# Rising conflict on London’s transport: calls for stricter penalties and infrastructure upgrades to combat noise and ‘bare-beating’



Choosing to forgo car travel for a coach journey from London to Bristol offered the chance to relax and enjoy a reprieve from driving, as one passenger recounted. Alongside the low cost and relatively comfortable experience, the peace was unexpectedly shattered by a fellow passenger playing a film on their laptop at full volume — a modern nuisance known as “bare-beating,” where commuters forgo headphones and impose their audio on others. This phenomenon, increasingly prevalent since the advent of smartphones with built-in speakers, has become a particular irritant on London’s public transport, especially the Underground.

This growing problem recently prompted Mayor Sadiq Khan to launch a campaign involving posters advising passengers to “Travel Kind,” serving as a subtle reminder to respect fellow users. However, critics argue that such initiatives are unlikely to curb the behaviour effectively, given that those who play music or videos aloud often do so deliberately, valuing the disruption or indifferent to social norms. The mayor’s effort, while symbolically important in marking the behaviour as a problem, may lack the enforcement power required to create real change.

Calls for a more robust response have been gaining traction from political quarters. The Liberal Democrats have proposed fines of up to £1,000 to deter offenders, echoing measures introduced by Irish Rail, which imposes £86 penalties for similar conduct such as vaping or playing videos loudly onboard. The Conservative shadow transport secretary Richard Holden has also supported sanctions, stating that passengers should not have to “endure somebody else’s choice of crap music.” A more moderate proposal would see fixed penalties around £150, comparable to existing fines for littering and cigarette butt disposal, aiming to impose a meaningful but not crippling deterrent in the context of the ongoing cost-of-living crisis.

Beyond the challenge of managing individual behaviour, the issue of noise pollution on the Tube extends to structural and environmental concerns. The London Assembly has repeatedly urged Transport for London (TfL) to address the broader problem of noise and vibrations caused by the Underground network. Since 2020, there has been a push for tighter public health standards, transparency about noise hotspots, and the adoption of innovative technologies to improve the situation for both passengers and residents living near the network. TfL has trialled solutions such as rail grinding and alternative track fastenings, despite financial constraints that pose ongoing challenges to noise mitigation efforts.

Londoners have access to resources on the TfL website to report noise and vibration issues, reflecting a commitment to engage the community in addressing these persistent concerns. Nonetheless, the longevity and high-frequency operations of the London Underground mean that managing noise remains a complex task, requiring a balance between realistic expectations and practical interventions.

While recent campaigns highlight growing awareness of noise nuisances in public transport, the frustration of commuters faced with inconsiderate headphone-dodgers suggests that stronger enforcement measures, combined with continued investment in infrastructure improvements, may be necessary to restore a degree of civility and comfort to London’s travel experience.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/headphones-fine-noisy-tube-train-transport-public-sadiq-khan-b2814230.html)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/headphones-fine-noisy-tube-train-transport-public-sadiq-khan-b2814230.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/headphones-fine-noisy-tube-train-transport-public-sadiq-khan-b2814230.html), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/7c96fc22-0494-41c5-b06a-475e65e65919)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/headphones-fine-noisy-tube-train-transport-public-sadiq-khan-b2814230.html), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/7c96fc22-0494-41c5-b06a-475e65e65919)
* Paragraph 5 – [[3]](https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/assembly/tighter-public-health-standards-needed-to-cut-tube), [[4]](https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-london-assembly-does/questions-mayor/find-an-answer/tube-noise-29), [[5]](https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-london-assembly-does/questions-mayor/find-an-answer/tube-noise-2), [[6]](https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-london-assembly-does/questions-mayor/find-an-answer/tube-noise-24), [[7]](https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-london-assembly-does/questions-mayor/find-an-answer/tube-noise-26)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/headphones-fine-noisy-tube-train-transport-public-sadiq-khan-b2814230.html), [[3]](https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/assembly/tighter-public-health-standards-needed-to-cut-tube), [[4]](https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-london-assembly-does/questions-mayor/find-an-answer/tube-noise-29), [[5]](https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-london-assembly-does/questions-mayor/find-an-answer/tube-noise-2), [[6]](https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-london-assembly-does/questions-mayor/find-an-answer/tube-noise-24), [[7]](https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-london-assembly-does/questions-mayor/find-an-answer/tube-noise-26)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/headphones-fine-noisy-tube-train-transport-public-sadiq-khan-b2814230.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/7c96fc22-0494-41c5-b06a-475e65e65919> - This article discusses the growing annoyance among British public transport users caused by 'headphone dodgers'—individuals who play music or videos aloud, disrupting the peace for fellow passengers. The Liberal Democrats have proposed cracking down on this behaviour with fines up to £1,000, aiming to champion the frustrations of the 'quiet majority.' The piece also explores historical complaints about public noise and suggests that subtle social pressure, rather than heavy-handed penalties, could help restore public transport decorum.
3. <https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/assembly/tighter-public-health-standards-needed-to-cut-tube> - In November 2020, the London Assembly urged Transport for London (TfL) to prioritise reducing noise and vibrations from the Tube network, which were causing severe disruption for Londoners. The Assembly called for tighter public health standards to address the issue, highlighting the impact of Tube noise on residents living near Underground lines and emphasising the need for long-term solutions to mitigate the problem.
4. <https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-london-assembly-does/questions-mayor/find-an-answer/tube-noise-29> - This document outlines the London Assembly's efforts to tackle Tube noise, including a market research questionnaire targeting global innovators to help manage noise on the Tube network. The initiative aims to explore new technologies and solutions to address the persistent issue of noise pollution affecting passengers and residents, reflecting the Assembly's commitment to improving the quality of life for Londoners.
5. <https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-london-assembly-does/questions-mayor/find-an-answer/tube-noise-2> - In June 2022, the London Assembly called for the Mayor, Deputy Mayor for Transport, and TfL Commissioner to intensify efforts to mitigate Tube noise for both passengers and residents. The motion emphasised the need for transparency regarding noise hotspots and rectification activities, urging the adoption of tighter public health standards to address the longstanding issue of Tube noise in London.
6. <https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-london-assembly-does/questions-mayor/find-an-answer/tube-noise-24> - This document provides an update on actions taken by Transport for London (TfL) to address Tube noise, including rail grinding and other targeted interventions. It also discusses trials of alternative track fastenings, such as Delkor, to reduce in-carriage noise. The document highlights the challenges TfL faces due to financial constraints but underscores the ongoing commitment to mitigating Tube noise for Londoners.
7. <https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-london-assembly-does/questions-mayor/find-an-answer/tube-noise-26> - In January 2023, the Mayor of London addressed the issue of Tube noise, acknowledging the challenges posed by the Underground network's age and high-frequency operations. The Mayor highlighted the importance of setting realistic expectations for noise levels and discussed the availability of a dedicated noise and vibration page on the TfL website for Londoners to report concerns and access information.