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740.01 General

The function of a noise barrier is to reduce traffic noise levels in adjoining areas. The noise abatement decisions are made during the environmental stage of project development, which is a highly interactive process. Before a noise barrier is designed, the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) needs to be confident that there is significant need, a cost-effective and environmentally acceptable noise barrier, a source of funds, and acceptance by adjacent property owners, local governmental agencies, and the general public.

Preliminary design information that may be found in the noise report includes:

- Sources of noise.
- Noise receiver locations.
- Predicted level of noise reduction.
- Locations of existing and future noise –impacts along the project corridor.
- Barrier location and height recommendations based on what is feasible and reasonable.

Design of a noise barrier project is the result of a team effort coordinated by the Project Engineer.

This chapter addresses the factors that are considered when designing a noise barrier and the associated procedures and documentation requirements.

740.02 Design

The two basic types of noise barriers are the earth berm and the noise wall. An earth berm can be constructed to the full height required for noise abatement or to partial height in conjunction with a noise wall to reach the required height. A noise wall can be made of concrete, masonry, metal, wood, or other approved innovative products, and can be supported by spread, pile, shaft, or trench footings.

Consideration of the noise report and the visual characteristics of adjacent land forms, vegetation, and structural elements (such as buildings, bridges, and retaining walls) will determine whether a proposed noise barrier might be berm, wall, or both.

An earth berm is the primary alternative if the visual and environmental quality of the corridor will be preserved or enhanced and materials and right of way widths are available. (See the [Roadside Manual](#) for criteria for determining whether a vegetated earth berm is appropriate.)

The region uses the noise report and other environmental documents (see the [Environmental Manual](#)) to help determine the location, exposure conditions, length, and height of the proposed noise barrier.

To design and locate a noise barrier of any kind, consider the following:

- Desired noise abatement
- Future right of way needs
- Cost and constructability
- Neighborhood character
- Visual character and quality of the corridor
- Future maintenance of the noise barrier and the whole right of way
- Wind
- Supporting soil
- Earthquakes
- Groundwater
- Existing drainage systems and water courses
- Exposure to vehicular impacts
- Potential for vandalism
- Existing vegetation and roadside restoration required
- Access for maintenance equipment and enforcement, traffic service, and emergency vehicles
- Access to fire hydrants from both sides
- Pedestrian and bicycle access
- Available and attainable width of right of way for berms
- Aesthetic and structural characteristics of available wall designs
- Visual compatibility of each wall design with other transportation structures within the corridor
- Construction limits for footings
- Locations of existing survey monuments
- Access to and maintenance of right of way behind a wall, including drainage structures
- Use of right of way and wall by adjacent property owners
- Drainage and highway runoff
- Drainage from adjacent land
- Existing utilities and objects to relocate or remove
- Water and electricity needs, sources, and access points

Avoid objects such as bridge columns, light fixtures, or sign supports that protrude and may present a potential for snagging vehicles.

740.02(1) Earth Berm

Berm slopes are a function of the material used, the attainable right of way width, and the desired visual quality. Slopes steeper than 2H:1V (3H:1V for mowing) are not recommended. Design the end of the berm with a lead-in slope of 10H:1V and curve it toward the right of way line.

Refer to the [Roadside Manual](#) for guidance regarding vegetation on berms.

740.02(2) Noise Wall

When feasible, to encourage competitive bidding, include several alternate noise wall designs in the contract and permit the contractor to submit alternate designs under the value engineering specification.

There are noise wall designs in the [Standard Plans](#). Additional designs are in various stages of development to become standard plans.

The draft-standard design sheets and other preapproved plans are available from the Headquarters (HQ) Bridge and Structures Office. The HQ Bridge and Structures Office also works with the regions to facilitate the use of other designs as bidding options.

When a noise wall has ground elevations that are independent of the roadway elevations, a survey of ground breaks (or cross sections at 25 foot intervals) along the entire length of the wall is needed for evaluation of constructability and to assure accurate determination of panel heights.

Size of openings (whether lapped, door, or gated) depends on the intended users. Agencies such as the local fire department can provide the necessary requirements. Unless an appropriate standard plan is available, such openings are designed and detailed for the project.

When a noise wall is inside the Design Clear Zone, design its horizontal and vertical (ground elevation) alignment as if it were a rigid concrete traffic barrier. (See Chapter 1610 for maximum flare rates.) See Chapter 1600 for more information about Design Clear Zone.

Provide a traffic barrier when a new noise wall is constructed within the Design Clear Zone. Installation of a traffic barrier is optional for a new wall when an existing wall is being extended (or the existing wall may be retrofitted with a barrier for continuity). For flare rates and approach slopes for concrete barriers, see Chapter 1610. Noise walls that provide a traffic barrier integrated in the design are available. Contact HQ Design for more information.

