Subject: Nuisance Noise From Train and Tube Station Public Address Systems

Report Number: 6

Report to: Environment Committee

Date: 11 October 2007

Report of: Executive Director of Secretariat

1. Recommendation

1.1 That the Committee agrees to recommend to BMAC the appointment of Angie Bray AM as a rapporteur to conduct a review or investigation of nuisance noise from underground stations.

1.2 That the Committee agrees the terms of reference as outlined at paragraph 5.4.

2. Background

2.1 On 12 July 2007 the Environment Committee agreed in principle that Angie Bray AM be appointed as a rapporteur to review nuisance noise from public address systems at overground train and tube stations. The Committee anticipated that this would lead to a letter and recommendations to Transport for London (TfL) and could form part of the Committee’s response to the National Noise Strategy consultation.

2.2 It was agreed that the Secretariat would report back to the Committee in October with the results of an initial investigation.

2.3 Angie Bray AM wished to pursue the issue having received a number of complaints from constituents regarding one particular station. The research conducted sought to establish whether these complaints were indicative of a wider problem in London.

2.4 To improve the Committee’s understanding of the scale of nuisance noise from public address systems at stations the following organisations were contacted:

- Environmental Health officers of London boroughs;
- Transport for London (TfL);
- Network Rail;
- The Association of Rail Operating Companies;
- London TravelWatch; and
2.5 The research sought to gain a better understanding of the issue at a local level and find out what measures or processes are in place to reduce the level of public address system noise escaping stations and to deal with complaints if they arise.

3. **Issues for Consideration**

   **Context**

3.1 The Environmental Protection Act 1990 regulates noise. Local authorities have a duty to investigate and take action against statutory nuisance noise. Environmental Health Officers often attempt to resolve the complaints informally but they may issue an abatement notice to the noisemaker. Failure to comply can lead to a fine, confiscation of equipment, such as a public address system, and criminal prosecution.²

3.2 Businesses have a defence against noise abatement orders if they have used ‘best practicable means’ to prevent or counteract nuisance noise. Regulations under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 place requirements on railway operators to ensure the safety of staff and passengers. Public address announcements are likely to form part of transport operator’s safety procedures.

3.3 There are 275 stations³ on the London Underground network, 125 are partially or completely underground and 150 are surface stations. There are 364 train stations in London. Underground stations which may operate from 5 am until 1.30 am, depending on location.⁴

3.4 Train and tube stations in London are undergoing a huge programme of refurbishment, including the replacement of public address systems. Metronet has upgraded 41 of 153 stations in its upgrade programme.⁵ Tubeline has upgraded 47 of 100 stations.⁶ That means that a further 165 underground stations will be upgraded in the coming years. TfL, through London Rail, is also working with train operating companies to upgrade train stations.⁷

3.5 The daily operation of the tube is the responsibility of London Underground, as a subsidiary of TfL. Metronet and Tubeline are responsible for the upgrading and maintenance of the stations. Train stations are maintained by Network Rail, which also operates London’s major stations. The respective rail companies operate the remainder of London’s train stations.

**Initial findings**

**Complaints**

3.6 Fourteen boroughs responded to our investigation reporting a total of 81 complaints. Some boroughs reported just one year’s data, while others reported over much longer time periods.

3.7 Of the boroughs that responded the majority had received two complaints a year or less about nuisance noise from public address systems.

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¹ Statutory nuisance noise is noise emitted from premises that is prejudicial to health or a nuisance.
³ Many of these are below ground and therefore the public address systems would not cause disturbance to neighbouring residents.
⁵ http://www.metronetrail.com/default.asp?siD=1176976867781
⁶ http://www.tubelines.com/explorer/
Four boroughs had received no complaints (Haringey, Southwark, Tower Hamlets, Waltham Forest) and Richmond upon Thames received less than one complaint a year, on average.

Three boroughs had received one or two complaints in one year (Croydon, Merton, Westminster). Islington, Newham and Kensington & Chelsea all received an average of around 2 complaints a year.

Two boroughs had 3 or 4 complaints in a year (Hammersmith and Fulham, Hillingdon)

One (Redbridge) had 9 complaints in one year.

3.8 About half of the 34 stations complained about were tube stations and half were train stations. However, over two thirds of the complaints were for tube stations. All except two of the multiple complaints were about tube stations and the worst ‘repeat offenders’ were the tube stations of Earls Court (15 over 8 years), South Woodford (6 over 1 year) and West Ham (12 over 13 years).

