

Is traffic noise about to be tamed?

Traffic noise is all-pervasive. Over 40% of people in the EU are regularly exposed to traffic noise averaging more than 55 decibels, the level the World Health Organisation considers to be unacceptably high (*Why Noise Matters*, Stewart et al).

But our roads could be about to get quieter. Two important, if separate, developments are underway. Electric cars are hitting our roads and there is a move in a number of places for free public transport to be introduced.

Electric cars will not be silent. Traffic noise is a combination of engine, tyre and road noise (different surfaces have different noise characteristics), and wind passage noise. The faster vehicles are travelling, the more road and tyre noise dominate, and the more wind passage noise contributes.

Electric cars will almost entirely eliminate engine noise which means that cars will be noticeably quieter at speeds of less than about 25mph but as speeds pick up so will the noise. Also engines will have some noise added to them so people can hear the cars coming at low speeds.

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Which brings us to the second trend: free public transport. At first this may sound like a hair-brained idea but it has been introduced in a number of places across the world and has not just cut car use but also brought overall benefits to the economy.

Estonia is set to become the first country to introduce nationwide free public transport following a successful five year trial in Tallinn, its capital city. <https://popupcity.net/estonia-to-become-the-worlds-first-free-public-transport-nation/> The Tallinn authorities argue that the scheme has benefitted the economy. Fewer traffic jams, all citizens paying an annual registration fee of £2 (which brings in more money than the fares did) and high-income groups going out more within the city thus generating more money for the local economy.

Free public transport schemes can be found in around 100 towns and cities worldwide. Read about them in this article from Transport for Quality of Life: http://www.transportforqualityoflife.com/u/files/180317%20Farefree%20buses_%20time%20to%20raise%20our%20sights.pdf

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Posted by Cut Noise