

Developing a new road user survey

January 2016



Introduction

One of Transport Focus's key responsibilities on behalf of road users is to develop a new road user survey to replace the current National Road User Satisfaction Survey (NRUSS). This is set out in the performance specification section of the Government's Road Investment Strategy for 2015-2020:

“As part of its responsibilities the Watchdog will, with stakeholder input, undertake a thorough review of the basis on which user satisfaction is assessed, and the factors that influence this. The Watchdog will investigate how best to develop new surveys that provide a more accurate picture of road user needs and wants, and the Company should support the Watchdog in this work. We expect that the new surveys will be developed for use during RP1 and initially run in parallel with the NRUSS to ensure that the results are consistent. The new surveys should be ready to replace the NRUSS by the start of RP2. They may be adopted earlier if the Watchdog, the Monitor, the Department and the Company feel it is sensible to do so.”

This short document explains progress so far and highlights a number of issues that are subject to ongoing discussions. Engagement continues with Highways England, the Department for Transport (DfT), the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) and other stakeholders. In early 2016 we will be consulting on the content of our proposed questionnaire.

If you have any questions or comments about anything in this document or the accompanying Independent Analytical Review, please contact: brigitta.horup@transportfocus.org.uk (senior insight advisor) or emma.emery@transportfocus.org.uk (road user manager).

Independent Analytical Review

To help inform our thinking, Transport Focus commissioned an Independent Analytical Review (the Review) of the existing NRUSS survey. This was led by Professor Graham Parkhurst, of the Centre for Transport and Society at the University of West of England, working with Adam Phillips of Real Research. A copy of the Review is [available here](#).

The Review recommends developing a high quality and flexible approach to collecting the views of users of the Strategic Road Network (SRN). Their key recommendation is to develop an online panel to allow the new satisfaction survey and other research to be conducted. The Review proposes that the main online survey interviews drivers only, and that they are randomly sampled, ideally from the Driver and Vehicle Licencing Agency's (DVLA) driver licence database. Those selected would be invited to opt in to the panel and could be invited to complete the satisfaction survey annually for up to three years. The satisfaction survey would take between 10 and 20 minutes to complete, be modular in design and would permit follow-up questioning. The panel would be refreshed periodically to replace panellists who had left. The Review proposes a piloting stage to test various aspects before the new survey is formally launched.

Transport Focus welcomes the Review and intends to use it and feedback from stakeholders to inform development of the new survey.

The sample

The Review proposes that only drivers of motorised vehicles are interviewed for the main survey, since drivers are likely to have higher awareness of the SRN while they are using it. The authors argue that passengers have a less comprehensive experience. In light of this recommendation we are minded to develop the new survey as a measure of driver satisfaction, but in the pilot stage we will also survey passengers in cars to allow and AN informed decision before the new survey goes live.

Discussions are continuing about the desirability of developing separate surveys among cyclists, pedestrians and horse riders who use the SRN. Similarly, we are discussing how to separately capture satisfaction with the SRN among logistics companies, coach operators and others for whom the SRN is integral to running their business.

In respect of the main survey, ensuring that the sample is representative of all drivers is very important. The DVLA's driver licence database is the only source of the 'universe' of UK-registered drivers; we therefore propose to draw our sample from it and are discussing with DVLA how this can be done. The biggest advantage of this approach is that it allows Transport Focus to draw a random sample of all drivers. In practice we would develop a specification to draw a random sample stratified by region, class of driver, and other driver information. Using the DVLA database means that we can ensure that we include 'hard-to-reach' groups that are not properly represented in NRUSS, such as drivers of buses,

coaches, light goods vehicles and heavy goods vehicles. It also allows us to ensure that we have sufficient numbers of participants such as novice drivers, older drivers and disabled drivers.