3.9 In the year to August 2007, the London Underground customer service centre recorded 182 complaints relating to public address and whistle nuisance noise. 60 of these were for South Ealing station and are explained by TfL as the result of multiple complaints by a group of nearby residents. The vast majority of stations had no complaints against them.

3.10 National Rail states that it has received very few complaints about nuisance noise from public address systems at the ten stations they operate in London. The last one being Cannon Street about 18 months ago.

3.11 We are still awaiting a formal response from ATOC.

3.12 An important theme to emerge from responses was that complaints often occurred after new public address systems were installed at stations. The London Borough of Redbridge stated “we started receiving complaints immediately after the stations had finished their refurbishment. In fact one of the starting incidents is normally the commissioning session were the tannoy are tested.”

3.13 Of the five MPs who responded to our investigation, only Tom Brake MP had received a complaint about nuisance noise from public addresses but the complaint was five years ago.

3.14 Angie Bray AM placed letters in west London newspapers in late 2006. In response she received complaints from 26 residents about 13 different Tube stations and one train station. Correspondence with these residents indicate that:

- many of the stations were causing ongoing nuisance noise and this was sometimes loud enough to be heard inside houses or to disrupt sleep,
- the noise had often started after station refurbishment,
- the noise levels and frequency of announcements had increased over the last few years.

Turnham Green had by far the most complainants with 7 residents complaining of nuisance noise, Ravenscourt Park and Chiswick Park both had 3 complainants, with the rest of the stations being complained about by one or two people.

**Tube stations – procedures to limit nuisance noise**

3.15 TfL’s full response is attached as Appendix A.
3.16 London Underground Limited (LUL) is in the process of developing a Manual of Good Practice for public address noise management.

3.17 Measures already taken by LUL to limit nuisance noise include:

- Only making announcements in surface stations between the hours of 7am to 11pm, except in emergencies. Some stations also limit announcements after 7pm.
- Standards stipulating that announcements should not cause unreasonable disturbance to neighbours in the vicinity of stations.
- Standards asserting that every attempt should be made to ensure that noise produced by new or upgraded equipment should not be noticeable to neighbours.
- Standards stating that the volume of announcements should be regulated in the morning and evening where there is potential that the normal volume may cause public nuisance.
- Working with Metronet and Tubeline to ensure PA systems are flexible and can be reconfigured to suit local conditions.
- Guidelines have recently been altered to reduce the overall frequency of announcements, especially those of a ‘non-travel’ nature.

3.18 LUL uses a range of measures to resolve nuisance noise including managing the frequency, timing and volume of announcements and taking technical measures such as relocating speakers, using ambient noise sensors to adjust volume to background noise, or using a built in automatic volume.

3.19 TfL believes that nuisance noise should be considered in the context of requirements to ensure safety of passengers and staff and the need to provide service information. Announcements are particularly important for passengers with learning difficulties, literacy problems, hearing or visual impairments. TfL states, “we realize that people live close to many of our stations and we are sensitive to the potential impact our operations can have on them. We try to balance the needs of our passengers with the needs of our neighbours.”

3.20 London TravelWatch echoes this call for balance between the needs of passengers and neighbours. London TravelWatch received 174 complaints from passengers about insufficient announcements or not being able to hear announcements and 21 complaints, primarily from local residents, about announcements being too frequent or too loud.

**Train stations – procedures to limit nuisance noise**

3.21 National Rail take a range of actions to limit nuisance noise from their public address systems including suitable positioning, restricting the type and frequency of announcements, limiting hours of use and adjusting volumes to be quieter outside rush hours.

3.22 We are still awaiting a formal response from the Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC).

**Resolution of complaints**

3.23 LUL states that it is “always willing to meet with the residents and local authority officers to discuss noise problems and attempt to resolve matters to the satisfaction of all parties.”
3.24 Complaints about stations operated by National Rail can be made either to station personnel or to a National Helpline. Complaints are recorded. National Rail resolved the most recent complaint at Cannon Street by capping and adjusting the positioning of some speakers.

3.25 Council officers were on the whole positive about the ability to resolve complaints about noise from public address systems at stations satisfactorily. Most had done so on an informal basis with the cooperation of operators and maintenance companies.

