

# Current Pollution Reports

## Analysis and management of current road traffic noise

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# Analysis and management of current road traffic noise

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## Abstract

Road traffic noise is one of the major environmental pollutants in cities around the world that continues to increase over the years despite the implementation of regulatory policies. The lack of engagement of national governments, the use of different or inadequate methodologies and the absence of implementation of measures to control road traffic noise are some of the causes why the population exposed to noise has not been reduced. There is a large number of recommendations, methodologies and procedures for adequate road traffic noise analysis and management in the scientific literature. The aim of this paper is to analyse the main findings of recent years with the objective of highlighting the current acoustic situation and to provide tools that can reverse it. Development of accurate noise analysis methods is close to reality. However, greater engagement and control by the authorities is needed for the implementation and efficiency of noise measures.

**Keywords:** road traffic noise; road traffic modelling; noise assessment methodologies; CNOSSOS-EU; noise action plans

## Introduction

Strategic noise maps (SNM) have been generated every 5 years in the European Union Member States (EU MS) since the establishment of the European Environmental Noise Directive (END) in 2002 [1]. Accordingly, three phases of noise map generation and

1 updating have been performed (2007, 2012 and, 2017). A new update of the strategic  
2 noise maps will be available by the end of this year 2022. An overarching policy requiring  
3 noise mapping or city noise modelling is either lacking or difficult to find in other  
4 countries. In fact, environmental noise reports by the World Health Organisation (WHO)  
5 generally show the results obtained in European countries [2, 3].  
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9 The results obtained in the three phases show that the number of European people  
10 exposed to road traffic noise is much higher than exposure to other source of  
11 environmental noise. According to the 2017 data, the overall number of people exposed  
12 to  $L_{den} \geq 55$  dB was estimated to be 113 million for road traffic noise, 22 million for  
13 railway noise, 4 million for aircraft noise and 1 million for noise caused by industry [4,  
14 5]. Similar differences between the number of people exposed to the different sources of  
15 environmental noise were found to  $L_{night} \geq 50$  dB. Therefore, road traffic is by far the  
16 biggest noise source in European cities, similarly in other cities around the world [6, 7]  
17 and villages [8, 9].  
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20 The number of people exposed to road traffic noise ( $L_{den} \geq 55$  dB) inside urban areas  
21 has been increasing from 2007 to 2017 in Europe (73.8 million in 2007, 80.7 million in  
22 2012 and 81.7 million in 2017) [4] and is even projected to increase in the coming years  
23 (83.6 million in 2020 and 84.3 million in 2030) [10]. Reducing the number of people  
24 exposed to  $L_{den} \geq 55$  dB might be too ambitious. However, the percentage of people  
25 exposed to  $L_{den} \geq 65$  dB has not decreased either (30% in 2007, 34% in 2012 and 30% in  
26 2017) [11]. Urban areas whose  $L_{den} \geq 65$  dB are considered black acoustic zones according  
27 to Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) criteria [12]. The  
28 primary objective of significantly reducing noise pollution in Europe is not being met.  
29 This increase in road traffic noise has also been reported in other countries. The total  
30 United States population potentially exposed to road noise, defined by a 24-hour average  
31 sound level, increased by 2.4% from 2016 to 2018 [11]. Nascimento et al. [14] show that  
32 60% of the points sampled in 2016 in the city of Goiânia exceeded the daytime equivalent  
33 sound level of 60 dB. They estimate that all assessed points will exceed 60 dB after 2036.  
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36 The International Transport Forum for passenger transport in the world expects  
37 transport demand to almost triple by 2050, especially through private cars, as a result of  
38 population growth and increasing wellbeing [14]. Population growth and traffic in cities  
39 are some of the possible causes that have been able to offset actions to reduce noise levels  
40 [5, 15, 16]. However, missing and inconsistent data call into question the exposed  
41 population shown in the different phases of SNM, as highlighted by different researchers  
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1 [17, 18, 19]. Accuracy in results was not the main priority in the first phase of the noise  
2 mapping process, but rather to generate more effective noise policies [18, 20]. In this  
3 respect, the first phase (2007) was successful because it had a high media impact and a  
4 legislative framework for the regulation of environmental noise in the EU MS was  
5 developed. Cities with more than 250,000 inhabitants were mapped in the first phase but  
6 noise mapping was carried out in cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants in the  
7 following phases. The number of people noise exposed was lower in the second (2012)  
8 and third (2017) phases despite the increase in the number of agglomerations. These  
9 partial or incomplete figures for exposure and their consequent estimation increases the  
10 uncertainty of outputs. The quality of output is another problem and varies considerably  
11 between EU MS for the following reasons [17, 18, 19]: different calculation methods have  
12 been used, various methods used to calculate population exposed to noise, no  
13 specification of simulation parameter figures (reflection order, type of pavement, size of  
14 the grid, etc.), contradictions in the calculation of the  $L_{den}$  (dB), use of estimated noise  
15 source data instead of real-life scenario data, insufficient quality of geographical and  
16 topographical data, different criteria for mapping urban roads, etc. So, noise mapping  
17 seems to have become an obligation rather than an instrument to improve the health and  
18 quality of life of the population [18]. Inexperience of local authorities, deficiencies in  
19 management and administration in data collection, shortage of human and financial  
20 resources were possible causes of missing and inconsistent data [21, 22].

