

**NOISE IMPACT ANALYSIS**  
**LOS ALAMITOS BLVD MEDIAN PROJECT**  
**LOS ALAMITOS, CALIFORNIA**

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## INTRODUCTION

The proposed project will include the construction of medians along four segments of Los Alamitos Boulevard. These segments are described below.

- Katella Avenue to Florista

The construction of a raised median island is proposed in this segment where striping currently exists. This median will include landscaping, irrigation and the installation of street lighting as well as necessary infrastructure. Vehicular movement between Katella Avenue and Florista will be limited to right-turn in and right-turn out from the driveways of businesses located adjacent to this area with increased U-turns from vehicles traveling north.

- Florista to Catalina

The project includes the construction of raised median islands where striping currently exists. This area will include landscaping, irrigation and the installation of street lighting, including necessary infrastructure. Similar to the Katella Avenue to Florista segment of Los Alamitos Boulevard, vehicular movements along this roadway segment will be limited to right-turn in and right-turn out from driveways of businesses located adjacent to this segment with increased U-turns from vehicles traveling south.

- Catalina to Sausalito

The City is proposing to construct raised median islands where striping currently exists from Catalina to Sausalito. The median will include landscaping, irrigation and the installation of street lighting, including necessary infrastructure. This area will also include a new offset pedestrian crosswalk. Vehicular movement will be limited to right-turn in and right-turn out at driveways of businesses located adjacent to this segment of Los Alamitos Boulevard, with increased U-turns from vehicles traveling south and north.

- Sausalito to Cerritos

Sausalito to Cerritos Avenue is the most northerly segment of Los Alamitos Boulevard included in the proposed project. A raised median island will be constructed in this segment where striping currently exists. Landscaping, irrigation and street lighting as well as necessary infrastructure are proposed in the median. Vehicular movement will be limited to right turn-in and right-turn out at driveways of businesses located adjacent to this roadway with increased U-turns from vehicles traveling south and north.

## NOISE SETTING

Sound is mechanical energy transmitted by pressure waves in a compressible medium such as air. Noise is generally considered to be unwanted sound. Sound is characterized by various parameters that describe the rate of oscillation of sound waves, the distance between successive troughs or crests, the speed of propagation, and the pressure level or energy content of a given sound. In particular, the sound pressure level has become the most common descriptor used to characterize the loudness of an ambient sound level.

The decibel (dB) scale is used to quantify sound pressure levels. Although decibels are most commonly associated with sound, "dB" is a generic descriptor that is equal to ten times the logarithmic ratio of any physical parameter versus some reference quantity. For sound, the reference level is the faintest sound detectable by a young person with good auditory acuity.

Since the human ear is not equally sensitive to all sound frequencies within the entire auditory spectrum, human response is factored into sound descriptions by weighting sounds within the range of maximum human sensitivity more heavily in a process called "A-weighting," written as dB(A). Any further reference in this discussion to decibels written as "dB" should be understood to be A-weighted.

Time variations in noise exposure are typically expressed in terms of a steady-state energy level equal to the energy content of the time varying period (called LEQ), or alternately, as a statistical description of the sound pressure level that is exceeded over some fraction of a given observation period. Finally, because community receptors are more sensitive to unwanted noise intrusion during the evening and at night, state law requires that, for planning purposes, an artificial dBA increment be added to quiet time noise levels in a 24-hour noise descriptor called the Ldn (day-night) or the Community Noise Equivalent Level (CNEL). The CNEL metric has gradually replaced the Ldn factor, but the two descriptors are essentially identical.

CNEL-based standards are generally applied to transportation-related sources because local jurisdictions are pre-empted from exercising direct noise control over vehicles on public streets, aircraft, trains, etc. The City of Los Alamitos therefore regulates the noise exposure of the receiving property through land use controls.

For "stationary" noise sources, or noise sources emanating from private property, such as a HVAC equipment, the City does have legal authority to establish noise performance standards designed to not adversely impact adjoining uses. These standards are typically articulated in the jurisdictional Municipal Code. These standards recognize the varying noise sensitivity of both transmitting and receiving land uses. The property line noise performance standards are normally structured according to land use and time-of-day.