3.26 Unsurprisingly, the experience of noise officers dealing with train operators and maintenance companies was less positive in the boroughs containing two of the ‘repeat offender’ stations. To illustrate,

- Redbridge has contacted station supervisors and were told that “the volume levels were set by senior engineers in the environment section” and that the volume levels “are a legal requirement for health and safety and for disabled travellers.”
- Kensington and Chelsea worked with LUL/Metronet to resolve “the matter informally without success” due to a “co-operative but ineffective” response.

3.27 Letters from residents received by Angie Bray AM indicate that measures taken by station managers to reduce nuisance noise were often perceived as either ineffective or leading to only a temporary reduction in nuisance noise. Many felt that their complaints had been met with a response from station staff that there is nothing they could do.

4. Initial analysis

4.1 Based on the low number of complaints received by boroughs about train stations, the generally positive response to borough noise officers from train station staff and the response from Network Rail, we believe that Rail operators are, on the whole, acting in a manner consistent with the Mayor’s policy. However, this conclusion should be reviewed once a response is received from ATOC.

4.2 TfL has reported relatively few complaints to its customer service centre, less than one per station. We have received only a small number of complaints from boroughs, two or less received by each borough that responded.

4.3 However, residents may not be reporting complaints to boroughs and may just be going directly to station managers. Further, evidence tends to suggest that LUL does not necessarily log complaints made to station managers. To give two examples: no complaints are recorded against Earl’s Court in the last year despite the recent problems; Chiswick Park also has no complaints recorded against it despite Angie Bray AM receiving letters from three complainants, with one even stating that they regularly visit the station to ask for noise to be reduced.

4.4 The upgrading or replacing of public address systems has often been the trigger for nuisance noise. This indicates that there have been problems with the standards that govern the contracts for installation and setting up of public address systems. However, TfL and Metronet have reviewed these standards with the aim of increasing the ability to respond to individual station circumstances.

4.5 TfL has made some policy changes recently in relation to public address announcements and are continuing to work on the issue as they develop the Manual. However, we do not yet have any concrete information to show whether these improvements have or will result in reduced
nuisance noise for residents. At this stage, it appears that TfL’s policies are largely satisfactory and are moving toward implementation of the Mayor’s policy on noise near stations. However, several areas could be improved including better testing and adjustment of noise when public address systems are replaced or upgraded.

4.6 Based on letters received by Angie Bray, there is some concern that, in the past, TfL’s policies have not been translated into sustained reductions in the levels of nuisance noise experienced by residents around some stations. If this poor policy implementation has not changed then policy alterations will have little impact on reducing nuisance noise for Tube station neighbours.

4.7 The following recommendations could be made to TfL based on investigations so far:

- The expectation is that the Manual will set out the full range of practical and technical measures available to address complaints and give advice about how these measures can be tailored to individual circumstances.
- Staff training for station managers is updated to reflect correct processes given recent changes and the development of the Manual.
- That consideration is given to including best practice and standards from other networks such as requiring independent assessment of the effects of new or upgraded public address systems.
- That the standards applied to the London Underground are equally applied to the London Overground network.
- Complainants should be able to hold TfL directly to account for achieving agreed standards. Station managers and customer service staff within TfL should inform complainants of the broad standards and outcomes they can expect in the resolution of their complaint. The Committee expects that this will include the PPP standards that announcements should not cause unreasonable disturbance to neighbours in the vicinity of stations and that the volume of announcements should be regulated in the morning and evening where there is potential that the normal volume may cause public nuisance.
- TfL should consider implementing Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) between itself and residents at problem stations. The MOUs would detail acceptable parameters of operation for the public address system and what levels of noise that residents should therefore expect at what times of day. Consideration would need to be given to providing appropriate, independent support for residents during the formation of an MOU. An MOU would give increased certainty to both residents and TfL.

5. Rapporteurship

5.1 It is proposed that further investigation focus on tube stations as initial findings show that despite tube stations only making up approximately 40% of the stations in London they cause over 60% of the complaints to boroughs about noise from public address systems.

5.2 A substantial amount of work has already carried out by Angie Bray on this issue, which has created a high level of awareness within TfL. The Mayor of London has spoken with TfL about the issue and the Managing Director of London Underground, Tim O’Toole, has involved himself in responding to individual complaints. A rapporteurship would seek to maintain a level of awareness of this issue with the Mayor and within TfL.
5.3 A large part of the solution to nuisance noise will come from technical solutions such as changes to the configuration of the hardware and software of the public address system and measures to contain noise within stations, such as erecting sound barriers. These should not be the focus of committee investigation, except in so far as ensuring that TfL policies mean that technical expertise is used to evaluate the full range of measures and implement the best solution given specific local requirements.

