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**INVESTIGATING THE EFFECT OF UNDER SLEEPER
PADS AND BALLAST MATS IN ATTENUATION OF
TRAIN INDUCED GROUND VIBRATIONS**

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DECLARATION

I declare that this is my own work and this thesis/dissertation does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any other University or Institute of higher learning and to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where the acknowledgement is made in the text. I retain the right to use this content in whole or part in future works (such as articles or books).

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The above candidate has carried out research for the PhD/MPhil/Masters thesis/dissertation under my supervision. I confirm that the declaration made above by the student is true and correct.

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Date: 29/12/2025

Prof. C. S. Lewangamage

Date: 29/12/2025

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to all those who offered unwavering support and encouragement throughout my academic journey. This achievement is not mine alone, it is also a reflection of the compassion, guidance, and solidarity of the remarkable individuals who stood by me during this transformative period.

To my principal supervisor, Dr. H. G. H. Damruwan, I express my heartfelt gratitude. Your insightful guidance, generous mentorship, and continuous encouragement have been instrumental in shaping this research. I would also like to extend my sincere thanks to my co-supervisor, Prof. C. S. Lewangamage, for providing valuable guidance on various aspects throughout this study.

I lovingly dedicate this work to my family, whose constant encouragement and patience have been my greatest strength. I also dedicate this thesis to my friends and research colleagues for their motivation, support, and positivity throughout this endeavor. Finally, this work is for anyone who is passionate about learning and committed to the pursuit of knowledge through research.

Above all, I dedicate this achievement to the people of Sri Lanka, whose contributions sustain the nation's free education system and made my academic journey possible.

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ABSTRACT

Increasing train speeds and axle loads in modern railway systems have intensified the problem of train-induced ground-borne vibration. Vibration generated at wheel–rail interface propagates through the track, ballast, and subgrade to nearby structures, causing potential discomfort, structural damage, and functional disruptions. Out of the available mitigation measures, under sleeper pads (USP) and ballast mats (BM) are very feasible methods that can be adapted in urban areas where the reserved area for track is limited. However, the complex interaction between these mitigation layers, the track system, and heterogeneous soil conditions remains insufficiently understood. This research addresses that gap through a comprehensive numerical investigation combining model validation and parametric analysis.

A three-dimensional finite element (FE) model of a coupled train–track–soil system was developed using the ABAQUS FE software to simulate time-domain vibration propagation. The model incorporated layered track components, rails, sleepers, ballast, sub-ballast, and subgrade, and implemented viscous boundaries to eliminate reflections from the truncated domain. A simplified three-car moving-load train model was adapted to accurately capture the vibration generation mechanisms. Model validation was performed against established field experiments from literature using several key metrics.

Following validation, a parametric study was designed to quantify the influence of USP and BM thickness and stiffness under two representative ground conditions, soft soil ($V_s = 200$ m/s) and stiff soil ($V_s = 400$ m/s). The chosen parameters, consistent with international standards and guidelines, included USP thicknesses of 8, 10, and 15 mm; stiffnesses of 0.15, 0.25, and 0.35 N/mm³; and BM thicknesses of 15, 23, and 30 mm with stiffnesses of 0.05, 0.09, and 0.22 N/mm³. Vibration attenuation was evaluated for near-field (0–10 m) and far-field (>10 m) receivers using Insertion Loss (IL) and frequency-dependent 1/3-octave band spectra.

Both USPs and BMs were found to be significantly more effective in stiff soil compared to soft soil, achieving stronger vibration reduction and extending attenuation further into the far field. In soft soil, soft or thick USPs can trigger near-field amplification due to soil–pad resonance, while stiff soil reliably delivers stable mitigation. Thicker and softer BMs provide the best performance, especially in mid-frequency bands (30–80 Hz) critical for human perception. Overall, vibration control is strongest near the track (within 10 m) and decreases with distance, with BMs offering superior and more consistent attenuation than USPs across all conditions.

The study provides clear guidance for choosing between USPs and BMs under different ground conditions, and show that simple, validated FE models can support reliable design decisions for urban rail vibration control.

