

UK NOISE ASSOCIATION

THE NEED TO TACKLE NOISE DURING THE NEXT MAYORAL TERM

Only 8% of Londoners report never being bothered by noise, slightly higher than the 6% who describe themselves as being very hard of hearing (1).

London is a very noisy city. There is some evidence to suggest it may be the noisiest in Europe. Noise impacts the health and quality of life of Londoners. But this paper concentrates on solutions. It suggests ways in which the next Mayor of London, in conjunction with the London boroughs and National Government, can tackle noise effectively. Potentially, there are some quick wins.

Percentage of Londoners bothered by noise

14% are dissatisfied with the noise levels they are exposed to when at home

23% are dissatisfied with noise levels in their neighbourhood

35% are dissatisfied with noise levels in London as a whole

This can vary across London.

London Assembly Constituency	Boroughs	Dissatisfaction with neighbourhood noise levels	Dissatisfaction with London noise levels
City and East	Barking and Dagenham City Newham Tower Hamlets	36%	38%
North East	Hackney Islington Waltham Forest	29%	36%
Brent and Harrow	Brent and Harrow	27%	35%
Merton and Wandsworth	Merton and Wandsworth	25%	40%
West Central	Hammersmith and Fulham Kensington and Chelsea Westminster	24%	36%
Lambeth and Southwark	Lambeth and Southwark	24%	36%
Croydon and Sutton	Croydon and Sutton	23%	37%
Barnet and Camden	Barnet and Camden	23%	36%
Enfield and Haringey	Enfield and Haringey	22%	25%
South West	Hounslow Kingston Richmond	20%	28%
Greenwich and Lewisham	Greenwich and Lewisham	19%	42%
Ealing and Hillingdon	Ealing and Hillingdon	19%	39%
Havering and Redbridge	Havering and Redbridge	17%	37%
Bexley and Bromley	Bexley and Bromley	12%	29%

Interestingly, in all constituencies people were more dissatisfied with noise levels across London than noise in their own neighbourhoods. Polling by Policy Exchange shows no discernible differences between class or sex but age was a factor but “not in the way one might expect. From the age of 25 onwards as people get older, they get less bothered by noise (1).” Our view is that this might be explained by housing. People living in detached or semi-detached homes are much less likely to hear noise from their neighbours than those in flats or house sharing. Social housing can be a particular problem.

(1). *Turning Down the Volume*, Policy Exchange, 2021 (<https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Turning-down-the-volume.pdf>)

The noises which annoy Londoners the most

Londoners top 12 most annoying types of noise (% bothered)

1. Sirens	54%
2. Private Motorbikes and Scooters	52%
3. Loud Music played from vehicles	51%
4. Engine revving	48%
5. Vehicle alarms	48%
6. Shouting	47%
7. Vehicle horns	46%
8. Vehicle accelerating	46%
9. Modified exhausts	44%
10. Helicopters	42%
11. Renovation at nearby properties	42%
12. Aircraft	40%

Top 10 measured by frequency (average number of times per year disturbed)

1. Sirens	440
2. Normal driving	362
3. Vehicles accelerating	359
4. Vehicle horns	348
5. Vehicles starting	332
6. Aeroplanes	315
7. Loud Music played from vehicles	301
8. Neighbouring children	277
9. Neighbours footsteps	271
10. Neighbouring teenager and adult voices	262

Source: *Turning Down the Volume*, Policy Exchange, 2021 (<https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Turning-down-the-volume.pdf>)

The Policy Exchange report noted: “Sources of noise that bother people on a regular basis, but that did not bother the largest share of Londoners are noticeably **aeroplanes** and **neighbour noise**. Although the number of people affected by this type of noise is more limited, those that are affected must deal with this type of noise on a more regular basis”. This is mirrored in the complaints we receive.

London is shaping up to be the noisiest city in Europe.

It leads the way on road and aircraft noise. Its restaurants and cafes have been voted the second loudest in the world. Only San Francisco tops them. And it is doubtful if any metro system in Europe can match the number and volume of the announcements on London Underground. A recent UN report identified London’s traffic as the noisiest in Europe https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/38060/Frontiers_2022CH1.pdf. The European Commission has estimated that 28% of all people potentially disturbed by aircraft noise across Europe live under the Heathrow flight paths. Figures released by Soundprint reveal London’s restaurants are the loudest in Europe <https://www.soundprint.co/locations/united-kingdom/greater-london/london>. A study from the UK Noise Association found platform announcements on London Underground can reach 98 decibels, louder than a plane landing at Heathrow http://www.ukna.org.uk/uploads/4/1/4/5/41458009/underground_announcements.pdf.

We will flesh all this out as we turn to solutions.

