

THE BOTTOM RUNG

Noise: the challenges, trends, technologies, politics and opportunities

Looking forward; seeking solutions

Spring 2021

OPINION SPLIT ON LOW TRAFFIC NEIGHBOURHOODS



They are called Low Traffic Neighbourhoods. LTNs, for short. They have been introduced in parts of London and other UK cities. Physical measures have been installed to restrict through-traffic. Generally, they are popular with people who live within them. But they have resulted in traffic being diverted onto main roads and 'boundary' roads. Traffic experts say some of that traffic may evaporate. But, if much of it remains, peace and quiet for some will be at the expense of others.

Read our thoughts on how traffic levels can be cut on *all* streets:

http://www.ukna.org.uk/uploads/4/1/4/5/4/1458009/the_great_traffic_disruptor_final.pdf

Road User Charging: A Fair Solution

Traffic levels have soared in recent years. Low Traffic Neighbourhoods are a way to try to reduce its impact on 'residential' areas. But, so far, this has had the effect of displacing traffic onto adjacent roads. In London this impacts a huge number of people. Almost three-quarters of a million live on main roads. And around a third of Londoners live within 50m of a busy road. Add in all the children at nursery/school & those who travel, work and shop on main roads and we start to understand the numbers impacted by traffic on main roads.

I believe road user charging is the most effective – and fairest - way to cut traffic on *all* roads. It would be distance-based. But, in order to work, a proportion of the money raised from it would need to be used to significantly

Road user charging is the most effective and fairest way to cut traffic on *all* roads

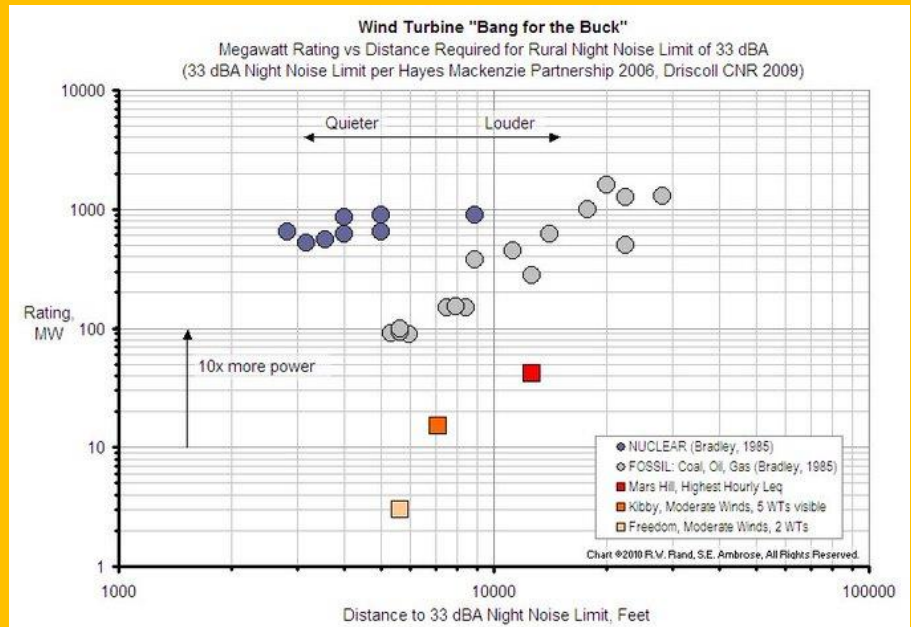
reduce the sky-high public transport fares in most British towns and cities. Road user charging would also replace existing motoring charges. The overall aim would be to ensure that, even with road user charging in place, most households spent less on transport than they do today.

To be truly effective, though, road user charging would need to be accompanied by measures to promote public transport and active travel – though it is likely that, with charging in place, the market for these other modes would increase naturally. Charging is also likely to make out-of-town business parks and shopping centres, often only really reachable by car, less attractive. In my view, it is the catalyst for change that we need.

John Stewart
Editor *The Bottom Rung*

ENERGY CAMPAIGNERS: WHY SO *SILENT* ON NOISE

I want to shout my frustration from the hilltops. But I am sure a wind turbine, perched there, dominating the valley below, will have beaten me to it! I want to yell at the whole wide world. At journalists who write about energy sources without a mention of the word 'noise'. At energy 'experts' who frame their discussions solely in terms of CO2. At politicians who do the same. At so many campaigners for whom noise is nothing but a quaint secondary issue. Raise noise and you are either patted on the head as a harmless eccentric or accused of climate betrayal.



I am not calling on all these new sources of energy to be ditched. All I am wanting is some reasoned debate. The wind farm debacle has shown what can happen when noise is absent from the debate. Many turbines built far too close to people's homes, leaving residents with decades of noise misery. My instinct is that 'heat pumps' may go the same way. My job has given me a good understanding of them. Many do not seem to cause noise problems. But are they *all* guaranteed not to cause noise problems? Why are their proponents so reluctant to even discuss the issue? I'm suspicious.

