

Context

The European Parliament’s Environment Public Health and Food Safety Committee (ENVI) is currently considering a Commission proposal for a Regulation on the sound levels of motor vehicles. The proposal, if adopted, will replace the existing vehicle noise directive (70/157/EEC), including enforcing tighter noise emission limits for cars, vans, lorries and buses and updating the testing method. The ENVI committee has come under significant pressure from the car industry to weaken the proposals. So much so that the draft report of the ENVI Committee not only weakens the Commission’s proposal for future standards **but also gives carmakers, in some specific cases, significantly more time to meet existing standards set 20 years ago**. This briefing paper outlines how and what can be done to improve the new EU legislation to tackle vehicle noise.

Why is it so important to cut vehicle noise?

According to the WHO, noise is, together with air pollution, the one of biggest environmental problem in Europe. It affects over 200 million of EU citizens causing sleep disturbance, ear damage, learning in problems in children and stress. Vehicle noise is annually associated with 50.000 premature deaths and 250.000 heart attacks. More stringent standards for vehicles would result in benefits which would outweigh costs by a factor of over thirty to one. Transport & Environment, in its position paper on the Commission’s regulation, suggests a five point plan that would improve the original text and bring about savings worth 51 billion Euros costing only 3 billion.

What’s the problem?

The Commission proposal includes both new noise limit values and a new test method through which vehicle noise levels will be measured. It foresees noise levels to be reduced in 2 steps as shown below.

Vehicles	Step 1	Step 2
	2 years after publication	5 years after publication
Cars, light duty vans and buses	-2dB(A)	-2dB(A)
Trucks	-1dB(A)	-2dB(A)

The co-decision process is focused on how much and how quickly noise levels for different types of vehicles should be tightened. But Parliament is also being asked to decide on changes to vehicle categories and the test method of a very technical nature. The amendments in the draft ENVI report significantly weaken the proposed limits.

Analysis undertaken for T&E by noise experts¹ shows how the ENVI committee’s draft report would significantly weaken noise limits compared to CURRENT standards: for some types of new vehicles it would take up to 16 years to be as quiet as presently required!

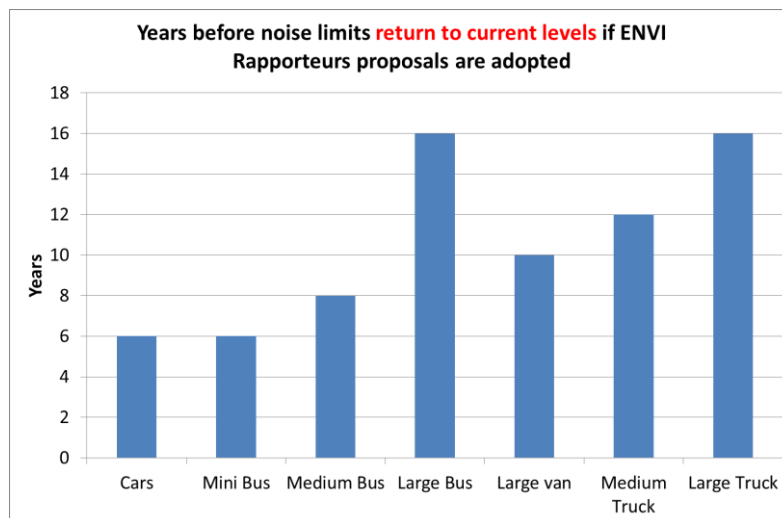
There are several ways the draft report would water-down the standards. These include:

¹ M+P Consulting Engineers

- Amending vehicle categories so that many more vehicles qualify for higher noise limits that were originally only intended for much larger or high performance vehicles;
- Proposing to round down measured results and allow vehicles in production to have more relaxed limits than tested vehicles;
- Allowing flexibilities in the new test method that can be exploited by vehicle manufacturers to produce test results that are much quieter than the vehicle achieves on the road;
- Using very quiet tyres on trucks during the test and testing at facilities that do not meet current international standards.

How much are the proposed limits being weakened?

As the graph shows, the ENVI committee's draft proposal substantially undermines the regulation put forward by the Commission.



Past regulations were also significantly weakened by amending the test procedure (such as the choice of gears, test surfaces and tyres). This enabled vehicles to meet apparently tighter limits without becoming quieter in practice!

Moving the goalposts by making changes to the test method just before new limit values come into force must not be allowed to weaken the limits again.

What should change?