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Different studies analysing the relationship between noise and health use the values  
shown in strategic noise maps. Therefore, poor data quality will significantly affect the  
results of disease burden studies [19]. In the last 5 years, the highest percentage of  
manuscripts using the keywords "urban traffic noise" in the SCOPUS database are related  
to the effects on people's quality of life and health as shown in Fig. 1.

Using the keywords "urban traffic noise" in the SCOPUS database, the highest  
percentage of manuscripts in the last 5 years are related to the negative effects on people's  
health and quality of life as shown in Fig. 1. Another significant percentage of papers are  
related to noise mapping, new methodologies and noise dynamics which will be discussed  
in the next section of this manuscript.



**Fig. 1.** Tag cloud of the frequency of road traffic noise topics reported in the last 5 years in the SCOPUS database.

Member states also have to draw up noise action plans and review them every 5 years according to the END [1]. Reducing noise exposure levels, which is the main objective of the END, depends on the development of appropriate action plans. Action plans have often had no effect in reducing noise levels either because they have not been properly implemented or reviewed. EU MS are not obliged to implement noise action plans and this is probably affecting their implementation and effectiveness. The absence or non-updating of noise maps in some countries has obviously influenced their non-obligatory drawing [23].

Considering the above, the aim of this study is to show the results or conclusions obtained in recent studies that can contribute to improve the accuracy of road traffic noise assessment and the implementation of appropriate action plans that can reduce the noise generated by vehicles.

## Road traffic noise assessment

### CNOSSOS- EU method

1 The END modifies Annex II corresponding to the Assessment Methods for Noise  
2 Indicators in 2015. This new annex proposes common assessment methods (CNOSSOS-  
3 EU) that should be applied from 2019 in all EU MS [24]. Therefore, the CNOSSOS-EU  
4 method should be used in the next phase of noise mapping (2022) and perhaps solve the  
5 problems encountered in the previous phases regarding the use of different  
6 methodologies.  
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10 CNOSSOS-EU method includes different sound emission and propagation models  
11 depending on the type of sound source [25]. For the noise produced by road traffic, the  
12 emission model was obtained from experimental measurements carried out in the  
13 IMAGINE - Harmonoise project [26]. Sound power coefficients were determined from  
14 linear regression between Sound Exposure Levels (SEL per 1/3-octave band) and vehicle  
15 speed. The propagation model was generated from NMPB-ROUTES-2008 [27].  
16 CNOSSOS-EU divides the noise source into corresponding equivalent point sources  
17 whose addition of sound waves is incoherent because they are energy-based models [28].  
18 However, coherent point sources are assumed in the Harmonoise/IMAGINE projects  
19 [28]. Consequently, various studies showed that CNOSSOS gave an underestimation of  
20 the noise levels [29, 30, 31]. The studies by Kahn et al. [32, 33] showed this  
21 underestimation. However, they could not quantify it due to the lack of measured noise  
22 data. Rey Gozalo and Gómez Escobar [34] performed an extensive sampling of  
23 measurement points on different typologies of urban roads in two cities. The major urban  
24 roads, which have the highest road traffic flow and percentage of heavy vehicles, showed  
25 absolute underestimation errors of about 3 dB. This error was lower on residential streets  
26 (about 2 dB). In addition, the error was significantly correlated with the flow and  
27 percentage of heavy vehicles. Most of the measurements, from which the  
28 Harmonoise/IMAGINE algorithm was developed, registered light vehicles and therefore,  
29 Czyzewski and Ejsmont [35] found a significant overestimation of the propulsion noise  
30 or underestimation of the rolling noise. The reason for the 3 dB underestimation is that,  
31 when the propagation model was changed, the direct sound wave and the reflected sound  
32 wave on the ground were not added [28, 36]. The END has recently published a  
33 modification of Annex II to solve this error and for this purpose, new sound power  
34 coefficients are shown in Table F-1 [37].  
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56 Pallas and Dutilleux [38] also reported an underestimation of the CNOSSOS-EU  
57 method estimates. They point out the need to improve the rolling noise contribution of  
58 CNOSSOS-EU method for medium-heavy vehicles and consider that it is not appropriate  
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to apply the same correction coefficients for respective road surface to both propulsion and rolling noise [38, 39]. The Netherlands National Institute for Public Health and the Environment carried out an analysis of CNOSSOS-EU method in 2017 before it was implemented [40]. Numerous issues were found in this study and were communicated to the EU commission. A report was drafted in 2019 with proposed amendments and possible improvements [41]. Relevant amendments include: the Rayleigh criterion is not defined, incorrect method for multiple diffractions in favourable conditions, large differences in ground attenuation between CNOSSOS-EU and ISO 9613 methods and attenuation due to industrial sites is absent in CNOSSOS-EU [40].

