

## DRAFT TECHNICAL PROCEDURE CHANGE

### PUBLIC INPUT PROCESS WHEN PLANNING APPROVED NOISE BARRIERS

May 31, 2007

#### **Objective**

To provide a more clear process for public involvement, this draft language revises the public involvement and voting process when working with communities on issues concerning Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) approved noise barriers.

#### **Background**

Noise barriers can be quite imposing, especially with the taller wall heights frequently needed to reduce noise for some neighborhoods. WSDOT noise policy identifies a method for working with communities (specifically residential voting parameters) when the WSDOT determines whether or not to install a noise barrier.

The current method for evaluating community opinion can be confusing. The existing noise policy identifies that “a majority” (60 percent of the first row of residents and 55 percent of residents further back from the barrier within 500 feet) of affected residences are allowed to vote on whether or not a project sponsor installs approved noise mitigation. The draft language included in this “Technical Procedure Change” document revises how voting is recommended to occur and how the concept of “majority” is used in relation to community input.

#### **Draft Language Change**

To assure a more straightforward and clear process to collect community input on noise barriers, WSDOT is looking to modify the “Reasonableness, Community Input” section of the state transportation-related noise policy (2006) with the following replacement language.

#### ***Community Input When Noise Barriers Are Warranted***

*The relationship of the location of a sound barrier to the residences or residential equivalents protected by the barrier will be considered when making a reasonableness determination. Very tall barriers located close to residents can have a negative visual impact. For example, a barrier may block afternoon sunlight or disrupt scenic or desirable views for residences adjacent to a highway.*

*Consideration of desirable views shall be included when assessing mitigation measures. When possible noise mitigation measures may be designed which effectively reduce traffic noise while maintaining views. The opinion of the affected property owners, particularly property owners adjacent to the proposed mitigation, will be considered to determine whether a barrier or other practicable mitigation is implemented. Community input may relate to the location, height, length of barrier; and where practicable, the composition and finish of a barrier.*

*If it is not possible to both effectively mitigate traffic noise and maintain the view, the project sponsor shall solicit input from affected households behind the barrier to determine the best course of action, especially when choosing whether or not to install mitigation:*

- *The opinion of 50.1 percent or more of affected property owners shall determine if sound abatement is desired; where*
  - *Residences in the first row (having a direct line of sight to the barrier with no intervening private properties between the residence and the barrier) are granted a weighting of 1.5, and*
  - *Residences beyond the first row and further back to within 500 feet of the roadway fog line are granted a weighting of 1.0.*
- *In the event of an even 50:50 tie, WSDOT will work with appropriate neighborhood leaders and the local jurisdiction to determine an appropriate outcome. WSDOT reserves the right to make the final decision for the project.*
- *In the case of rental property, the property owner's opinion shall take precedence over the renter's opinion on whether sound mitigation is desired.*
- *A community may offer an alternative method of decision-making on whether or not to accept a sound barrier provided that there is cohesive community support for the sound barrier and the decision is clear and binding (e.g., based on approved covenants, restrictions or bylaws of a community organization).*
- *Alternative parameters and voting guidelines may be chosen for projects with unusual topography, cultural, or historic significance (e.g., structures over water, historic districts) and need to be evaluated by the State Acoustics Program Manager on a case-by-case basis.*

WSDOT is evaluating various methods of establishing voter/household eligibility to be applied to projects on a case-by-case basis. Specific projects may use alternative methods than those established in the 2006 noise policy with the approval of the WSDOT Acoustics Program Manager.

### **Where to Find Additional Information**

This draft language is not included in the existing 2006 Washington State Department of Transportation Noise Policy and Procedures. However, to access the 2006 document, please go to our website at:

<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/NR/rdonlyres/26528ACC-7437-427C-BE81-F6FFA9C3BFD2/0/WSDOTNoisePolicy.pdf>

### **Next Steps**

It is likely that final updates in “Community Input” language will be updated in a 2007 Noise Policy revision in the summer of 2007.

If you have any questions or comments please contact Mia Waters, WSDOT Noise Program Manager, at 206/440-4541 or [watersy@wsdot.wa.gov](mailto:watersy@wsdot.wa.gov).