

I-355 extension creates desire for noise barriers

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By Guy Tridgell The Daily Southtown

Bruce Steinke wanted to buy a home last year next to the new Interstate 355 extension in Lockport.

Steinke had one condition before putting his name on the dotted line: A noise wall had to come with the purchase. This spring, Steinke got his wall, about 30 feet from his back door in the Parker Ridge subdivision.

"It's extremely important to me," he said. "I'm just glad it's there. We could have had nothing."

As the 12½-mile extension nears its November opening, who gets noise walls and who doesn't will be discussed up and down the new toll road. Few issues stoke greater passion among people who live near multilane highways.

"Whenever the tollway has public hearings, we almost get more questions about noise walls than the roads themselves," said Joelle McGinnis, spokeswoman for the Illinois State Toll Highway Authority. "Folks generally are always interested in noise walls."

In Steinke's subdivision, the walls were added at the developer's expense. Lockport officials placed the requirement on Lord & Essex Homes of Aurora for building so close to I-355.

The tollway authority plans to add 2.6 miles of walls in six other locations along the route, from Bolingbrook to New Lenox, for a combined \$5.5 million. Construction of the walls on the extension's north end started this month.

For the first time on a new stretch of tollway in Illinois, multiple materials will be incorporated into the walls -- including the first plastic noise wall in the state near 163rd Street in Lockport. All of the walls will resemble a reddish brick.

Several criteria must be met before the tollway authority will consider adding noise walls:

Commercial and industrial properties are ineligible. Only parks, schools and houses can have them. Also, the buildings must be no more than 500 feet from the tollway.

Traffic generated from the road has to be at least 67 decibels by 2030, the noise akin to someone talking in a normal voice from 3 feet away.

The construction of the wall must result in a noise reduction of five decibels or greater.

A "cost-per-resident analysis" needs to show that a wall will benefit many homeowners. This condition is a sore point for Lake County homeowners on massive lots next to the Tri-State Tollway.

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