

Summary of Noise Barriers Constructed By December 31, 2001

The Federal-aid highway program has always been based on a strong State-Federal partnership. At the core of that partnership is a philosophy of trust and flexibility, and a belief that the States are in the best position to make investment decisions that are based on the needs and priorities of their citizens. The FHWA noise regulations give each State department of transportation (SDOT) flexibility in determining the reasonableness and feasibility of noise abatement and, thus, in balancing the benefits of noise abatement against the overall adverse social, economic, and environmental effects and costs of the noise abatement measures. The SDOT must base its determination on the interest of the overall public good, keeping in mind all the elements of the highway program (need, funding, environmental impacts, public involvement, etc.).

Highway traffic noise should be reduced through a program of shared responsibility. State and local governments should practice compatible land use planning and control in the vicinity of highways. Local governments should use their power to regulate land development in such a way that noise-sensitive land uses are either prohibited from being located adjacent to a highway, or that the developments are planned, designed, and constructed in such a way that noise impacts are minimized. It should be noted that FHWA noise regulations limit Federal participation in the construction of noise barriers along existing highways to those projects that are proposed along lands where land development or substantial construction predated the existence of any highway.

The flexibility in noise abatement decision-making is reflected by data indicating that some States have built many noise barriers and some have built none. Through the end of 2001, 44 SDOTs and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico have constructed over 1,831 linear miles of barriers at a cost of over \$1.9 billion (\$2.5 billion in 2001 dollars). Six States and the District of Columbia have not constructed noise barriers. Ten SDOTs account for approximately sixty-eight percent (68%) of total barrier length and seventy-four percent (74%) of total barrier cost.

This paper contains a listing of data supplied by all SDOTs. It should be noted that the cost data in the listing are approximate due to differing State practices for estimating costs and due to the fact that for some barriers (28 miles), the cost could not be estimated at all. The data represent best estimates of SDOTs for barrier construction. There may be non-uniformity and/or anomalies in the data due to differences in individual SDOT definitions of barrier information. It should also be noted that California and Arizona did not provide data for the years 1999, 2000, and 2001. This fact greatly affects data for these years, since California constructs many noise barriers annually (119 miles costing 134 million in 2001 dollars for 1994-1998) and California has constructed twenty-three percent (23%) by area of all barriers to date.