



<b>Subject:</b>	Consultation on the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) Roads - Environmental Noise Directive Round 4 - draft Road Noise Action Plan 2023-2028.
<b>Date:</b>	13 <sup>th</sup> January 2026
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Siobhan Toland, Director of City Services.
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Alastair Curran, Environmental Protection Manager

### Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted?

Yes

☐

No

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Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.

Insert number

1. Information relating to any individual
2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)
4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter
5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained
6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction
7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision

After Council Decision

Sometime in the future

Never

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☐  
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### Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

Yes

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No

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<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues</b>
1.1	<p>The Department for Infrastructure (DfI) is presently consulting on a fourth-round draft Road Noise Action Plan, covering the period 2023-2028 in accordance with the Environmental Noise Directive or END</p> <p>The Department's consultation document may be accessed via the following weblink:  <a href="https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/consultations/environmental-noise-directive-road-noise-action-plan-2023-2028">https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/consultations/environmental-noise-directive-road-noise-action-plan-2023-2028</a></p>
1.2	<p>This report serves to provide an overview of the round 4 noise mapping assessment process, the technical amendments to the mapping methodology that have been implemented since round 3 and the outcomes of the noise mapping and associated action planning processes for the Belfast City Council area. The report considers the proposed Candidate Noise Management Areas (CNMAs) for Belfast and the associated mitigation measures proposed by DfI in order to reduce levels of road transport related population noise exposure within the CNMAs and their environs.</p>
1.3	<p>Finally, this report provides at Appendix 1, a proposed response to the Department for Infrastructure consultation concerning the Roads - Environmental Noise Directive Round 4 - draft Road Noise Action Plan 2023-2028.</p>
1.4	<p>The Committee is advised that responses to the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) Roads - Environmental Noise Directive Round 4 - draft Road Noise Action Plan 2023 – 2028 are to be received by the Department by 17:00 on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2026.</p>
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
2.1	<p>The Committee is requested to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Note the contents of this Roads - Environmental Noise Directive Round 4 - draft Road Noise Action Plan 2023-2028 report;</li> <li>• Agree that the proposed consultation response, provided at Appendix 1 to this report, be submitted to the Department for Infrastructure by the consultation deadline of 17:00 on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2026.</li> </ul> <p>Upon Committee agreement, the consultation response will be provided to the Department for Infrastructure by 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2026, indicating that the consultation response is subject to ratification at a meeting of full Council on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2026 and that the consultation response may therefore be subject to amendment.</p>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	<p>The Committee is advised that pursuant to requirements of The Environmental Noise Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006, as amended, and Annex V of the European Directive for Assessment and Management of Environmental Noise 2002/49/EC, colloquially referred to as the Environmental Noise Directive or END, the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) is presently consulting on a fourth round draft Road Noise Action Plan covering the period 2023-2028.</p>
3.2	<p>The Committee will appreciate that END requires Competent Authorities, such as the Department for Infrastructure, in the case of major roads, to review, and where necessary, to revise their Noise Action Plans every five years or whenever a 'major development' affects the current noise situation. The DfI round 4 draft Road Noise Action Plan therefore constitutes the five-year review covering the period from 2023 to 2028.</p>
3.3	<p>The round 4 draft Road Noise Action Plan 2023-2028 has been based upon the outworkings of the fourth round of strategic noise mapping, which in accordance with the Environmental</p>