Regarding the assessment of population exposure, CNOSSOS-EU has implemented the VBEB model [42]. VBEB model distributes the noise receivers on the façades at different height levels depending on the number of floors. Each of these receivers will determine the noise level to which each dwelling is exposed considering the height parameter. Arana et al. [43] shows that the VBEB model is more accurate than the procedure of calculating the exposure of people at a height of 4 metres on the most exposed façade proposed by the END [1]. Vienneau et al. [44] analysed the relationship between road traffic noise and myocardial infarction mortality considering different methods to distribute the exposed population in the building and different spatial scales. Changes in spatial scale introduced more bias than changes in the method of distributing the exposed population.

All these uncertainties reported in the estimation of noise values by the CNOSSOS method prior to the new Annex II of the European Directive [37] call into question the results shown in studies that relate noise and negative health effects. The population exposed to road traffic noise varies significantly depending on the method used as shown in a study by Murphy and Douglas in Dublin [45]. Morley et al. [46] successfully implemented the CNOSSOS-EU road traffic prediction model for international epidemiological studies. So, several researchers have used the CNOSSOS-EU method in very recent epidemiological studies. They have used the UK Biobank cohort (502,490 citizens recruited from 2006 to 2010 in the UK) and estimated noise level data for 2009 with a search radius of 500 m [47, 48, 49, 50, 51]. They have analysed the relationship between road traffic noise and cardiovascular disease, mortality, sleep, mental health and obesity.

### **Quality of input parameters**



1 The amendments implemented in the recent new version of the CNOSSOS-EU method  
2 will significantly improve the accuracy of the method [37]. However, despite the  
3 existence of guideline recommendations [52, 53], the quality of the estimates is strongly  
4 influenced by the modelling parameter configuration and the inputs [43, 54]. Arana et al.  
5 [43] pointed out the following simulation parameters: reflection order, type of pavement  
6 and size of the grid. Arana et al. [43] recommend using a second reflection order in urban  
7 areas with high building density. However, most noise maps only use one reflection order.  
8 Moreover, ISO 1996-2 corrections should be considered when *in situ* noise receivers are  
9 not located in free field [55, 56]. The consideration of horizontal and vertical diffractions  
10 in the calculation benefits the accuracy of the estimates although it entails a higher  
11 computational cost [41, 54]. The number of pavement types in the CNOSSOS-EU method  
12 has tripled compared to the NMPB-96 method [53] and this can lead to uncertainty about  
13 the correct assignment. In addition, the wear of the pavements significantly influences  
14 their acoustic properties. Recent research shows significant advances in pavement wear  
15 recognition and assessment [57, 58, 59]. Van Hauwermeiren et al. [57] propose an  
16 approach based on commodity sensors in a fleet of cars that label the pavement type using  
17 machine learning. Licitra et al. [58] and Freitas et al. [59] model and evaluate the acoustic  
18 ageing of pavements. Licitra et al. [58] apply regression models for acoustic ageing and  
19 Freitas et al. [59] uses data mining techniques. Regarding the grid size, noise maps of  
20 some Spanish cities use a 5x5 m resolution [43]. Cai et al. [60] developed a method based  
21 on high-resolution population and noise distributions with a cell size of 4x4 m.  
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23 The quality of the meteorological data determines the accuracy of the sound  
24 propagation model [54]. These parameters are introduced globally in the noise modelling.  
25 Humidity and sound pressure do not vary significantly over short distances between  
26 source and receiver. However, temperature can be variable from one city location to  
27 another. Barrigón Morillas et al. [61] find very significant relationships between  
28 temperature and  $L_{Aeq}$  (dB). Wind is also an influential variable on sound levels when the  
29 wind speed exceeds 5 m/s [62].  
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31 Quality of cartographic and topographic data (buildings, altitude...) is also considered  
32 by Arana et al [43] to be relevant to improve the quality of outputs. A mapping accuracy  
33 of 0.5 m in elevation is desirable to ensure accurate estimates of the exposed population  
34 [43]. Buildings or their heights are not always present in the public cartography of cities.  
35 This problem was encountered in the elaboration of the noise map of Santiago de Chile  
36 [63]. Google Street View or Google Earth are possible sources where this information  
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1 can be obtained. However, there are methods that optimise the buildings extraction from  
2 high resolution satellite imagery using deep learning [64] and software that make 2D GIS  
3 data three-dimensional [65]. Building height is also important for estimating population  
4 noise exposure [66]. The most accurate methodologies place noise receivers at different  
5 heights from the façade [42]. 3D noise mapping is becoming increasingly common [67,  
6 68]. The resolution of population data is important for the accuracy of noise exposure  
7 calculations as Cai et al. [60] and Vinneau et al. [69] show. Resident counts per dwelling  
8 or building are complex to obtain. Population data are most often provided by street or  
9 neighbourhood. Methodologies are now being developed that take into account the  
10 mobility of people and therefore noise exposure results are realistic and accurate.  
11 Methodologies are now being developed that take into account the mobility of people and  
12 therefore noise exposure results are realistic and accurate [70, 71]. People are not static  
13 and move in and out of their homes on a daily basis to get to work.

