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June 4, 2015

Mike Merrill  
County Administrator  
County Center  
601 East Kennedy Blvd., 26th Floor  
Tampa, FL 33602

RE: Urge Expeditious Ferry Service Implementation to benefit MacDill Air Force Base and Execute Federal Investment

Dear Administrator Merrill:

I respectfully urge you to use every effort to implement Tampa Bay water-borne ferry service as expeditiously as possible. Ferry service would benefit the personnel at MacDill Air Force Base who are experiencing significant delays in entering the base and would execute the substantial federal grant dollars made available to Hillsborough County for ferry service.

Tampa Bay ferry studies have indicated that service should begin with an eastern Tampa Bay terminal for MacDill Air Force Base personnel. There appear to be no problems with the MacDill AFB ferry terminal. Ferry service to the base has never been more important due to the serious traffic congestion and delays that service members and contractors face when they arrive at the MacDill gates. Colonel Daniel H. Tulley, Commander of the 6th Air Mobility Wing recently advised me that the congestion is getting worse and that MacDill stands ready to implement the ferry plan. Base personnel I have spoken with also strongly favor the new transportation option.

Every day, 7,000 to 9,000 cars seek to enter MacDill AFB. The long wait times impact the ability of service members to arrive on-time to their important assignments. The ferry is projected to take 62,081 miles a day off of local highways and save commuters time on trips to and from work. Studies have shown that 7,800 MacDill households reside in southeastern Hillsborough County and about 1,500 would use the ferry service each day. Congestion at the gates is a growing concern for MacDill AFB's leadership. Colonel Tulley is responsible for more than \$2.8 billion in base property and capital assets and he controls an annual budget exceeding \$163 million. You are well aware that MacDill AFB represents a major economic driver in the Tampa Bay area, with a total economic impact of \$5 billion annually. I strongly share his concern the wait times must be addressed immediately.

The problem is further exacerbated due to fact that the U.S. Air Force has put a hold on any new on-base housing at MacDill. Therefore, any relief that could have been provided by housing more of the servicemembers on-base is likely years away.

In addition, it also is important that Hillsborough County and our local transportation and planning authorities remain good stewards of federal grant dollars for transportation. Such grant dollars are very hard to come by. As you are aware, I worked to secure \$475,000 in 2009 from the Federal Highway Administration for a feasibility study and an additional \$4.8 million grant in 2014 from the Federal Transit Administration to use for brick and mortar work on ferry service. Unless the community puts these federal grant dollars to work, it will be more difficult to advocate for greater transportation investments for our community. Therefore, I urge you to work together expeditiously to make a final determination on a suitable eastern Tampa Bay launch site that respects environmental concerns and ensures the safe operation of existing shipping operations. These resources work in balance and tandem now and ferry service should not be a challenge to such talented professionals and community members. More cost-effective, timely and affordable access to MacDill AFB, congestion relief around the base, and the start of an innovative transportation solution are within reach.

Thank you for your attention to this important initiative. I hope you will consider the advantages of diversifying and streamlining MacDill entrances to our national defense and local economy. If you have any questions please do not hesitate contact me or Kevin Karpay at 813-871-2817 or 202-225-3376.

Sincerely,



Kathy Castor  
U.S. Representative  
Florida – District 14