**Proposed terms of reference**

5.4 The proposed terms of reference for this investigation are:

- What is the current scale of the problem of nuisance noise from public address systems at selected Tube stations?
- Have recent changes made by TfL to policies and guidelines, and their implementation by staff and Infracos, reduced the level and frequency of nuisance noise from Tube stations?
- What further changes are needed in policy and practice to reduce nuisance noise from Tube station public address systems to an acceptable level?

**Key stakeholders**

5.5 Key stakeholders will include:

- Residents and resident associations in the areas immediately surrounding surface Tube stations – residents have already responded to letters in newspapers placed by the Committee and earlier, in west London, by Angie Bray AM. This would be followed up by a targeted mail to several problem stations.
- TfL – TfL has provided a response to initial investigations setting out their response to the issue so far as prompted by work by Angie Bray AM and meeting with the Mayor. A meeting with TfL to discuss the evidence, recommendations and potential solutions.
- Metronet and Tube Lines
- Borough noise officers - we have already contacted boroughs.
- Noise Campaigners - United Kingdom Noise Association (UKNA) will be contacted to discuss the issue and potential solutions; they have already had some involvement in the issue through the work of Angie Bray AM.
- London TravelWatch, particularly in relation to passengers who may rely upon announcements such as the blind – London TravelWatch has provided a written response.

**Methodology**

5.6 BMAC approval of the rapporteur would be sought at the 1 November 2007 meeting. Letters would be sent to residents surrounding two or three surface Tube stations asking them whether they have experienced nuisance noise from the stations public address system recently. This would indicate what impact recent changes by TfL to policies and procedures have had. It may also highlight areas that require further work by TfL.
5.7 The benefit of this approach is that the Committee will have greater certainty about the current situation when engaging with TfL. The risk is that, given the number of complaints gathered in investigations so far, only a low level of response is received from residents.

5.8 An example of best practice would be sought of either a Tube or Rail station, with housing nearby, that has either not caused nuisance noise or has found a lasting solution to nuisance noise. There is potential to use Rickmansworth station, which is identified by TfL as a station where a satisfactory solution has been implemented.

5.9 Meetings would be arranged for Angie Bray AM with UKNA to discuss their experience of the issue and explore the possibility of UKNA supporting residents near problem stations in the formation of an MOU with TfL. A meeting would also be arranged between Angie Bray AM and TfL to discuss the issues and possible solutions.

5.10 A short report would be produced and conclusions would form part of a response to the National Noise Strategy.

5.11 Suggested timetable

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<th>Activity</th>
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<tr>
<td>BMAC approval</td>
<td>1 November 2007</td>
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<tr>
<td>Targeted letters to residents near several surface Tube stations</td>
<td>November 2007</td>
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<tr>
<td>Angie Bray AM meets with UKNA and TfL</td>
<td>Late November 2007 – Early December 2007</td>
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<td>Final report complete</td>
<td>January 2007</td>
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6. Strategy Implications

6.1 This report directly addresses Policy 33 of the Mayor’s Ambient Noise Strategy. The policy states “The Mayor will urge the rail industry and other stakeholders, and will expect Transport for London, to minimise the impact of noise at and near stations, interchanges and other rail facilities, as far as safe and practicable, having particular regard to the needs of disabled people. This includes measures related to announcements.”

6.2 Defra are in the process of developing a National Noise Strategy. The strategy is scheduled for publication by the end of 2007.

7. Legal Implications

7.1 Under S.59 of the Greater London Authority Act 1999 the Assembly has the power to keep under review the exercise by the Mayor of his statutory functions. The powers of the Assembly include the power to investigate and prepare reports about: any actions and decisions of the Mayor; any actions and decisions of any member of staff of the Authority; matters relating to

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8 Mayor’s Ambient noise strategy – pg113
9 http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/noise/ambient.htm
the principal purposes of the Authority; matters in relation to which statutory functions are exercisable by the Mayor, and any other matters which the Assembly considers to be of importance to Greater London.

7.2 Section 54 GLA Act enables the Assembly to arrange for any of its functions to be discharged on its behalf by a committee or sub committee of the Assembly or by a single member of the Assembly.

7.3 The proposals set out above fall within the Committee’s powers as set out in paragraphs 7.1 - 7.2 above.

8. **Financial Implications**

8.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

Background Papers: None
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