23 Despite the importance of the quality of the inputs mentioned above, the quality of the  
24 noise source data is the most influential on the accuracy of urban noise models [43, 72].  
25 Road traffic flows come from major roads in many occasions because they are the ones  
26 that usually have traffic counters for their regulation in the city. These urban roads register  
27 high and constant noise levels. The noise estimates for these urban roads are usually the  
28 ones with the lowest error [34, 73]. So, new methodologies are often analysed in this type  
29 of urban roads [67, 74, 75]. However, the majority of the population lives on residential  
30 streets for which less information is available. In addition, vehicle speeds are often below  
31 50 km/h on residential roads. The noise model algorithms have been developed on the  
32 basis of data collected on major or interurban roads where vehicle speeds are usually  
33 above 50 km/h [76, 77]. Therefore, the largest estimation errors are frequent on such  
34 urban roads [34, 73]. Rey Gozalo and Gomez Escobar show that an adequate *in situ*  
35 measurement strategy could be an alternative for assessing residential streets with low  
36 vehicle flow [73]. Vehicle speed is rarely available. Some researchers take the maximum  
37 regulated speed of the road as a reference [73]. There is no information on speed ranges  
38 or acceleration on urban roads [77]. The lack of this information generates uncertainties  
39 especially when the traffic flow is pulsed (intersections with traffic lights, roundabouts...).

54 In fact, these zones have been the subject of interest for different microscopic traffic  
55 modelling [78, 79]. Another important aspect is that the CNOSSOS-EU method  
56 differentiates between 5 types of vehicles and many of the traffic registers only  
57 differentiate between light vehicles (cars and motorbikes) and heavy vehicles. Traffic

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counters usually classify vehicles according to their length using pavement sensors or Doppler radar. Therefore, differentiation between types of heavy vehicles or between types of two-wheeled vehicles on the basis of length may lead to uncertainties. These traffic sensors also record the speed of vehicles. Current studies show the identification of different vehicle typologies and their speed using machine learning from images collected by video cameras placed on urban roads [80, 81, 82]. Vehicle speed can also be determined from the sound spectrum as reported in the study by Zambon et al [83].

### **Alternative methodologies for assessing road traffic noise**

When *in situ* measurements are carried out to register different parameters of the road traffic source: noise levels emitted, flow and typologies of vehicles, speed... it is advisable to apply an appropriate methodology to reduce costs and ensure that the data accurately reflect the urban reality. Barrigón Morillas et al. [84] reviews different methodologies for assessing *in situ* urban noise. The stratification of streets according to their functionality, called the Categorisation Method [85], has proven its applicability and accuracy in different cities around the world [86]. Stratification of urban roads is also considered in dynamic noise mapping [87]. In addition, *in situ* measurements are recommended to verify the estimates made by noise models [52]. Calibration allows verification of the adequacy of the decisions regarding the configuration of the modelling parameters and the quality of the inputs. However, noise maps are not always calibrated with *in situ* measurements or measurements are only carried out on major roads. Inaccurate or uncertain estimates will affect the success of future action plans.

