

Road traffic remains biggest source of noise pollution in Europe

The EEA briefing '[Managing exposure to noise in Europe](#)' provides updated estimates of the numbers of people exposed to noise in Europe. It also provides an update on the measures being taken by EU Member States in addressing noise issues.

Noise pollution remains a major environmental health problem in Europe, with the transport sector being a major cause. Road traffic noise is the dominant source affecting human exposure above the EU's threshold of 55 decibels (dB) for daily exposure and 50 dB for night exposure. Around 100 million people are exposed to road traffic noise above 55 dB in the 33 member countries of the EEA (Figure 1). Of these, 32 million are exposed to very high noise levels (above 65 dB). Railways is the second largest source, with 19 million people exposed above 55 dB. Aircraft noise, close to major airports, is the third main source, with more than 4.1 million people exposed, followed by industrial noise within urban areas, with 1.0 million people exposed.

Noise from road traffic alone is the second most harmful environmental stressor in Europe, behind air pollution, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). The harmful effects of noise arise mainly from the stress reaction it causes in the human body, which can also occur during sleep. These can potentially lead to premature death, cardiovascular disease, cognitive impairment, sleep disturbance, hypertension and, at the least, annoyance.

Figure 1. Number of people in the EEA-33 member countries exposed to noise levels above 55 dB L_{den} , 2012

Tackling noise pollution in the EU

The European Union has taken action to address the problem through the 2002 [Environmental Noise Directive](#) (END). The EU legislation requires Member States to prepare noise maps that inform the development of action plans designed to prevent and reduce harmful exposure. The briefing also presents an updated summary of the different types of measures used by countries to reduce noise. These range from actions that control noise at source, such as introducing low noise road surfaces, quieter aircraft and railway stock, through to measures such as improving urban design to reduce traffic volumes and restricting housing developments in high noise areas.

The briefing is a follow-up to the EEA's [Noise in Europe 2014 report](#) and its release coincides with the [Noise in Europe conference](#) held in Brussels on 24 April and International Noise Awareness Day on 26 April. The briefing is based on the latest data reported to the EEA by its member countries in accordance with the EU's Environmental Noise Directive (END). Accompanying the briefing are [updated country factsheets](#) and a [new web-viewer](#) which shows updated data on noise pollution across Europe.

Dundee Mental Health Awareness Week



Abertay University's Dundee Mental Health Awareness Week starts today.

Details of the events can be downloaded [here](#).



Abertay University

While the Conservatives shirk responsibility, Labour will deal with the dirty air damaging the lives of millions of British people – Hayman

Sue Hayman MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, ahead of the High Court consideration of the government's request to further delay publication of their air quality plan, said:

"If the government fails to publish its plan to deal with the chronic levels of air pollution today then Labour will, within the first 30 days of our administration.

"Labour will bring forward a new Clean Air Act, setting out how we would tackle air pollution that NHS experts say contributes to 40,000 premature deaths every year.

"With nearly 40 million people in the UK living in areas with illegal levels of air pollution, it is simply not acceptable for ministers to hide behind the general election to delay publishing plans to improve air quality.


“Purdah rules exist to stop one party using the machinery of government for their electoral advantage, not to be used as an excuse to delay acting on vital public health matters. We trust that the court will recognise this.

“While the Conservatives shirk responsibility, Labour will deal with the dirty air damaging the lives of millions of British people.”

[Recording of the week: when is a word not a word?](#)

This week's selection comes from Jonnie Robinson, Lead Curator of Spoken English.

The [Evolving English: WordBank](#) is extremely positive evidence of the robust nature of our native dialects, as demonstrated by this speaker's use of the verb puggle [= 'to prod, poke about in e.g. a hole to clear obstruction']. As a young, female, middle-class speaker she doesn't conform to the usual dialect stereotype and she also comes from the south of England, where the apparent demise of local speech forms is most frequently asserted. Nonetheless she expertly describes and defines a word recorded in the Oxford English Dictionary as 'English regional (chiefly south-east)'. Puggle also features in the 6-volume English Dialect Dictionary, the most comprehensive record of 18th and 19th century English regional vocabulary, where it's attested in Hertfordshire and Essex.

 Puggle – as defined in Vol. 4 of the English Dialect Dictionary (1898)

[To have a puggle](#)

As a dialectologist I'm also particularly interested by her observation that 'I always thought it was a real word and it turns out it's not'. This, sadly, is frequently the fate of dialect vocabulary, but I hope she and other users of perfectly valid local forms are reassured to know that the validity of puggle is acknowledged by authoritative dictionaries and that it has been around in the Home Counties for at least 150 years and clearly still survives in the 21st century – no doubt alongside other supposedly 'long-lost' southern dialect words.

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US tax cuts – saving Speaker Ryan

I had the pleasure of hearing Speaker Ryan of the US House of Representatives when he was in London last week talking about the new Administration's strategy.

He came across as able, engaging, well informed and keen to get on with the job. He wore power well, and handled deftly the questions of those in the media and think tank world who wished to trip him up or drive wedges between the House and the President.

There was surprisingly little reporting of his remarks on the media. He was warm and positive about the US/UK relationship. He constantly stressed its special nature and its long history, joked about the time the UK burned the White House and made a clear offer of early progress on a US/UK trade deal just as soon as the UK was in a position to do so. Given all the comments we hear reported on possible complexities in confirming our current free trade arrangements with the EU in a new format, it was odd we did not hear a lot more about a likely free trade deal with our single largest overseas country market.

He explained in a response to my question that both House Republicans and the President are keen on tax reform and reduction. Both agree on the shape of the simplification and reduction of personal income taxes. The differences over reform and reduction of corporate income taxes he thought to be easy to overcome, as both want the same direction of travel. Healthcare reform has been given priority because the spending reductions it produces are helpful in working out the budget impact of the tax changes. However, if they cannot secure an early healthcare reform the tax reform can still proceed.

He repeated that Republicans understand the current mood of scepticism about political establishments. They understand they need to deliver on both healthcare reform and tax reductions to keep their promises and to speed the US recovery. Getting things through the Congress even when a party has a majority in both as the Republicans do is never easy. Speaker Ryan seems determined to achieve something before the year is out.