TRANSPORT & ENVIRONMENT

Sept 2013

Briefing

Vehicle noise
Impact of Commission, Parliament and Council positions

Context

Traffic noise is the second biggest environmental factor affecting Europe's health after air pollution. Almost half of EU citizens are regularly exposed to road traffic noise over the level that the World Health Organisation (WHO) considers to pose a serious risk to health.[1] Noise pollution has been linked to 50,000 fatal heart attacks every year in Europe.[2] According to a recent Eurobarometer, close to half of us believe noise affects our health "to a large extent".[3] The first implementation of vehicle noise standards was established in the early 1970s, the last reduction was in 1995. Unfortunately this has yielded only a small effect on the noise emission of actual traffic.

To assist the institutions through the swift-second reading agreement, TNO developed a report intended to assist the European Council in finalising its common position. The report impact assesses the three available limit values set by the Commission, the Parliament and the Council.

Main findings

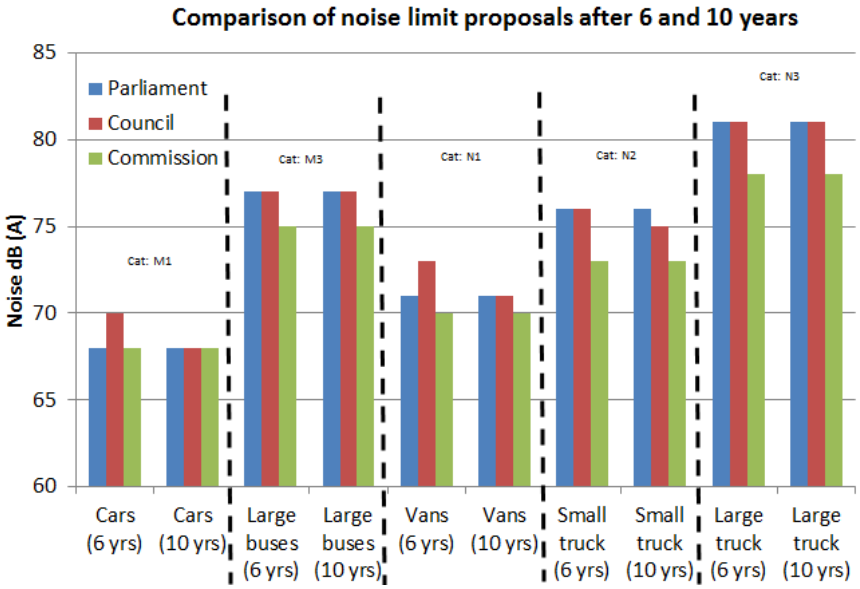
The main findings of the TNO report are sumarised in the table below. The table clearly indicates that the Commission proposal has the highest benefit to cost ratio (27) compared to 20 for the Parliament and 22 for Council. But the Council approach delays significant action until 2023 with the benefits not being fully realised for another 15 years after this.

	Commission	**Parliament**	**Council**
Overal noise reduction (compared to current situation)	3,4dB	1,9dB	2,6dB
Limit values reduction	- 4dB (light vehicles) - 3dB (heavy vehicles)	On average -2dB, but in some cases the limit increases (louder) than current standards.[4]	- 4dB (light vehicles) - 3dB (heavy vehicles)
Reduction timeframe (Starting from 2013)	Two phase reduction Phase 1: 2 yrs (2015)* Phase 2: 3yrs (2018)	One phase reduction Phase 1: 6yrs (2018)	Three phase reduction Phase 1: 2 yrs (2016)* Phase 2: 6-8yrs (2020-2022) Phase 3: 10-12yrs (2024-2026)
Costs and benefits 2013-2040 period for EU27	Societal benefit: €190 bl Cost to industry: €7bl	Societal benefit: €115 bl Cost to industry: €5,8bl	Societal benefit: €123 bl Cost to industry: € 5,7bl
Number of people "highly annoyed" in comparison to current 54,9ml of Europeans	42,2 ml (- 13 ml)	46,1 ml (-9 ml)	43,9 ml (- 11 ml)

*Implementation of new test method, not real-world noise reduction limits.

[1] WHO (2011): http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-publish/abstracts/burden-of-disease-from-environmental-noise.-quantification-of-healthy-life-years-lost-in-europe
[2] T&E Report (2008): http://www.transportenvironment.org/publications/can-you-hear-us-why-it-finally-time-eu-tackle-problem-traffic-noise
[3] Eurobarometer survey (2010): http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_347_en.pdf
[4] The permissible sound level of road vehicles is part of the EU vehicle type approval legislation, as laid down in EU Directive 70/157/EEC and in the UN-ECE Regulation No 51

The table below compares five key vehicle category and proposed noise reduction after six to ten years. In most cases, bar Cars (cat: M1) the Parliament and Council proposal do not attain the Commission's level of ambition, even after ten years. The large buses (cat: M3), small trucks (cat: N2) and large trucks (N3) do not even come close to the Commission proposal, particularly worrying due to their collective market share of the fleet.



It is important to note that initially, the new standards will only apply to entirely new types of vehicles, so not require any changes at all to current models.

Recommendations

Our recommendations for the outcome of the trilogue dscussions are to.

1. Ensure an overal noise reduction of no less than 3,5dB
2. Ensure the new test (phase 1) is implemented within 2 years and that the significant reduction in limits for all cars (phase 3) is delayed for no more than 6 years after the Regulation's entry into force.
3. Ensure that noise testing is representative of real world noise emissions by:
    - Testing tyres with a minimum tread depth of at least 80% and the use of traction tyres and not 1,6mm.
    - Requiring mounting of traction tyres (not steering tyres) on the drive axels of heavy vehicles, to prevent artificially low noise measurements (by 1dB) in tests.
4. Ensure the adoption of stricter limits for harmful peak levels of noise, for example when an engine is revved.
5. Request that the Commission assess which active safety system can best serve the objective of improving the safety of vulnerable road users in urban areas.

Further information

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