

# FACT SHEET

## Summary of Proposed Updates to CEQA Thresholds Related to Construction Noise and Vibration

January 11, 2024

### Background

Pursuant to California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guideline Section 15064.7(b), the Department of City Planning (Department) is considering adopting updated thresholds of significance and methodologies to analyze impacts for construction noise and vibration. Pursuant to the authority of the Director of Planning (Director) under Los Angeles Charter Section 506 to make and enforce any necessary rules and regulations, the Director is considering the adoption of updated thresholds and methodology in the Department's preparation of CEQA clearances. Below is a summary of the proposed updates to the CEQA Thresholds related to Construction Noise and Vibration.

An analysis of the City's current construction noise thresholds, as well as a review of best practices and thresholds used by other jurisdictions, found that the City's existing thresholds are overly conservative, especially in the context of impacts to public health. In particular, the use of a numeric threshold based on the increase in decibel levels over existing ambient conditions (e.g., a 5 dBA [A-weighted decibel] increase over ambient conditions) often results in a determination that construction noise impacts are significant, even for routine construction activities that are expected to occur in an urban environment. The increase in ambient level threshold is so low that it has the potential to show significant environmental impacts, even for activities such as a single day of construction or exterior remodeling of a single-family home in a residential area involving no unusual noise-producing equipment. As a result, a more appropriate construction noise threshold should be crafted in consideration that construction noise is temporary and periodic, and that while construction noise could result in human annoyance, it may not necessarily result in direct health impacts unless a certain absolute noise threshold is attained.

The thresholds were developed based on input from noise experts, Department staff, and review of noise thresholds used by other state and local agencies.

## Purpose

- The new set of thresholds are intended to:
  - Be better suited to the City's urban nature, yet still recognize the importance of human health, including sleep disruption.
  - Account for reasonable expectations regarding noise and vibration during daytime and nighttime hours, and also include absolute noise levels that are intended to protect human health.

## Current Thresholds

### Construction Noise

#### **Daytime - Increase Above Ambient**

- Construction activities lasting more than one day would exceed existing ambient exterior sound levels by 10 dBA or more at a noise-sensitive use.
- Construction activities lasting more than 10 days in a three-month period would exceed existing ambient exterior noise levels by 5 dBA or more at a noise-sensitive use.

#### **Nighttime - Increase Above Ambient**

- Construction activities would exceed the ambient noise level by 5 dBA at a noise-sensitive use outside of LAMC construction hours (between the hours of 9:00 P.M. and 7:00 A.M. Monday through Friday, before 8:00 A.M. or after 6:00 P.M. on Saturday, or at any time on Sunday).

### Construction Vibration

The City utilizes guidance from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to assess ground-borne vibration impacts related to potential building damage and human annoyance.

#### **Building Damage**

- Project construction activities cause ground-borne vibration levels to exceed 0.5 peak particle velocity (PPV) at the nearest off-site reinforced concrete, steel, or timber building.
- Exceed 0.3 PPV at the nearest off-site engineered concrete and masonry building
- Exceed 0.2 PPV at the nearest off-site non-engineered timber and masonry building
- Exceed 0.12 PPV at buildings extremely susceptible to vibration damage, such as historic buildings

## **Human Annoyance**

- Exceed 72 VdB at off-site sensitive uses, including residential, hotel and theater uses

## **New Thresholds**

### **Construction Noise**

#### **Daytime - Increase Over Ambient**

None for daytime construction activities (between 7:00 A.M. and 7:00 P.M. Monday through Friday, and between 8:00 A.M. and 6:00 P.M. on Saturdays)

#### **Daytime - Absolute Threshold**

Maximum 80 dBA Leq (8-hour) absolute threshold at sensitive uses (at the property line with outdoor uses or at the exterior of the building), including outdoor public recreational areas

#### **Nighttime - Increase Over Ambient**

Maximum 5 dBA increase above the ambient noise level at sensitive uses (between 7:00 P.M. and 7:00 A.M. Monday through Friday, and between 6:00 P.M. and 8:00 A.M. on Saturdays, and anytime on Sundays or national holidays). Certain mat pour activities are exempt from this provision.

#### **Nighttime - Absolute Noise**

- Maximum 55 dBA Leq (Equivalent Continuous Sound Pressure Level) for sensitive uses within older buildings that would have operable windows that may be open
- Maximum 65 dBA Leq for sensitive uses with windows closed that are not operable and are single-glazed
- Maximum 70 dBA Leq for sensitive uses that have newer construction (i.e., the structures have been designed to ensure that an interior 45 dBA is obtained with double-paned windows). Certain mat pour activities are exempt from this provision.

### **Vibration**

#### **Daytime - Human Annoyance**

No numerical threshold

#### **Nighttime - Human Annoyance**

Maximum 0.80 VdB at the exterior of a sensitive use building

#### **Building Damage**

Construction activities shall not exceed the following building damage thresholds for the identified structures:

- Fragile Buildings: 0.1 PPV
- Historic Buildings: 0.25 PPV
- Older Residential Structures: 0.3 PPV
- New Residential Structures: 0.5 PPV
- Modern Industrial/Commercial Buildings: 0.5 PPV

## Public Process

**Director-level Public Hearing.** Per State CEQA law, public notice and a hearing is required. The hearing may be held by the Director, the City Planning Commission, or the City Council. The Department of City Planning conducted a Director-level public hearing on December 20, 2023. A 10-day notice was provided to the City's internal environmental and historic resource consultant list, Neighborhood Councils, Interested Parties, and those signed up as Land Use Expeditors, and for News Alerts and Citywide Code Amendments through media communications.

## Next Steps

The Director of City Planning will consider the public testimony received, before potentially adopting Updated CEQA Thresholds. Any updated guidance would be publically available on the Department's website at:  
<https://planning.lacity.org/project-review/environmental-resources>.

For questions, please email [mindy.nguyen@lacity.org](mailto:mindy.nguyen@lacity.org).