

CLIENT

Pennsylvania Department of
Transportation

DATES

2023 - 2025

COLLABORATORS

CDM Smith

REFERENCE

Marian Hull,
Principal Planner,
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BUDGET

\$80,518

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Connect the Dots supported public outreach and engagement for the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) in collaboration with CDM Smith regarding proposed noise barriers along I-95 in residential neighborhoods. Connect the Dots engaged residents of impacted and benefited properties in the Phase One Noise Barrier Area to raise awareness about noise barriers, explain the approval process, and gather community insights, concerns, and questions. These conversations informed upcoming events and helped encourage resident participation in the voting process. The purpose was to inform City of Chester residents about the proposed noise wall barriers on Interstate 95 and encourage them to vote on the development of the noise walls and general design.

SERVICES PERFORMED

This work is the first of many phases of noise barrier outreach and engagement, and was conducted in two phases: Engagement Set Up (Phase Zero) and Engagement Implementation (Phase 1). Phase Zero focused on connecting with the community and building trust through site visits, attending community events, and sharing project information with the community. Phase One was focused on insight gathering, information sharing, and voting outreach. Through informational public meetings, voting meetings, and mobile voting engagement, Connect the Dots was able to connect with the community and bring project information and the vote to community members where they are.

- **Site Visits (7):** Connect the Dots conducted seven on-the-ground Site Visits over three months engaging in informal conversations with community members to build trust and gather critical insights on how to best connect with residents, learn residents' questions and concerns, and determine logistics and accessibility needs for upcoming meetings.
- **Address Validation:** Conducted an address validation exercise to ensure all impacted residents were accurately identified and included in targeted outreach efforts.
- **Open Houses (4):** Held four open house events at community-suggested locations with the support of a local community partner organization.
 - The Informational Open Houses featured a central community impact area, a.k.a. "The Front Porch."
 - The area was intentionally designed to reflect the community's culture of gathering on front porches in the summer and fall.
 - The designated space featured comfortable seating that encouraged both casual conversation and independent exploration, creating a welcoming and familiar atmosphere for people of all ages and abilities.
- Multiple opportunities for voting by way of a mobile voting station that brought project information and the ballot box directly to residents' doorsteps.



PROJECT OUTCOMES

Engagement Outcomes:

- Collected greater than 100% of the required number of ballots and achieved a greater than 30% sample size of eligible voters.
- A definitive majority of the residents in the neighborhood area voted “yes” to allow for the construction of a noise barrier along I-95.

Insights and Implications:

- Consistent Site Visits, in-person visibility in the neighborhood, and conversations with residents helped build trust with the community and established a long-term relationship throughout the duration of the project.
- Conversations with stakeholders and residents to gather information about questions and concerns allowed the team to iterate and adapt outreach and engagement approaches and informed the highly attended informational meetings.
- Meeting people where they were—both physically and through representation on our Field Team—proved highly effective in increasing voter participation. This approach helped us reach a significant sample size and ultimately resulted in a clear majority vote.
- Established an adaptable framework for engagement that can be replicated across future noise wall phases and neighborhoods.

