INHALATION OF SMALL PARTICLES ($PM_{2.5}$) IN URBAN ROAD TUNNELS AND UNDERGROUND IN MADRID (SPAIN). A CITIZEN SCIENCE PROJECT

Ángel López-Encuentra[a*], Esther Gil Cid [b], Luis Miguel Pozo Coronado [c]

[ax] Emeritus Professor Medicine. Retired. Universidad Complutense Madrid. Calle Ocaña 120. 28047 Madrid. Spain loencu0@gmail.com

[b] Departamento de Matemática Aplicada. Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED). Calle Juan del Rosal, 12. 28040 Madrid. Spain egil@ind.uned.es

[c] Departamento MATIC. ETSI Sistemas Informáticos. Campus Sur. Universidad Politécnica de Madrid. Calle Alan Turing s/n 28031 Madrid Spain. lm.pozo@upm.es

---

*Corresponding author:

Ángel López Encuentra

Universidad Complutense Madrid.

Calle Ocaña 120.

28047 Madrid. Spain

loencu0@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Some public infrastructures do not routinely monitor air pollution, particularly in semi-enclosed transport environments such as road tunnels and metro systems. Low-cost sensors (LCS) may complement official monitoring by providing accessible exposure data.

This study aimed to validate LCS performance and to assess $PM_{2.5}$ concentrations in urban transport microenvironments in a large city with the active participation of various citizens.

LCS measurements were compared with reference station data using Pearson correlation coefficients. The device was mounted outside a vehicle while driving through road tunnels, and additional measurements were conducted on metro platforms and inside subway carriages. All measurements were carried out by different citizens who had been previously trained.

The correlation between LCS and the reference station was high ($r = 0.9301$; 95% CI: 0.926–0.934), supporting device reliability. In road tunnels, mean $PM_{2.5}$ increased from 12.62 µg/m³ (SD 11.3) in the first half of the journey to 16.6 µg/m³ (SD 15.2) in the second half ($p < 0.001$). On metro platforms, concentrations exceeded 10 µg/m³ (mean 20 µg/m³; range 10–32), while inside carriages levels remained above 5 µg/m³ (mean 10 µg/m³; range 5.8–17.8).

These results have been reviewed, assessed, and discussed by all participating citizens from the signatory associations. As no safe threshold for $PM_{2.5}$ exposure has been established, systematic monitoring and the integration of low-cost technologies into public health surveillance are needed to inform regulation and urban transport policies.

233 words

INTRODUCTION

Small-sized particles present in inhaled air are responsible for numerous respiratory and systemic diseases, even at low concentrations and within short exposure times—ranging from hours to days **(Wenhua et al., 2024; Orellano et al., 2020; Sun et al., 2024)**. Among respiratory illnesses, their association with asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and lung cancer is particularly noteworthy **(Kampa and Castanas, 2008)**. Moreover, due to their small size, these particles can penetrate the alveolar–capillary membrane, enter the bloodstream, and reach distant organs such as the heart, brain, and kidneys **(Vanbrabant et al., 2024)**. Exposure to fine particles (e.g., $PM_{2.5}$) is a recognized risk factor for premature death, pulmonary or cardiac disease, pregnancy complications, cancer, diabetes, and neurological disorders **(Manisalidis et al., 2020; World Health Organization, 2025)**.

Although efforts are made to control their concentrations in large cities through fixed or mobile air quality monitoring stations, there remains variability in the available data regarding their concentrations inside urban tunnels **(Advisory Committee on Tunnel Air Quality, 2018; Svartengren et al., 2000; Jiang et al., 2024; Zhao et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021; Skerker, 2017; Zamorategui-Molina et al., 2021; Zhou et al., 2014; Miller and Newby, 2020)** and subway systems **(Luglio et al., 2023; Zhao et al., 2017; Cartenì et al., 2015; Figueroa-Lara et al., 2019; Querol et al., 2012; Van Ryswyk et al., 2017; Luglio et al., 2021; Martins et al., 2016; Nieuwenhuijsen et al., 2007; Moreno et al., 2015)**.

In Madrid (Spain), several tunnels are used for transportation. These include the so-called M30 ring road, with 10 km of underground highway, and the extensive metro network comprising 13 lines, 303 stations, and a total length of 295 km. In 2023, approximately 374 million vehicles and 487.5 million users circulated through the M30, while 662 million passengers used the metro network during the same year. In 2025, 736,974,012 trips were made on the metro.

The M30 system includes 1,000 ventilation fans and 90 pumping wells with a flow capacity of 8,000 m³/day **(EMESA M-30)**. According to information provided by M30 management (April 22, 2024; personal communication), there are 19 $PM_{2.5}$ particle filtration stations within the tunnels. However, few data exist regarding $PM_{2.5}$ concentrations ($cPM_{2.5}$) inside the M30 tunnels—either within or outside vehicles. Only two publications related to the M30 were identified, one concerning the ventilation systems **(del Rey Llorente et al., 2005)** and another on the advantages of reducing the speed limit to 70 km/h **(Pérez-Prada and Monzón, 2014)**.

In 2024, a Spanish research group examined gas and particle concentrations in a segment of the M30 **(López-de Abajo et al., 2024)**. Their objective was to assess the potential deterioration of concrete caused by gas exposure. Regarding $PM_{2.5}$, they could only measure concentrations in the ventilation gallery, as no sensors were installed inside the traffic tunnels themselves.

Similarly, in the Madrid metro system, there is insufficient information about $cPM_{2.5}$ levels on platforms and inside train carriages. Only a few press reports exist **(elDiario.es; Donostiarrak; ConBici)**. Recently, the initiation of a pilot study to measure $cPM_{2.5}$ levels in the Madrid metro was announced **(Envira)**.

The concept of Citizen Science seeks to generate knowledge through the participation of civil society **(Froeling et al., 2024; Vohland et al., n.d.)**. Several professionals from different disciplines, together with neighborhood organizations from Madrid's Latina District, decided to conduct a civic environmental monitoring initiative focused on air quality in various urban environments.

The objective of this study was to measure the concentration of PM_2 ($cPM_{2.5}$) levels in the M30 tunnels and the metro using a portable monitoring device.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This is an observational study examining environmental risk factors. All spot determinations of $cPM_{2.5}$ in this study were performed using a portable monitoring device (AirBeam3 HabitatMap, USA) (AB3), which had been validated by comparing its measurements with those of a fixed municipal monitoring station (see Figure SI 1 in supplementary material: *Performance evaluation and utility of a low-cost particulate matter sensor for use in a citizen science context*). Air temperature and relative humidity were recorded simultaneously during all measurement campaigns.

To analyze the relationship between AB3 values and government hourly data, an initial analysis was conducted by obtaining the correlation coefficient between the hourly averages obtained from both instruments. All linear model fitting calculations were performed using RStudio (see suplementary material).

Using a different approach, agreement between both datasets was assessed with the Bland and Altman method, which involves plotting the difference between AB3 and TEOM hourly measurements against their mean and calculating the mean differences and their confidence intervals (see supplementary material).

To assess the validity of AB3, its ROC curve was constructed for the TEOM 10 $\mu g/m^3$ threshold (political limit of the European Union), and predictive values for AB3 at that cutoff point were calculated using Stata v16.1 statistical software (see supplementary material).

The data collected by the AirBeam device are transmitted via Wi-Fi or 4G cellular communication technologies. The measurements recorded by the AB3 can be viewed, mapped, and graphically displayed in real time through devices running Android or iOS operating systems, as well as via the AirCasting web platform, which is openly accessible.