Most of the popular noise mapping software are expensive, although open-source noise modelling is becoming more and more common [88]. Considering the high influence of input data quality on prediction accuracy, many researchers choose to develop their own models or algorithms. Observation-based approaches generated the first algorithms, also called statistical methods. Despite their simplicity, they established significant relationships between sound levels and variables such as flow, type of vehicles or distance to the source [89]. These regression models give good results in urban areas with similar speeds and similar pavements and are used in educational apps [80]. A variety of studies are now developing multiple regression models that include other urban or land use variables to predict noise levels. These models are called land use regressions (LUR) and generally use GIS to register the different urban variables and estimate the results. Some of these models explain up to 80% of the noise variability but also incorporate some road

1 traffic characteristics [90, 91]. Barrigón et al. [85] showed different studies where only  
2 the road traffic flow was able to explain 70% of the  $L_{Aeq}$  (dB) variability. Moreover, there  
3 is no prior selection of predictor variables in many of these models and, therefore, their  
4 effectiveness decreases, i.e. the models include many independent variables and some of  
5 them have no significant relationship with the noise variable [91, 92]. In fact, root-mean-  
6 square error (RMSE) is usually between 3 and 5 dB [90, 92]. However, LURs have also  
7 been developed that only include urban variables and present high explanations of noise  
8 variability [92, 93]. These models can be an alternative or complement to traditional noise  
9 models especially when analysing the applicability or effectiveness of action plans related  
10 to urban planning. Sensitivity of these models to variables that do not have a linear  
11 relationship with noise has led to the development of machine learning algorithms [75,  
12 81, 82, 94]. Currently, deep learning is displacing other machine learning techniques  
13 (support vector machine (SVM), artificial neural network (ANN), adaptive neuro-fuzzy  
14 inference system (ANFIS)...) because they use a greater number of hidden layers  
15 favoring the learning of more linear patterns and, therefore, solving more complex  
16 interactions [94].

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29 Road traffic noise maps made with the CNOSSOS-EU method are considered static  
30 because they only provide the annual average value of noise levels [95]. Some researchers  
31 consider them semi-dynamic because they include dynamic variables such as speed.  
32 Noise quantification in annual average values is not sufficient to assess the negative  
33 effects of noise on health and its variability also needs to be determined. Therefore, the  
34 development of new methodologies to assess noise dynamics has been an important focus  
35 of research in recent years.

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42 DYNAMAP project based on dynamic road traffic noise mapping using low-cost  
43 sensors has been widely disseminated in the scientific community [87]. Noise maps in a  
44 ring road of Rome and a neighbourhood of Milan are periodically updated from data  
45 registered at noise monitoring stations [74]. In addition, urban road classification methods  
46 have been applied [96] and procedures have been developed for the identification and  
47 elimination of events anomalous to road traffic noise [97, 98]. Wei et al. [99] interpolates  
48 the results obtained from the measurements also considering the road typology. Better  
49 least squares fits are obtained for the observations than for the traffic data.

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microscopic models. Some studies couple microscopic traffic models (SYMUVIA, VISSIM...) and noise prediction models [78, 79, 88]. Kinematic characteristics of vehicles in certain traffic control strategies are obtained from traffic models. Other studies use smart-phone microphone observations as a data source [100, 101, 102]. Ventura et al. [101] used this data to update a pre-calculated noise map. Picaut et al. [102] extends temporally and spatially the logging of sound data by mobile phones using the NoiseCapture app.

Dynamic noise maps require a large number of variables as shown above. Managing a large number of spatial and temporal variables increases the computational cost and can affect the efficiency of mathematical models due to the presence of interaction between variables. Sensitivity analyses can manage the influence of variables in models and only include those that contribute significantly by studying their uncertainty. Aumond et al. [103] shows the reduction of 40 input parameters required by the CNOSSOS-EU method to 15 input parameters. Using a sequential forecasting approach or meta-models also optimises and improves the accuracy of noise models [72, 104].

The accurate estimation of the variability of sound levels is an important advance but really the main objective of noise maps is to accurately assess the exposed population. In response, recent studies elaborate receiver-centric noise exposure sensitivity maps [105]. These maps consider the daily mobility of the population and are therefore also dynamic maps.

## **Noise management and abatement**

Developing accurate urban noise assessment methodologies provides reliable information on the acoustic environment. If noise levels reach values that negatively affect the health of citizens, the objective is to reduce them. In addition, preservation of quiet areas is also a priority objective of the European Noise Directive. A review of current studies aimed at managing and abating road traffic noise is shown in this section. There are fewer studies on this topic as shown in Fig. 1.

Table 1 has been elaborated taking as a reference the figure "10 ways to combat noise pollution" produced by the European Commission [106]. They have been classified according to the priority order of action: source, propagation path and receiver. Nine of the ten ways to combat urban noise are related to the source of road traffic. Table 1 therefore reflects the importance of reducing road traffic noise.