	<p>Noise Regulations, has been produced for major roads, based upon 2021 road transport data. The Committee will be aware, however, that during 2021, Northern Ireland was subject to Covid-19 movement restrictions, with controls not finally rescinded until February 2022. Accordingly, it is unclear as to the applicability of noise modelling undertaken for road transport for a 2021 year to the entirety of the 2023-2028 five-year review period.</p>
3.4	<p>Notwithstanding, the qualifying thresholds for round 4 are the same as for previous rounds of noise mapping and action planning, meaning that noise mapping and action planning are prepared and reported for all major roads with more than 3 million vehicle passages per year and for agglomerations with a population in excess of 100,000 persons, a population density equal to or greater than 500 people per km<sup>2</sup> and which are considered to be urbanised.</p>
3.5	<p>The only designated agglomeration within Northern Ireland for the purposes of round 4 is the Belfast urban area, meaning that roads modelled within the Belfast Agglomeration for round 4 comprise urban areas of Belfast, Castlereagh, Carrickfergus, Lisburn, Newtownabbey and North Down districts. Major roads included trunk roads, motorways and classified roads with more than 3 million vehicle passages per year.</p>
3.6	<p>The Committee is advised that within END, there are presently no noise limit values established for the United Kingdom. The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) had previously, therefore, employed an assessment methodology established by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Welsh Government in relation to noise from roads by determining where the 1% of the population that are affected by the highest noise levels are located, and by further determining that these locations are where the LA<sub>10,18</sub>-hour indicator is at least 75dB.</p>
3.7	<p>For the Belfast Agglomeration, round 4 roads noise modelling has estimated that 11,000 dwellings within the Belfast Agglomeration are shown to be exposed to noise levels from major roads greater than 75 dB Lden (energy equivalent noise level, compared to around 800 dwellings in round 3. For the L<sub>night</sub> parameter, approximately 2,100 dwellings within the Belfast agglomeration are exposed to noise levels of more than 70 dB L<sub>night</sub>, compared to approximately 100 dwellings in round 3.</p>
3.8	<p>It is noted that the assessment methodology has changed since the round 3 mapping with the adoption of the CNOSSOS-EU 2020 assessment methodology for round 4. Accordingly, for round 4, within the Belfast Agglomeration and indeed, for major roads outside of the Belfast agglomeration, there has been a significant increase in the number of people exposed to noise levels greater than 75 dB Lden when compared to the round 3 outcome; (22,700 persons for round 4 versus 3,100 persons for round 3, for the Belfast Agglomeration) and noise levels greater than 70 dB L<sub>night</sub> (4,800 persons for round 4 versus 400 persons for round 3, for the Belfast Agglomeration). The Northern Ireland network of major roads is generally focused on Belfast, including the main radial corridors along the M1, M2, A1 and A6.</p>
3.9	<p>For the purposes of identifying Candidate Noise Management Areas (CNMAs), the round 4 strategic noise maps were analysed to identify the 1% of the population affected by the highest road traffic noise levels from those exposed to road traffic noise above 50 dB LAeq,16-hour. The top 1% of the population with the highest noise exposure were then grouped into spatial clusters of 50m and those clusters were categorised into four priority bands based upon the number of affected properties (&gt;0-4, 5-10, 11-20 and &gt;20). Locations where more than 11 residential properties are affected served as the basis for proposing round 4 CNMAs. The Department's acoustic consultants have commented that these locations are characterised by high noise exposure and have been prioritised for potential noise reduction interventions. The top 10 clusters, based upon population, have been selected from this dataset and are proposed as CNMAs within the Round 4 – draft Road Noise Action Plan 2023-2028 - Section 6.3 Potential Mitigation Measures for Round 4 CNMAs, and Appendix C Proposed CNMAs for Round 4.</p>

3.10	<p>Of the round four 10 CNMAs proposed for Northern Ireland, 2 are located within the Belfast City Council area, namely:</p> <p><b>CNMA 1 - Belfast, Beersbridge Road</b> – covering an approximate 335 m length of the Beersbridge Road, from its junction with the Avoniel Road to the Connswater Greenway / Conn's Water and encompassing 39 residential properties and premises.</p> <p><b>CNMA 2 - Belfast, College Square East</b> – covering an approximate 425 m length of College Square East from its junction with Wellington Place to College Avenue and from College Avenue to its junction with Divis Street, encompassing student accommodation at John Bell House, Queen's Accommodation Elms (BT1), the College Central apartment building, properties beside 103-105 Castle Street and at 12 Hamill Street, and the Morning Star House, 2-12 Divis Street.</p>
3.11	<p>Council noise officers have reviewed maps of the proposed CNMAs, and it appears that in respect of CNMA 1, some recent residential developments along the Beersbridge Road may not be fully reflected within the Department's maps, and that for CNMA 2, the properties located beside 103-105 Castle Street are retail premises.</p> <p>In addition to the Department's general mitigation measures the Department's acoustic consultants have indicated that Table 6.3 of the draft Road Noise Action Plan provides a summary of proposed mitigation measures for round 4 CNMAs, which are subject to available funding and powers available to DfI, adding that due to the nature of the measures, many of the costs are unknown as they are outside of the powers available to DfI, and that some of the proposed measures identified are generic and it is anticipated that these will be developed over the course of the round 4 period (2023- 2028).</p>
3.12	<p>Accordingly proposed mitigation measures for <b>CNMA 1 - Belfast, Beersbridge Road</b> include: <i>'Introduction of targeted initiatives such as speed reduction, car-pools, cycling to work schemes and encouraging the use of public transport, including the BRT on the Albertbridge Road - so could potentially benefit from the scheme'.</i></p>
3.13	<p>The Department for Infrastructure will appreciate however, that with respect to CNMA 1, the Beersbridge Road is already regularly served by Translink Metro Service 4, and that at the location of the proposed CNMA 1, the Translink Belfast Rapid Transit (BRT) G1 Glider east route, which runs from Belfast city centre, via the Albertbridge and Upper Newtownards Roads, terminating at the Dundonald Park and Ride, is located some 600 m away. It is unclear, therefore, whether the proposed mitigation measures, that also include speed reductions, carpooling, etc. will lead to the necessary improvements in road transport related noise within the CNMA by the delivery date of 2028.</p>
3.14	<p>Proposed mitigation measures for <b>CNMA 2 - Belfast, College Square East</b> include: <i>'Introduction of targeted initiatives such as car-pools, cycling to work schemes and encouraging the use of public transport. The promotion of the use of railway commuting may aid the reduction in commuter traffic into the city centre'.</i></p>
3.15	<p>The Department for Infrastructure will appreciate that Divis Street and College Square East provide access to and from the city centre via the A12 Westlink 'off' and 'on' slips, and that College Square East and Divis Street, connecting to the Falls Road, additionally provide access to and from the city centre for residents living in the west of the city. Moreover, the Falls Road, Divis Street and College Square East also form a component of the Belfast Rapid Transit G1 Glider route that starts at McKinsty Road, close to the Belfast City Council boundary with Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council, travels through the city centre and eventually terminates in the east of the city at the Dundonald Park and Ride.</p>
3.16	<p>Accordingly, and mindful of the road network at, and in the vicinity of CNMA 2, it is unclear whether the proposed introduction of targeted initiatives such as car-pools, cycling to work</p>

