

REPORT TO CONGRESS
ON
Defense Access Roads



**Office of the Under Secretary of Defense,
Acquisition and Sustainment
3010 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-3010**

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Requirement

This report is provided in response to Senate report 115-269, page 10, accompanying S. 3024, the Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Appropriations Bill, 2019, and House Report 115-673, page 9, accompanying H.R. 5786, the Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 2019, respectively.

Senate Report 115-269, page 10, accompanying S. 3024, the Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 2019:

Defense Access Roads. – The Committee is concerned about the lack of future planning for Defense Access Roads (DAR) and transportation infrastructure needs as flooding on roads at domestic installations that are vital to military operations increases in frequency and severity. The Committee directs the Secretary of Defense, in consultation with the Secretary of Transportation to establish a process for assessing the flood risk to defense access roads, with particular attention to communities that have experienced severe flooding from non-storm surge flooding and flooding due to storm surge. The Committee expects that process to be informed by the best available science regarding flood risk in the United States. Further, the Committee directs the Secretary of Defense to report no later 90 days after enactment of this act on the national security risks of neglected DAR roads and projects affected by flooding due to storm surge, including what data and other appropriate information it is using to inform its risk and need assessment, and any relevant obstacles, to include legal, in carrying out such projects.

House Report 115-673, page 9, accompanying H.R. 5786, the Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 2019:

Defense Access Roads. – The Committee is concerned about the lack of future planning for Defense Access Roads (DAR) and transportation infrastructure needs as continued flooding of vital access roads occurs more frequently. The Committee directs the Secretary of Defense to work with the Secretary of Transportation to prioritize DAR roads and projects specifically examining bases in communities that have experienced flooding by both non-storm surge flooding and flooding due to storm surge and report to the Committee no later than 30 days after enactment of the Act on its findings. Further, the Committee is concerned about the increasingly harmful impacts of flooding on facilities at DOD’s coastal military installations and on the roads and infrastructure to access these installations. In January 2018, the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Energy, Installations and Environment, initiated a preliminary Screening Level Vulnerability Assessment Survey of DOD installations worldwide. With this report and other similar reports by GAO, the Committee directs the Secretary of Defense to incorporate efforts from the reports to mitigate the effects of flooding on roads and infrastructure on domestic installations that are vital to military operations.

Background

The DAR Program is authorized by title 23, United States Code, section 210 (23 USC 210). Under this authority, the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) is authorized to expend funds appropriated for defense access roads. Roadways may become eligible for defense funding under the authority of the DAR Program when the required improvements are a result of:

- a. Defense doubling of public highway traffic [in a short period of time] due to establishment of a new installation, or expansion/movement of personnel to an installation.
- b. New access road or gate/entrance requirement.
- c. New mission requiring heavy and damaging vehicle traffic on low-grade roads.
- d. Closing public highways permanently due to military necessity.

Defense access roads are **public roads that have been certified as important to national defense** per 23 U.S.C. §210. As such, not every public roadway that provides access to a military reservation is classified as a defense access road. The certifications are made by the Commander of the Military Surface Deployment and Distribution Command (SDDC) so that critical national security requirements can be addressed on particular public roads that do not meet Department of Defense (DoD) mission needs.

State/local highway authorities are responsible for developing and maintaining public highways to all permanent traffic generators, including defense installations. When improvements generated by DoD actions are not anticipated or programmed in regular local roadway improvement programs and highway officials are unable to fund needed improvements, the DAR Program may be considered. The DAR Program is the method for the DoD to pay for public highway improvements required because of sudden/unusual, DoD-generated traffic impacts. A sudden increase in defense traffic may include situations such as a dynamic increase in mission-related activities, such as a large restationing action or mission change. The DAR Program is not a source of funding; instead, it is a mechanism for DoD to request defense funds towards mission-critical, off-base transportation improvements.

To initiate a DAR project, the local military base commander, working in coordination with local officials, identifies access or mobility needs and formally submits such requirements through his/her respective Military Department headquarters to SDDC, who will then validate that the project has the potential to meet the eligibility criteria. Upon meeting DAR program office validation, SDDC requests the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) conduct an evaluation, develop a cost estimate, and determine the scope-of-work to address noted deficiencies, in accordance with Title 23 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 660E (Appendix C). Once the evaluation is completed and submitted to SDDC, the DAR Program

office prepares a certification package signed by the SDDC Commander, which makes the project eligible for DoD funding. The military service operating the base is responsible for budgeting the project through its normal planning, programming, and budgeting process. After project funding is authorized and appropriated by Congress, the funds are transferred to the FHWA who allocates the funding to the appropriate agency (federal, state, county or local transportation authority) to execute the project. Upon completion of the project, long-term maintenance of the improvement becomes the responsibility of the owning highway authority.

DoD does not have any maintenance responsibilities for defense access roads, with the exception of specific, Air Force requirements in the Minuteman missile program that necessitate annual monitoring of 1,500 miles of certified gravel roads. It is the responsibility of Federal, State, and local DOT officials to monitor public roadways and address any impacts, including flooding, in the planning of their State and local transportation improvement plans. The highway agencies collect revenue that is specifically for the purpose of maintaining those roadways and such agencies should evaluate the risk of roadway flooding. Additionally, in coordination with the DOT, state and local highway agencies can propose system upgrades to current roadways as a part of the federal aid program.

Flooding

The Department of Defense does not manage or maintain DAR roads since they are public roadways under the jurisdiction of state and local highway agencies. Thus, DoD coordinates military mission needs with State and local transportation agencies responsible for evaluating risks of flooding and impacts on public infrastructure. However, in implementing the DAR program, DoD works directly with the FHWA on the delivery of defense access road projects built to the Federal and/or State construction standards, including evaluation of flood risks.

DoD manages an enormous amount of infrastructure facilities, including thousands of miles of roadways internal to defense installations. The Department is continually monitoring whether improvements should be made to those facilities, including evaluation of flood risks. Any roadways and structures, whether on-base or off-base (DAR Program projects), built with defense funding are constructed to the federal standards for roadways and structures, as required by law.

To date, the Military Departments have indicated that they do not currently have any flood-prone locations creating a national security risk to transportation access for military installations. The DAR Program office maintains active projects supporting 10 defense installations and is not aware of any specific flood risks associated with any of these projects. One area in the past, on which DoD worked closely with transportation agencies on flooding problems, is in North Dakota to support the requirements of Minot AFB and the Minuteman Program. Over the past decade, North Dakota has received larger than average rainfall in areas with roads that are part of the certified, Minuteman missile road network. In the annual planning of projects, DoD worked closely with FHWA and the North Dakota DOT to jointly fund maintenance of any roadways impacting the operational mission of the Air Force. In conclusion, the DoD has the necessary means to address any flooding issues or risks (storm or non-storm surge) that may impact DoD missions if the roads meet the criteria to be certified as a Defense Access Road. However at this point, no specific problems are known to exist.