## NOISE COMPATIBILITY GUIDELINES

Noise compatibility standards are used in evaluating land use projects. A proposed land use must be shown to be compatible with the ambient noise environment, particularly for noise sources over which direct City control is preempted by other agencies. The State of California Office of Noise Control land use compatibility recommendations, presented in the Los Alamitos General Plan Noise Element, apply to those noise sources not amenable to local control such as

on-road traffic, aircraft, trains, etc. Because cities cannot regulate the noise created by such sources, they control the types of land use or levels of mitigation required by the receiving property.

Noise/land use compatibility planning standards vary with the noise sensitivity of the receiving land use. Low density residential uses are considered most noise-sensitive, multi-family residences and transit lodging slightly less so, and schools, libraries, churches and in-patient health care represent the third tier of desired noise protection. The noise standards for these uses generally apply to usable outdoor space such as yards, pools, patios, etc. By meeting outdoor standards, it is typically easy to meet indoor standards that do not intrude into sleeping or comfortable conversations. Office and commercial uses are considered to have intermediate noise sensitivity with an emphasis more on interior noise exposures unless there are outdoor amenities (outdoor restaurant seating, waiting areas, etc.) exposed to roadway noise. Industrial uses, agriculture, utilities or open space are considered less noise-sensitive.

Land uses adjacent to the proposed median improvements between Katella and Cerritos are almost exclusively commercial. None of the commercial uses appear to have substantial outdoor connection. Several former single family structures have been re-purposed into commercial uses. These commercial uses (“Arbor Village”) include a restaurant, (“Shenandoah at the Arbor”). However, all outdoor dining seating at this restaurant is on the rear patio shielded by the structure itself. Traffic noise from Los Alamitos Boulevard was inaudible on the rear patio during several luncheon dining visits. There is one motel (“Best Western”) along the alignment, but there are no outdoor uses at the motel closest to the roadway that would warrant special noise impact considerations

Any traffic noise impact consideration during construction or future redistribution of traffic at the motel would be possibly for guests sleeping in the front tier of rooms facing Los Alamitos Blvd. The building code requirement for new transient occupancy is an indoor noise level of 45 dB CNEL. This threshold is considered an appropriate CEQA significance threshold for the existing motel sleeping quarters.

Noise-sensitive uses (single and multi-family residences) are located adjacent to side streets accessing Los Alamitos Blvd. However, traffic volumes along these roadways are very low such that redistribution of traffic associated with project implementation is unlikely to create any unacceptable traffic noise conditions. In the absence of any noise-sensitive land uses beyond those noted above, the City’s general plan standard for commercial land uses is considered the applicable threshold for noise impact evaluation.

As shown in Table 1, the guidelines recommend an exterior noise exposure of less than 70 dBA CNEL for commercial uses as “normally acceptable” and up to 78 dBA CNEL are considered “conditionally acceptable” and may be permitted if noise mitigation is included in the design. Noise exposure is generally not considered a siting constraint for commercial uses along Los Alamitos Blvd.

## NOISE STANDARDS

For noise generated on one property affecting an adjacent use, the City of Los Alamitos in Chapter 17.24 of the Municipal Code, limits the amount of noise crossing the boundary between the two uses. For regulated on-site sources of noise generation, the noise ordinance prescribes limits that are considered an acceptable exposure for residential uses in proximity to regulated noise sources. The  $L_{50}$  metric used in the noise ordinance is the level exceeded 50% of the measurement period of thirty minutes in an hour. One-half of all readings may exceed this average standard with larger excursions from the average allowed for progressively shorter periods. The larger the deviation, the shorter the allowed duration up to a never-to-exceed 20 dBA increase above the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile standard. Nighttime noise levels limits are reduced by 5 dBA to reflect the increased sensitivity to noise occurring during that time period. In the event that the ambient noise level exceeds any of the noise standards, the standards shall be increased to reflect the ambient noise level. The City of Los Alamitos limits exterior and interior noise in residential neighborhoods to a daytime standard of 55 dBA and 60 dBA for commercial uses for  $L_{50}$  noise levels.

