

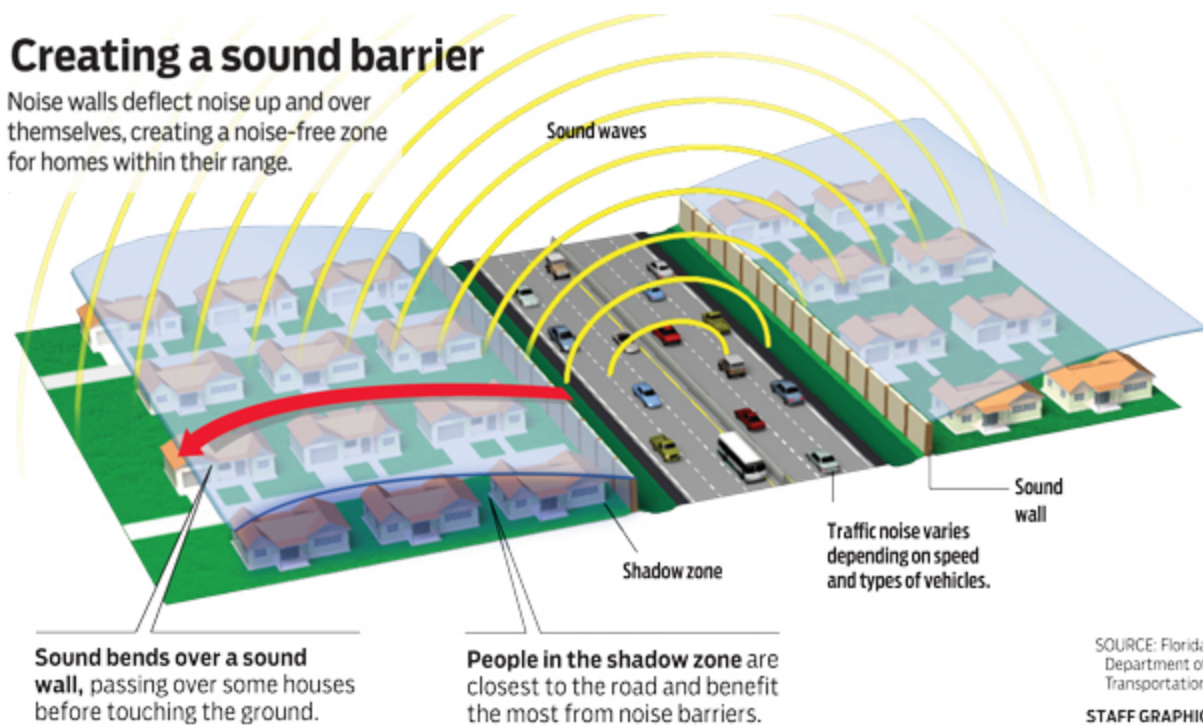
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Pricey noise walls have limited benefits

About \$28 million being spent on barriers on Interstate 595. Some residents say they don't notice any reduction in noise.

By [Michael Turnbell](#), Sun Sentinel

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Every time an expressway in South Florida is widened, millions of dollars are spent on concrete walls to buffer the noise – roughly \$2 million to \$3 million per mile, on average.

But they only help the first row or two of homes.

Beyond that, they provide "psychological" relief and block the view of traffic but not much else.

Noise walls have gone up along just about every stretch of Interstate 95 from Miami to Jupiter. Florida's Turnpike has added them as stretches have been widened in Broward and Palm Beach counties.

For the reconstruction of I-595 in [Broward County](#), about \$28 million is being spent on noise barriers that if stacked end-to-end would stretch more than 11 miles.

Some residents say they haven't helped at all.

"I live in the Jacaranda area and the noise gets worse on a daily basis," said Betsy Gonzalez.

Congress established standards for highway noise levels in the early 1970s during the same movement that produced federal acts for protecting water, air and endangered species.

Sound levels must reach 66 decibels to make a community eligible for a noise barrier, and the wall has to cut the noise by at least 5 decibels. In Florida, the wall can't cost more than \$42,000 for each home it benefits.

The cost for noise walls varies depending on the height and length, where it's located and the size of the project.

For instance, in 2002, a 22-foot tall wall that stretched 2,180 feet along I-95 in Miami-Dade County cost about \$1.7 million to build, according to the Federal Highway Administration. In 2005, an 8-foot tall wall over 3,700 feet in length along I-95 in [Delray Beach](#) cost about \$2 million.

Studies have shown that such barriers can cut traffic noise in half. But those that get the greatest benefit live in what's called the shadow zone, an area that stretches only several hundred feet beyond the wall.

For the tallest walls built in Florida, which are 22 feet high, that means usually only the first couple rows of homes truly benefit. Past that, their effectiveness is limited.

"They will not eliminate the noise. They will reduce it," said James Mykytka, a noise consultant for the Florida Department of Transportation.

About 123 miles of noise walls were installed statewide from 1977 to 2007 at a cost of about \$270 million, according to the most recent federal data. About 81 percent of the walls were constructed in Broward, Palm Beach and Miami-Dade counties.

Nationwide, about 2,500 miles of noise walls were built from the '70s through 2007. The cost: \$3.3 billion.

If you were to look from above I-595 when the construction is over in 2014, you would see a labyrinth of walls separating the main lanes of I-595 from S.R. 84 and the crisscrossing ramps connecting the two parallel highways.

Where I-595 passes over cross streets, Mykytka said there will be 8-foot-high barriers along the outside lanes of I-595 working in tandem with 14-foot barriers on S.R. 84 below. In places where

the barriers can be built on the ground away from the road, the walls will be as high as 22 feet. Anything taller can't withstand hurricane gusts of 140 mph.

Bill Beasley lives one street north of the canal in Planation Acres, which is between Hiatus and Flamingo roads.

"I have an unobstructed view of I-595 westbound traffic and can readily hear its associated noise," he said. "Hopefully the 14-foot wall will reduce traffic noise."

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