The longest section of the M30 tunnel, including its access ramps, spans 16.4 km. The measurement of $cPM_{2.5}$ levels was carried out by driving inside the M30 tunnels with the AB3 device mounted on the exterior of a vehicle. Multiple measurements were conducted at different times during 2024, all on working days. Traffic measurements in the road tunnel were conducted during both off-peak and peak traffic periods. Only data collected between tunnel entry and exit were included.

This study was carried out by several citizens from Madrid's Latina District who voluntarily contributed to this initiative. The date, exact entry and exit times, and exposure duration were recorded for each measurement.

During 2024 and early 2025, additional $cPM_{2.5}$ measurements were performed on metro platforms and inside train carriages of the Madrid underground network. The same AB3 device was used, handled by different volunteer citizens from the Latina District. For each measurement, the date, time, and exposure duration were documented. Metro measurements were performed at different times of the day.

Figure 1 and 2 shows the areas within the Municipality of Madrid where the M30 road tunnel and the Madrid Metro lines included in the study are located, and the locations of the nearest government air quality monitoring stations to the areas investigated.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) 2021 report, the recommended annual mean limit for $cPM_{2.5}$ in ambient air should not exceed 5 µg/m³ **(World Health Organization, 2021)**. The European Union, in 2024, set the limit at 10 µg/m³ **(Council of the European Union, 2024)**. The WHO guidelines explicitly state that their limits apply both outdoors and indoors worldwide, covering all environments where people spend time. Nevertheless, clinical effects have been observed even at concentrations below 5 µg/m³ **(Wei et al., 2024; Wei and Schwartz, 2024; Marks, 2022; Bloss, 2021; Wei et al., 2022)**.

RESULTS

Performance evaluation of a low-cost particulate matter sensor

Since the AB3 records data every minute and only ten-minute data were available from the governmental station, ten-minute averages were obtained from AB3 data using the same notation and method as for official data. A total of 6,321 valid and coincident observations were obtained. The correlation coefficient for ten-minute data was 0.92, with a 95% confidence interval (CI) of 0.921–0.928. The Adjusted R-squared was 0.865 (see supplementary material: *Performance evaluation and utility of a low-cost particulate matter sensor for use in a citizen science context*).

M30

A total of 15 routes were conducted inside the M30 tunnels. The cumulative measurement time for $cPM_{2.5}$ within the tunnel amounted to 3.5 hours (**Table 1**). The mean $cPM_{2.5}$ concentration was 14.62 µg/m³ (SD 13.5), with a median of 11 µg/m³ and values ranging from 0 to 123 µg/m³. **The mean cPM2.5 values from the published government outdoor monitoring data for the study days ranging from 3 to 8 µg/m³.**

All recordings exhibited a similar pattern: an initial phase showing a mild-to-moderate increase in $cPM_{2.5}$, followed by a later phase with a marked rise and a sharp decrease upon exiting the tunnel. Based on this behavior, the $cPM_{2.5}$ data were divided into two phases (A and B), corresponding respectively to the first and second halves of each tunnel transit. This division does not represent statistically defined change points. It only shows the difference in $cPM_{2.5}$ between the two arbitrarily periods. Data showing isolated, abnormally high $PM_{2.5}$ values over very short periods (typically lasting only a few minutes) were considered measurement artefacts and were excluded from the dataset

Figure 3 illustrates one of the $cPM_{2.5}$ measurements obtained inside the M30 (January 2025). The average value recorded was 31.3 µg/m³. At the same time, the nearest outdoor fixed station (M. Álvaro) reported a $cPM_{2.5}$ level of 10

μg/m³. Throughout the entire tunnel traversal, $cPM_{2.5}$ exceeded 10 μg/m³, reaching peaks above 50 μg/m³, followed by a rapid drop upon exiting the tunnel.

The $cPM_{2.5}$ in both phases—initial and final—were mean $cPM_{2.5}$ values of 12.60 (SD 11.3) and 16.64 (SD 15.2) μg/m³, respectively. These differences were statistically significant (p = .000). During 3.3 hours of the total 3.8 hours (87%), $cPM_{2.5}$ levels inside the M30 tunnels surpassed the limit of 5 μg/m³. For approximately 12 minutes of a 14-minute journey, $cPM_{2.5}$ remained above the limit of 5 μg/m³. Using the threshold of 10 μg/m³, concentrations exceeded this limit for 2 hours (45%) of total tunnel time—equivalent to roughly 6 minutes of exposure per trip.

On September 26, 2024 (11:00–12:00 AM), the AB3 monitor was placed inside a vehicle traveling through the M30 at a moderate speed, using standard cabin ventilation with windows closed, and without heating or air conditioning. The total journey lasted 21 minutes. For 6.5 minutes (31%), $cPM_{2.5}$ exceeded 10 μg/m³, and for 9.8 minutes (47%), it exceeded 5 μg/m³. At the same time, the nearest external government station reported outdoor $cPM_{2.5}$ concentrations between 1 and 4 μg/m³.

On November 3, 2024, a section of the M30 was closed to vehicular traffic and opened to pedestrians. Two of the study authors walked through this section carrying the AB3 device. The measurement started at 9:00 AM and lasted 88 minutes. For 47 minutes (53%), $cPM_{2.5}$ levels were above 10 μg/m³, and for 71 minutes (81%), at or above 5 μg/m³. Unlike the pattern observed with vehicular traffic, there was no final-phase peak followed by a sharp drop at the exit. At the same time, nearby outdoor stations reported $cPM_{2.5}$ levels between 1 and 2 μg/m³. Vehicular traffic had been halted at midnight on November 3, suggesting that residual pollution persisted in the tunnels for at least 9–10 hours afterward.

Madrid Metro

Across all analyzed metro platforms in different Madrid stations, mean $\mathbf{cPM_{2.5}}$ were equal to or above 10 μg/m³ (overall mean 20 μg/m³; SD 9), with marked variability. Recorded values ranged from 10 μg/m³ at A. América to 32 μg/m³ at Oporto station (**Table 2**).

At P del Ángel station, monitoring began on the platform and continued until the AB3 reached surface level **(Figure 4**). $\mathbf{cPM_{2.5}}$ values decreased from 25 μg/m³ on the platform to 9 μg/m³ upon reaching the surface.

Inside metro carriages, variability was also observed, even within the same day, between different train types. In a train with open inter-car connections, $cPM_{2.5}$ averaged 13 μg/m³ (range 9–19 μg/m³). In another train with separated cars and excellent ventilation, the mean was 10 μg/m³ (range 8–12 μg/m³). As a reference, the nearest outdoor fixed monitoring station recorded 8 μg/m³ at that time.

A total of 13 spot measurements of varying durations were performed inside metro carriages across several lines. These results are summarized in **Table 3**.

In all cases, concentrations exceeded the limit of 5 µg/m³ (mean 10 µg/m³; SD 5.6), with mean values ranging from 5.8 µg/m³ to 17.8 µg/m³.

In **Table 2,** simultaneous outdoor data from the different stations are presented. These data were obtained from the nearest government-operated air quality monitoring stations. The data are presentad graphically in **Figure 5**.

DISCUSSION

This citizen science study presents multiple measurements of $cPM_{2.5}$ across different dates and urban environments in Madrid, Spain, addressing the lack of publicly accessible data. Measurements were conducted in the M30 vehicle tunnels and the metro system.

According to the Open Data Portal of the Madrid City Council, $cPM_{2.5}$ data from the M30 are currently not available for public release (personal communication, 17 October 2025). Similarly, the Madrid Metro Transparency Portal reports that no $cPM_{2.5}$ data are available for its facilities (personal communications, 5 September 2024 and 1 September 2025).