A median improvement project would likely not create stationary noise sources governed by the Municipal Code standards. Any code-restricted noise generation would possibly derive from construction. However, the Ordinance restricts hours of construction with heavy equipment to hours of lesser noise sensitivity from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. on weekdays and Saturdays, with the exception of federal holidays. Construction is exempt from numerical ordinance standards as long as hours are restricted to the permissible daytime hours.

Table 1

## Land Use Compatibility for Community Noise Environments

Land Use Category	Community Noise Exposure Ldn or CNEL, dB									
	50	55	60	65	70	75	80	85		
Residential – Low Density Single-Family, Duplex, Mobile Homes										
Residential – Multi-Family										
Transient Lodging – Motels, Hotels										
Schools, Libraries, Churches, Hospitals, Nursing Homes										
Auditoriums, Concert Halls, Amphitheaters										
Sports Arena, Outdoor Spectator Sports										
Playgrounds, Neighborhood Parks										
Golf Courses, Riding Stables, Water Recreation, Cemeteries										
Office Buildings, Business Commercial and Professional										
Industrial Manufacturing Utilities, Agriculture										

**INTERPRETATION**



**Normally Acceptable:** Specified land use is satisfactory based upon the assumption that any buildings involved are of normal conventional construction, without any special noise insulation requirements.



**Conditionally Acceptable:** New construction or development should be undertaken only after a detailed analysis of the noise reduction requirements is made and needed noise insulation features included in the design. Conventional construction, but with closed windows and fresh air supply systems or air conditioning will normally suffice.



**Normally Unacceptable:** New construction or development should generally be discouraged. If new construction or development does proceed, a detailed analysis of the noise reduction requirements must be made and needed noise insulation features included in the design.



**Clearly Unacceptable:** New construction or development should generally not be undertaken.

Source: State of California Governor's Office of Planning and Research, General Plan Guidelines, 1990.

**Table 2  
Los Alamitos Noise Ordinance Limits**

**EXTERIOR NOISE STANDARDS**

<b>Noise Zone</b>	<b>Noise Level</b>	<b>Time Period</b>
Residential – daytime	55 dB(A)	7 a.m. — 10 p.m.
Residential – nighttime	50 dB(A)	10 p.m. — 7 a.m.
Office	55 dB(A)	Anytime
Commercial	60 dB(A)	Anytime
Industrial	70 dB(A)	Anytime

Source: Municipal Code Section 17.24.050

**INTERIOR NOISE STANDARDS**

<b>Noise Zone</b>	<b>Noise Level</b>	<b>Time Period</b>
Residential	55 dB(A)	7 a.m. — 10 p.m.
	45 dB(A)	10 p.m. — 7 a.m.
All others uses	55 dB(A)	anytime

Source: Municipal Code Section 17.24.070

**17.24.060 Prohibited exterior noise levels.**

A. *It is unlawful for a person to create noise, or to allow the creation of noise on property owned, leased, occupied, or otherwise controlled by a person, that causes the noise level when measured on a residential, public institutional, professional, commercial, or industrial property, either within or without the city, to exceed the applicable noise standard:*

1. *For a cumulative period of more than thirty (30) minutes in any hour;*
2. *Plus five dB(A) for a cumulative period of more than fifteen (15) minutes in any hour;*
3. *Plus ten (10) dB(A) for a cumulative period of more than five minutes in any hour;*
4. *Plus fifteen (15) dB(A) for a cumulative period of more than one minute in any hour; or*
5. *Plus twenty (20) dB(A) for any period of time.*

B. *In the event the ambient noise level exceeds the categories described in subsections above, the cumulative period applicable to the category shall be increased to reflect the ambient noise level. (Ord. 688 § 1, 2006)*

## LAND USE NOISE IMPACTS

### THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

According to the current CEQA Appendix G guidelines, noise impacts are considered potentially significant if they cause:

- a. Exposure of persons to or generation of noise levels in excess of standards established in the local general plan or noise ordinance, or applicable standards of other agencies. Noise levels exceeding the City of Los Alamitos Noise Standards would be considered significant.
- b. Exposure of persons to or generation of excessive groundborne vibration or groundborne noise levels.
- c. A substantial permanent increase in ambient noise levels in the project vicinity above levels existing without the project.
- d. A substantial temporary or periodic increase in ambient noise levels in the project vicinity above levels existing without the project.