It would shock – no confuse – climate campaigners if we insisted that priority be given to the quietest form of energy regardless of its CO2 impact

It would shock – no confuse – climate campaigners if we insisted that priority be given to the quietest forms of energy regardless of its CO2 impact. I have got the options ready to go out to public consultation! How do wind turbines, nuclear plants and fracking compare in noise terms? Is sticking with a gas boiler quieter than switching to hydrogen or installing a heat pump?

It is energy I know about but I sense I've got allies in other fields. The pressure to develop new cars and aircraft is driven by climate considerations, with noise and air pollution just by-products. And there are development experts and anti-poverty campaigners who argue it is more fossil fuels not solar or wind which will help millions out of poverty. If my employer looks the other way, I might be naughty and go to the climate conference being held in Glasgow in November with a banner: 'Noise Uber Alles'!

The author is a local authority Environmental Health Officer.

Cut Noise is calling for a Noise Audit of all energy and transport plans:
http://www.ukna.org.uk/uploads/4/1/4/5/4/1458009/noise_audit.pdf

There is a complaint about noisy neighbours every 80 seconds

In 2019, nearly 424,000 noise complaints were made to local councils across the UK – the equivalent of one every 80 seconds.

Music and parties (28 per cent), domestic (14 per cent) and animal noise (13 per cent) were the top three causes for complaints over the past three years. London is the noisiest region, but Belfast, Newport and Coventry all make the top 10 noisiest local authorities. The figures are revealed in research from Churchill Home Insurance (1).



Despite the frequency of complaints, however, only one in every 54 resulted in a noise abatement notice (2) being issued. That is just a fraction over 2%. Some complaints *can* be resolved through a conversation with the neighbour. And some noise makers *will* stop after a warning. But this low figure must mean a lot of noise makers are escaping scot free. Local authorities can be reluctant to issue noise abatement orders because they need quite a high level of proof. Some have used anti-social behaviour orders instead since the process is simpler and quicker. But, nevertheless, it does seem that noise sufferers are not being well served.

A complaint every 80 seconds can only be described as a crisis; even an epidemic. It should not be left to local authorities to deal with this. Government needs to tackle the underlying causes. Government should also ensure that local councils have adequate resources to tackle the crisis.

Music and parties account for a huge 28% of complaints. There will undoubtedly be persistent offenders. Motorists who break the rules get points on their licences, leading to a ban. Why not introduce a similar scheme for those who persistently annoy with their music. Three offences and you are banned from playing music for three years. Extreme? I think not.....given how widespread the problem is and the suffering it causes.

We can continue to kid ourselves that a complaint every 80 seconds doesn't signal an epidemic or we can take radical action

Unless we are willing to impose these sorts of measures, we have no chance of tacking the epidemic of noise that is causing a complaint to be made every 80 seconds. Let that sink in. A complaint every 80 seconds. If you can't handle your music, you lose it. If you can't stop your dogs barking, you lose them. Indeed, we may need to go further to conquer the epidemic. Just as there is pressure on governments to ban the noisiest planes and oversize cars, oughtn't they to look at banning the most powerful sound-systems? It only seems extreme because we are not used to thinking about neighbour noise in this way. Business as usual = acceptance the noise epidemic will continue. We can continue to kid ourselves that a complaint every 80 seconds doesn't signal an epidemic. Or we can take the radical action required.

Noisy neighbours have had a significant negative impact on people during lockdown (3). Consumer omnibus research conducted by Opinium showed nearly half (24 million) of Britons believed neighbours' antisocial noise has had a negative impact on their mental wellbeing during the first lockdown. What further evidence are we waiting for?

References: (1). Freedom of information Act request issued to all UK councils on 24th January 2020. A total of 313 out of 382 local councils (81.9%) responded, of which 297 (77.7%) provided usable data. The councils that provided usable data accounted for 80.1% of the UK population. (2). A noise abatement notice is an official notice² given by a council to those responsible for causing a disturbance, telling them to either stop the activity or limit it to certain times to avoid causing a nuisance. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/statutory-nuisances-how-councils-deal-with-complaints#abatement-notice> (3). Consumer omnibus research conducted by Opinium between 29th May and 2nd June 2020. A nationally representative sample of 2,000 adults were polled, of which 914 stated that neighbour noise of some form had had a negative impact on their mental wellbeing. More detail: <https://www.directlinegroup.co.uk/en/news/brand-news/2020/09062020.html>

A NEW TYPE OF FLIGHT PATH COULD MAKE OR BREAK COMMUNITIES

The biggest changes to flight paths in the UK for over half a century are now underway

Introducing PBN - a new type of flight path

The global changes are driven by a move away from ground-based technology to satellite technology to guide planes. Their impact on local communities will be significant. The new flights paths, called Performance Based Navigation (PBN), will be different to the routes we currently have. They will be dedicated, narrow, precise routes which will increase reliability, reduce the costs of fuel for airlines, cut CO2 per plane but allow more flights to use most airports. Their impact on communities will depend on how they are implemented. America has got it disastrously wrong, concentrating all the planes on narrow routes over the same communities, some of them new communities, without a break. Residents have been in revolt. Lawsuits have ensued. In the UK, ACOG, also known as Our Future Skies, is the body overseeing the expansion - <https://www.ourfutureskies.uk/about-us/who-are-acog/> - has got the chance to learn the lessons from the US and design routes that work for residents as well as the industry.