A consistent finding was the variability of results across days and locations, both in the M30 and on metro platforms and inside train carriages.

M30 Tunnel

The average values across multiple measurements indicated a global mean $cPM_{2.5}$ concentration of 14.6 µg/m³ (SD 13.5). All M30 measurements exhibited the same pattern: an initial mild-to-moderate increase in $cPM_{2.5}$, followed by a pronounced rise and a sharp decrease at tunnel exit (Figure 1). This “piston effect” suggests that polluted air is pushed along the tunnel in the direction of vehicular traffic, potentially exacerbated by uphill driving and acceleration at tunnel exits.

Previous studies focusing on other objectives allowed direct measurements inside the M30 ventilation gallery **(López-de Abajo et al., 2024)**. Gas concentrations were recorded, but $cPM_{2.5}$ inside the tunnel could not be measured due to the absence of sensors. Data from the ventilation gallery, collected over 15 days in late 2019, showed $cPM_{2.5}$ levels averaging 26.74 µg/m³ (max 65, min 1.80). A citizen request in December 2018 for M30 air pollution data via the City Council Open Data Portal received no response, and similar requests in 2025 have also gone unanswered **(Ayuntamiento de Madrid)**.

Madrid Metro

For the metro, only limited press reports were found regarding a citizen measurement campaign in 2018 **(elDiario.es; Donostiarrak; ConBici)**.

Our measurements inside Madrid metro stations and carriages showed high variability, influenced by factors such as platform ventilation and train type. In

general, platform concentrations were higher (100% > 10 µg/m³) than inside carriages (100% > 5 µg/m³).

Except for maintenance workers inside tunnels or metro staff, most users experience short and limited exposures each time they enter the platforms, although exposure inside metro cars is usually longer.

Public health implications

Short-term exposure to airborne particles and gases has been less studied than long-term exposure, but recent evidence suggests significant health effects. A recent literature review **(Orellano et al., 2020)** reported that brief exposures to $cPM_{2.5}$ (hours or a few days) were associated with all-cause mortality (RR 1.0065; 95% CI 1.0044–1.0086) and with respiratory, cardiovascular, and cerebrovascular mortality, with the highest certainty of evidence.

Globally, approximately one million premature deaths per year (2000–2019) have been attributed to short-term $cPM_{2.5}$ exposure, representing 2.08% (1.41–2.75) of all deaths per 100,000 inhabitants. Mortality estimates were similar across different exposure thresholds (5.9, 10, or 15 µg/m³) **(Wenhua et al., 2024)**.

A daily increase of 10 µg/m³ in $cPM_{2.5}$ concentrations is associated with a rise in daily all-cause mortality **(Ma et al., 2024)**. These findings support the conclusion that even short-term exposure to $cPM_{2.5}$ can have measurable health impacts.

There is evidence indicating that there is no safe threshold for $cPM_{2.5}$ concentrations and that some health effects occur immediately after exposure and can persist for at least three years **(Wei et al., 2024; Wei and Schwartz, 2024; Marks, 2022; Bloss, 2021; Wei et al., 2022)**.

Air inside vehicle tunnels typically exhibits higher pollutant concentrations than outdoor air. The clinical significance of short-term exposure remains poorly understood. Some studies have reported respiratory effects in asthmatics and inflammatory or cardiovascular responses after brief exposure to traffic-related tunnel air **(Liu et al., 2024)**.

International studies have documented extremely high $cPM_{2.5}$ levels in traffic tunnels: 77.2 ± 17.4 µg/m³ in China **(Wenhua et al., 2024)**, up to 468 µg/m³ in another Chinese study **(Zhou et al., 2014)**, and 75–160 µg/m³ in Mexico **(Zamorategui-Molina et al., 2021)**. These observations align with our findings, showing progressive increases from tunnel entry to exit **(Wang et al., 2021)**.

In hypertensive patients at high cardiovascular risk, maintaining systolic blood pressure at 120–130 mmHg (compared with 140–150 mmHg) reduces major vascular events **(Hudda et al., 2021; Guo et al., 2025)**. A recent 2-hour exposure experiment to traffic-related air pollution demonstrated dose-dependent increases in systolic and diastolic blood pressure, with early responses observable within 20 minutes **(Young et al., 2023),** an effect that

was reduced with high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filtration **(Larsson et al., 2007)**.

Exposure of healthy individuals to traffic-related air pollution in tunnels also induced mild lower airway inflammation and early activation of bronchial epithelial signaling pathways **(Qiu et al., 2019)**. Multiple regression analyses suggest that in-vehicle pollutant concentrations are mainly influenced by roadside levels, temperature, and ventilation settings **(London Underground., 2024)**.

Air pollutant levels inside subway tunnels have been more extensively studied both within and outside Spain. Critical reviews indicate that subway tunnel air pollution can be more harmful to health than outdoor air **(Zhao et al., 2017)**. Concentrations inside tunnels were reported as 2–14 times higher than outdoors, and inside train carriages, $cPM_{2.5}$ ranged from 18 to 36 μg/m³.

$cPM_{2.5}$ are higher in underground environments due to poor ventilation and frequent train traffic **(Cartenì et al., 2015)**, with deeper stations showing higher particle levels **(Figueroa-Lara et al., 2019)**. In Canada, studies of subway $PM_{2.5}$ composition identified iron (Fe) as the dominant component **(Van Ryswyk et al., 2017)**. In the USA, $cPM_{2.5}$ levels in underground systems of various cities were extremely high: 779 ± 249, 548 ± 207, 341 ± 147, 327 ± 136, and 112 ± 46.7 μg/m³, compared with outdoor levels of 20.8 ± 9.3, 24.1 ± 9.3, 12.0 ± 7.8, 10.0 ± 2.7, and 12.6 ± 12.6 μg/m³, respectively **(Luglio et al., 2021)**. Coal and iron accounted for approximately 80% of subway $PM_{2.5}$.

In the London Underground, annual $cPM_{2.5}$ measurements are publicly available for both platforms and driver cabins **(Smith et al., 2020)**. Mean subway concentrations were 88 μg/m³, compared with 22 μg/m³ outdoors **(Smith et al., 2020)**, with iron oxide representing 47% of the particulate composition.

Subway dust is considered more toxic than outdoor PM, inducing higher genotoxicity in cultured human lung cells **(Loxham and Nieuwenhuijsen, 2019)**, likely due to its high iron content. Although in vivo evidence is limited, in vitro studies confirm significant toxicity. Its toxicity has been compared to welding fumes **(Loxham and Nieuwenhuijsen, 2019; Health and Safety Executive)**.

Occupational exposure in the metro shows mixed results. London Underground staff exposed to high PM levels did not exhibit clear associations with absenteeism **(Mak et al., 2024)**. However, highly exposed employees in the Stockholm underground showed elevated cardiovascular risk markers compared with low-exposure staff **(Bigert et al., 2008)**.

In Barcelona, subway $cPM_{2.5}$ levels inside trains ranged from 11 to 32 μg/m³, while platforms were higher, averaging 46 μg/m³ (Line 9) and 125 μg/m³ (Line 3) **(Querol et al., 2012)**.

For an annual average outdoor $cPM_{2.5}$ level of 19 µg/m³ (Madrid, 2003–2005), the relative risk (RR) of daily overall respiratory mortality was 1.028 (1.004–1.052); occurring at lag 1 for respiratory failure, RR was 1.082 (1.012–1.151) **(Guaita et al., 2011)**.

Variability in $cPM_{2.5}$ may be attributed to differences in ventilation, air conditioning, wheel and braking materials, seasonal changes, and passenger density **(Moreno et al.,2014)**, with an estimated increase of 0.4 µg/m³ per passenger during peak hours **(Xu et al., 2016)**. Concentrations tend to be lower in summer due to increased ventilation to reduce platform temperature.

