Lacey through DuPont.

On Monday the Directorate of Emergency Services will open Mounts Road Gate for in-bound traffic between 5 to 8 a.m., Monday through Friday.

"This gate is being opened to allow traffic traveling east on Mounts Road destined for Joint Base Lewis-McChord to avoid entering Interstate 5," said Larry Freeman, chief of installation access. "Traffic travelling west on Mounts Road coming from Interstate 5 will not be allowed to turn left and enter this gate. Traffic entering Mounts Road Gate will follow the range road to Center Gate located next to the confinement facility. Security officers will be posted at that location to verify identifications before allowing access," Freeman said.

Washington State Department of Transportation is working with the military base, Federal Highways Administration and local agencies on road improvements, such as filling potholes and about 100 feet of repaving, to prepare the additional base entrance at Mounts Road in Nisqually to open Monday.

"We're very fortunate that we were able to partner with WSDOT to bring this new gate online quickly," said Jay C. Mathews, JBLM public affairs officer.

"We were able to fund the repairs to the access road and WSDOT was able to execute the work in short order to enable us to open the gate — a win-win for all of us and an example of the great support we're receiving from WSDOT and all our regional partners," Mathews said.

"This was truly a team effort, and we thank our partners at JBLM and Pierce County for their quick work that allowed us to move ahead and get this open," said Kevin Dayton, WSDOT's Olympic Region administrator.

All of the agencies that coordinated this effort say the added base access should help relieve recent increases in congestion on northbound I-5 in south Puget Sound.

"We are not the only reason there is traffic congestion on Interstate 5 but clearly the return of our Soldiers from deployment has added to an already overburdened transportation grid," Mathews said. "The traffic impacts our community as it does the entire region and we want to do our part to help mitigate the congestion as best we can."

Shortly after Labor Day, morning traffic backups on northbound I-5 increased substantially, sometimes doubling the normal drive time, especially during the morning commute. Engineers credit a growing population for bringing I-5 near capacity in the area, coupled with the recent redeployment of 18,000 service members.

The new Mounts Road base access is just one of the strategies JBLM, WSDOT, FHWA and local agencies are using to keep traffic flowing through the corridor. Already, WSDOT has improved signal timing at DuPont/Steilacoom and Nisqually interchanges, added more incident-response crews to clear disabled vehicles on I-5 and improved the interchange at Center Drive.

Other intermediate solutions under consideration include installing ramp meters, closed-circuit TV cameras and additional driver traffic-information tools.

Over the longer term, federal, state and county officials will continue to collaborate on improving mobility through the corridor. It's all part of the Defense Department-funded Office of Economic Adjustment Study, which was completed this month. The study developed growth projections, determined the scope of needs and provided preliminary improvement recommendations. It also laid the groundwork for environmental assessment and preliminary design processes for increasing mobility.

"JBLM is continuing to look at our traffic situation holistically, through a work group established to look at all

options, short and long term. It's important that we make our best effort to relieve the congestion that affects us, both on and off the installation," Mathews said.

Until more improvements can be made, WSDOT asks drivers who can, to change their route or travel during off-peak hours. Ride-sharing and using public transportation can also get more people in fewer cars and help ease congestion.

Call 511 or visit [www.wsdot.wa.gov/traffic](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/traffic) for real time traffic information.

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