

NCDOT Traffic Noise FAQs

1. When does a project need a noise study?

- If any environmental document other than a State Minimum Criteria Determination Checklist (MCDC) is being prepared, the need for a noise study is determined by the type of improvements, regardless of project funding. In these cases, always consult the Traffic Noise and Air Quality Group (TNAQ) for a determination on whether or not a noise study is needed. The policy can be a little hard to interpret, but TNAQ understands the policy's intent and applies the policy uniformly and consistently statewide in making this determination. TNAQ is always eager to help you answer this question.
- If project is being processed as an MCDC, then no noise study is needed. However, the Division may choose to do one anyway if noise might be a public concern of the public, so that their questions can be better addressed. This is especially true if the project is building a new-location road near noise sensitive land uses (homes, churches, schools, etc.).

2. On State funded projects, when does the Division Engineer get to determine whether a noise study will be prepared?

- The Division Engineer does not make this decision (except in the case of an MCDC – see Question 1). Whether or not a noise study is required is dictated by policy. Consult TNAQ office at scoping, and we will assess your project in light of the Traffic Noise Policy and advise whether or not a noise study is needed. The new authority granted to DEs in the 2016 Traffic Noise Policy pertains to abatement, not analysis (see Question 3).

3. On State funded projects, when does the Division Engineer get to determine whether noise walls will be provided?

- On a state-funded project that is not adding through lanes to an interstate or US route with full control of access, the Division Engineer can determine whether a likely noise wall identified in the TNR is practicable. The rationale for the practicability call must be provided in writing (the TNAQ Group can assist with this). This is a new provision of the 2016 Traffic Noise Policy.

4. If there are a bunch of driveways and intersections that would prevent a noise wall from being built, then there's no need to do a noise study, right?

- Wrong. Even if no abatement can be provided due to driveways, etc., we still must identify and disclose traffic noise impacts to the public as part of National or State Environmental Policy Acts (NEPA or SEPA).
 - Our noise studies serve two purposes. One is to identify anticipated noise impacts and disclose them to the public in compliance with NEPA/SEPA. This is the primary purpose of the Traffic Noise Report (TNR) done during the NEPA/SEPA phase. The TNR will also identify preliminarily feasible and reasonable noise abatement.
 - The second purpose noise studies serve (achieved by the Design Noise Report [DNR]) is to identify and recommend the location and size of noise walls during final

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design. The results of this report are used for soliciting public preference of those benefited by a wall (the balloting process) and for providing the design team critical noise wall information for inclusion in the project plans and specifications.

5. How long does it take to do a noise study?

- Allow at least 150 calendar days from Notice to Proceed or availability of designs, whichever is later, and a completed report.

6. When is the right time to get started on a noise study?

- As soon as designs are available for the detailed study alternatives. These can be functional or preliminary. It is much better to get started sooner with a lesser level of design than to wait for the availability of approved design plans. Since CEs are being done in 12 months, and since the TNR needs to be signed before the CE approval date, we need to get started as soon as any level of design on project alternatives is available.
- However, there is preliminary work (noise analysis work plan, field work, model validation, baseline modeling) that can be done while designs are being developed. This preliminary work can begin once project limits and proposed improvements are known.
- Your noise study should evaluate all detailed study alternatives, not just the Preferred Alternative, so do not wait until you select the Preferred before starting your noise study. Doing so will jeopardize your project schedule.
- Contact TNAQ for project-specific guidance as needed.

7. What level of involvement should the TNAQ have in Division managed projects?

- PROJECT SCOPING: Always consult us at scoping and we will advise you on the need for a traffic noise (or air quality) study based on the specific project. Invite us to your scoping meetings, send us your start of study letters, send us your scopes of work to review.
- FIRM CONTRACT SCOPING: We will provide a standard scope template, review your traffic noise (or air quality) scope of work, prepare workday estimates, review firm's workday estimate, negotiate with the firm when necessary.
- REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF DELIVERABLES: We will review and approve all traffic noise deliverables (traffic noise work plans, validation models, TNRs, and DNRs, and TNR or DNR addenda).
- PUBLIC MEETINGS: We will attend public meetings for projects where noise is a concern or where noise walls are likely. After completion of a DNR, we will also take the lead in scheduling/leading balloting meetings.
- BALLOTING PROCESS: We will conduct the balloting process for soliciting public preference on recommended noise walls in a DNR.
- PANEL DRAWINGS: We will review and approve all panel drawings for noise walls.
- DESIGN REVISION REVIEW: We will review all design revisions to noise walls, or revisions to project design that may affect noise walls.

Traffic Noise Policy, Traffic Noise Manual, TNR Standard Scope Template and other important resources can be found at

connect.ncdot.gov

Click on Resources, then Environmental, then Guidance and Procedures.

Look under Manual Section: Air and Noise.