Limitations

Several limitations apply to this study. The most significant is the lack of continuous data across multiple days, stations, weather conditions, traffic intensity, and vehicle speeds in the M30 and metro. Instead, numerous spot measurements were collected at different times and months.

In metro environments, $PM_{2.5}$ is often dominated by iron-rich dust. The AB3 sensor shows a −83% bias when measuring welding smoke **(Sousan et al., 2017)**, which is chemically analogous to the hematite present in tunnels. To date, no published studies have evaluated the reliability of optical sensors such as the AB3 for assessing iron-rich $PM_{2.5}$, highlighting the need for future measurements to employ validated non-optical methods to ensure accuracy. If such an extreme bias truly reflects real-world conditions, the degree of underestimation in our data would be even more concerning.

The health risks of short-term exposure to $cPM_{2.5}$ for 15–20 minutes remain uncertain due to the lack of targeted studies. Accumulation and repeated high exposures over days, weeks, or months are assumed to have a greater health impact. Epidemiologically, even short exposures can have significant public health consequences if large populations are affected. In 2023, 374 million vehicles circulated on the M30, and 662 million passengers used the Madrid Metro, including sensitive individuals such as the elderly, children, pregnant women, or individuals with chronic cardiopulmonary diseases **(Hernandez et al., 2025)**.

CONCLUSIONS

Substantial international evidence indicates excessive $cPM_{2.5}$ pollution inside urban tunnels with high vehicle traffic and within metro systems. Official data for $cPM_{2.5}$ in Madrid's M30 and metro were unavailable to the authors. However, the spot measurements presented here demonstrate that $cPM_{2.5}$ may have health implications, particularly for susceptible populations.

Deployment of $cPM_{2.5}$ monitors in urban tunnels with heavy traffic, as well as on metro platforms and inside train carriages, is recommended. Measuring pollutant concentrations in these environments is justified by high vehicle and passenger flows and by estimates of preventable mortality in Madrid (**López-Encuentra et al**., 2025). The resulting data should be publicly available to

inform users and protected when necessary. If $cPM_{2.5}$ exceeds thresholds, corrective measures must be implemented accordingly.

Words: 3606

Acknowledgements: Coordinadora Vecinal Distrito Latina (COVELA), Madres por el Clima Lourdes and Citizen Science contributors: Inés López Pérez, Elia Pozo, Alba López Tinahones, Raquel Piqueras, Francisco José García, Miguel Angel Pavón Morales, Carlos FG.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare not to have any conflicts of interest that may be considered to influence directly or indirectly the content of the manuscript.

Funding: This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Artificial Intelligence Involvement: The entire manuscript and supplementary material have not been, neither completely nor partially, produced with the help of any generative artificial intelligence software or tool.

Authors' Contributions: All authors have contributed equally to the concept, revision, writing and editing of this work.

REFERENCES

1. **Advisory Committee on Tunnel Air Quality** (2018) *Criteria for in-tunnel and ambient air quality*. November. Available at: https://www.chiefscientist.nsw.gov.au/independent-reports/tunnel-air-quality (Accessed: 1 October 2025).
2. **Ayuntamiento de Madrid** (n.d.) *Calidad del aire de los túneles de la M-30*. Available at: https://datos.madrid.es/portal/site/egob/menuitem.3efdb29b813ad8241e830cc2a8a409a0/?vgnextoid=892c7e4000897610VgnVCM2000001f4a900aRCRD&vgnextchannel=102612b9ace9f310VgnVCM100000171f5a0aRCRD&vgnextfmt=default (Accessed: 1 October 2025).
3. **Bigert, C., Alderling, M., Svartengren, M., Plato, N., de Faire, U. and Gustavsson, P.** (2008) 'Blood markers of inflammation and coagulation and exposure to airborne particles in employees in the Stockholm underground', *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 65, pp. 655–658. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1136/oem.2007.038273
4. **Bloss, W.** (2021) *Air pollution: science shows there's no safe limit – here's how laws must change*. *The Conversation*. Available at: https://theconversation.com/air-pollutionscience-shows-theres-no-safe-limit-heres-how-laws-must-change-167223 (Accessed: 1 October 2025).
5. **Cartenì, A., Cascetta, F. and Campana, S.** (2015) 'Underground and ground-level particulate matter concentrations in an Italian metro system', *Atmospheric Environment*, 101, pp. 328–337. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.atmosenv.2014.11.030
6. **ConBici** *¿Es saludable la calidad del aire en el Metro de Madrid?* Available at: https://conbici.org/noticias/noticias-nacionales/es-saludable-la-calidad-del-aire-en-el-metro-de-madrid (Accessed: 1 October 2025).
7. **Council of the European Union** (2024) *Air quality: Council ready to start talks with Parliament on new rules to strengthen standards in the EU*. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/ES/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L_202402881 (Accessed: 1 October 2025).
8. **del Rey Llorente, I., Espinosa Antelo, I. and Alarcón Álvarez, E.** (2005) 'Criterios de seguridad en los túneles de la Calle 30. Sistemas de ventilación', *Revista de Obras Públicas*, 3454, pp. 59–70.
9. **Donostiarrak** *Contaminación por partículas $PM_{2.5}$ en el interior del Metro y la Gran Vía de Madrid*. Available at: https://www.donostiarrak.com/es/content/contaminacion-por-particulas-pm25-en-el-interior-del-metro-y-la-gran-de-madrid (Accessed: 1 October 2025).
10. **elDiario.es** *Los viajeros del Metro de Madrid respiran hasta cinco veces más contaminación que en el exterior*. Available at: https://www.eldiario.es/madrid/viajeros-metro-madrid-respiran-contaminacion_1_1657096.html (Accessed: 1 October 2025).
11. **EMESA M-30** (n.d.) *Proyecto de renovación del Centro de Control de Madrid Calle 30*. Available at: https://www.emesa-m30.es/renovacion-centro-de-control-de-madrid-calle-30/ (Accessed: 1 October 2025).
12. **Envira** (n.d.) *Metro de Madrid utiliza tecnología IoT para monitorizar la calidad del aire*. Available at: https://envira.es/metro-de-madrid-utiliza-

tecnologia-iot-para-monitorizar-la-calidad-del-aire/ (Accessed: 1 October 2025).