The ENVI Committee should resist the car industry's pressure and aim at improving the Commission's regulation, not make it weaker. Specifically, MEPs in the ENVI Committee should:

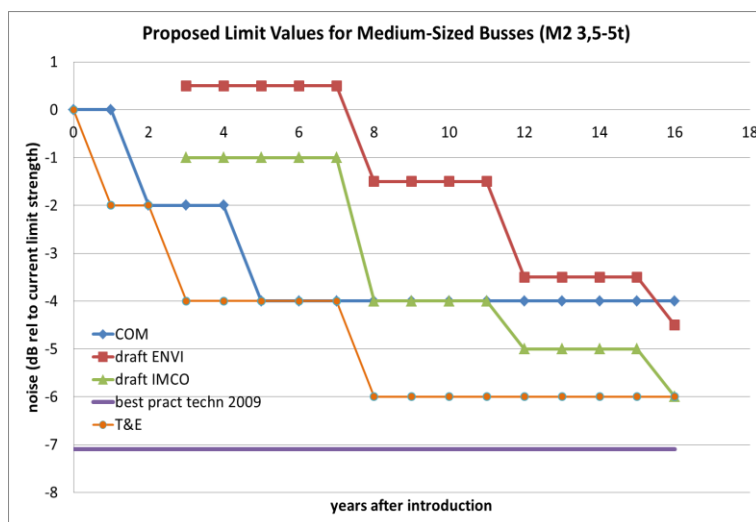
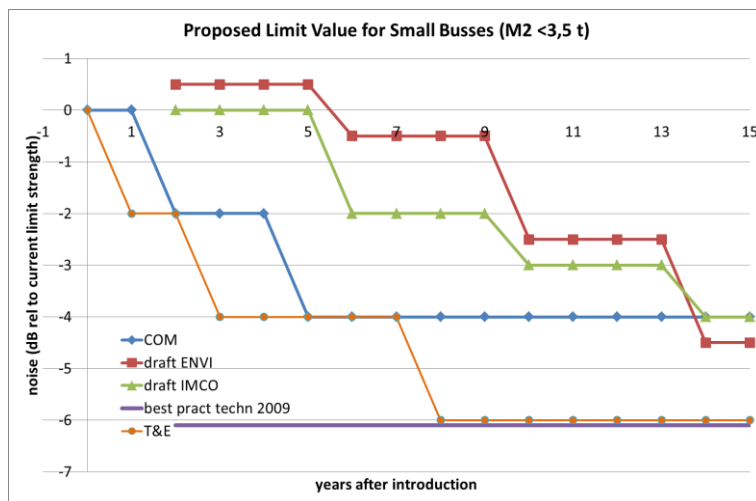
1. Include a simple clear statement in the proposal on how much and how quickly noise levels should be reduced for different types of vehicles;
2. Make a clear requirement that changes to the test method and vehicle categories should NOT lead to any changes to the equivalent stringency of the proposals;
3. Use committology to agree the details of the test method and agree vehicle categories.

