

# Quebec willing to pay bigger share of Highway 20 sound barrier in Beaconsfield

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Updated: September 8, 2015



A new sound barrier along Highway 20 in Beaconsfield may get more funding than usual from the Quebec government. Derrick Pounds, right, has been advocating for it for years and lives near the problem area. He and his neighbour, Dominic Orlando, live next to the highway. **MARIE-FRANCE COALLIER / MONTREAL GAZETTE**

Beaconsfield's sound barrier on the south side of Highway 20 may cost the city's residents less than expected, if a new agreement between the city and the Quebec government discussed last Thursday moves ahead.

The compromise would mean the provincial government would absorb 75 per cent of the cost of the \$20.5-million concrete sound barrier, leaving city taxpayers with a \$5 million bill.

The cost of a sound barrier would normally be split evenly between a municipality and the provincial government. A press release issued by the city stated that Quebec would be covering more than half because of changes to the highway over the past 30 years, including the construction of the Woodland overpass in 1998, an increased speed limit, a doubling of traffic and the removal of stoplights — changes that led to more noise.

"I've lived in this same house, which is 200 metres south of the highway, for 52 years. We've seen huge changes," said Derrick Pounds, one of the people who worked on the agreement and the chair of Beaconsfield's Citizens Sound Wall Committee. "We can't open our windows at night in the summertime because it's a racetrack along the highway."

"I know from experience that the sound level where we live, we're not going to get the full effect of a sound wall. People living close are going to get the full effect, and it's going to be reduced," he said. "I've been in areas where the sound barriers have been built, and you can carry on a conversation."

Pounds said the wall is "a win-win," because he believed that residents' health and property values might improve.

"There are pluses and minuses to having a wall," said Beaconsfield Mayor Georges Bourelle. "I think it will be 100-per-cent effective in reducing the noise, that's pretty clear. But a wall's a wall," he said, and some residents may have aesthetic objections.

One of the World Health Organization's regional offices issued a press release in 2009 linking noise levels above 55 decibels to health problems, including high blood pressure and heart attacks.

Quebec's Transport Ministry did a sound study in 2010, dividing the area south of the highway into three sectors, including one between Woodland Ave. and St-Charles Blvd. The average sound levels were between 68 and 72 decibels in that area. All three sectors south of the highway studied in the MTQ's 2010 report were labelled "loud."

MTQ guidelines state that a sound barrier should be built when noise levels are over 65 decibels.

Simulations in the 2010 report showed that a sound wall could reduce the noise by about 10 decibels. The sound barriers proposed in that study also had an estimated cost of \$20.5 million.

A citizens' petition for a sound wall on the south side of the highway also circulated in 2010.

But the sound barrier isn't a done deal.

"The first step now is going to be to have a written agreement with the government," the mayor said. After that, residents will need to decide how to pay for their share — two obvious ways are implementing a general tax or with a tax that only homeowners affected by the wall will pay, Bourelle said.

"I want it to be an extensive and thorough consultation process," the mayor said.

If everything goes as planned, the wall could be built in the next three to four years.

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