National Rail Passenger Survey

Stakeholder review

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1. Executive summary

This review included a consultation with stakeholders giving us their opinion and feedback on the National Rail Passenger Survey (NRPS). The headline findings are:

a) NRPS clearly influences improving standards, as it is commonly the basis for setting action plans for operational staff. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are often an intrinsic part of this.

b) The ability to benchmark is seen as not only valuable, but a unique feature and strength of the survey.

c) Any media interest or public awareness means that the industry cannot ignore the findings and has to be seen to act.

d) The survey questionnaire is widely considered to be too long, even if this provides a source of rich data.

e) Sample size is the single most significant stakeholder issue, with the large majority (particularly TOCs) wanting an increase. Criticism was most concentrated when discussing data at a station level.

f) Building blocks are an important way of driving improvement as they allow organisations to target action.

g) Most stakeholders would appreciate a change to a quarterly survey.

h) Online analysis tools are not heavily used. The main reasons being that they are not publicised enough or that stakeholders lack confidence in being able to use them effectively.

i) There is a desire among stakeholders for the surveying and reporting processes to embrace technology more. Handheld devices and online surveying are felt not to be used enough to reflect their changing usage.

j) Scrutiny by media, DfT and ORR mean that NRPS has a high and respected profile in the industry. This scrutiny demands action and improves standards.

2. Background and objectives

NRPS (as the National Passenger Survey) was first commissioned in 1999 to measure passenger satisfaction with rail company performance on a consistent basis. It was designed to allow comparisons to be made between the Train Operating Companies (TOCs).

More than three and half years after the last review, we wanted to ensure the survey's continued usefulness to stakeholders, and to identify whether any changes or improvements are necessary. This report is the result of consulting with our key stakeholders to gather feedback and opinion. The report is accompanied by the NRPS Technical Review, carried out by Roberts-Miller Associates.

3. Our approach

In June and July 2014 we interviewed representatives of 23 external NRPS stakeholders, either in face-to-face meetings or in telephone discussions. The consultees were drawn from across a range of authorities and operators in areas where NRPS is conducted. We also consulted other organisations that are not directly involved in the survey but which nevertheless use NRPS. For full details of the consultees see appendix A.

We asked consultees to comment on all aspects of the survey, including:

- usage to impact on standards
- the questionnaire
- limitations
- frequency
- design and methodology
- fieldwork
- reporting
- organisation and industry attitude.

As part of this review we also sought feedback from internal stakeholders and this is covered separately towards the end of the report.

4. Review findings

4.1 NRPS use and impact on standards

The initial process for stakeholders commonly involves translating the data into a standard format for the particular organisation. This is then circulated to key or senior staff before being disseminated to a more operational level.

At this stage, they are looking for broad trends, in comparison with similar organisations or in the case of Train Operating Companies (TOCs) significant changes to their own historical performance. They will concentrate on issues pertinent to their particular network, for example commuters. What they hope to find are the aspects where they are doing well and where they need to look at putting resource in to improve. This will inform any press release at this stage.

Most TOCs reported that a primary use of NRPS is to compare their own performance with competitors. This might be against similar operators or with others in their business group.

Some TOCs concentrate more of their analysis on identifying the drivers of the "headline" figures, and these will be used to inform the planning stage. This might be done via the board or a specific steering group. Once completed, it is passed to teams to implement. Specific working groups may be created, but TOCs specifically mentioned:

- communications
- guards
- revenue protection teams
- station staff
- customer services.

TOCs often referred to NRPS as being a supplement to a wider suite of data available to them, and they may check whether NRPS fits in.

In devolved areas, franchise teams will report to the Minister and meet with the specific TOC to discuss all aspects of performance. It supplements data in monthly reports and is used as a guideline to set the standard. If this standard is breeched, the TOC is fined. It also feeds into any Invitations to Tender and negotiations with bidding groups.

Once action plans have been put in place, most TOCs will implement some form of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) using NRPS. Some were open enough to share that manager's bonuses are closely tied to NRPS scores showing improvement.

The collective opinion expressed by stakeholders on whether the survey is useful was very positive. In particular, the ability to benchmark was seen as a unique strength. It was described as "**priceless**" by one stakeholder in identifying areas that needed attention, and another saying it was "...**really useful. Nobody has a bigger sample size."**

Negative criticism was very rare among stakeholders, and was confined to the limiting factor of sample size. But this was rare as most others were content to see results as solid high level indicators and that the finer detail could be provided by other research. TOCs were generally happy that the results are robust enough to influence, or at least measure investment.

