

MERSEYSIDE NOISE STUDY CONFERENCE : Question and Answer sessions

Session 1 : Peter Wilson, GONW, Jo Bray, Defra

Q: Will Wales be covered under the National Noise Strategy?

A: No, Just England. The devolved administrations will have to take their own action, although the Environmental Noise Directive will cover England, Wales and Scotland (JB)

Q: Are animals considered as receptors of noise, as they not only make noise, but suffer as a result of it (fireworks etc)?

A: No, only humans are considered as receptors in the context of NNS (JB)

Q: How is tranquillity defined in the UK?

A: No clear definition as yet, although there is some research underway (JB)

A: There is Government policy on rural areas which refers to tranquillity as an issue, so it is being taken into account (PW)

Q: Are there any plans to limit noise from 6 & 8 wheel vehicles?

A: There are powers to stop vehicles that are too loud, and bus noise is controlled via drive-by tests. (N Scales)

Q: Most traffic noise is as a result of tyre-road interface. Believes that technology has gone as far as possible with regard to alternative surface, so what is being done about tyres?

A: Tyre issues are the responsibility of the tyre producers, who should be made to do something about it. (N Scales)

Q: In what way have the noise mapping studies that are to be let soon been simplified?

A: DEFRA originally tried to address the objectives of the noise strategy and the Environmental Noise Directive under one contract. This did not result in value for money as there were some issues arising from the tender process. Have decided to initially look at noise distribution maps which will feed into strategy development. (JB)

Q: Are Noise Action Plans a requirement of the Environmental Noise Directive?

A: Yes, and DEFRA focussing on road, rail and air (JB)

Q: Who would implement the Action Plans?

A: There will be a consultation process to determine the competent body(ies). (JB)

Q: It is known there are issues concerning tyre noise on surfaces, especially at high speed. Is it possible to promote local authorities and the Highways Agency working together through the Local Transport Plan (LTP) process to look at noise as an issue?

A: Neil Scales to take this issue up with Ministers and CfIT, and try and feed into the forthcoming LTP guidance.

Q: What was the relationship between Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and the Environmental Noise Directive? SEA must be undertaken on the future LTPs.

A: DEFRA will look at how the two link together. (JB)

Q: Will the noise strategy include construction noise?

A: Interesting issue, but no clear answer. DEFRA looking at a neighbourhood noise strategy which may cover construction. (JB)

A comment was made that although there is some legislation to address noise from construction, it is often overlooked.

Q: How is DEFRA intending to divide the country for the mapping studies?

A: Cannot announce anything yet due to DEFRA procurement rules. (JB)

Q: How is airport noise controlled?

A: The noise strategy will address the issue of noise from airports, but it is DfT that has the policy instruments to control noise. (JB)

Q: What advantage do DEFRA see in having conducted the Merseyside Noise Study if it is going to do the work anyway?

A: The study adds to the knowledge base. It gives much more local knowledge that would be required for the mapping studies. (JB)

Q: As it currently stands in the UK we tend to impose a highway scheme on a residential area, then impose noise regulation on to those. Are there plans to improve this?

A: There are no plans to update the Noise Insulation Regulations (JB)

Session 2 : Mary Stevens, NSCA, Stephen Birch, Sefton Council

Q: How did the Committee for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) define tranquil areas in studies from 1960's and 1990's?

A: Did not use numerical criteria and the methodology was criticised as not being robust. CPRE are to re-do the work. (MS)

Q: Impressive study, but vibration has been left out. Are there plans to include it in future work as it needs to be? If noise levels are low then the perception/sensation of vibration goes up.

A: It was not covered to any great extent, although it was touched on in the perception study. Will look at including it in the future. However, it should be noted that as vibration tends to be picked up mainly along major linear routes, this wider ranging study did not go into that level of detail. (SB)

Q: It is known that due to forecast traffic growth and limited effectiveness of road surface materials that the noise climate can only get worse. Any comments?

A: Need serious planning now and joined up thinking. Legislation is on the horizon but it is over a long timescale. (MS)

Q: Present methodologies for tackling noise are not really effective and will not improve tranquil areas.

A: Combination of methods needed including traffic management and education (MS)
Building it into LTP guidance would be useful (NS)

Q: Had assumed Merseyside Noise Study undertaken over a year, but see that summer holiday period was excluded. Was consideration given to seasonal variation?