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Communities are looking for an improved noise climate over their area.
That is all about flight paths and the volume and height of planes.
And fair mitigation & compensation

Our Future Skies can deliver that if:

- The flight paths can be rotated, with curved approaches considered if necessary, to provide people with a break from the noise and reduce the number of flights over any one community.
- It is recognized that there may be places where respite is not the best option – for example by routing planes over unpopulated places.
- These precise, dedicated flight paths will get rid of most of the conflicts with routes from other airports which will mean departing aircraft will not be ‘held down’ by flight paths used by these other airports and thus will be able to fly at higher altitudes. This could also allow some arrivals to be higher.
- Engage with local communities and the general public to allow them, where possible, to help shape the new flights.
- Recognise the historic importance of getting things right. The next half-century will see more people flying globally, a big cut in aircraft emissions but a smaller reduction in noise from planes. It means operational improvements – together with effective mitigation – will be key to cutting noise over communities. Well-designed PBN routes can be an important first step.

For our full report: http://www.ukna.org.uk/uploads/4/1/4/5/41458009/airspace_change.pdf

Do-it-Yourself: Measure the noise in the venue

by Gregory Scott



What will happen?

This October, participating organizations will partner with SoundPrint to engage their communities for a fun, mission-driven competition where users take sound level measurements at venues such as restaurants, bars, coffee shops, gyms and parks with the SoundPrint app and submit them to a publicly accessible database. The event and the collected data will be used to raise hearing health awareness. And many prizes will be awarded to the most dedicated participants!

Based on the collectively gathered data, SoundPrint then advocates for safe noise levels on a broad scale, including sharing the data with the WHO's World Hearing Forum and researchers.

Past SoundPrint campaigns have generated hearing health awareness with thousands of participants. Learn more about the success of prior events [here](#).

Who is participating?

Members of the WHO's World Hearing Forum, professional organizations, audiologists, speech pathologists, hearing aid companies, noise pollution activists, acoustic experts and others will join together to raise hearing health awareness to prevent noise induced hearing loss.

How does your organization and your constituents benefit?

- Contribute to the mission of raising hearing health awareness!
- Create a fun, community-building activity for your constituents
- Learn how to gauge whether their environment is safe or dangerous for hearing health.
- Find quiet venues for those with hearing loss and sensory disorders to patronize
- Ask venue managers of loud places to optimize their acoustics
- SoundPrint shares the data collected by your participants
- Be featured on SoundPrint's website along with other health-minded organizations

What you need to do?

- **Reserve your spot with a "yes" via the form link below**
- A month prior to the event, SoundPrint will send you everything you need to share with your community via email, social media or print in advance and during the campaign to contribute to the cause. You just copy and paste!

How do I join? Fill out this [FORM HERE!](#)

Gregory Scott is *Founder of SoundPrint, member of [World Hearing Forum](#) via the WHO*

Listen Out!

Our regular slot that gives you the chance sound off!

LOCKDOWN: Welcome to my world!

So, you are finding it difficult to walk the streets of London with no shop to visit or café to grab a coffee. Welcome to my world! I've been doing it for years! Virtually all these places have become out of bounds to me because they insist on playing background music. It is not just that I don't like it. I find it disturbing. Whenever I have to visit somewhere where music is playing, I'm on edge until I can get out. You probably have no idea how few places are available to me. I know the pubs, cafes and restaurants I can go to but there's not many of them. I am spoilt in the Holborn area of London; there are some surprising finds in Soho. And, of course, there is Wetherspoons. I have a Wetherspoons in every town! I seek the sanctuaries out. Tim Martin, the founder and boss of Wetherspoons is my hero. I send a (silent) daily prayer for the day he was born. This is my challenge to you. You are only allowed to visit shops, pubs, cafes and restaurants which don't play music. How different is that from Lockdown? My bible Quiet Corners - <https://pipedown.org.uk/quiet-corners/>, may help you. It is produced by Pipedown <https://pipedown.org.uk/>

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The Whisperer



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"I don't drive, never owned a car. My wife & I cycle as do our children (youngest travel in our cargo bike). I'm tired of hearing it's lazy motorists who oppose LTNs. For me, it's about those most responsible exporting traffic & pollution to those already most at risk."

Thought-provoking words from a fierce opponent of Low Traffic Neighbourhoods

Help! I've got a noise problem!

You can contact:
**The Noise Abatement
Society**
<http://noiseabatement.org>

Helpline on 01273 823 850;
email [info@noise-
abatement.org](mailto:info@noise-abatement.org)

The Noise Abatement
Society also carries out a
range of activities including
research and lobbying

Or contact **Noise Nuisance**
<https://noisenuisance.org/>

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