



EUROCITIES statement on the Commission proposal for a regulation on the sound level of motor vehicles

EUROCITIES is convinced that the introduction of stricter noise emission limits for vehicles is essential to achieve the goals set by the Environmental Noise Directive. We welcome the proposal of the European Commission to tighten noise emission limit values for motor vehicles (COM(2011)856 final). However, we believe that the proposal must be strengthened further to significantly reduce the number of people exposed to excessive, unhealthy noise in the EU. Meaningful progress towards this goal, which was already set ten years ago in the 6th Environment Action Programme (EAP), is only possible with substantial reductions of vehicle noise. Such reductions are technically and economically feasible¹.

Main proposals

The new limit values proposed by the Commission mostly reflect what is being done already, as the vast majority of cars already meet the first stage of the stricter limits. We believe that additional measures will be necessary to tackle urban noise problems adequately and within an acceptable timeframe.

To ensure effective regulation of vehicle noise, we would like to see:

1. A **faster timetable** for introducing the new standards. Even then, when looking at the car fleet turnover rates, it will still take many years before this legislation will have a positive impact on noise levels in the EU
2. **Additional longer term reduction targets** of 3dB by 2020 and an extra 3dB by 2025. We believe that this is technically feasible and allows for sufficient lead time for the automotive industry.
3. Scientific research in order to reduce vehicle noise emissions and setting out a **European research agenda** to encourage and support the automotive industry in developing an integrated approach to redesigning road vehicles.
4. A **noise label** for road vehicles similar to the existing tyre and energy labelling.
5. An obligation for Member States to add **noise emission testing** of vehicles to the set of mandatory regular safety and/or pollutant emissions tests of vehicles in use.

¹ CAETS letter to the Director General of DG Enterprise and Industry, 5 June 2011 Reduction Potential of Road Traffic Noise, Prof. W. Kropp et al, Chalmers University 2007

Background: noise in Europe's cities

Traffic noise burden in cities

In 1996 the European Commission published the Green Paper on Future Noise Policy. This was an important step towards a comprehensive European noise policy. The Green Paper reported that around 20 percent of EU citizens were suffering from noise levels which were considered as being unacceptable by scientists and health experts. In its resolution of June 1997, the European Parliament expressed its support for the Green Paper and urged that specific measures and initiatives be laid down in a directive on the reduction of environmental noise. This Environmental Noise Directive was published in 2002.

The Environmental Noise Directive has been of great importance in assessing the extent to which Europeans are exposed to noise. The reported figures in the Green Paper were by and large confirmed by the results from the first round of noise mapping.

We know now that within urban agglomerations

- some 60 million people are exposed to noise levels above 55dB during daytime;
- 40 million people are exposed to noise levels above 50dB at night.

Outside these agglomerations

- another 40 million people are exposed to noise levels above 55dB during daytime from major roads;
- around 30 million people are exposed to noise levels above 50dB at night from major roads.

We expect that the second round of noise mapping which is currently under way will show even larger numbers.

Data also shows that the impact of other sources like railways, airports and industry is relatively limited compared to noise from road traffic. The results of a EURO CITIES questionnaire on noise confirm this: 98% of the responding cities said that traffic noise is the main noise problem in their cities².

Health and social costs

Noise caused by road traffic is significant. Numerous reports show that this cannot be without consequence for human health³. High levels of annoyance and more importantly sleep disturbance have serious health effects like high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, heart attacks and strokes. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has estimated that traffic noise accounts for an annual loss of over 1 million healthy life years (DALY) in the EU⁴.

² Noise Questionnaire EURO CITIES, 2008

³ Traffic Noise Reduction in Europe, CE Delft, August 2007; Road Traffic Noise and Stroke - a prospective cohort study, Mette Sørensen et al, 2011; Transportation Noise and Cardiovascular Risks, UBA Wolfgang Babisch, 2006; Good Practice Guide on Noise and Health Effects, European Environment Agency, 2010; Night Noise Guidelines, WHO 2009

⁴ Burden of disease from Environmental Noise, WHO 2011

Other negative effects like loss of concentration leading to learning disabilities⁵, loss of production and traffic accidents are also reported. Furthermore, research indicates that high levels of traffic noise can lead to a devaluation of house prices⁶.

Although it is difficult to monetise the health and social costs of traffic noise, some reports suggest that these amount to at least 40 billion euros annually for the EU22⁷.

Quiet vehicles are the key to quieter cities

Cities have taken numerous measures to protect their citizens from traffic noise, including traffic planning, installing noise barriers and giving residents access to (relatively) quiet areas. However, these cannot deliver alone. Even if cities were able to apply most or all of the known local noise reduction measures at the same time, we believe that no more than a 5-7dB reduction of noise levels could be achieved. Making vehicles quieter is indispensable.

Engine noise remains dominant factor in cities

In urban areas, most vehicle noise comes from engines because, at low speed, engine noise dominates over the noise generated by tyres and road surfaces. Consequently, silent engines are vital for protecting citizens in our cities from excessive, harmful noise.

The EU cannot wait for electrification of engines to reduce noise. Due to slow market penetration and fleet turnover, electric vehicles will not represent a high enough share of the vehicle park for a long time to significantly reduce noise in cities. Cars, trucks and buses must become silent across the board much more quickly.

Conclusions

Although the 6th Environmental Action Programme and the Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment aimed at a reduction of the number of people exposed to environmental noise, developments in the real world over the past 10 years have shown that the noise burden in urban areas, especially from traffic, has not declined. In fact, despite considerable efforts by city authorities, the distance to target in urban areas seems to be greater than ever before. It may take well over a decade to achieve noise reduction targets as proposed by the Commission considering the necessary lead times for industry and the pace of car fleet turnover. When looking at the considerable health impacts and the incurring social costs, there is sufficient evidence that the benefits of stricter noise reduction limits at the source far outweigh the costs.

As cities are often noise 'hotspots', and 75% of Europeans live in cities, noise reduction in urban areas must be a priority not only for our cities but also for the EU. While our cities continue to act on noise, effectively reducing noise from road vehicles is indispensable to bringing down Europeans' noise exposure, improving their health and benefiting economy and society. We fully support the improvement of vehicle noise regulation and urge the European Parliament and Council to strengthen the Commission's proposal.

⁵ Quantitative response of children to environmental noise, Prof. S. Stansfeld et al, 2010

⁶ Traffic Noise Reduction in Europe, CE Delft, August 2007 ; Good Practice Guide on Noise and Health Effects, European Environment Agency, 2010

⁷ Traffic Noise Reduction in Europe, CE Delft, August 2007; EU22 refers to EU27 except Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Malta