Overall, the feeling was that NRPS frames other research, but because it is in the public eye and has a media presence, it "**demands action**".

4.2 Areas of value

Overall satisfaction is the key score that all stakeholders home in on, predominantly to compare with other organisations. Relevant information for specific teams is picked up, if not in the first analysis, then later by other areas of the organisation.

Other than overall satisfaction, the areas analysed most depend on the characteristics of the network involved, or the types of action plans currently in place, in order to assess impact of resourcing. This will happen as a matter of course if areas of improvement have already been agreed with the Passenger Focus.

Although most stakeholders commented that all areas are looked at, most of the TOCs mentioned that they focus on those areas where they feel they can directly influence improvements. These would typically be value for money, punctuality/-reliability, information and any aspect of staff performance. This is coupled with a significant proportion of the TOCs feeling it is the key drivers of satisfaction which demand their attention.

The non-TOC stakeholders usually have an area of particular interest. For example, BTP looks at anything connected to personal security.

An echo of comment on the surveys usefulness was that a press or PR angle may push some TOCs to the area of specific interest, but this doesn't seem to be a concern across the industry.

For the large majority of stakeholders, too much information is better than too little, and so all results are looked at but with some caveats:

- Particular results are considered outside of influence (inter-modal connectivity).
- Facilities which are not provided by the TOC (toilets, car parking etc).
- It is of general interest, but not considered robust enough to base business decisions (station information with small sample numbers).
- It is of interest but cannot be made specific (station information where individual TOC influence cannot be separated from others).
- It is not within an area of specific interest (academic interest of BTP and personal security).

4.3 The questionnaire

Stakeholders expressed a range of opinions in this section. The only aspect which was close to gaining a consensus was that the questionnaire was felt to be very long, and some expressed concerns that this may affect completion rates. It is important to note though, that although suggestions were made about what might be

added (see Appendix C), there were very few suggestions as to what should be removed. This category was almost exclusively made up of removing questions concerning services that a particular TOC did not provide, for example on-train toilets.

Some mention was made of additional free text replies in order to get some more detail behind responses, particularly key drivers. There were some admissions that this would add to the length of questionnaire and time required to complete it. This demonstrated a split in stakeholders between those from the customer service or the business sides, and those who had more expertise in research and analysis. The latter were generally accepting of the questionnaire and suggested refinements rather than additions. They also felt that detail could often be found in accompanying complimentary research done by the TOCs themselves.

Some comments referred to how a lack of passenger understanding might require the questions to be redefined. For example, does the questionnaire assume that passengers are able to distinguish the responsibilities of TOCs and Network Rail?

How a passenger is defined was also mentioned. Knowledge of whether they are a Commuter / Leisure / Business user was not thought to be as useful as whether they are making a first or standard class journey would be.

There was some criticism with regard to how slow NRPS has been in including recent developments in Wi-Fi, smart phone technology and social media.

There was one request for value for money questions to be reframed to capture or encourage more detail. There was also a suggestion that a mechanism for concentrating on particular legs, and not just the whole journey should be considered.

4.4 Limitations

Sample size was by far the most significant issue. Particularly at station level, it was thought to be too small to be either significant or useful. This was slightly offset by some TOCs saying that this level of detail is provided by their own research.

Other comments around stations in this section included a perception of there being an unwanted heavy bias at large stations, the concern being that the overall perception of the TOC could be determined by the experience of just one location. This could be complicated when numerous TOCs are using the same large station, as passengers may not appreciate who is responsible for the provision of facilities.

A similar concern was brought up regarding passengers' lack of knowledge leading to unfair comparisons. For example some route comparisons are felt to be unfair due to very different TOC responsibilities for stations and very different budgets.

Multi modal comparison was an issue that was discussed by a handful of stakeholders. They felt a total picture of passenger transport would be useful. References were made to the Bus (BPS) and Tram (TPS) passenger surveys as a means of providing this. This prompted a comment that NRPS, BPS and TPS all have strengths and weaknesses that could be addressed together. From a business perspective, passengers "**may not always realise that rail can be cheaper than bus**" although this stakeholder thought that the real competition comes from car use.

Data that is felt not to be captured includes:

- technology, specifically hand held devices (for providing Passenger Information During Disruption (PIDD))
- experience of first class
- catering
- Wi-Fi
- average ticket cost (and evaluation of value for money)
- retail experience at stations.