	<p>schemes and encouraging the use of public transport will deliver the required reductions in road noise at this busy city centre location. It is acknowledged, however, that the nearby Grand Central Station and the promotion of the use of railway commuting may aid the reduction in commuter traffic into the city centre. The opportunity for further transition from road commuter traffic towards rail travel will though largely be determined by commuter needs and by those commuter catchment areas served by the Translink rail network. Moreover, the transition to hybrid working for many city centre organisations, after the Covid-19 pandemic, is likely to have resulted in a reduction in the commuter traffic within Belfast City Centre.</p>
3.17	<p>By way of conclusion, it is considered that where residential properties within the Belfast City Council area have been determined by the Department for Infrastructure to be subject to excessive road transport related noise levels, more affirmative, measurable and site specific mitigation measures should be proposed by the Department, in contrast to being dependent upon improvements in the local noise environment associated with the introduction of what may be regarded as 'softer' and intangible modal shift type initiatives such as car pools, cycle to work schemes and encouraging the use of public transport. As already highlighted, the proposed CNMAs and their environs are serviced by the Translink Belfast Metro bus services and / or the Translink Belfast Rapid Transit Glider.</p>
3.18	<p>Moreover, it is unclear which organisations would be responsible for the introduction and operation of specific measures such as carpools and cycle to work schemes within each of the CNMAs and how their implementation and impact could be monitored and confirmed by the Department for Infrastructure in order to ensure that road transport noise levels within the CNMAs are reduced to 'acceptable' levels by 2028.</p>
3.19	<p>The Department's comment that when addressing specific CNMAs, validation exercises can be undertaken including, for example, that site-specific noise monitoring can be completed when developing noise models to determine the specification of acoustic barriers or low noise road surfacing is, however, welcomed. Although acoustic barriers or low noise road surfacing are not proposed for either of the Belfast CNMAs, the Department for Infrastructure should nevertheless undertake noise readings to validate the round 4 mapping and to confirm the need for designation and implementation of the proposed CNMAs. The Department should additionally engage with residents and other relevant parties located within each of the CNMAs in order to agree any final necessary road noise mitigation measures.</p>
3.20	<p><b><u>Financial and Resource Implications.</u></b> There are no financial or resource implications for Belfast City Council associated with the proposed consultation response to the Department for Infrastructure.</p>
3.21	<p><b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment.</u></b> The Department for Infrastructure has advised within its consultation document that under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, public authorities have a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity. The Department consequently has further advised that an Equality Impact Assessment screening exercise and Rural Needs Impact Assessment were carried out for the Round 4 Road Noise Action Plan, which concluded that no further action is necessary i.e. a full EQIA was 'screened out' but should the need for a full Equality Impact Assessment be identified, this decision will be reviewed.</p>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Appendices -</b>
	<p><b>Appendix 1</b> – Belfast City Council proposed consultation response in respect on the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) Roads - Environmental Noise Directive Round 4 - draft Road Noise Action Plan 2023-2028.</p>