



**Meeting of Polis Political Group
Barcelona, 25th – 26th February 2007**

European and local policy initiatives on noise and urban transport

The political group of Polis will be provided some further background information following-up the technical visit of the previous evening on night delivery in Barcelona on the issue of urban noise.

It is proposed to follow this up with a brief exchange on the policy debate around noise abatement policies in relation to urban transport.

Noise can simply be defined as unwanted sound. Noise conflicts have always been part of urban life. They arise from the population density and the close vicinity of housing, industrial sites, traffic routes, etc. that form our cities. Today much is known on the negative impacts of noise, in particular the related health problems have been widely discussed. This has led to the European Directive on Environmental Noise that forces Member States – and that means in most cases the local authorities – to set up noise maps and noise action plans for agglomerations bigger than 100,000 inhabitants.

The World Health Organisation suggests noise limits to secure health and well-being of citizens. Existing noise maps show that these noise limits are exceeded in large parts of the agglomerations. 80% of the environmental noise in urban areas is caused by road traffic. Thus, to reduce the noise level in urban areas significant changes in urban road traffic are necessary. The most effective measures encompass speed limits accompanied by all kinds of traffic calming measures, bans on HGV (in certain areas and/or in certain time periods), bans on vehicles with high noise emissions in general, limited access zones, measures to enhance modal shift towards public transport, cycling and walking, as well as measures to smooth the traffic flow.

Polis is involved in the EC co-funded project SILENCE which deals with urban surface transport. We are producing a handbook that supports local authorities in drawing up the local noise action plans.

Relevant issues with regard to local noise policy that need to be discussed on the political level:

- A logical step at European level in the future would be to set common noise limit values. Will this be helpful for local authorities?
- Environmental zones could be developed into “quiet zones” with access restriction for vehicles with noise emission above certain thresholds. Are European standards necessary?
- There are conflicts between different local policy objectives. For example: Reducing night-time noise could lead to more HGV traffic in the morning hours

causing more congestion during rush hours. Street devices to raise road safety might lead to an increase in noise. Where ranks noise compared to other policy objectives?

- Abating noise in areas with very high noise levels might pose questions like: Is an increase in noise for a bigger part of residents acceptable to reduce noise for a small group, which is affected by very high levels? (e.g. by redistributing HGV traffic)
- The Directive on Environmental Noise supplements other directives dealing with noise emissions from cars, tyres, etc. Do you think tighter standards in this area are necessary for cities being able to reduce the noise exposure of residents?

Obligation to act – European Directive on Environmental Noise

In 2002, Directive 2002/49 relating to the assessment and management of environmental noise was adopted by the European Parliament and Council. The Directive stipulates that

- Strategic noise maps have to be made for agglomerations with more than 250,000 inhabitants by June 2007 and for all agglomerations (more than 100,000 inhabitants) by June 2012.
- Action plans to manage the noise exposure where limit values are exceeded have to be drawn up by July 2008 for agglomerations with more than 250,000 inhabitants and for the smaller agglomerations by July 2013.

The Directive does not set any noise limit values. This is in the discretion of the Member States.