**Table 1.** Estimated sound reduction of the main noise actions developed in Europe.

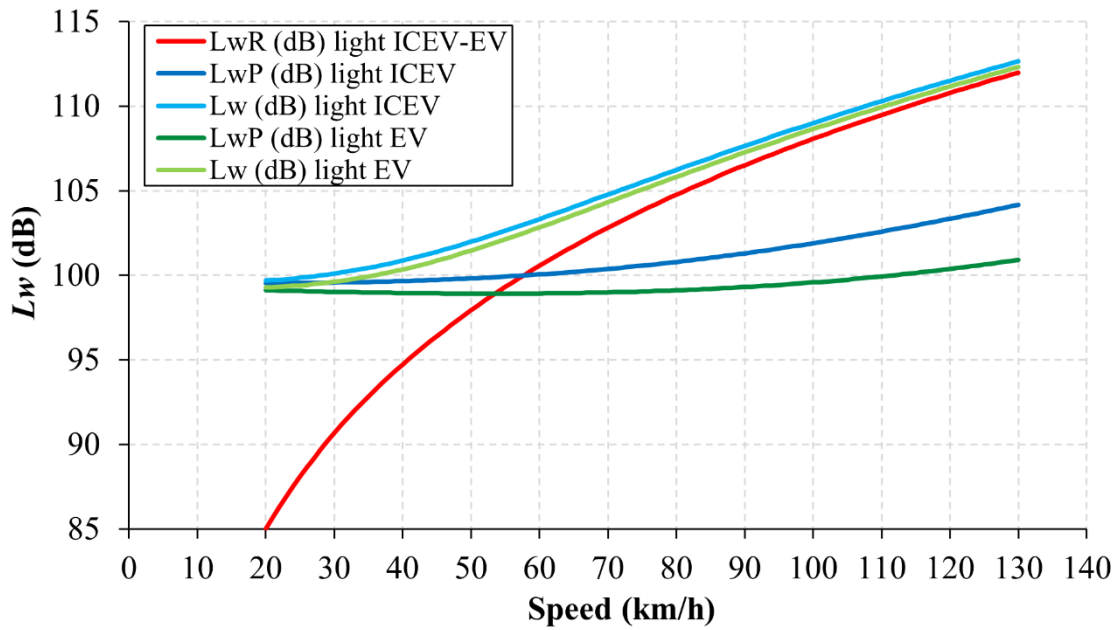
Source [106]

Category	Noise reduction actions	Estimated reduction (dB)
Source	Electric vehicles	1
	Low-noise tyres	3 – 4
	Quiet road surfaces	3 – 7
	Traffic management	1 – 4
Path	Noise barriers	3 – 20
Receiver	Building insulation	5 – 10
	Building design	2 – 15
Other	Land-use planning & design	Unknown
	Changing driving styles	5 – 7

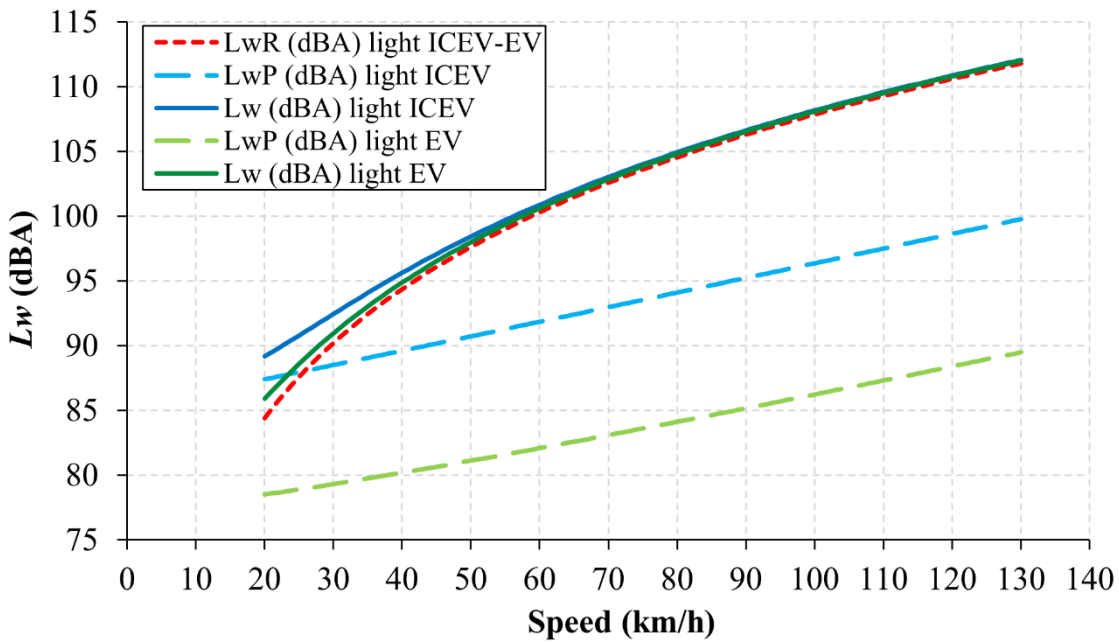
### Road traffic noise control measures at the source

