

City to get \$1.4 million for sound walls on I-55

By Jennie Korb
Staff writer

Things could soon quiet down for Darien residents living near Interstate 55.

The city recently learned it would get \$1.4 million in federal funds secured by U.S. Rep. Judy Biggert, R-13th District, of Hinsdale, to help pay for construction of a sound barrier along I-55 between Lemont Road and Cass Avenue.

In 2002, Darien and Willowbrook jointly hired Huff and Huff Inc., an environmental engineering and consulting firm based in La Grange, to conduct a noise study along Route 83 in anticipation of the state's plan to someday widen that road. Darien expanded its portion of the study to include I-55 after hearing from residents who live near the highway concerned about noise.

"We had the study done, and it showed how a wall would reduce decibel levels of sound from the traffic on the expressway," said City Administrator Bryon Vana.

According to the study, which was completed last year,

all but one of the 10 areas studied along I-55 experience noise levels high enough to warrant some kind of abatement measure now — and by 2020 all of them will. The study recommended noise walls to diminish sound on Route 83 and I-55, but pointed out those would not be viable or economically feasible in some areas.

Vana said the city has not yet applied for state grants for the sound barrier on I-55, but now that it has matching funds secured from the federal government, it can get that process started.

According to a statement from Biggert's office, the congresswoman wrote the chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Treasury and Independent Agencies in March, asking for help for Darien's project. The funding was included in the Omnibus Appropriations Bill passed by the House and Senate Nov. 20.

Peggy Concannon, who lives near I-55 and has been spearheading residents' efforts there for several years, along with resident Joan Wayman, said she is very grateful to Biggert for securing the funds.

"This is huge, this is absolutely huge what (Biggert) was able to do for us. ... This is a beautiful holiday present," Concannon said.

She said the city and residents have been working with state Sen. Christine Radogno, R-41st District, of La Grange, and Darien Mayor Carmen Soldato had been trying to secure funds at the federal level.

Concannon pointed out that at Frontage Road and Carlisle Court, the road is lower than the expressway, and there is just a little fence and not much land between the expressway and the homes.

"We think it's really a safety issue as well as the noise issue, and we think (the wall is) going to be great for property values in the neighborhood, as well," Concannon said. "It will probably take a couple more years, but it's great news."

She said the city had planned to meet in a few weeks with residents living near I-55 to ask if they would be willing to "step up to the plate" to help provide the matching funds required for the state grant through some kind of special assessment, but now that won't be necessary.

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