A: Limited resources meant that it could not be carried out over a year. However, used a standardised method so tried to take account of seasonal variation. Tried to counter any effects by ensuring all areas of Merseyside were covered in both study periods ie pre and post school holidays. Were as pragmatic as possible under the circumstances. (SB)

Q: What does Mary Stevens mean by 'noise mapping with a purpose'?

A: Although noise mapping is proposed, it does not appear to have a strategic purpose. It is being done because the EC says it must, but what will be done with the information that is collated. That is why NSCA proposed an Expert Group, so they could help form a view for the future.

Session 3 : Jo Page, Woodholmes Group, Paul Barratt, Hepworth Acoustics

Q: Perception survey indicated a high level of bother from minicabs and taxis. Did you drill down on the specifics of what was bothersome eg slamming doors, horns etc ?

A: No, just generic noise only (JP)

Q: Did you look at the correlation between levels of bother and income of the population?

A: Yes and no. The detail is in the report, but there were areas where the higher income groups appeared more bothered by noise types. (JP)

Q: The noise levels around the airport seems a little low, whereas airport noise is reported as a problem. Comments?

A: Range of levels 47-60 dB. Closer to the airport was higher (PB)

A: Note there is only one airport on Merseyside. Survey had to cover each authority area and look at sources of noise from airport, therefore in some cases the survey results are from under a flight path, so noise levels were not necessarily as high as would be expected close to the airport itself.(SB)

Session 4 : Peter Hepworth, Hepworth Acoustics

Q: Did you record sound whilst measuring levels, to give an indication of what was causing the Lmax at 5am?

A: No (PH)

Q: There is a difficulty with mitigating noise from roads, as residential/country roads are the problem areas as speed is not a factor. Noise barriers and road surfacing are no good in these areas, and traffic calming seems counter productive. Any comments?

A: Traffic management is the real answer. Traffic calming does have problems, and can have a negative impact on air quality as well. (PH)

Q: How many of the respondents to the perception survey lived near a busy road. There seems to be a bias toward residential.

A: There certainly were some, but have to accept the majority of people would live in 'residential' areas. (JP)

Q: How did you make sure that questions were not predisposed to a certain answer? Can you provide reassurance that this did not happen?

A: The survey repeated the questions used in the DEFRA funded National Noise Attitude Study. Phrasing of questions is important so that they are not leading. Could accept that there was a potential for introducing bias by introducing specific questions in the middle, but confident it was not the case. (JP)

Q: Noise modelling vs noise measurement. Was this done to measure the accuracy of the measurements on a receptor by receptor basis?

A: No, just a quick comparison and assessment. There were two areas where there was no correlation. (PB)

Q: Did respondents get asked whether they had any specific hearing impairment that may have affected their answers?

A: No (JP)

Q: Where respondents had commented on the problem associated with 'people leaving pubs', had they also responded to the question concerning noise associated with 'people outside houses'?

A: There was a specific section where they could identify Entertainment noise as an issue. If this was ranked highly they answered a detailed section, where the answer about people leaving pubs was given as an open response. This was not actually coded in the questionnaire. (JP)

Plenary Session, Chair – Geoff Kerry, Institute of Acoustics

Q: Is ambient noise a serious issue for residents on Merseyside?

A: Yes

Q: Is road traffic noise the prevalent source of environmental noise?

A: Yes

Q: Road traffic noise – is it traffic patterns or driving behaviour that causes most annoyance?

A: -Depends where it is and when it happens. You may get mixed sources of noise at given times of the day

-Traffic pattern is important, for example, predominantly HGVs in early hours

-Traffic pattern has changed over the years, whereas driving style has not changed that much

-Educate people as much as you want, but almost impossible to change driving style

Q: How do public perceptions of noise and noisiness relate to measured levels of noise?

A: If they think noise can be avoided then it is more annoying, incurring a 10dB penalty.

Q: How can the results be used best?

A: - Need a strategic link between Noise Action Plans and LTP

- Strategic planners need to be involved. Property developers tend to want to develop near transport links whereas planning authorities do not. Residents of an area will not pay for noise mitigation. Maybe need a change to taxation regime to pay for action.

- We do need a link between Noise Action plans and LTP. SEA will apply to all development plans which will include LTP, so noise should be considered.

Q:What should be in the Merseyside Noise Strategy?

Are we after cost effective measures or quick fixes

Trial noise mitigation schemes

Develop a noise map

A:- Yes to noise maps and trial schemes. Need to prioritise and tackle most serious cases first.

- Noise should be included as an issue when setting or changing road speed limits