CEQA Guidelines also identify potential impact significance due to aircraft noise. Los Alamitos JTFB airport is located more than one mile south-west of the proposed median improvements. The adopted airport noise contour is substantially less than the 70 dB CNEL level considered clearly acceptable for commercial land uses. Airport noise will not affect any minor changes in roadway noise associated with implementation of the proposed project.

The term "substantial increase" is not defined by any responsible agency. The limits of perceptibility by ambient grade instrumentation (sound meters) or by humans in a laboratory environment is around 1.5 dBA. Under ambient conditions, people generally do not perceive that noise has clearly changed until there is a 3 dB difference. A threshold of 3 dBA is commonly used to define "substantial increase." An increase of +3 dBA CNEL in traffic noise would be consistent a significant impact.

Two characteristic noise sources are typically identified with land use intensification such as that proposed for the development of the Los Alamitos Median project. Construction activities, especially heavy equipment, will create short-term noise increases near the project site. Such impacts may be important for nearby noise-sensitive receptors such as any existing residential uses. Upon completion, project-related traffic will cause an incremental increase in area-wide noise levels throughout the project area. Traffic noise impacts are generally analyzed both to insure that the project not adversely impact the acoustic environment of the surrounding community, as well as to insure that the project site is not exposed to an unacceptable level of noise resulting from the ambient noise environment acting on the project. This project could cause a small increase in area wide traffic but the increase will likely be imperceptible relative to the overall traffic in the project vicinity.

## NOISE SOURCES

### PROJECT-RELATED VEHICULAR NOISE IMPACTS

Long-term noise concerns from the change in traffic volumes on roadways in the project vicinity. This concern was addressed using the California specific vehicle noise curves (CALVENO) in the federal roadway noise model (the FHWA Highway Traffic Noise Prediction Model, FHWA-RD-77-108). The model calculates the Leq noise level for a particular reference set of input conditions, and then makes a series of adjustments for site-specific traffic volumes, distances, speeds, or noise barriers.

This analysis evaluates the change between existing noise levels with and without project at the same locations. Table 3 summarizes the 24-hour CNEL level at 50 feet from the roadway centerline. Four traffic scenarios were evaluated; existing conditions with and without project, and future (year 2040) with and without project.

The project includes construction of raised medians along four segments of Los Alamitos Blvd and will require restriction of left turn movements at some intersections which will result in adjustments to current traffic patterns. Therefore, there can be a decrease in traffic due to accessibility. For the streets without feasible median openings, or side streets and driveways with median closures, traffic is reassigned to the nearest provided left/U-turn lanes at the median openings along Los Alamitos Boulevard. Some roadways will experience a slight decrease in traffic noise as a result of project implementation. In addition, the volume of traffic increases slightly in the future at “build-out” conditions which would cause an increase in overall traffic noise.

As seen in Table 4, because the area is largely built-out, it takes a very large increase in traffic volume to substantially alter the noise environment. Along Los Alamitos Blvd, where there is already substantial traffic, the project does little to impact the traffic noise levels. The largest project related increase is +1.1 dBA CNEL on East Catalina Street. This change will be almost undetectable. The next largest project related increase is +0.3 dBA CNEL. Catalina Street has very low current traffic volumes such that even a small increase in traffic would yield a more noticeable proportional impact. It should be noted that 13 of the 19 analyzed intersections are not predicted to have any quantifiable traffic noise impact (<0.0 dBA).

As discussed, some side streets will experience a decrease in noise levels because of traffic redirection. For example, W Catalina Street is anticipated to experience a 0.1 dBA reduction in noise level after project implementation. Project related traffic noise impacts will be less-than-significant.

The cumulative analysis compares “future with project” to “existing” conditions. This “future with project” to existing comparison shows a maximum impact of +1.0 dBA CNEL from roadway centerline on Katella, west of Los Alamitos Blvd. Not only is this increase much smaller than the significance threshold, the project itself contributes negligibly to the increase and would occur even without project implementation. Project only related traffic noise increases and cumulative traffic noise increases associated with project implementation are considered to be less-than-significant.

