

# NOISE

## 9.1 NOISE COMPATIBILITY

### Introduction

The General Plan provides goals and policies to guide compatible land uses and the incorporation of noise attenuation measures for new buildings that will protect people living and working in the City from an excessive noise environment. The General Plan provides sufficient policy direction for noise-related issues. The policies in the Community Plan focus on specific noise land uses compatibility issues. Noise sensitive land uses include residential and schools for children. The Land Use Element provides policies and recommendations for future residential with commercial uses. The Urban Design element addresses building and site design which can be used avoid and attenuate excessive noise levels. Uptown is an urban community with a mix of uses and transportation facilities. The community has a higher ambient noise level from commercial, freeways, major streets, aircraft operations, and rail operations.

Figure 9-1 illustrates the future noise contours from freeways, major roads, and rail lines. The noise contours do not reflect changes in noise levels due to topography such as the freeway elevation above ground level or other physical barriers including vegetation, walls, or buildings. The Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan contains the noise contours for the San Diego International Airport.

Community Noise Equivalent Level or CNEL is the noise rating scale used for land use compatibility. The CNEL rating represents the average of equivalent noise levels, measured in A-weighted decibels (dBA), at a location for a 24-hour period, with upward adjustments added to account for increased noise sensitivity in the evening and night periods. The A-weighted filter places a greater emphasis on frequencies within the range of the human ear. The General Plan provides compatibility guidelines for evaluating land uses based on noise levels. To maintain and enhance the existing land use character, the General Plan specifies that noise levels at or below 75 dBA are conditionally compatible for multi-family residential uses and mixed-use commercial-residential development. Any new residential use above 60 dBA CNEL must include sound attenuation measures are included to reduce the interior noise levels to 45 dBA. Typical attenuation measures are addressed in the General Plan.

### GOAL

- Development that is planned and designed to avoid or attenuate excessive noise levels.

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### COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY

Where residential and other sensitive receptor uses are present or proposed, the potential for noise impacts from commercial activities are important to evaluate, such as deliveries during late night and early morning hours, generate noise that can affect the nearby residential uses. Reducing the effect from commercial activity noise involves site planning and integrating noise attenuation measures in new buildings that will reduce interior sound levels. Refer to General Plan Policies NE-E-1 through NE-E6.

### POLICIES

- NE-9.1** Implement operational measures in areas where eating, drinking, entertainment, and assembly establishments are adjacent to residential.
- a. Institute appropriate open/close window hours for eating and drinking establishments.
  - b. Require that the volume of amplified music is lowered during the last hour of service.

- c. Encourage the use of evening security staff to control loitering after hours and crowds.
  - d. Provide noise attenuation measures to reduce the noise levels generated from the establishment, to the degree possible, within their premises with special attention on “open air” concept establishments. (such as beer gardens or large outdoor eating and drinking venues).
  - e. Encourage bars to remain open to serve food after alcohol has stopped being served to encourage a slower flow of people leaving the establishment after hours.
- NE-9.2** Evaluate and consider potential noise impacts as a condition of permit approval, renewal and/or a change of use, for eating and drinking establishments that incorporate “open air” or large outdoor eating and drinking venues, based on acoustical studies and/or industry best practices.
- NE-9.3** Locate the commercial portion of new mixed-use developments away from existing single-family residences.
- NE-9.4** Promote “quiet-in-residential neighborhoods” signs to bring awareness to evening commercial patrons who walk through residential neighborhoods.
- NE-9.5** Encourage existing drive-thru restaurants to use visual-only confirmation order screens especially at locations adjacent to residential buildings.
- NE-9.6** Encourage truck deliveries for businesses to occur on commercial streets with commercial zoning zones during day-time hours.
- NE-9.7** Incorporate sound attenuation measures such as sound absorbent wall/ceiling materials, sound walls, and dense, drought-tolerant landscaping where commercial uses such as restaurants and bars are permitted, especially adjacent to residential areas.
- NE-9.8** Encourage private waste pick-up, franchise hauler agreements with the City to be organized by geographic area to reduce unnecessary frequency and instances of multiple haulers servicing areas.
- NE-9.9** Implement the standard noise controls to reduce construction noise levels emanating from new construction to minimize disruption and annoyance.
- a. Limit construction activity hours.
  - b. Equip all internal combustion engine-driven equipment with intake and exhaust mufflers that are in good condition and appropriate for the equipment.
  - c. Locate stationery noise-generating equipment (e.g. compressors) as far as possible from adjacent residential receivers.
  - d. Acoustically shield stationary equipment located near residential receivers with temporary noise barriers.
  - e. Utilize “quiet” air compressors and other stationary noise sources where technology exists.
  - f. Encourage construction contractors to prepare a detailed construction plan identifying the schedule for major noise generating construction activities that includes coordination with adjacent residents so that construction activities can be scheduled to minimize noise disturbance.
  - g. Encourage construction contractors to designate a “disturbance coordinator” who would be responsible for responding to any complaints about construction noise.

