

*Oral presentation (C)*  
*5-13-03*

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: MAY 12, 2003

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL

THROUGH: PHILIP SUNDERLAND, CITY MANAGER *PS*

FROM: RICHARD J. BAIER, P.E., DIRECTOR  
TRANSPORTATION & ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES *R. Baier*

SUBJECT: APPROVAL OF NOISE BARRIER FOR WOODROW WILSON BRIDGE PROJECT

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On May 6, the Virginia Department of Transportation received formal concurrence from the Federal Highway Administration to proceed with the design and construction of a noise barrier on the Virginia approach spans of the new Woodrow Wilson Bridge. This noise barrier will reduce the traffic noise impact in the Yates Gardens neighborhood, at St. Mary's School and in Jones Point Park. The approval of the noise barrier culminates a two year campaign by Council, the Neighborhood Task Force and City staff to overcome objections and obtain noise relief for residents living near the bridge, users of Jones Point Park and others.

Installing one of the first innovative see-through highway noise barriers in the U.S., VDOT has now agreed to extend the transparent barrier along the north side of the new inner loop span. The see-through barrier will start at the bridge's abutment, at Royal Street, and extend approximately 1,550 feet eastward over Jones Point Park between the pedestrian trail and traffic on the bridge. The maximum 17-foot high sound barrier will be made of a transparent acrylic material called Paraglas that is one-half inch thick with five-foot, six-inch high panels, which will significantly reduce decibel levels in adjacent neighborhoods. The material is protected from UV rays to prevent yellowing, and it is also graffiti-resistant and easily cleaned.

The City is indebted to Virginia Transportation Secretary Whittington W. Clement and his staff for their support in for this noise mitigation. After meeting with Mayor Donley and Councilman Euille, the Secretary was instrumental in reopening this issue after VDOT's earlier rejection of the proposal due to aesthetic, operational and maintenance considerations. Subsequently, VDOT proposed a transparent barrier design that effectively negated these objections.

If you have questions, please call either Rich Baier (703/838-4966), or Reed Winslow (703/548-3180).

Attachment: FHWA letter to VDOT

cc: The Honorable Whittington W. Clement  
Alexandria Woodrow Wilson Bridge Neighborhood Task Force  
City Council Members-elect  
Barbara Gordon, Public Information Officer



U.S. Department  
of Transportation

**Federal Highway  
Administration**

Virginia Division  
(804)775-3320

May 6, 2003

P.O. Box 10249  
400 N. 8th Street Rm. 750  
Richmond, Virginia 23240

**IN REPLY REFER TO:**

Woodrow Wilson Bridge Project;  
FHWA Review of VDOT's  
Request for a Transparent Bridge  
Mounted Noise Barrier System;  
Federal No: DPB-V013(010)  
State No: 0095-96A-106, PE101  
City of Alexandria

Mr. Malcolm T. Kerley  
Chief Engineer for Program Development  
Virginia Department of Transportation

1401 East Broad Street  
Richmond, Virginia 23219-2000

Dear Mr. Kerley:

We are in receipt of your letter dated April 30, 2003, requesting FHWA concurrence in extending the proposed noise barrier that would be located on the north side of I-95/I-495 on to the new Woodrow Wilson Bridge approximately 1,550 feet. Just as a background, the joint FHWA-VDOT Noise Abatement Committee approved a barrier in September of 2000 that would extend the barrier approximately 570 feet on to the Woodrow Wilson Bridge to protect noise sensitive receptors in the City of Alexandria. In November of that year, the VDOT Chief Engineer approved a barrier that would be located north of I-95/I-495 but terminate at the western abutment to the bridge citing aesthetic, safety, operational, and maintenance concerns. On December 13, 2000, FHWA agreed to participate in the construction of the noise barriers designed for the Woodrow Wilson Bridge project including the barrier that would terminate at the western abutment. In the winter and spring of 2001, VDOT continued to coordinate with the City of Alexandria on a variety of issue including noise issues related to the bridge. Based on this additional coordination, additional noise impacts were identified and a noise barrier was designed that would address a majority of the total noise impacts by extending the proposed noise barrier located north of I-95/I-495 approximately 1,000 feet on to the bridge. Despite identification of additional impacts, VDOT continued to withhold support for the barrier because the reasons cited for eliminating the barrier originally had not changed. In light of the additional

impacts that had been identified, VDOT requested FHWA concur in November of 2001 in their decision to terminate the proposed noise barrier at the western abutment to the new bridge for the same reasons cited previously. By letter dated January 9, 2002, FHWA concurred in VDOT's decision to terminate the proposed noise barrier at the western abutment. In May, VDOT changed their position on extending the noise barrier on to the bridge believing that transparent barrier technology could address the previous concerns; consequently, VDOT requested FHWA's concurrence in now extending the barrier. In response, FHWA requested information from VDOT asking them to document how the four conditions originally cited in support of terminating the noise barrier at the western abutment were no longer applicable. Additionally, FHWA cited the role that coordination with the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, the National Capital Planning Commission, the Design Review Working Group and the Ad Hoc Committee of the Design Competition Selection Panel played in its original decision to support VDOT in their decision to terminate the noise barrier at the western abutment. Accordingly, FHWA requested that coordination with these groups be reestablished. In August of 2002, VDOT provided documentation addressing the aesthetic, safety, operational, and maintenance issues as they now related to a transparent noise barrier system. However, VDOT had not reinitiated coordination with the groups cited above that had been instrumental in providing input into the design and aesthetics of the bridge. Therefore, FHWA informed VDOT that before it could concur with their decision to extend the noise barrier on to the bridge, coordination with these groups needed to occur.

VDOT's April 30, 2003, letter documents this coordination. As a result of this coordination, the four groups identified above have responded positively and expressed support for the barrier. Most offered comments and suggestions which have been considered by VDOT resulting in a few minor changes to the barrier. Based upon this documented coordination and the feedback received, FHWA concurs with VDOT's decision to extend the proposed noise barrier located north of I-95/I-495 approximately 1,550 feet on to the new Woodrow Wilson Bridge using a transparent noise barrier system.

If you have any comments or questions, please contact me at 775-3338.

Sincerely,

Roberto Fonseca-Martinez  
Division Administrator

/s/ Edward S. Sundra

By: Edward S. Sundra  
Environmental Specialist, Sr.

CC: John Gerner, FHWA  
Nelson Castellanos, FHWA