SOLUTIONS

Traffic Noise

1. Lower speeds

Cutting the urban speed limit from 30mph to 20mph will reduce traffic noise as there is a direct link between speed and noise (2)

2. Quieter Road Surfaces

The use of quieter road surfaces could halve the noise from traffic. Quieter road surfaces like porous asphalt cost more than traditional road surfaces but are 3-10 times more cost-effective than mitigation measures such as home insulation or the construction of noise barriers (3).

3. Noise Cameras

Introduce more noise cameras which can identify and track the vehicle. This should cut down on 'boom' cars and noisy motorcycles.

4. Electric Vehicles

Electric vehicles will cut noise. There are caveats. First, tyre noise will still be present, meaning electric vehicles will only cut car noise up to speeds of about 35mph; above that tyre noise dominates. Second, it is uncertain how much noise will be added to electric vehicles – and the tone of it - so people can hear them coming. But, even with these caveats, electric vehicles will cut noise levels in built-up areas quite noticeably.

5. Quieter Sirens

Given the way sirens annoy Londoners it is worth the Mayor speaking with the emergency services to look into the feasibility of using quieter sirens without compromising the vital work the services do.

6. Rule out Low Traffic Neighbourhoods

Low traffic Neighbourhoods can cut noise and traffic levels within the LTN but usually by increasing them on the surrounding roads which can be busy main roads that are often already the noisiest. The focus should be on cutting noise on those roads; not the already quieter roads.

Aircraft Noise

The European Commission has estimated that 28% of all people potentially disturbed by aircraft noise across Europe are under the Heathrow flight paths (4). That amounts to over 700,000 people. Add that to over 80,000 potentially annoyed by London City Airport. Although only the 14th largest airport in the UK, London City impacts more people than any other UK airport except Heathrow and Manchester.

Coming up for possible decision

Heathrow Airport is almost operating at pre-COVID levels. It is expected to decide within the next year or so whether to apply again for a third runway or whether to make more use of the existing runways.

London City currently has an application to operate planes for more hours on Saturdays and for more early morning flights. It has shelved any plans to raise its annual cap above 111,000 for now.

New flight paths will be introduced at all airports in London and the South East by about 2027 as air traffic control moves to a satellite system to guide planes. It will mean narrower, more concentrated flight paths. Our view is that it is essential these flight paths are alternated to give Londoners respite.

(2). Speed and Road Traffic Noise, Paige Mitchell, UK Noise Association, 2009

(3). The Danish Road Noise Strategy, Danish Environmental Protection Agency, 2003

(4). Page 22, Heathrow Airport Environmental Noise Directive Noise Action Plan 2010- 2015

http://noise.heathrowairport.com/assets/Internet/Heathrow_noise/Assets/Downloads/Statics/NAP_main.pdf

Neighbour Noise

Enforcement, Enforcement, Enforcement

There is legislation in place to deal with neighbour noise. The challenge is for the police and local authorities to find the resources and the will-power to use it effectively.

Key legislation:

Environmental Protection Act 1990 - <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1990/43/contents>

Noise Act 1996 - <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/37/contents>

The Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 - <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/12/contents/enacted>

Over the past decade many local authorities have failed to tackle neighbour noise effectively. Some of this has been down to lack of resources but it has also been the result other areas being given priority. The Policy Exchange suggested the Metropolitan Police be given similar powers to local authorities. We would endorse that. We would also endorse the idea of a noise hotline. The one set up in New York has been effective.

London-wide Noise

One of the most striking findings to come out of the Policy Exchange polling was the large number of people annoyed by the wider noise climate in London: noise in parks, 'souped up' vehicles, busking, music on public transport. We would add the number and loudness of announcements on the Underground (on average there is an announcement on the trains every 42 seconds). Many Londoners also complain about piped music in shops, cafes and restaurants. And in places like Soho, with a concentration of bars and clubs, there is a particular problem with street noise.

Solutions:

- Work with local councils to tighten up by-laws on noise in outdoor spaces
- Impose higher fines for breaching a Public Spaces Protection Order in London
- Update and tighten the rules and regulations on busking to deal with the problems caused by amplification - see our report *Busking* https://www.uknoiseassociation.com/uploads/4/1/4/5/41458009/ukna_busking_snapshot.pdf
- Reduce the number and volume of announcements on the Underground - see our report *Sound Questions* https://www.uknoiseassociation.com/uploads/4/1/4/5/41458009/underground_announcements.pdf
- Work with communities and councils in places like Soho to strike a better balance between the interests of residents, visitors and businesses.
- Encourage businesses to involve staff in all decisions regarding background music.

We can be contacted via email: johnstewart2@btconnect.com

<https://www.uknoiseassociation.com/>