Electric vehicles (EVs) were developed and promoted to reduce air pollution in cities. EVs currently represent 3% of the light vehicle fleet and are expected to reach 15-30% by 2030 in Europe [107]. Improvement in battery performance, increase in charging stations and financial support granted by the EU MS have contributed to the expansion of EVs [107]. Noise generated by EVs is lower than that of internal combustion engine vehicles (ICEVs), especially at speeds below 50 km/h as shown Fig. 2. Considering the sound power level in dBA (see Fig. 2 b), the difference between EVs and ICEVs is 1.5 dB at 30 km/h and 0.5 dB at 50 km/h. These differences may vary from those proposed by Pallas et al. [108] because the new sound power values ( $L_w$  (dB)) proposed by CNOSSOS-EU method [107] have been used.

a)



b)



**Fig. 2.** Sound power level generated by rolling and propulsion of light internal combustion engine and electric vehicles in dB (a) and dBA (b) according to the CNOSSOS-EU method [37] and Pallas et al. [108], respectively.

Other studies obtain  $L_w$  (dBA) differences between ICEVs and EVs slightly higher than those shown in Fig. 2. Campello-Vicente et al. [109] obtain differences of 2 dB for a speed of 50 km/h and Yamauchi et al. [109] obtain differences of 2-4 dB for speeds of

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20-30 km/h. Yamauchi et al. [110] also indicates that the artificial noise created by the Acoustic Vehicle Alerting System (AVAS) between speeds of 0-20 km/h was not negligible. Ibarra et al [111] found much larger differences between hybrid electric vehicles (HEVs) and EVs: 3 dBA on urban roads (50 km/h speed limit) and 7 dBA on interurban roads (80 km/h speed limit). Regarding to heavy vehicles, Laib et al. [112] evaluate the effect of using electric buses in the urban environment. Results show a decrease of 10 dB compared to internal combustion engine buses for 30 km/h. However, there are no differences in the noise levels emitted for 50 km/h.

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Considering the vehicle flow registered in residential streets in previous studies [73, 86] and the sound power levels emitted by electric vehicles (Fig. 2), only if 100% of vehicles were electric and their speed was 30 km/h, the levels generated would be close to the limits proposed by the WHO [3]. Residential or neighbourhood streets (Category 4 and 5 according to [85]) have the lowest vehicle flows but also the highest percentage of the population living on them. Lower vehicle speeds would also reduce the number of traffic accidents [113] but would increase energy consumption [114]. Acceleration also influences noise levels [79] and therefore driving style is important. The future deployment of autonomous cars will benefit in this context [115].

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Cesbron et al. [116] shows that the type of road surface can significantly decrease noise (overall a decrease of 6.2 dBA) in contrast to current electric vehicle traffic. Absorption and low texture are the main noise reduction properties of the road surface [116]. Praticò and Anfosso-Lédée [117] show different types of quiet pavements that have been developed: porous asphalt, rubberised asphalt, poroelastic road surface, very thin asphalt... Rubberised asphalt has shown a significant reduction of traffic noise (8-10 dB(A)) in current studies [118, 119]. Furthermore, these asphalts can be considered recyclable as crumb rubber from urban waste can be used [120]. Despite the good acoustic properties of these quiet asphalts, their sound absorption decreases with age. This decrease is influenced by many factors and different models have now been developed to estimate it [58, 59]. Another relevant current issue is the life cycle of low-noise pavements. Piao et al. [121] conclude that the use of semi-dense asphalt instead of stone-mastic asphalt reduces noise (thus benefiting human health) but increases energy demand and global warming.

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Noise reduction provided by quiet pavement can be improved by optimising tyre properties. Tested tyres running on the smooth road surface in the QCITY project showed a noise reduction of 1.7 to 2.1 dB, for speeds of 40 km/h and 50 km/h [107]. This reduction



