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## Pendleton Avenue to get safer new look

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Drivers on Joint Base Lewis-McChord have come to accept the heavy traffic that can turn a three-mile lunch run into a 30-minute commute, as a matter of routine. They even tolerate the added challenge of major road construction — detours, flaggers, and longer traffic delays — visible signs of a base in transition.

“We’ve grown,” Tom Tolman, master planner for the Directorate of Public Works, said. “The installation has more than doubled in population since 2003 when we were sitting around 17,000 (military personnel) and we’re up over 42,000 now.” Adding the numbers of family members and civilian employees who access the base drives JBLM’s population growth to more than 100,000.

Rapid population growth on JBLM overtook the pace of funding, designing and building the infrastructure required. The installation’s main thoroughfares can no longer easily accommodate traffic levels. As the main east-west arterial through the heart of JBLM Lewis-Main, Pendleton Avenue has been part of the Directorate of Public Works Master Plan for future upgrades since 2007. An estimated 2,000 vehicles per hour travel the two-lane road during peak hours.

“Pendleton was definitely a street that was failing and it had to have something done to it,” Tolman said. Tolman said increased vehicle traffic and limited sidewalks near lodging and shopping areas made pedestrian and bicycle traffic unsafe.

“It’s the young spouse pushing a stroller back from the commissary across the gravel edge of the road that’s the typical image that I don’t want to see. Nobody wants to see that, but that’s what was happening all the time,” Tolman said. Sections of Pendleton Avenue, between 41st Division Drive and 7th Street, haven’t changed since the days of Camp Lewis nearly 100 years ago, Gary Stedman, DPW Special Projects Planner, said.

“When the original Camp Lewis was laid down, it wasn’t designed for the Soldiers to have vehicles; it was designed for the military to have the vehicles. So, when we evolved from that period to today where everybody has at least one vehicle, we still have the same street configuration and pattern,” he said.

While the upgrades are long overdue, DPW master planners spent years developing plans that reflected garrison leaders’ insistence on quality-of-life improvements for service members and their families.

The improvements will mirror the “Complete Street” concept with a new boulevard that accommodates all modes of transportation — vehicles, bicycles, pedestrians as well as have sustainable features that together make JBLM a more livable community.

“We wanted to be able to move the traffic, get people through there in a way that was safe, and still let the functions that have to happen along Pendleton happen safely and comfortably,” Tolman said.

Pendleton Avenue will be widened to two lanes in each direction with a center turn lane, planted median, and a side street on either side for store-front parking and bike paths.



Scott Hansen/Northwest Guardian

Detour signs direct traffic along JBLM’s Pendleton Avenue.



“The idea is that (Pendleton) would be a tree-lined boulevard, a place that not only looks attractive as the center of the installation, but then does those things that we want it to do like helping reduce air pollution by keeping traffic moving and dealing with storm water,” Tolman said.

The initial work of moving utilities underground called for removal of some of the oldest trees along Pendleton Avenue. Planners directed removal of only trees in the footprint of the new road and those with underground work near tree roots that would either kill or transform them into hazards with the potential to fall into the street, or onto pedestrians or buildings.

Fewer than 30 trees were removed for the entire project, while 445 Maple, Katsura and ornamental pear trees will be planted along the new boulevard to buffer pedestrians on the sidewalk from vehicles on the road, making walking safer and more comfortable.

The new trees will form part of the sustainable landscape that includes rain gardens, pervious pavers and bio-filtration soil. The low-impact development will collect and filter storm water through multiple levels of gradation rock to remove contaminants and return the water to the ground.

Base officials ask for patience, admitting that the work to improve one of JBLM’s busiest roads is a major inconvenience and will continue to be one until the project is complete in summer 2013.

At a July 18 groundbreaking ceremony to kick off the next phase of construction on Pendleton Avenue near the Town Center area, Colonel Thomas Brittain, JBLM commander, said the discomfort is only temporary, but it will be worth it. “You’ve heard me say to the community, ‘accept the short term pain, for the long term gain.’” Brittain said. “We are making our installation a better piece by piece. We’re knocking off requirements that we have identified in our master plan and this is going to be a great addition to the installation,” he said.

Jonathan Norquist, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers project engineer, said the community’s reaction to the ongoing construction and traffic inconveniences has been positive overall.

“We’ve thrown everything we possibly can at them and everybody’s taking it in stride,” he said. The contractor tries to do his best to accommodate the public and traffic as much as he can without getting to the point where he has to stop work.”

Norquist advises drivers to prepare for major road work in this area. Find and use alternate routes to bypass Pendleton between 41st Division Drive and 7th Street, and avoid the construction area as much as possible.

“The good news is we’re (still) going to have two lanes of traffic; the bad news is it’s going to look like Armageddon as far as traffic control measures go. There’s going to be traffic shifts similar to what was done on Pendleton between 2nd and 3rd Division drives. There’s going to be cones and signs and flaggers out there in some places, and it will be very difficult to maneuver through if you’re not taking your time.”

Together, base officials, the USACE project managers, and the contractor, Bristol Engineers Service Corporation, keep the community informed by publishing traffic revisions, road closures and any major detours on message boards, Bristol’s Pendleton Avenue Project website and in the Northwest Guardian. For information or to comment, go to the Pendleton Avenue Construction Update link at [www.lewis-mcchord.army.mil](http://www.lewis-mcchord.army.mil).

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