Keywords: Train-induced ground vibration, Under sleeper pads, Ballast mats, Vibration attenuation

TABLE OF CONTENT

DECLARATION	I
DEDICATION	II
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	III
ABSTRACT	IV
LIST OF FIGURES	IX
LIST OF TABLES	XII
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	XIII
CHAPTER 1	1
INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background of the Study	1
1.2 Research Problem	3
1.3 Aim and Objectives	5
1.4 Scope of the study.....	5
1.5 Significance of the study	6
1.6 Guide to thesis	6
CHAPTER 2	
LITERATURE REVIEW	8
2.1 Introduction.....	8
2.1.1 Growth of Railway Transport and High-Speed Rail.....	8
2.1.2 Ground-Borne Vibration and Noise: Mechanisms and Human/Environmental Impact	9
2.1.3 Prior Local Studies on Train Induced Ground Vibrations	9
2.2 Theoretical Background.....	11
2.2.1 Vibration Generation in Railways.....	11
2.2.2 Wave Propagation in Soil	11
2.2.3 Attenuation Mechanisms.....	14
2.2.4 Receiver Response	16
2.3 Review of Modelling Techniques.....	18
2.3.1 Analytical Approaches	18
2.3.2 Numerical Approaches.....	18
2.4 Vehicle Modelling Approaches	21
2.4.1 Constant axle load models	21
2.4.2 Randomly Varying axle load models.....	22

2.4.3	Detailed multi-body vehicle models	23
2.5	Vibration Mitigation Strategies	24
2.5.1	Vehicle-Based Measures	24
2.5.2	Track-Based Measures	27
2.5.3	Measures in Propagation Path	29
2.5.4	Special Focus: Elastic Track Elements	32
2.6	Chapter Summary	34
CHAPTER 3		
METHODOLOGY		35
2.1.	Introduction to the Chapter	35
2.2.	Overview and Research Design	35
2.3.	Track Modelling	36
2.3.3.	Geometric Model	36
2.3.4.	Material Model	38
2.3.5.	Layer Interactions	38
2.3.6.	Mesh Strategy	39
2.3.7.	Boundary Conditions	41
2.4.	Vehicle Modelling	43
2.4.3.	Lumped Mass Model	44
2.4.4.	Wheel Rail Coupling	45
2.4.5.	Implementation in the FEM software	46
2.5.	Validation Strategy and Datasets	47
2.5.3.	Reference Field Measurement Studies	47
2.5.4.	Validation Metrics	49
2.6.	Chapter Summary	50
CHAPTER 4		
FE MODEL VALIDATION AND DESIGN OF PARAMETRIC STUDY		51
4.1.	Introduction	51
4.2.	Validation of 3D FE Model	51
4.2.1.	Velocity Time Histories	51
4.2.2.	Frequency Content of Vertical Velocity	53
4.2.3.	Root Mean Square Velocity (Running)	55
4.2.4.	Vibration Attenuation	56
4.2.5.	Limitations of the FE Model	58

4.3. Design of Parametric Study	59
4.3.1. Optimizing Vehicle Model to Improve Simulation Efficiency	59
4.3.2. Selection of Soil Conditions and Baseline Response	60
4.3.3. Selection of Values for the Parametric Study	62
4.4. Chapter Summary	63
CHAPTER 5	
UNDER SLEEPER PAD: PARAMETRIC STUDY AND PERFORMANCE	
EVALUATION	64
5.1. Introduction	64
5.2. Effect of Under Sleeper Pad on Soft Soil	64
5.2.1. Effect on the Waveform	64
5.2.2. Peak Decay and Quantification of Loss Along the Free Field	66
5.2.3. Frequency-Specific Analysis of the Loss	69
5.3. Effect of Under Sleeper Pad on Stiff Soil	71
5.3.1. Effect on the Waveform	71
5.3.2. Peak Decay and Quantification of Loss Along the Free Field	72
5.3.3. Frequency-Specific Analysis of the Loss	75
5.4. Chapter Summary	76
CHAPTER 6	
BALLAST MATS: PARAMETRIC STUDY AND PERFORMANCE	
EVALUATION	77
6.1. Introduction	77
6.2. Effect of Ballast Mat on Soft Soil	77
6.2.1. Effect on the Waveform	77
6.2.2. Peak Decay and Quantification of Loss Along the Free Field	79
6.2.3. Frequency-Specific Analysis of the Loss	80
6.3. Effect of Ballast Mat on Stiff Soil	82
6.3.1. Effect on the Waveform	82
6.3.2. Peak Decay and Quantification of Loss Along the Free Field	83
6.3.3. Frequency-Specific Analysis of the Loss	86
6.4. Chapter Summary	87
CHAPTER 7	
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	
7.1. Conclusion	88