**Table 3**  
**Los Alamitos Blvd Median Improvement Project**  
**Traffic Noise Impact Analysis**  
**(dBA CNEL at 50 feet from centerline)**

Segment		Existing	Existing w Project	2040	2040 w Project
Los Alamitos/	Cerritos-Briggeman	69.4	69.4	70.3	70.3
	Briggeman-Serpentine	69.1	69.1	69.8	69.8
	Serpentine-Catalina	69.1	69.4	69.8	70.1
	Catalina W-Catalina E	69.2	69.4	69.9	70.1
	Catalina E-Florista	68.9	69.0	69.7	69.8
	Florista-Katella	69.2	69.2	69.9	69.9
Cerritos/	W of Los Alamitos	69.1	69.1	69.6	69.6
	E of Los Alamitos	69.5	69.5	70.0	70.0
Saustilito/	W of Los Alamitos	57.8	57.8	58.1	58.1
Briggeman/	E of Los Alamitos	59.5	59.5	59.7	59.7
Serpentine/	E of Los Alamitos	53.1	53.1	53.3	53.3
Catalina W/	W of Los Alamitos	55.9	55.9	56.2	56.1
Catalina E/	E of Los Alamitos	58.9	60.0	59.2	60.2
Florista/	W of Los Alamitos	61.4	61.7	61.7	62.0
	E of Los Alamitos	62.2	62.3	62.5	62.6
Katella/	W of Los Alamitos	71.6	71.6	72.6	72.6
	E of Los Alamitos	71.1	71.1	71.9	71.9

**Table 4**  
**Los Alamitos Blvd Median Improvement Project**  
**Project Impact**  
**(dBA CNEL)**

	<b>Segment</b>	<b>Existing Impact<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Yr 2040 Impact<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Cumulative Impact<sup>3</sup></b>
Los Alamitos/	Cerritos-Briggeman	0.0	0.0	0.9
	Briggman-Serpentine	0.0	0.0	0.7
	Serpentine-Catalina	0.3	0.3	1.0
	CatalinaW-Catalina E	0.2	0.2	0.9
	Catalina E-Florista	0.1	0.1	0.9
	Florista-Katella	0.0	0.0	0.7
Cerritos/	W of Los Alamitos	0.0	0.0	0.5
	E of Los Alamitos	0.0	0.0	0.5
Saustilito/	W of Los Alamitos	0.0	0.0	0.3
Briggeman/	E of Los Alamitos	0.0	0.0	0.2
Serpentine/	E of Los Alamitos	0.0	0.0	0.2
Catalina W/	W of Los Alamitos	0.0	-0.1	0.2
Catalina E/	E of Los Alamitos	1.1	1.0	1.3
Florista/	W of Los Alamitos	0.3	0.3	0.6
	E of Los Alamitos	0.1	0.1	0.4
Katella/	W of Los Alamitos	0.0	0.0	1.0
	E of Los Alamitos	0.0	0.0	0.8

<sup>1</sup> The difference between existing with and without project traffic noise levels

<sup>2</sup> The difference between future with and without project traffic noise levels

<sup>3</sup> The difference between “future with project” and “existing” traffic noise levels

The only possibly noise-sensitive land use along the proposed alignment is the motel guest rooms abutting the roadway. The proposed project would not cause any change in traffic volumes that would affect sleeping guests. The build-out traffic noise at the motel façade would be just under 70 dB CNEL. Noise attenuation with closed windows and heavy black-out drapes is 25-30 dB. Guest room noise levels, both now and at area build-out, are/will be less than the 45 dB CNEL sleeping quarter standard if guests close their windows.

## PROJECT CONSTRUCTION

There are no noise sensitive uses immediately adjacent to the project site, except possibly the Best Western Motel. Almost all existing development is comprised of non-residential commercial uses with direct access to these commercial properties provided via driveways. The Los Alamitos Municipal Code restricts the hours of construction to hours of lesser noise sensitivity with heavy equipment to operate from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. on weekdays and Saturdays, excluding federal holidays.

