

RAILWAY NOISE AND THE ENVIRONMENT: A SUMMARY

This is a summary of the current state of knowledge on the environmental aspects of railway noise. It is based on the experience built up on British Railways over many years, and includes information from other railway administrations. Detailed data are not included in this report, although for certain aspects a considerable body of information is available. Recent substantial changes concern wheel-rail noise, lineside barriers, and the total movement noise of trains.

Noise is experienced by the general public from a variety of railway activities. The most important of these arises from the running of trains, and constitutes the principal subject matter of this report. However, other situations can lead to the generation of environmental noise, including loudspeaker announcements at stations, shunting and marshalling of trains, and even level crossing bells. Maintenance of railway equipment and installations may also be noisy, track tamping and ballast cleaning being particularly obtrusive to the public.

So far, train running noise has given rise to very little complaint, in spite of the intensive use of many lines at high speeds. This arises from historical precedent, in that the railway system was virtually complete by the end of the 19th century and is accepted as a feature of the landscape. It has also clear that a relatively small proportion of the population is exposed to railway noise compared to that which hears road traffic. However, where new railways are being planned, a more critical response can be expected. Accordingly, great care is being taken in all countries to minimise their environmental impact.