An online panel

We agree with the Review that an online panel has the potential to be a cost-effective way to collect robust data. An online approach has a number of advantages:

- it is considerably more cost-effective than alternatives, such as face-to-face interviewing and postal surveys
- online interviewing automatically routes participants through the survey, so it is more straight-forward to complete
- online surveys can be designed so that participants can use a range of devices to input their responses, which increases the accessibility of the survey
- online surveys can be designed to support interactive mapping
- online offers better options to develop more real time data reporting
- any app version of the online survey could make use of geo-fencing, which may be useful for future developments.

There are however disadvantages to a panel approach, including that:

- those invited to complete the questionnaire will be a random sample of those who have joined the panel, rather than a random sample of the 'universe' of drivers as a whole.
- drivers willing to join the panel will inevitably have different characteristics to those who were selected to join but did not.

The disadvantage of a wholly online approach is that not everyone has access to the internet. However, we note the Review's advice that internet use among drivers is likely to be around 90 per cent and rising.

Number of respondents

The sample size needed is determined by the level of sub-group analysis required. We propose that the minimum number of respondents should not be less than 20,000 and ideally would be 30,000.

This is based on being able to provide robust data by Highways England Region and Area at regular intervals. If the 20,000 respondents were equally spread across seven regions there would be 2,857 in each Highways England Region. If we reported on the findings monthly this figure would be 238. This would give a confidence interval of plus or minus 6.4 per cent at the 95 per cent confidence level. Based on this level of reporting we would not recommend a sample smaller than 20,000.

The questionnaire

We have developed a draft of the questionnaire we intend to use. It is in two parts. First, the website registration page which will collect information about the driver and, second, the trip-based satisfaction survey:

1. **Part one:** where the driver will be asked about their driving confidence; how much they enjoy driving; their vehicle and the type of journeys they usually make; and their overall satisfaction with the SRN based on experiences in the last 12 months.
2. **Part two:** where details and views about their last SRN journey are collected. Only those that have driven on the SRN in the last month will be eligible to participate. Part two will ask the overall satisfaction question which will in future be Highways England's Key Performance Indicator (KPI) in the area of user satisfaction.

Piloting

Transport Focus has appointed research agency Future Thinking to work with us on piloting the new survey. We have drawn up plans to design and test the following aspects of the new survey:

- wording of the invitation to participate
- design of the questionnaire (including the need for alternative versions for some classes of driver)
- length of the questionnaire
- need for incentives to encourage responses
- design of the website registration page
- presentation of the online survey on different devices, including smartphones
- likely registration and survey response rates by driver classes
- presentation of SRN maps on electronic devices.

There is one important development in relation to the pilots. The Review envisaged all respondents being recruited to the online panel first, from which individuals would be invited to complete the questionnaire. However, in the pilot stage we intend that half of participants will do this, while the remainder will be invited to complete the questionnaire straightaway without having first joined the panel. This will allow us to compare the two sampling approaches and to understand how the requirement to join a panel affects recruitment and response rates.

The key performance indicator (KPI) metric

Highways England's current KPI for user satisfaction is provided by the NRUSS. The KPI is a composite measure combining scores in five different areas:

- journey time

- roadwork management
- general upkeep
- information provision
- safety.

We do not propose to use a composite measure to report satisfaction in the new survey. In other Transport Focus surveys such as the National Rail Passenger Survey we ask an 'overall satisfaction with the journey' question which is the headline figure. We believe that overall satisfaction is ultimately what constitutes success or otherwise and is a highly relevant concept to survey participants. An overall satisfaction question allows people to provide their views about individual aspects of the journey, as well as provide a 'when all said and done' level of overall satisfaction. It also avoids potential perversities created by giving each question equal weight or the complication of applying an accurate weighting to each question.

Dual running between the new survey and NRUSS

The new survey is highly likely to produce a different overall satisfaction score than is reported by the NRUSS because of:

- changes to the sample structure
- the use of an overall satisfaction measure rather than a composite measure
- the introduction of weighting (to ensure that results are representative of all drivers or all journeys), and
- different methodology.

A period of dual-running is therefore proposed between the new survey and NRUSS in order to compare results and report on differences between the two measures. This will inform discussion about the overall satisfaction value within the new survey that is equivalent to the current 90 per cent target in the NRUSS.

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