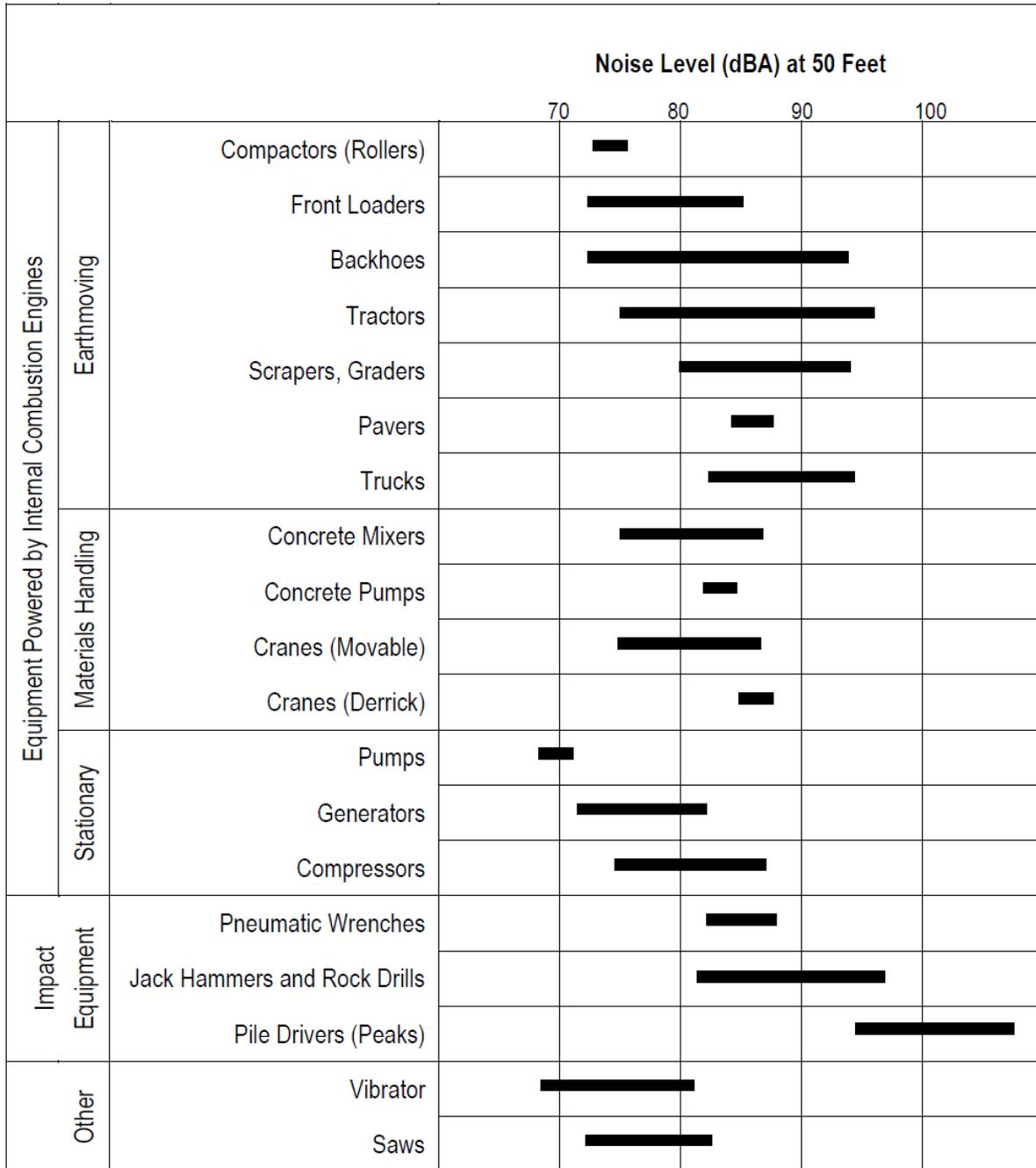
These hours are included as conditions on any project construction permits and these limits will serve to minimize any adverse construction noise impact potential and the City of Los Alamitos does provide noise standards for construction activity noise. However, even with activities restricted to these hours, they may nevertheless generate noise levels that are intrusive to adjacent uses.

