

Senate Transportation Committee

Vivian Hall 271-3091

SB 631-FN, installing a sound barrier on Interstate 93 southbound.

Hearing Date: January 20, 2026

Time Opened: 3:10 p.m.

Time Closed: 3:40 p.m.

Members of the Committee Present: Senators Ricciardi, McConkey, Ward, Prentiss and Fenton

Members of the Committee Absent : None

Bill Analysis: This bill directs the department of transportation to install sound barriers along the southbound side of Interstate 93, between Pillsbury Road and the Exit 4 Southbound off-ramp.

Sponsors:

Sen. Carson

Rep. Packard

Rep. Lundgren

Rep. W. MacDonald

Who supports the bill: 43 individuals signed in support of SB 631-FN. Contact vivian.hall@gc.nh.gov for further details.

Who opposes the bill: 1 individual signed in opposition for SB 631-FN. Contact vivian.hall@gc.nh.gov for further details

Who is neutral on the bill: 1 individual signed in as neutral for SB 631-FN. Contact vivian.hall@gc.nh.gov for further details.

Summary of testimony presented in support:

Senator Sharon Carson, Senate, District 14

- Senator Carson introduced SB 631-FN which proposes installing a sound barrier along I-93 southbound near the Baldwin senior living community in Londonderry to address significant traffic noise.
- Sound barriers have been installed north of Pillsbury Road and south of exit 4A, but there is a gap near the Baldwin, leaving residents exposed.

Senator Ricciardi asked what the population density is there.

Senator Carson said she was unsure, but the assisted living is an apartment complex with a significant number of residents affected by the noise.

Senator Ricciardi suggested the Department of Transportation should measure decibel levels and consider population density to determine if a noise barrier is justified.

Senator Carson said the residents have done work that includes a decibel study to justify the noise barrier.

Senator Ricciardi asked Senator Carson to consider, if the project doesn't qualify, substituting it with her previously proposed bill and using toll credits to fund the sound barrier.

Senator McConkey asked if the complex is alongside a section of road that has been there or have there been other things, such as turning lanes, that have been added since the building's creation.

Senator Carson replied that the area between exits 4 and 4A in Londonderry was originally an apple orchard and has gradually been developed since the early-to-mid 2000s, now including multiple apartment buildings, a senior living complex, and several doctor's offices.

Senator McConkey asked if the highway was there first when the properties were built. Senator Carson confirmed the highway was there first.

Neutral Information Presented:

Jonathan Evans, Noise Program Manager, New Hampshire Department of Transportation

- The Department of Transportation handles noise as a step-by-step process for alleviating noise from the highway. Mr. Evans explained there are two types of projects.
 - Type 1 projects are changes to highways that may create new noise, while Type 2 projects address existing noise issues from older highways built before federal noise guidelines.
 - Type 2 projects have a policy but no current funding in the 10-year plan, and other requirements make implementation challenging.
- Existing barriers north of the site don't cover this neighborhood, and prior highway projects did not evaluate noise here since the development didn't exist at that time.

Senator McConkey noted the high cost of implementing these projects. He asked if the only viable option is because that structure must be built within highway limit right of way. **Mr. Evans** confirmed that it is the case.

Senator McConkey asked if it is possible for the Department of Transportation to partner with nearby landowners to use their land for a noise mitigation project,

such as a berm, instead of being limited to building within the highway right-of-way.

Mr. Evans said they are bound by the federal requirements and don't allow for the implementation of a noise barrier using external funds. It potentially could create inequality amongst municipalities.

Senator McConkey asked if building a noise barrier on adjacent private land (with an easement) instead of within the state right-of-way could allow a less expensive construction method.

Mr. Evans explained that the greatest cost of noise walls are materials and installation, and they must be tall, long, and dense enough to be effective.

Senator McConkey asked if it was possible to limit the structure from a seven-foot structure to a four-foot structure.

Mr. Evans explained the reasonability criteria for implementing noise mitigation.

Senator Ricciardi asked whether residents in a housing complex built after a highway was constructed are eligible for restitution, unlike long-established neighbors affected by increased traffic noise.

Mr. Evans said it would depend on the situation and gave a few examples.

Senator Ricciardi highlighted the lack of funding for noise projects and asked if contractors could be required to include noise protection measures in bids to safeguard residents' quality of life.

Senator Ward noted that it goes back to the builder of that facility. They should have planned some sort of noise mitigation in the upon construction.

Mr. Evans explained what noise compatible planning was and cited the city of Portsmouth as an example.

Senator Prentiss noted the jurisdiction could go back to local governments and planning boards.