13. **Figueroa-Lara, J.J., Murcia-González, J.M., García-Martínez, R., Romero-Romo, M., Torres Rodríguez, M. and Mugica-Álvarez, V.** (2019) 'Effect of platform subway depth on the presence of airborne PM2.5, metals, and toxic organic species', *Journal of Hazardous Materials*, 377, pp. 427–436. Available at: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0304389419306351
14. **Froeling, F., Gignac, F., Toran, R. et al.** (2024) 'Implementing co-created citizen science in five environmental epidemiological studies in the CitieS-Health project', *Environmental Research*, 240, article 117469. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envres.2023.117469
15. **Guaita, R., Pichiule, M., Maté, T. et al.** (2011) 'Short-term impact of particulate matter ($PM_{2.5}$) on respiratory mortality in Madrid', *International Journal of Environmental Health Research*, 21, pp. 260–274. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/09603123.2010.544033
16. **Guo, X., Sun, G., Xu, X. et al.** (2025) 'Benefit–harm trade-offs of intensive blood pressure control versus standard blood pressure control on cardiovascular and renal outcomes: an individual participant data analysis of randomised controlled trials', *The Lancet*, 406, pp. 1009–1019. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(25)01391-1
17. **Health and Safety Executive** (n.d.) *Health risks from welding*. Available at: https://www.hse.gov.uk/welding/health-risks-welding.htm (Accessed: 1 October 2025).
18. **Hernandez, H., Santamaria-Garcia, H., Moguilner, S. et al.** (2025) 'The exposome of healthy and accelerated aging across 40 countries', *Nature Medicine*, 31, pp. 3089–3100. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1038/s41591-025-03808-2
19. **Hudda, N., Eliasziw, M., Hersey, S.O. et al.** (2021) 'Effect of reducing ambient traffic-related air pollution on blood pressure: a randomized crossover trial', *Hypertension*, 77, pp. 823–832. Available at: https://www.ahajournals.org/doi/10.1161/HYPERTENSIONAHA.120.15580
20. **Jiang, N., Lv, Z., Zhang, R. et al.** (2024) 'Characteristics, source analysis, and health risk of $PM_{2.5}$ in the urban tunnel environment associated with E10 petrol usage', *Environmental Science and Pollution Research*, 31, pp. 30454–30466. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/s11356-024-33194-0
21. **Kampa, M. and Castanas, E.** (2008) 'Human health effects of air pollution', *Environmental Pollution*, 151, pp. 362–367. DOI: 10.1016/j.envpol.2007.06.012
22. **Larsson, B.M., Sehlstedt, M., Grunewald, J. et al.** (2007) 'Road tunnel air pollution induces bronchoalveolar inflammation in healthy subjects', *European Respiratory Journal*, 29, pp. 699–705. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1183/09031936.00035706
23. **Liu, J., Li, Y., Ge, J. et al.**, on behalf of the ESPRIT Collaborative Group (2024) 'Lowering systolic blood pressure to less than 120 mm Hg versus less than 140 mm Hg in patients with high cardiovascular risk with and without diabetes or previous stroke: an open-label, blinded-outcome, randomised trial', *The Lancet*, 404, pp. 245–255. Available at:

https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(24)01028-6/abstract

24. **López-de Abajo, L., Alberti, M.G. and Gálvez, J.C.** (2024) 'Pollutant concentration prediction from traffic data analysis for concrete durability studies in Madrid Calle 30 urban tunnels', *Tunnelling and Underground Space Technology*, 144, article 105477. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tust.2023.105477
25. **López-Encuentra, A., Gil Cid, E., Abraira, V. et al.** (2025) 'Avoidable mortality burden attributable to $PM_{2.5}$n Madrid (Spain)', *Open Respiratory Archives*, 7, article 100494. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.opresp.2025.100494
26. **Loxham, M. and Nieuwenhuijsen, M.J.** (2019) 'Health effects of particulate matter air pollution in underground railway systems: a critical review of the evidence', *Particle and Fibre Toxicology*, 16, article 12. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1186/s12989-019-0296-2
27. **Luglio, D.G., Katsigeorgis, M., Hess, J. et al.** (2021) '$PM_{2.5}$ concentration and composition in subway systems in the Northeastern United States', *Environmental Health Perspectives*, 129. Available at: https://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/doi/full/10.1289/EHP7202
28. **Luglio, D.G., Huynh, T., Saporito, A. and Gordon, T.** (2023) 'Investigation of a river-tunnel effect on $PM_{2.5}$ concentrations in New York City subway stations', *Transportation Research Part D: Transport and Environment*, 115, article 103579. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.trd.2022.103579
29. **Ma, Y., Nobile, F., Marb, A. et al.** (2024) 'Short-term exposure to fine particulate matter and nitrogen dioxide and mortality in 4 countries', *JAMA Network Open*, 7, article e2354607. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.54607
30. **Mak, J., Feary, J., Amaral, A.F.S., Marczylo, E., Cullinan, P. and Green, D.C.** (2024) 'Occupational exposure to particulate matter and staff sickness absence on the London underground', *Environment International*, 185, article 108529. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envint.2024.108529
31. **Manisalidis, I., Stavropoulou, E., Stavropoulos, A. and Bezirtzoglou, E.** (2020) 'Environmental and health impacts of air pollution: a review', *Frontiers in Public Health*, 8, article 14.
32. **Marks, G.B.** (2022) 'Misuse of pollution reference standards: no safe level of air pollution', *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine*, 205, pp. 984–985. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1164/rccm.202201-0160ED
33. **Martins, V., Moreno, T., Minguillón, M.C. et al.** (2016) 'Origin of inorganic and organic components of $PM_{2.5}$ in subway stations of Barcelona, Spain', *Environmental Pollution*, 208, pp. 125–136. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envpol.2015.07.004
34. **Miller, M.R. and Newby, D.E.** (2020) 'Air pollution and cardiovascular disease: car sick', *Cardiovascular Research*, 116, pp. 279–294. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1093/cvr/cvz228
35. **Moreno, T., Pérez, N., Reche, C. et al.** (2014) 'Subway platform air quality: assessing the influences of tunnel ventilation, train piston effect

and station design', *Atmospheric Environment*, 92, pp. 461–468. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.atmosenv.2014.04.043

36. **Moreno, T., Reche, C., Rivas, I. et al.** (2015) 'Urban air quality comparison for bus, tram, subway and pedestrian commutes in Barcelona', *Environmental Research*, 142, pp. 495–510. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envres.2015.07.022
37. **Nieuwenhuijsen, M., Gómez-Perales, J.E. and Colvile, R.N.** (2007) 'Levels of particulate air pollution, its elemental composition, determinants and health effects in metro systems', *Atmospheric Environment*, 41, pp. 7995–8006. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.atmosenv.2007.08.002
38. **Orellano, P., Reynoso, J., Quaranta, N., Bardach, A. and Ciapponi, A.** (2020) 'Short-term exposure to particulate matter (PM_{10} and $PM_{2.5}$), nitrogen dioxide (NO2), and ozone (O3) and all-cause and cause-specific mortality: systematic review and meta-analysis', *Environment International*, 142, article 105876. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envint.2020.105876
39. **Pérez-Prada, F. and Monzón, A.** (2014) 'How lowering speed limits in an urban highway affects traffic performance and emissions: the case of Madrid M-30 ring-road'. In: *XI Congreso de Ingeniería del Transporte (CIT 2014)*, pp. 1–16. Available at: https://oa.upm.es/31150/ (Accessed: 1 October 2025).
40. **Qiu, Z., Liu, W., Gao, H.O. and Li, J.** (2019) 'Variations in exposure to in-vehicle particle mass and number concentrations in different road environments', *Journal of the Air & Waste Management Association*, 69, pp. 988–1002. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/10962247.2019.1629357
41. **Querol, X., Moreno, T., Karanasiou, A. et al.** (2012) 'Variability of levels and composition of PM_{10} and $PM_{2.5}$5 in the Barcelona metro system', *Atmospheric Chemistry and Physics*, 12, pp. 5055–5076. Available at: https://acp.copernicus.org/articles/12/5055/2012/acp-12-5055-2012.html
42. **Skerker, J.** (2017) *The contribution of highway tunnels to airborne particle concentrations in an urban area*. Senior Honors Thesis. Tufts University, School of Engineering, Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering.
43. **Smith, J.D., Barratt, B.M., Fuller, G.W. et al.** (2020) '$PM_{2.5}$ on the London Underground', *Environment International*, 134, article 105188. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envint.2019.105188
44. **Sousan, S., Koehler, K., Hallett, L. and Peters, T.M.** (2017) 'Evaluation of consumer monitors to measure particulate matter', *Journal of Aerosol Science*, 107, pp. 123–133. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaerosci.2017.02.013
45. **Sun, Y., Milando, C.W., Spangler, K.R. et al.** (2024) 'Short-term exposure to low level ambient fine particulate matter and natural cause, cardiovascular, and respiratory morbidity among US adults with health insurance: case time series study', *BMJ*, 384, article e076322. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj-2023-076322
46. **Svartengren, M., Strand, V., Bylin, G. et al.** (2000) 'Short-term exposure to air pollution in a road tunnel enhances the asthmatic

response to allergen', *European Respiratory Journal*, 15, pp. 716–724. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1034/j.1399-3003.2000.15d15.x

