

MnDOT Noise Barriers

Update to 2013 Evaluation Report

Problems Identified

- **Biased method for assessing public support.** For federally funded noise barrier projects (associated with a larger highway construction project), MnDOT's method of assessing local residents' support favored building barriers. Opponents were essentially required to assemble supermajorities to defeat a proposed barrier.
- **Problems with state-funded noise barrier program.** MnDOT's program to build "stand-alone" noise barriers (built on existing highways unrelated to a larger construction project) was not available outside the Twin Cities metropolitan area, even though some outstate communities are affected by highway noise. Further, MnDOT's ranking method for potential projects had mathematical flaws which unfairly affected some communities.
- **Lack of transparency.** Many MnDOT noise-related decisions were made administratively with little public input or documentation. MnDOT could not provide reasons for some decades-old decisions that are still in effect.
- **No maintenance planning or funding.** Although MnDOT annually spent money to build barriers, it did not routinely repair or evaluate the condition of existing barriers.

Changes Implemented

- **Modifications to MnDOT noise policy.** Working with stakeholders, MnDOT has modified its noise policy for federally funded projects and will soon seek federal approval. The rewritten policy adopts OLA's recommended changes for assessing public support.
- **Creation of advisory committees with outside members.** The department has created technical and policy advisory committees to more transparently develop and review noise policies. The committees include non-MnDOT members, including several legislators.

Action Needed

- **Make changes to state-funded program.** MnDOT intends to create a program that would build stand-alone noise barriers in nonmetro locations meeting appropriate criteria. The department also intends to reexamine its ranking method for proposed stand-alone noise barriers in the metro area. However, no changes have been implemented to date.
- **Address gaps in maintenance resources.** Although a recent study found that MnDOT's noise barriers are generally in good shape, the department's inability to develop long-term plans for noise barrier maintenance remains a concern.

FEBRUARY 2015