To address the CEQA significance criterion regarding “substantial temporary or periodic noise increases in ambient noise levels” for construction noise, a “substantial” noise increase is defined as an increase in noise to a level that causes interference with land use activities at nearby uses. One indicator that construction noise could interfere with daytime activities would be speech interference. Speech interference is an indicator of impact on typical daytime activities. A speech interference threshold is used to identify substantial increases in noise resulting from temporary construction activities. Noise peaks generated by construction equipment could result in speech interference at nearby commercial uses if the noise level in the interior of the building exceeds 65 dBA which is also the residential noise threshold for speech intelligibility. A typical commercial structure can reduce noise levels by 30 dBA with the windows closed.

An exterior noise level of 95 dBA ( $L_{eq}$ ) at receptors would maintain an interior noise environment of 65 dBA with windows closed. It should be noted that such noise levels would be sporadic rather than continuous in nature, because different types of construction equipment would be used throughout the construction process. In addition, project activity will not occur in any one area for long as construction progresses down the alignment.

Figure 1 shows the typical range of construction activity noise generation as a function of equipment used in various building phases. Peak noise levels from heavy construction equipment are typically around 85-90 dB at 50 feet from the source. “Standard” construction requirements have been assumed and jack hammers would likely create the most noise. Therefore, an interior noise level of 65 dBA can be achieved in adjacent commercial uses with the ability to close windows.

**Figure 1  
Typical Construction Equipment  
Noise Generation  
Levels**



rc: EPA PB 206717, Environmental Protection Agency, December 31, 1971, "Noise from Construction Equipment and Operations."

## CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY VIBRATION

Construction activities and street traffic are some of the most common external sources of vibration that can be perceptible inside adjacent commercial uses. Construction activities generate ground-borne vibration when heavy equipment travels over unpaved surfaces or when it is engaged in soil movement. The effects of ground-borne vibration include discernable movement of building floors, rattling of windows, shaking of items on shelves or hanging on walls, and rumbling sounds. Within the “soft” sedimentary surfaces of much of Southern California, ground vibration is quickly damped out. Groundborne vibration is almost never annoying to people who are outdoors (FTA 2006).

Groundborne vibrations from construction activities rarely reach levels that can damage structures. Because vibration is typically not an issue, very few jurisdictions have adopted vibration significance thresholds. Vibration thresholds have been adopted for construction projects, but these relate mostly to structural protection (cracking foundations or stucco) rather than to human annoyance.

Vibration is most commonly expressed in terms of the root mean square (RMS) velocity of a vibrating object. RMS velocities are expressed in units of vibration decibels. The range of vibration decibels (VdB) is as follows:

65 VdB	-	threshold of human perception
72 VdB	-	annoyance due to frequent events
80 VdB	-	annoyance due to infrequent events
94-98 VdB	-	minor cosmetic damage

To determine potential impacts of the project’s construction activities, estimates of vibration levels induced by the construction equipment at various distances are presented below:

Equipment	Approximate Vibration Levels (VdB)*		
	25 feet	50 feet	100 feet
Pile Driver	93	87	81
Large Bulldozer	87	81	75
Loaded Truck	86	80	74
Jackhammer	79	73	67
Small Bulldozer	58	52	46

\* (FTA Transit Noise & Vibration Assessment, Chapter 12, Construction, 2006)

Pile driving is not anticipated for use on this project. Because of the limited working space access, a large bulldozer would similarly be not utilized. The on-site construction equipment that will create the maximum potential vibration is a jackhammer. The stated vibration source level in the FTA Handbook for such equipment is 73 VdB at 50 feet from the source. There are no sensitive uses adjacent various proposed median improvement sites. In addition, vibration from cars and trucks on Los Alamitos Boulevard would likely mask any project related impact. Vibration levels are much lower than the damage threshold. Therefore construction activity vibration impacts are judged as less-than-significant.

## MITIGATION

Construction activities are mitigated by required compliance with grading/construction permits. These considerations include:

- No construction is to take place between the hours of from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. on weekdays and Saturdays.
- All construction equipment shall use properly operating mufflers.

Project-related off-site traffic noise changes on existing streets will not be significant, and will not substantially alter the existing and forecasted noise environment. Traffic noise impact analyzed at a “with-project” versus “no-project” condition shows project-related noise is not individually significant.