47. **Transport for London** (2024) *Airborne dust monitoring at selected London Underground train stations*. Available at: https://content.tfl.gov.uk/station-dust-monitoring-july-august-2024.pdf (Accessed: 1 October 2025).
48. **Van Ryswyk, K., Anastasopolos, A.T., Evans, G. et al.** (2017) 'Metro commuter exposures to particulate air pollution and $PM_{2.5}$-associated elements in three Canadian cities: the urban transportation exposure study', *Environmental Science & Technology*, 51, pp. 5713–5720. Available at: https://pubs.acs.org/doi/10.1021/acs.est.6b05775
49. **Vanbrabant, K., Van Dam, D., Bongaerts, E. et al.** (2024) 'Accumulation of ambient black carbon particles within key memory-related brain regions', *JAMA Network Open*, 7, article e245678. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.5678
50. **Vohland, K., Land-Zandstra, A., Ceccaroni, L. et al.** (n.d.) *The science of citizen science*. Switzerland AG: Springer. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-58278-4
51. **Wang, W.C., Dat, N.D., Chi, K.H. and Chang, M.B.** (2021) 'Characterization of $PM_{2.5}$and particulate PAHs emitted from vehicles via tunnel sampling in different time frames', *Aerosol and Air Quality Research*, 21, article 210074. Available at: https://doi.org/10.4209/aaqr.210074
52. **Wei, Y., Qiu, X., Sabath, M.B. et al.** (2022) 'Air pollutants and asthma hospitalization in the Medicaid population', *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine*, 205, pp. 1075–1083. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1164/rccm.202107-1596OC
53. **Wei, Y., Feng, Y., Danesh Yazdi, M. et al.** (2024) 'Exposure-response associations between chronic exposure to fine particulate matter and risks of hospital admission for major cardiovascular diseases: population based cohort study', *BMJ*, 384, article e076939. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj-2023-076939
54. **Wei, Y. and Schwartz, J.** (2024) 'The updated WHO air quality guidelines are a big step forward but not a complete solution', *BMJ*, 384, article q542. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.q542
55. **World Health Organization** (2021) *WHO global air quality guidelines: particulate matter ($PM_{2.5}$ and PM_{10}), ozone, nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide and carbon monoxide: executive summary*. Available at: https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240034228 (Accessed: 1 October 2025).
56. **World Health Organization** (2025) *The Global Health Observatory*. Updated 7 August 2025. (Accessed: 1 October 2025).
57. **Xu, B., Yu, X., Gu, H., Miao, B., Wang, M. and Huang, H.** (2016) 'Commuters' exposure to $PM_{2.5}$ and CO2 in metro carriages of Shanghai metro system', *Transportation Research Part D: Transport and Environment*, 47, pp. 162–170. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.trd.2016.05.001
58. **Yang, W., Xu, R., Yang, T. et al.** (2024) 'Estimates of global mortality burden associated with short-term exposure to fine particulate matter

($PM_{2.5}$', *The Lancet Planetary Health*, 8, pp. e146–e155. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196(24)00003-2

59. **Young, M.T., Jansen, K., Cosselman, K.E. et al.** (2023) 'Blood pressure effect of traffic-related air pollution: a crossover trial of in-vehicle filtration', *Annals of Internal Medicine*, 176, pp. 1586–1594. Available at: https://doi.org/10.7326/M23-1309
60. **Zamorategui-Molina, A., Gutiérrez-Ortega, N.L., Baltazar-Vera, J.C., Del Ángel-Soto, J. and Tirado-Torres, D.** (2021) 'Carbon monoxide and particulate matter concentrations inside the road tunnels of Guanajuato City, Mexico', *Aerosol and Air Quality Research*, 21, article 210039. Available at: https://doi.org/10.4209/aaqr.210039
61. **Zhao, L., Wang, J., Gao, H.O. et al.** (2017) 'Evaluation of particulate matter concentration in Shanghai's metro system and strategy for improvement', *Transportation Research Part D: Transport and Environment*, 53, pp. 115–127. Available at: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1361920916304102
62. **Zhao, Y., Jiang, C.H., Song, X., Li, Z. and Zhang, Y.** (2021) 'Modelling particle diffusion patterns inside urban road tunnels in Dalian, China, employing annual field measurement', *Building and Environment*, article 107681. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.buildenv.2021.107681
63. **Zhou, R., Wang, S., Shi, C. et al.** (2014) 'Study on the traffic air pollution inside and outside a road tunnel in Shanghai, China', *PLoS ONE*, 9, article e112195. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0112195

776
777 .

Measurement No	Date	Tunnel entry time
1	2024/1/26	17.45
2	2024/2/11	18.31
3	2024/9/16	11.38
4	2024/9/17	9.25
5	2024/9/26	10.16
6	2024/9/27	18.03
7	2024/9/27	19.52
8	2024/9/30	8.33
9	2024/9/30	13.56
10	2024/10/24	8.57
11	2024/10/24	9.52
12	2024/10/24	12.01
13	2024/10/24	17.44
14	2024/11/4	8.56
15	2024/11/4	13.52

778
779
780 **TABLE 1.** Spot measurements of $cPM_{2.5}$ into road tunnel (M30). Mean travel
781 time through the tunnel: 14 min
782

Station	Mean $PM_{2.5}$ (µg/m³)	Standard Deviation $PM_{2.5}$ (µg/m³)	Median $PM_{2.5}$ (µg/m³)	Min–Max $PM_{2.5}$ (µg/m³)	Mean HR (%) HR Min–Max (%)	PM2.5 Outdoor
P. ANGEL	19.6	4.98	22	10 – 30	47.5 46 – 49	8
P. ANGEL	18.6	2.1	18	12 – 24	66 60 – 72	10
C CAMINOS	14.8	2.9	15	9 – 22	51 50 – 53	10
ARGUELLES	13.1	1.7	13	10 – 16	69 67 – 71	8
OPORTO	32.4	5.2	30	23 – 46	50 48 – 58	5
M VADILLO	15.2	1.9	15	8 – 20	54 48 – 58	7
AV AMERICA	10	1.7	10	7 – 14	48 47 – 51	5
LEGAZPI	11	2.3	10	6 – 16	53 50 – 56	7

TABLE 2. Spot measurements of $cPM_{2.5}$ on platforms of the Madrid Metro. $PM_{2.5}$ concentrations are expressed in micrograms per cubic meter (µg/m³). HR indicates relative humidity. Observation durations are in minutes**.**

Metro Line (*)	Start Time	Observation Duration (min)	Mean $PM_{2.5}$ (µg/m³)	Standard Deviation $PM_{2.5}$ (µg/m³)	Median $PM_{2.5}$ (µg/m³)	Min–Max $PM_{2.5}$ (µg/m³)	Mean RH (%)	RH Min–Max (%)
L2 c	7:14	840	5.8	2.6	6	1–25	37	28–47
L6 c	10:17	59	17.8	6.2	18.6	7.5–37.6	47	41–62
L6 c	11:18	58	11.7	3.9	10.3	6–22	56	49–68
L6 p	11:47	15	16	1.9	15	13–19	53	51–54
L6 p	12:37	14	9	1.7	9	7–12	49	48–50
L5 p	10:44	35	9.2	1.6	8.6	7–12	48	43–57
L5 p	11:22	15	8.3	1.8	8.1	5.6–11	44	43–46
L5 p	11:44	21	8.8	1.1	8.9	6.7–12	43.5	43–44
L5 p	11:47	15	16	1.9	15	13–19	53	51–54
L5 p	11:21	31	11	2.5	11	7–19	46	44–49
L5 p	11:57	40	9.5	2.1	9.3	6–15	44	42–49
L5 p	12:43	60	6.2	1.9	6.3	2–11	45	40–57

TABLE 3. Spot Measurements of $cPM_{2.5}$ Inside Madrid Metro train carriages. (*) Partial data collection on the line: p; complete data collection: c. RH: Relative humidity (%). Observation durations are in minutes. $PM_{2.5}$ concentrations are in µg/m³.