7.2. Recommendations.....	90
7.3. Future Work.....	91
REFERENCES.....	92

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1:	Transmission of train induced ground vibrations from source to receiver (Ouakka et al., 2022).....	2
Figure 1.2:	Vibration measurement at the Koralawella site.....	3
Figure 1.3:	Measured vertical velocity of the house floor during passage of Train T9 at 2 seconds interval.....	4
Figure 2.1:	Historical maximum train speed timeline (UIC High Speed Department. High speed lines in the world; 2013).....	8
Figure 2.2:	Schematic and realistic mass/suspension vehicle system of a train.....	11
Figure 2.3:	Seismic wave propagation (Woods, 1968).....	12
Figure 2.4:	The three main wave forms in the ground association with the transmission (a) Rayleigh (b) Compressional (c) Shear (Peterie et al., 2014).....	14
Figure 2.5:	Exposure response curves following from a meta-analysis carried out in project, Cargovibes (Waddington et al., 2015).....	17
Figure 2.6:	A 2.5D approach.....	20
Figure 2.7:	A coupled BE/FE approach.....	20
Figure 2.8:	Track deflection due to the moving of X2000 HST (a) time history (b) frequency content (Kouroussis et al., 2014).....	22
Figure 2.9:	Simple dynamic model for multi body spring/damp system (a) 1/2 car body (b) 1/4 car body.....	23
Figure 2.10:	Different orders of wheel out-of-roundness (a) First-order (b) Second order (c) Third order (Ouakka et al., 2022).....	25
Figure 2.11:	Effects of changing wheel resilient material stiffness on ground vibration level (a) at 4 m distance (b) at 10 m distance (c) at 16 m distance (d) at 20 m distance (Kouroussis et al., 2012).....	26
Figure 2.12:	General frequency ranges of different excitation mechanisms (Ouakka et al., 2022).....	27
Figure 2.13:	Embedded railway system.....	28
Figure 2.14:	Resilient fastening system (a) high-resilience fastening system and (b) resilient pre-load fastening (Panodral, 2020).....	28
Figure 2.15:	Numerical visualization of peak particle velocity of ground during a HST passage for track at grade (left) and track on embankment (right).....	30
Figure 2.16:	Components of Under Sleeper Pads.....	32
Figure 2.17:	Illustration of BM and its installation.....	33
Figure 3.1:	Framework for the development of 3D FE model.....	36
Figure 3.2:	Basic methodological framework used in the study.....	36

Figure 3.3:	Half-track soil profile used in FE model with layer thickness....	37
Figure 3.4:	Basic layout of the track components.....	37
Figure 3.5:	Track-soil layer interactions.....	39
Figure 3.6:	Assigned connector elements for rail pad.....	39
Figure 3.7:	Comparison of wave transmission in a model with different element sizes.....	40
Figure 3.8:	Complete overview of the boundary conditions of the FE model	41
Figure 3.9:	Viscous dashpot for absorbing energy of S-waves (Cs) and P-waves (Cp).....	42
Figure 3.10:	Configuration of Thalys HST.....	43
Figure 3.11:	Lumped Mass Model.....	44
Figure 3.12:	Measured PPV as a function of distance away from track (Degrande & Schillemans, 2001).....	47
Figure 3.13:	Vertical velocity time histories at (a) 4m (b) 8m from track and frequency content of vertical velocity at (c) 4m (d) 8m during passage of Thalys HST at 314 kmph (Degrande & Schillemans, 2001).....	48
Figure 3.14:	Vertical velocity time histories at 16m from track center during passage of InterCity at 156kmph (Lombaert & Degrande, 2009b).....	48
Figure 3.15:	Vertical velocity time histories at 16m from track centre during passage of Thalys HST at 218 kmph (Lombaert & Degrande, 2009b).....	49
Figure 4.1:	Vertical velocity time histories at receivers at (a) 4 m (b) 8 m (c) 12 m (d) 16 m.....	52
Figure 4.2:	Frequency content relevant to vertical velocity at receivers (a) 4 m (b) 8 m (c) 12 m (d) 16 m.....	54
Figure 4.3:	Comparison of running V_{rms} of response from FE model with field data at receivers (a) 4m (b) 8m (c) 12m (d) 16m.....	55
Figure 5.1:	Velocity time histories of varying USP thickness on soft soil at (a) 4 m receiver and (b) 16 m receiver.....	65
Figure 5.2:	Velocity time histories of varying USP stiffness on soft soil at (a) 4 m receiver and (b) 16 m receiver.....	66
Figure 5.3:	PPV attenuation along the free field of soft soil with varying (a) USP thickness and (b) USP stiffness.....	67
Figure 5.4:	One-third octave spectrum of the insertion loss of vertical velocity across USP thickness on soft soil at (a) 4 m receiver and (b) 16 m receiver.....	69
Figure 5.5:	One-third octave spectrum of the insertion loss of vertical velocity across USP stiffness on soft soil at (a) 4 m receiver and (b) 16 m receiver.....	70