1 was increased to 6.3 dBA with a prototype dualQ tyre. Once a real model of the Qdual  
2 tyre was created in the CityHush project, the reduction was 4.7 dBA for the EV and 4.1  
3 dBA for the ICEV at 50 km/h [107].  
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5 In addition to speed reduction as part of traffic management actions, cities have limited  
6 private vehicle access to certain central areas [122, 123]. Efficient public transport and  
7 more bicycle lanes have also had a positive impact on the noise environment in some  
8 cities [124]. Limiting the access of heavy vehicles to central urban areas or not operating  
9 waste services at night also reduces noise levels.  
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11 Ögren et al [125] show future scenarios of Gothenburg using different road traffic  
12 reduction measures. Low-noise pavement all roads or low-noise tires (-5 dB) show similar  
13 decreases in the number of exposed population (from 210,000 inhabitants  $L_{den} > 55$  dBA  
14 in 2015 to 150,000 inhabitants in 2035). Reducing vehicle speed (-10 km/h) has the most  
15 immediate effect, but reducing traffic flow provides a steady reduction in noise levels.  
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#### 24 **Road traffic noise control measures at the propagation path and the receiver**

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27 Noise barriers are the main propagation path noise reduction strategy. New waste for  
28 the construction of noise barriers appear every year: construction and demolition [126],  
29 palm tree pruning [127] ... Innovative solutions that provide significant noise reductions  
30 are the use of sonic crystal and T-shaped acoustic barriers covered with oblique diffusers  
31 [128, 129]. Sustainability of the materials constituting the acoustic barrier should be  
32 considered [130]. Martinez-Orozco [131] and Halim [132] show results of the loss of  
33 effectiveness of different noise barriers.  
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40 The proposal for green noise barriers continues to spread despite low sound reduction  
41 values. Reductions between 5 and 10 dBA are achieved by combining depth and density  
42 of trees [133]. The great benefit of greenery is related to sound perception as indicated by  
43 Van Renterghem [134]. Van Renterghem and Botteldooren [135] also show the sound  
44 reduction provided by roadside embankments. Other alternatives to noise barriers that  
45 provide high noise reductions (>10 dBA) are the use of tunnels or underpass [136, 137].  
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51 Vegetation is also used in buildings to provide aesthetic and acoustic improvements.  
52 The water content of green roofs can lead to an improvement in acoustic reduction  
53 reaching values of 7 dBA [138]. Yang and Yeong [139] list the main design elements in  
54 today's building envelope with acoustic properties: balcony, protrusions, vegetation,  
55 materials, façade height, and façade profile. An average insertion loss of 7.8 dBA is  
56 provided by these elements for road traffic. Building morphology design, creating  
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1 shielded side of dwellings produces greater reductions for road traffic noise (20 dBA)  
2 [140].

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4 Regarding the insulation of buildings, EU MS have established *in situ* criteria to be  
5 assessed. There are building elements that provide high insulation but their effectiveness  
6 depends on their installation. In Spain, different levels of acoustic comfort have recently  
7 been established according to the UNE 74201 standard (2021).  
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### 10 11 **Other road traffic noise control measures**

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14 Appropriate urban planning allows for long-term urban noise management by  
15 protecting those areas with good acoustic quality (quiet areas, green areas) and  
16 remediating those with high noise levels. Berlin and Hong Kong have used zoning plans  
17 to protect sensitive areas [106]. Madrid and Cáceres have developed actions to increase  
18 green areas, restrict road traffic in central areas and increase pedestrian streets [122, 123].  
19 However, the efficiency of many of these proposals has not been evaluated as shown in  
20 Table 1.  
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27 Another possible measure is public education and awareness-raising. The  
28 dissemination of the negative effects of noise in the different media has contributed to the  
29 knowledge of this serious environmental problem. Also, it is important that there is public  
30 participation in decision-making in noise mapping. Macedo et al. [141] propose to  
31 develop a sustainable driving indicator that minimises noise and pollution emissions  
32 similar to the existing indicator for fuel consumption. Asensio et al. [142] create a useful  
33 tool that can help drivers avoid particularly noise-sensitive areas by estimating the noise  
34 emitted by a single vehicle.  
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### 43 **Conclusions**

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46 Road traffic noise continues to increase in cities although environmental noise  
47 assessment and management policies have been successfully implemented in many  
48 countries. First, the lack of a common noise assessment method and then the shortcomings  
49 of the common method developed, create doubts about the figures of the exposed  
50 population. Improvements proposed in recent years will lead to the development of an  
51 accurate common noise method. A new detailed guide with recommendations for the  
52 configuration and measurement of the different parameters would be advisable. The  
53 engagement of countries is key to reducing the number of people exposed to noise levels  
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1 that have negative effects on their health and quality of life. However, most of the road  
2 traffic control measures proposed in the action plans have not been implemented. The  
3 creation of policy frameworks that allow for greater interaction with the scientific  
4 community would benefit the actual implementation of findings.  
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## 19 **Compliance with Ethical Standards** 20

### 21 **Conflict of Interest** 22

23 The authors declare no competing interests.  
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### 27 **Human and Animal Rights and Informed Consent** 28

29 This article does not contain any studies with human or animal subjects performed by any  
30 of the authors.  
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