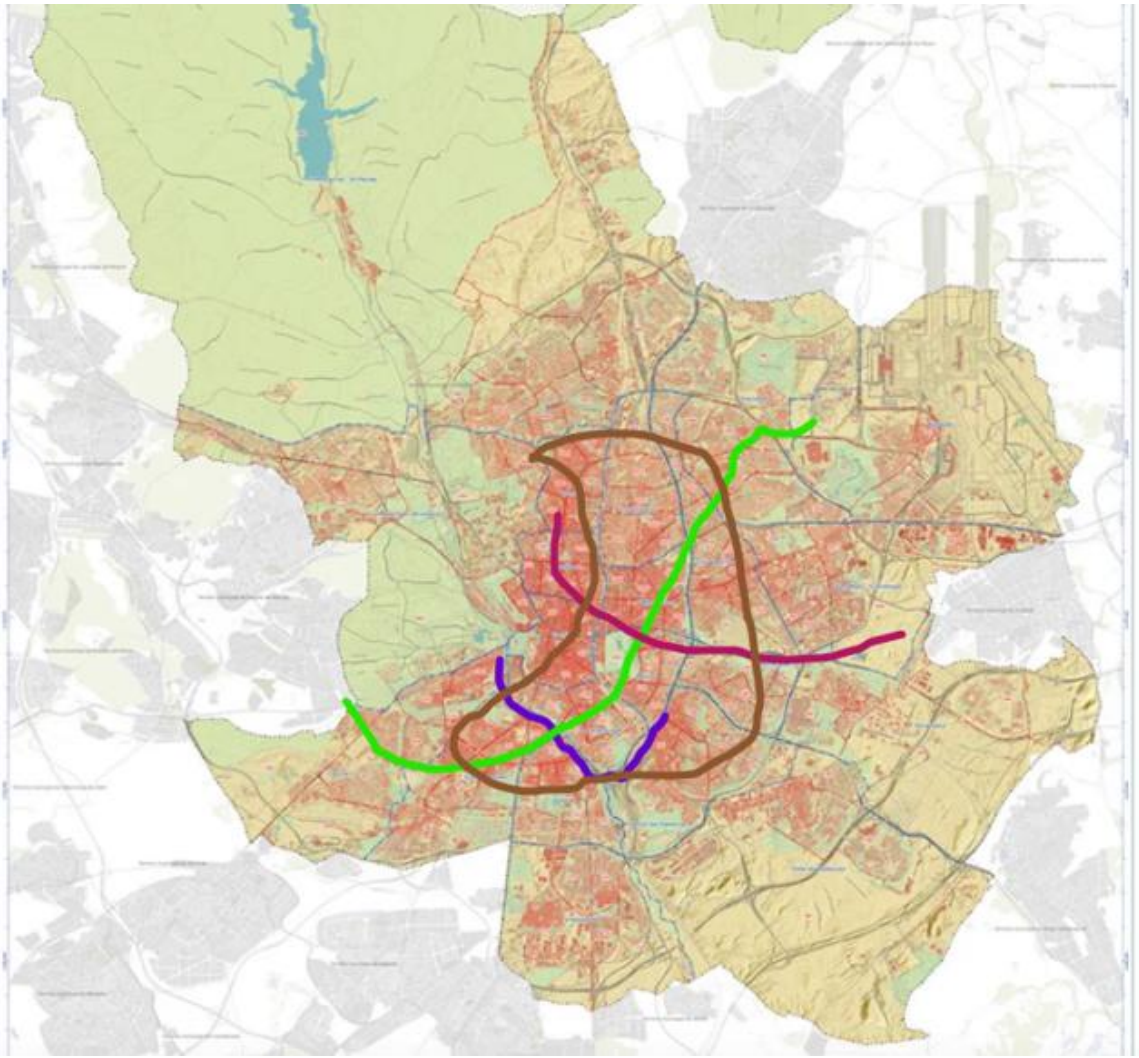


FIGURE 1. Map of the Municipality of Madrid showing the location of the M30 road tunnel (blue) and the Madrid Metro lines included in the study.