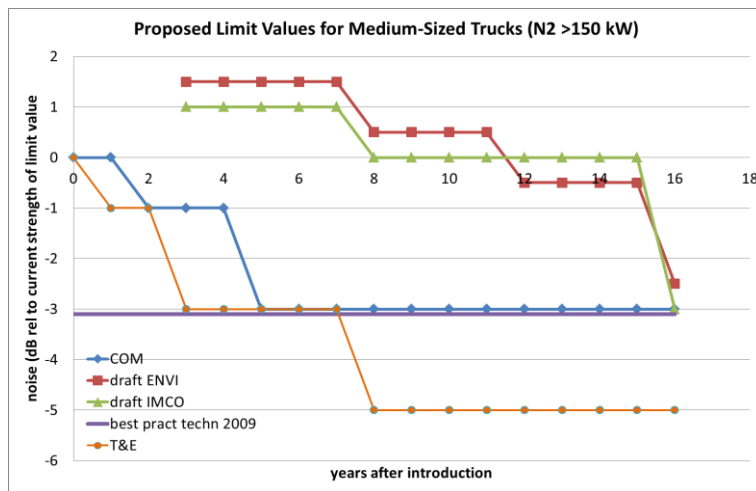
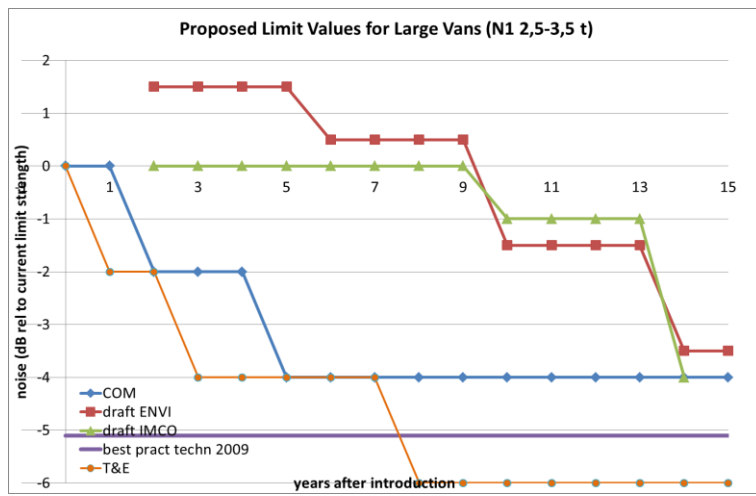
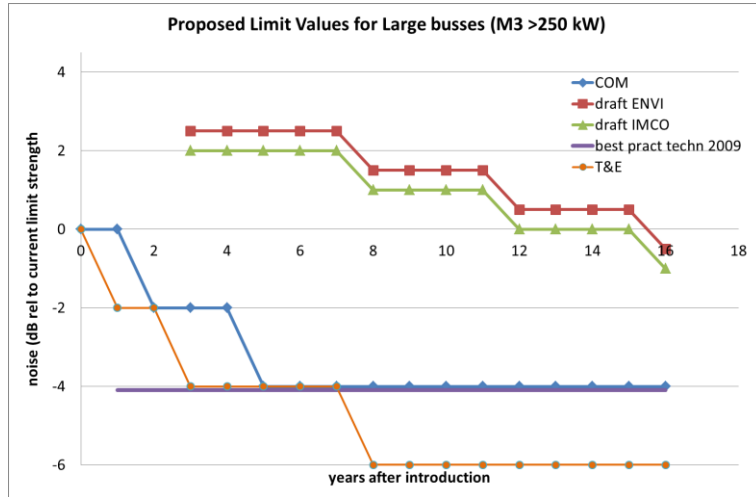
The Parliament needs to send a clear message about how much, and how quickly, it wants vehicles to become quieter. Its wishes should not be distorted by technical adjustments introduced through the new test method and vehicle classes.

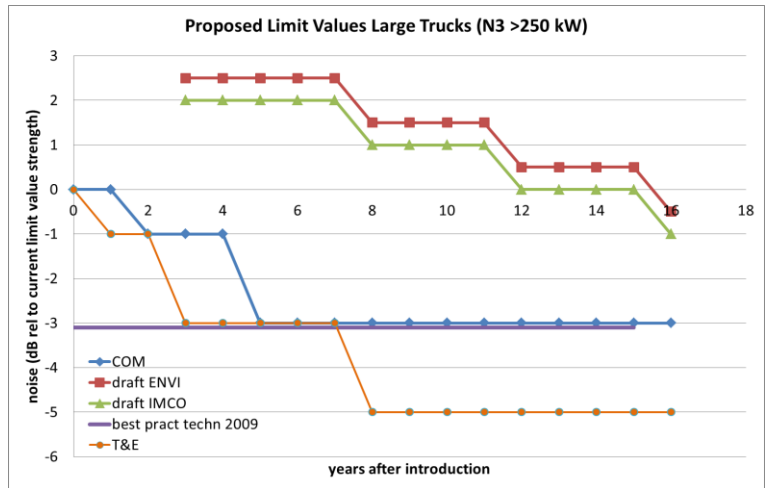
Proposed Limit Values Vehicle Types

Observations

The analysis of the European Commission proposal, compared with the drafts of the ENVI and IMCO committees, proves that their proposed limit values together with reclassifications of vehicle classes actually lead to much weaker and ineffective standards, as shown below. On average the ENVI proposal starts at 1-2dB higher than the Commission proposal. Besides, an additional 1dB needs to be included due to the conformity of production (COP), and an extra half dB for rounding to enable final report to be made in full integer values. The graphs clearly demonstrate that the Light Vehicle ENVI proposal does *eventually almost* reach the Commission's final decibel rating of a general reduction of 2dB. However this would only be achieved after 14 to 16 years. In the case of the Heavy Vehicles, the ENVI proposal would *never reach the Commission proposal end point, not even after 16 years*.







More info at:

www.transportenvironment.org/transport-noise