

February 20, 2009

The Transportation Committee Via email: cj.strand@cga.ct.gov

RE: SB-448: An Act Concerning Sound Barriers Along Fairfield County State Highways  
Public Hearing - Feb 24, 2009 1:00 pm

Dear Chair & Transportation Committee Members:

I am unable to attend the public hearing, but write you today in support of Senate Bill 448 for sound barriers, in particular, north and south of Exit 16 in Norwalk.

As a long-time resident of Olmstead Place in East Norwalk, I am well familiar with the amount of noise and unrestricted pollution that is caused by vehicles on I-95. When the Olmstead Place development was built in the early 1960's, no one could have imagined the amount of traffic morning, noon and night. A number of factors, not the least of which were the removal of tollbooths, the dawn of two-income homes, and the growing demand for consumer packaged goods, have all contributed to more trucks and cars than ever on I-95.

My home is within 500 feet of I-95 at Exit 16 where our cul-de-sac ends just several feet from the highway. My neighbors and I have been waiting patiently for years for the state to install sound barriers. As of 2006, our road was #81 on a list of 131 still waiting for funding for barriers. The extreme noise, and the wind-blown road debris, including small particulate pollutants, impacts our life in every season. The time has come to fully fund the installation of barriers, with federal funds if available, with state funds if necessary.

Other communities in Fairfield County, indeed throughout Connecticut, enjoy the relative peace that sound barriers provide. Norwalk has been excluded from this quality of life initiative for years, while those around us even received brand new barriers to replace older technology. We have also seen commercial zones of Route 1 parallel to the highway receive sound barriers, while Norwalk residential neighborhoods go without.

The constant din of highway noise is intolerable, grows worse over time, and impacts our lives on a daily basis. The drone of car engines is constant during morning rush hour as traffic is backed up southbound, and again in the evening as it backs up northbound. In the "non-rush hour" of the mid-day, the never-ending roar of trucks bombards us - each truck estimated by Sen. Duff as the equivalent of 28 cars! During the endless construction and maintenance near Exit 16, the road is congested no matter what the hour. I'm not sure which is worse: the sound of cars and trucks whizzing by at 70mph or the relentless stop and go engines in a traffic jam!

I believe sound barriers will greatly reduce the noise. They may very well mitigate the amount of particulate pollution from the highway as well. Researchers at the University of Southern California conducted a 13-year study of 3600 children, and concluded that "damage from living near a freeway is about the same as that from living in communities with the highest pollution levels" The newspaper account of the study went on to say that children living near busy highways "have significant impairments in the development of their lungs that can lead to respiratory problems for the rest of their lives". There are many young children in my neighborhood, and also many senior citizens. They, and all of us, deserve a healthy living environment, one free from airborne pollutants and the constant, unnerving barrage of highway noise.

If our legislators and governor are serious about participating in the economic stimulus programs that will put people to work and benefit citizens, one can hardly find a better, more shovel-ready project than barrier installations. At a time when the cost of materials and labor may hit historic, competitive lows, we should be ready to act quickly to secure funding, prepare project bid packages, and get shovels into the ground soon. If federal funding is not available, then I urge you to push for appropriations from existing highway funds & gasoline tax revenues to pursue this program at once. I respectfully recommend you begin the projects at Exit 16 in Norwalk, where there is a high concentration of residential development.

Thank you for your time and your consideration.

Respectfully,

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Diane M. Cece