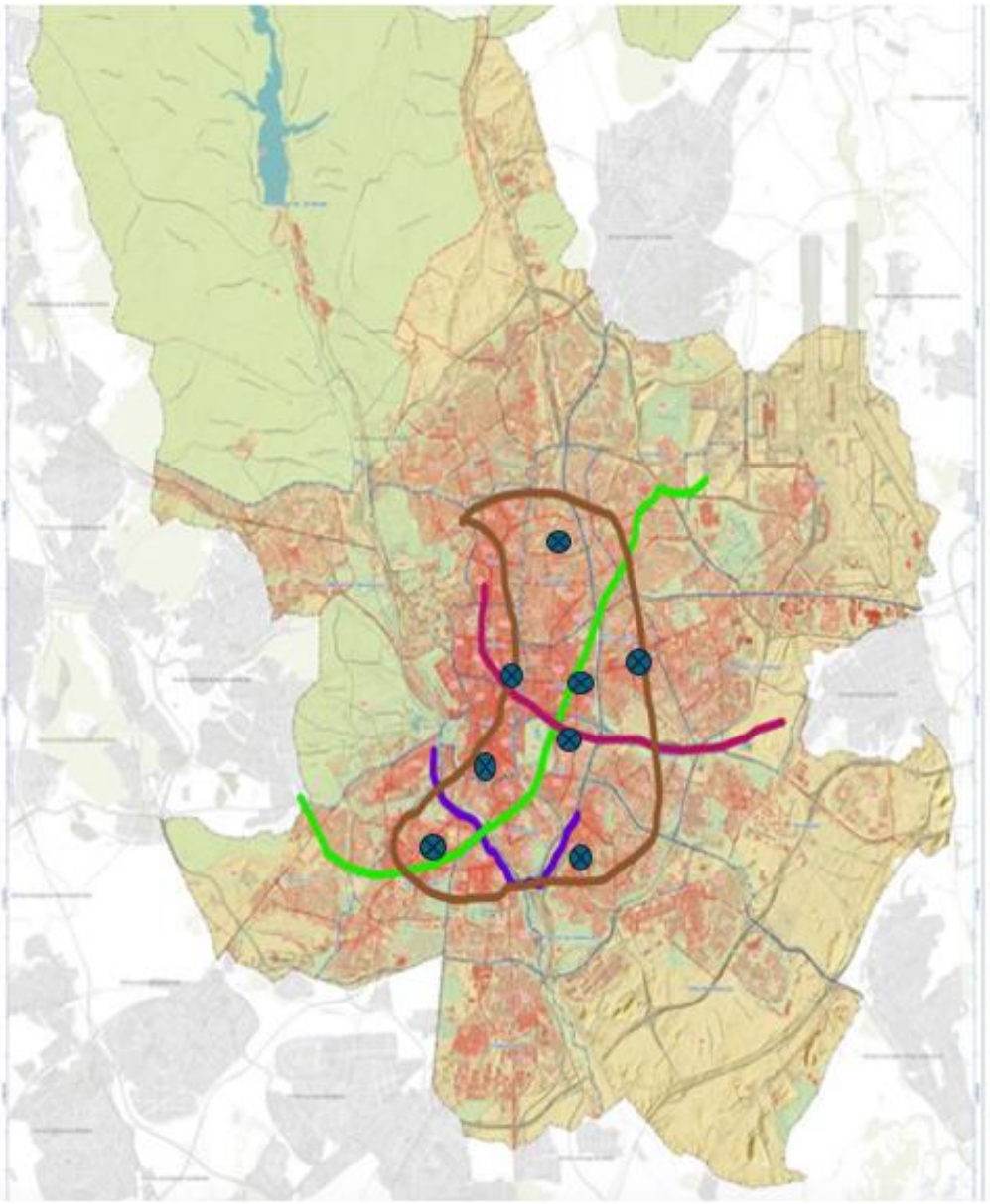


FIGURE 2. Map of the Municipality of Madrid showing the location of the M30 road tunnel (blue) and the Madrid Metro lines included in the study. The dots indicate the locations of the nearest government air quality monitoring stations to the areas investigated.

cPM$_{2.5}$ CONCENTRATION TRENDS IN M30

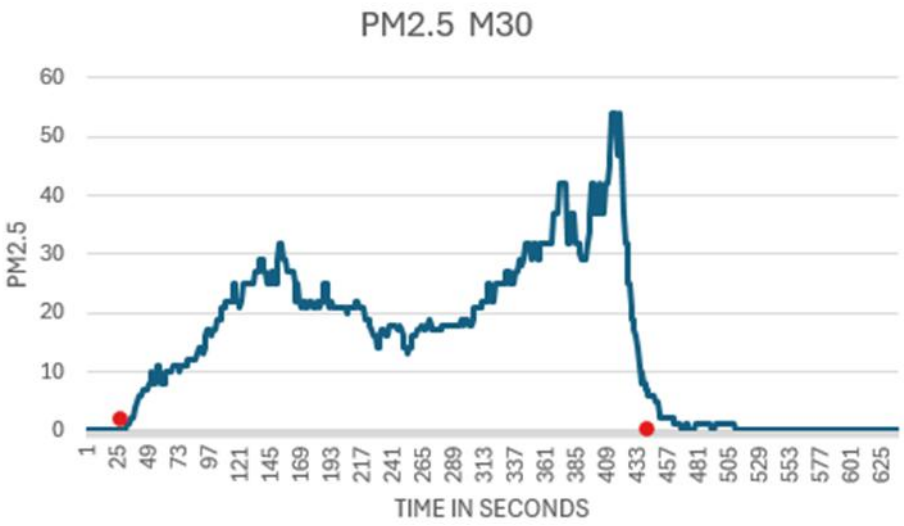


FIGURE 3. PM$_{2.5}$ in µg/m³. The start and end of the vehicle's journey in the M30 tunnel are marked with two red dots.

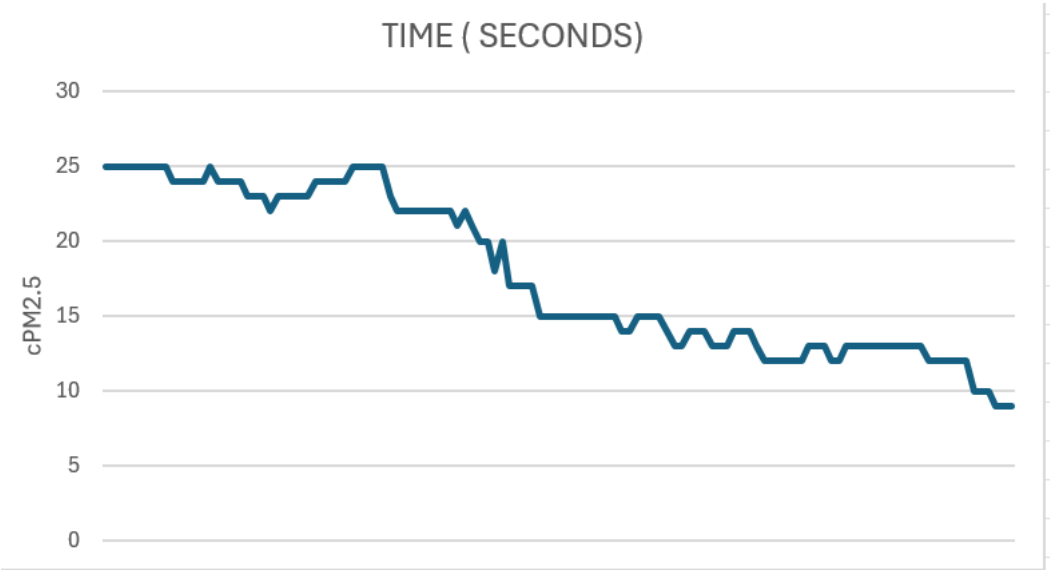


FIGURE 4. $cPM_{2.5}$ Measurements from the platform to the outdoor exit. Initial $cPM_{2.5}$ data on the platform: 25 µg/m³; final outdoor $cPM_{2.5}$ data: 9 µg/m³

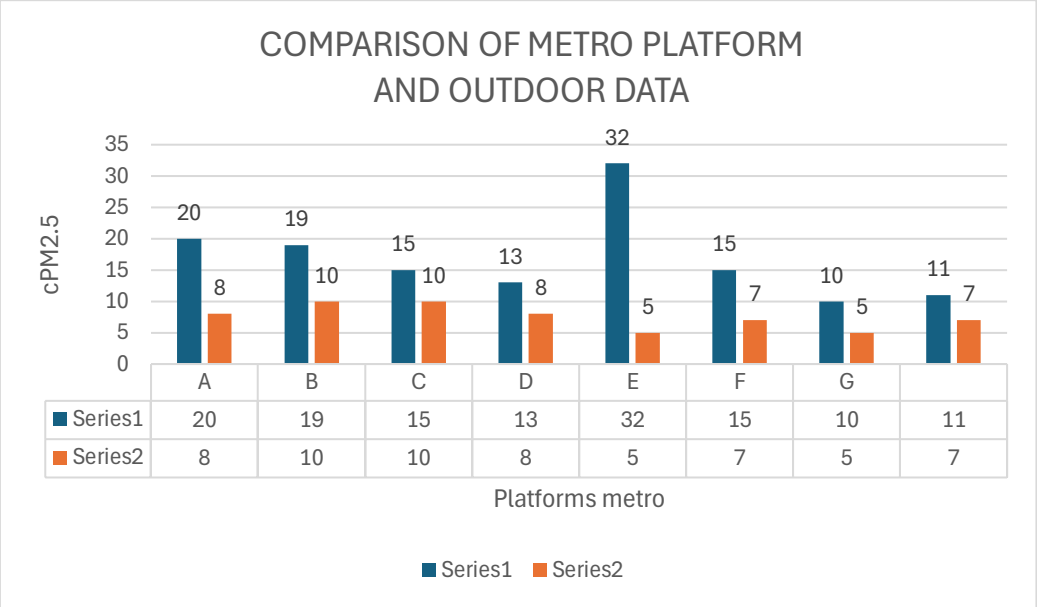


FIGURE 5. $cPM_{2.5}$ concentrations (μg/m³) at the different metro platforms (A, B, etc.) and outdoors. Series 1: Metro. Series 2: Outdoor.