## MOTOR VEHICLE TRAFFIC NOISE

Vehicle traffic noise is directly related to the traffic volume, speed, and mix of vehicles. Major roadways that include State Route 163 and Interstate 5, are the primary sources of motor vehicle noise within the community. Noise from trucks driving within, or parked and idling along roads in the community can also be a source of annoyance for noise sensitive uses. Uptown is affected by truck traffic associated with commercial land uses. Trucks in general generate more noise than cars and light trucks. Refer to General Plan policies NE.B.1 through NE. B.8.

## POLICIES

- NE-1.10** Encourage the use of traffic calming measures as a means to enhance safety and reduce vehicle noise.
- NE-1.11** Establish wayfinding signs within the community to facilitate efficient and more immediate vehicle access to community destinations such as parks, schools, business areas, parking areas, and to freeways for motorists.
- NE-1.12** Raise awareness to changes in vehicle speed on major thoroughfares residential areas through the placement of neighborhood traffic calming measures such as landscaping, community identity signs, and installation of public art.
- NE-1.13** Work with Caltrans to establish and maintain landscape buffers along freeway rights of way through the use of berms, planting of native and/or drought resistant trees and shrubs.
- NE-1.14** Encourage traffic calming and speed reduction awareness to effect positive change along neighborhood streets.

## RAIL NOISE

Rail noise is a source of noise in the community and primarily consists of single event noises coming from rail crossings located in the neighboring Midway/Pacific Highway community west of Interstate 5. Freight trains, intercity rail (Amtrak), commuter rail (Coaster), and light rail transit (Trolley) can generate high, relatively brief, intermittent noise events within the vicinity of at grade rail crossings where horns and crossing bells are sounded. Federal regulations require trains to sound their horns at all roadway-rail grade crossings. Horns, whistles and bells on the moving trolley vehicles, and horns from freight trains, combined with stationary bells at grade crossings can generate excessive noise levels that can affect noise sensitive land uses. To minimize excess train horn noise, the federal government allows the establishment of train horn “quiet zones.”

This requires the implementation of safety measures to compensate for the loss of the train horn usage. Additionally, the Mobility Element supports roadway-rail grade separation since this will eliminate the need for bells and horns at the existing grade crossing which will reduce the noise level. Refer to General Plan policies NE.C.1 through NE-C.4.

## AIRCRAFT NOISE

Aircraft noise and overflight of aircraft from San Diego International Airport (SDIA) affects Uptown. Aircraft noise can affect people living and working in the community at varying degrees, depending on a person’s level of annoyance. The SDIA prohibits most late night takeoffs to help limit noise impacts and maintains the Quieter Home Program to retrofit existing homes in areas above the 65 dBA noise level contour to reduce interior noise levels to an acceptable level. The community is within the Airport Influence Area, which is the boundary for the Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan (ALUCP) for SDIA. The ALUCP is prepared by the Airport Land Use Commission (ALUC) for San Diego County. Aircraft noise is one of the factors that the state-required ALUCP addresses with established policies for land use compatibility, as discussed in the Introduction. The General Plan conditionally allows future multiple unit and mixed-use residential uses in the areas above the 65 dBA airport noise contour within the Airport Influence Area for SDIA to maintain and enhance the character and urban form. Refer to General Plan policies NE.D.1 through NE-D.6.

The noise levels associated with helicopter operations can affect noise sensitive land uses depending upon the flight path, the helicopter types used, and the number of operations, and the time of the day. In Uptown, helicopter operations are associated with UCSD Medical Center and Scripps Hospital.

## POLICIES

- NE-1.15** Consider existing and future exterior noise levels when planning and designing developments with noise sensitive uses to avoid or attenuate excessive noise levels.
- NE-1.16** Utilize the Community Plan and the Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan noise contours when making land use planning decisions.
- NE-1.17** Ensure that future residential use above the 60 dBA CNEL aircraft noise contour include noise attenuation measures to ensure an interior noise level of 45 dBA CNEL and provide an aviation easement to the airport operator for SDIA.

- NE-1.18** Support the establishment of a train horn “quiet zone” at the Old Town, Washington Street, Noell Street, Vine Street, and Sassafras Street at-grade rail crossings.

## EVENT NOISE

Noise and sound amplification associated with special events that take place on the west side of Balboa Park present serious challenges for the neighborhoods of Bankers Hill/Park West. This has become a consistent occurrence due to the popularity of the park’s western border as a venue for year-round programming of special events such as parades and organized walking and running events. Workable solutions will require effective planning, diligent enforcement of clear policies and procedures, and mutual support and cooperation among the community, City and event organizers.

## POLICIES

- NE-1.19** Encourage the continued evaluation of the special event planning process to improve noise mitigation.
- NE-1.20** Work with the Park and Recreation Department to supply and train Park Rangers to use volume meters and to be aware of noise issues in the community.
- NE-1.21** Consider the establishment of a “buffer zone” between the location of special events and Sixth Avenue
- NE-1.22** Relocate sound stages and amplification equipment away from Sixth Avenue.
- NE-1.23** Apply noise decibel monitoring to public address systems used for announcements and all sound equipment used by musicians and other performers utilizing amplified sound.
- NE-1.24** Locate larger special events away from the West Mesa to areas more internal to Balboa Park where possible.
- NE-1.25** Monitor sound levels at special events to ensure that noise does not exceed the allowed noise level as specified in the noise ordinance.