

TRANSPORTATION NOISE AND CONTROL BRUIT DES TRANSPORTS ET SON CONTROLE

City Noise: Report of the Urban Noise Task Force of the City of Vancouver

M. Kathleen Pichora-Fuller

University of British Columbia, 5804 Fairview Ave., Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z3

1. BACKGROUND.

In March 1996, the Vancouver City Council formed a task force of citizens to address growing concerns regarding an apparent increase in the adverse effects of noise on everyday life in Vancouver. As a result of the work of the task force, in April 1997, City Council adopted numerous recommendations that were made in City Noise: Report of the Urban Noise Task Force of the City of Vancouver. The terms of reference, process, findings, recommendations, and implementational consequences of the work of the Task Force will be described.

2. TERMS OF REFERENCE.

The Task Force was to explore the nature and extent of impacts on the urban soundscape, including impacts from motor vehicle sources, with a view to recommending a package of tools and initiatives to be implemented to reduce these impacts. The seven terms of reference were to:

1. Identify the current status of the urban soundscape as compared with the early 1970s when the last Community Noise Survey was completed and identify some significant sources of noise and noise complaints.
2. Identify public expectations about the noise environment through social surveys to measure the community's reaction to noise, the level of annoyance in the community and community awareness of and satisfaction with current regulations and their enforcement.
3. Inventory the issues and impacts of noise on the environment, on public health and on the enjoyment of peace, quiet and rest in the City.
4. Inventory and evaluate the instruments currently in use to control and minimize these impacts on the natural environment and humans, including regulations, educational approaches, citizen action, land-use policy and advocacy on the City's part.
5. Seek advice from City staff, professionals, academics, and others on solutions to the identified soundscape issues.
6. Involve the public, including requests for written submissions, focus group discussions, and a symposium at which the public shares information and is asked for input.
7. Prepare a final report summarizing the key issues and proposed strategies, and containing a series of recommendations, with timelines and priorities to be widely distributed for both staff and public consideration prior to its final consideration by Council.

3. PROCESS.

The 10 members of the Task Force selected by City Council were recruited from the public by newspaper ads. The members included male and female citizens living in different areas of Vancouver; two members, Kathy Pichora-Fuller and Barry Truax were academics; two members, Dick Hiscocks and Mike Noble, had related professional training in physics or engineering; two members, Tom Detlor and Margaret Eberle, had experience in urban planning. Roy Silverson was a member of the Society for Soundscape Awareness and Protection (Right to Quiet), Errol Hannigan was a member of the BC Coalition of Motorcyclists, Susan Kainer and Bradley Jang were citizens with personal experiences of the adverse effects of noise in the community. Two City Councillors, Lynne Kennedy and

Gordon Price acted as liaisons with City Council. Five members of staff also participated: Judy Rogers, Deputy City Manager; Nick Losito, Director of Environmental Health; Alfred Guthrie, Noise Control Officer; and, Gail Johnson and Larry Cantrell, City Clerks.

Three subcommittees were formed to address different categories of problems and solutions: public education, regulation, industrial initiatives.

The entire Task Force held 18 meetings and additional subcommittee meetings were also held. Public input was gathered by various means: a contracted telephone survey of 1000 citizens; letters, e-mail, and telephone calls from 250 individuals and groups, including both Vancouver-based and other groups; two public meetings; and, invited presentations.

4. FINDINGS.

The telephone survey results indicated that the majority of citizens, especially those living in the more densely populated downtown and west end areas, considered noise to be a problem and one that has become worse in the last five years. The most significant noise sources identified in the telephone survey were noise related to traffic, specific types of vehicles and sirens, followed by noise from parties. Other major noise sources that were identified were noise related to gardening, aircraft, alarms, garbage dumpsters, and special public events. The most common problems that were described in the correspondence that was received involved noise from house and garden maintenance and vehicles. Overall, public input highlighted how noise is a symptom as well as a cause of social stress, and it raised issues regarding the cultural significance of sound, quiet, and noise.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS.

A total of 165 recommendations were made. Rather than emphasize regulatory control, emphasis was put on public education solutions. The solutions were organized under the headings: education, traffic, air transportation, other transportation, signals, events, recreational and entertainment, home and neighbours, residential maintenance, construction, and industrial noise controls.

6. IMPLEMENTATION.

City Council immediately and unanimously approved 51 recommendations that had been designated by City staff as being readily implementable and supportable. Decisions on 49 other recommendations are pending reports back from staff on resource implications, legal consultation, or further consultation with stakeholders. The City resolved to advocate for action from other levels of government or external agencies concerning an additional 35 recommendations that fell outside the mandate of the City. Finally, 27 recommendations were not endorsed because they were not considered to be supportable and no action was taken on the remaining 3 recommendations. Sector-specific work teams consisting of appropriate City and Health Board staff and at least one member of the Task Force will be formed in Fall 1997 to begin implementation.