To designate a standard noise wall, select the appropriate general special provisions (GSPs) and state the standard plan number, type, and foundation type.

Wall type is a function of exposure and wind speed (see Exhibit 740-1).

A geotechnical report identifying the angle of internal friction “*f*” and the allowable bearing pressure is needed for selection of a standard foundation. The standard spread footing designs require an allowable bearing pressure of 1 Tsf (Ton per square foot). The standard trench and shaft footing designs require an “*f*” of at least 32° for D1 and 38° for D2.

A special design of the substructure is required for noise walls on substandard soil, where winds exceed 90 mph, and for exposures other than B1 and B2 as defined in Exhibit 740-1.

For maintenance of the surface of a tall wall (10 feet or more), consider harness tie offs for the fall protection required by the Department of Labor and Industries.

Exhibit 740-1 Standard Noise Wall Types

	Exposure				
	B1		B2		C
Wind Speed	80 mph	90 mph	80 mph	90 mph	
Wall Type	A	B	C	D	Special Design *

Wind speed is according to Figure 1-2.1.2.A of the (AASHTO) Guide Specifications for Structural Design of Sound Barriers. Assume the wind to be perpendicular to the wall on both sides and design for the most exposed side.

Exposure is determined by the nature of the immediately adjacent ground surface and the extension of a plane at the adjacent ground surface elevation for 1500 feet to either side of the noise wall:

- Exposure B1 = Urban and suburban areas with numerous closely spaced obstructions having the size of single-family or larger dwellings that prevail in the upwind direction from the noise barrier for a distance of at least 1,500 feet.
- Exposure B2 = Urban and suburban areas with more open terrain not meeting the requirements of Exposure B1.
- Exposure C = Open terrain with scattered obstructions that includes flat, open country, grasslands, and elevated terrain.

*For a noise wall with Exposure C, on a bridge or overpass or at the top of a slope, consult the HQ Bridge and Structures Office, as a special design will probably be necessary.

740.03 Procedures

The noise unit notifies the Project Engineer's Office when a noise barrier is recommended in the noise report.

The Project Engineer's Office is responsible for interdisciplinary teams, consultation, and coordination with the public, noise specialists, maintenance, construction, region Landscape Architecture Office (or the HQ Roadside and Site Development Section), right of way personnel, Materials Laboratory, State Bridge and Structures Architect, HQ Bridge and Structures Office, CAE Support Team, HQ Development Services & Access Manager, consultants, and many others.

If a noise wall is contemplated, the region evaluates the soils (see Chapter 610 and Chapter 710) and obtains a list of acceptable wall design options. The list is obtained by sending information pertaining to soils and drainage conditions, alignment, and height of the proposed wall to the State Bridge and Structures Architect.

If a vegetated earth berm is considered, see the Roadside Manual for procedures.

The State Bridge and Structures Architect coordinates with the HQ Bridge and Structures Office, HQ Hydraulics Section, HQ Geotechnical Office, and the region to provide a list of acceptable standard, draft-standard, and preapproved proprietary noise wall designs, materials, and finishes that are compatible with existing visual elements of the corridor. Only wall designs from this list may be considered as alternatives. Limit design visualizations of the highway side of proposed walls (available from the CAE Support Team in Olympia) to options from this list. The visual elements of the private property side of a wall are the responsibility of the region unless addressed in the environmental documents.

After the noise report is completed, any changes to the –dimensions or location of a noise barrier must be reviewed by the appropriate noise unit to determine the impacts of the changes on noise abatement.

On limited access highways, coordinate any opening in a wall or fence (for pedestrians or vehicles) with the HQ Development Services & Access Manager and obtain approval from the Director & State Design Engineer, Development Division.

On nonlimited access highways, an access connection permit is required for any opening (approach) in a wall or fence.

The HQ Bridge and Structures Office provides special substructure designs to the regions upon request; reviews contract design data related to standard, draft-standard, and preapproved designs; and reviews plans and calculations that have been prepared by others (see Chapter 710).

Approval by the State Bridge and Structures Architect is required for any attachment or modification to a noise wall and for the design, appearance, and finish of door and gate-type openings.

Approval by the State Bridge and Structures Architect is also required for the final selection of noise wall appearance, finish, materials, and configuration.

740.04 Documentation

Refer to Chapter 300 for design documentation requirements.

740.05 References

740.05(1) Design Guidance

Guide Specifications for Structural Design of Sound Barriers, AASHTO, 2002

Standard Plans for Road, Bridge, and Municipal Construction (Standard Plans), M 21-01, WSDOT

740.05(2) Supporting Information

Environmental Manual, M 31-11, WSDOT

Roadside Manual, M 25-30, WSDOT