Figure 5.6:	Velocity time histories of varying USP thickness on stiff soil at (a) 4 m receiver and (b) 16 m receiver.....	71
Figure 5.7:	Velocity time histories of varying USP stiffness on stiff soil at (a) 4 m receiver and (b) 16 m receiver.....	72
Figure 5.8:	PPV attenuation along the free field of stiff soil with varying (a) USP thickness and (b) USP stiffness.....	73
Figure 5.9:	One-third octave spectrum of the insertion loss of vertical velocity across USP thickness on stiff soil at (a) 4 m receiver and (b) 16 m receiver.....	75
Figure 5.10:	One-third octave spectrum of the insertion loss of vertical velocity across USP stiffness on stiff soil at (a) 4m receiver and (b) 16m receiver.....	76
Figure 6.1:	Velocity time histories of varying BM thickness on soft soil at (a) 4 m receiver and (b) 16 m receiver (right).....	78
Figure 6.2:	Velocity time histories of varying BM stiffness on soft soil at (a) 4 m receiver and (b) 16 m receiver.....	78
Figure 6.3:	PPV attenuation along the free field of soft soil with varying (a) BM thickness and (b) BM stiffness.....	79
Figure 6.4:	One-third octave spectrum of the insertion loss of vertical velocity across BM thickness on soft soil at (a) 4m receiver and (b) 16m receiver.....	81
Figure 6.5:	One-third octave spectrum of the insertion loss of vertical velocity across BM thickness on soft soil at (a) 4m receiver and (b) 16m receiver.....	81
Figure 6.6:	PPV attenuation along the free field of stiff soil with varying (a) BM thickness and (b) BM stiffness.....	84
Figure 6.7:	One-third octave spectrum of the insertion loss of vertical velocity across BM thickness on stiff soil at (a) 4 m receiver and (b) 16 m receiver.....	86
Figure 6.8:	One-third octave spectrum of the insertion loss of vertical velocity across BM thickness on stiff soil at (a) 4 m receiver and (b) 16 m receiver.....	86

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1:	Interim vibration standards for Type 3 structures subjected to vibration due to vehicle movements (CEA, 2008).....	3
Table 1.2:	Recorded PPV on the floor of the structure during the passage of trains.....	4
Table 2.1:	Summary of the prior local studies.....	10
Table 2.2:	Material damping coefficients for different soil types (Bahrekazemi, 2004).....	16
Table 2.3:	Perception of vibration according to DIN, after (Smith et al., 2015).....	17
Table 2.4:	Different types of wave barriers and their effectiveness in attenuating ground vibrations.....	31
Table 2.5:	Classification of Under Sleeper Pads based on their stiffness (UIC).....	32
Table 3.1:	Summary of material properties of the track elements (Degrande & Schillemans, 2001).....	38
Table 3.2:	Element types and sizes of different parts of the FE model.....	40
Table 3.3:	Dashpot coefficients based on their location.....	43
Table 3.4:	Thalys HST dynamic properties (Kouroussis et al., 2011).....	43
Table 3.5:	InterCity train mass properties (Lombaert & Degrande, 2009b)....	44
Table 4.1:	Percentage variation of PPV and Vrms between FE model response and field data.....	58
Table 4.2:	Material properties for considered soft and stiff soil conditions (Bongini et al., 2012).....	61
Table 4.3:	Selected values for the parametric study.....	63
Table 5.1:	Quantified vibration reduction of varying USP thickness in soft soil.....	68
Table 5.2:	Quantified vibration reduction of varying USP stiffness in soft soil.....	68
Table 5.3:	Quantified vibration reduction of varying USP thickness in stiff soil.....	74
Table 5.4:	Quantified vibration reduction of varying USP stiffness in stiff soil.....	74
Table 6.1:	Quantified vibration reduction of varying BM thickness in soft soil.....	80
Table 6.2:	Quantified vibration reduction of varying BM stiffness in soft soil	80
Table 6.3:	Quantified vibration reduction of varying BM thickness in stiff soil.....	85
Table 6.4:	Quantified vibration reduction of varying BM stiffness in stiff soil	85

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BM	Ballast Mat
CEA	Central Environmental Authority
FE	Finite Element
FEM	Finite Element Method
HST	High-Speed Train
IL	Insertion Loss
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
P-wave	Primary (compressional) seismic wave
PPV	Peak Particle Velocity
S-wave	Secondary (shear) seismic wave
USP	Under Sleeper Pad
UIC	International Union of Railways
V_{rms}	Root-Mean-Square Velocity
V_s	Shear-wave velocity
V_p	Compressional-wave velocity