One comment was that qualitative feedback is not facilitated with a "Would you like to be approached for further surveying...?" type of question.

The fact that the media's understanding of the data is basic was noted and it was felt that a neutral commentary on figures would start to address this.

To balance some of the negative comments on limitations, there was also the opinion that radical change is not needed, only some amendments to how the data is presented. This would be more building block options and meaningful geographical splits. Percentage scores are thought to be useful, but the ability to see average scores could be more so. Some TOCs would also want to see the split between very and fairly satisfied to give more accuracy.

A few respondents asked whether the on-line systems could be improved (esp. Reportal and the verbatim comments system).

4.5 Frequency and seasonality

On the whole, twice a year is felt to be acceptable but seen as the minimum. It was common that comparisons are more frequently made season against season, rather than wave on wave.

A significant proportion would want a quarterly survey, some stating that "**all others of this type**" are quarterly. Some felt that the current system might see TOCs focus on the months around fieldwork or publishing, but would then switch off for four months. Only some of these recognise the cost and resource implications this would cause to Passenger Focus and themselves.

A broadly equal number were happy with a biannual survey and felt that their own data could fill in the gaps. The negatives that they did identify were that they could be "**swamped**" with data and it could be off-putting for respondents.

More data is always welcome, and no one thought that an annual survey would be acceptable. Stakeholders pointed out that there is a period (given variously as anywhere between 6 -18 months) before one sees a genuine impact on NRPS data.

Some aspects of survey timing attracted polar opinion. Some would like to tap into summer data, where others thought the leisure bias would be unwelcome. Some felt that seasonality was biased against those networks prone to bad weather, where others wanted to know the impact of these conditions and felt it was the same for all.

There was a general consensus on continuity. The link to historical data is seen as crucial and any developments affecting this key ability would be unwelcome.

This section did attract some questions about how other potentially distorting factors were accounted for. For example:

- major sporting/music events
- engineering work
- fare rises
- late evening journeys (not currently covered)

4.6 Design and method

A typical comment in this section was that the survey is too long, which is assumed to be off-putting to passengers. However, it was also highlighted that this amount of questions does give "**a rich source of data.**" One stakeholder appreciated the ambition of the survey and felt the methodology was suitably robust.

In the course of interviews, four main alternatives to the existing survey methodology were discussed:

1) Online
   Use of online surveying was thought to be able to improving the completion rate as well as the speed of reporting. A suggestion was made that an event to promote this would quickly embed it as a method. However one comment

2) was that online could lose the immediacy which is considered to be important in a journey specific survey.

3) On train
Not all were aware that this is done at all. Some felt that this was not done enough, and would be a highly cost effective way in which to add station level data and increase sample size and completion rates.

4) Postal
Postal questionnaires were not particularly popular and seen as being too self-selecting to be effective or make a significant impact.

5) Face to face
Face to face would give better qualitative but less quantitative data. One stakeholder thought using the same regular respondent passengers each wave would be especially useful.

Some stated that they are "**happy to trust this to Passenger Focus**" and given the numbers involved feel the methodology is reasonable.

One stakeholder was interested to know what evidence there is that a passenger had completed the journey when filling in the questionnaire, especially on busy commuter routes.

The view from academia was that NRPS is rigorously designed and well outlined in the design and methodology document. Being journey specific it is far more useful than general passenger opinion.

As above, sample size is clearly the key criticism of NRPS. The common opinion is that station data is not represented statistically well enough to be of use. Some feel that bigger stations are also under sampled, but others feel there is a bias there, that needs to be addressed. This could be done by either increasing the scope of the survey to incorporate more types of station, or making sure that both ends of the journey are captured. This is felt more acutely on networks with many small stations.

Both TOCs and PTEs thought the sample size was too small, "**even with a clever methodology**" and some wanted more honesty about statistical significance to prevent confidence being undermined.

Many stakeholders were keen to quote figures that they felt justified their concerns. For example:

- revenue surveys are 100 times bigger
- 2000 respondents per 26M journeys (TOC)
- 1100 respondents per 86M journeys (TOC)
- 30000 respondents per 1 billion journeys.

Some compared their own sample size to NRPS to further highlight this point.

Five stakeholders had no problem with sample size, recognising the reasons for the numbers achieved. It was also pointed out that other national surveys are 2000-3000 at best and that TOCs are right about fine detail but clearly have a very different perspective and should be encouraged to concentrate more on top level data.

Sample design is generally accepted, with only station level data felt to be a problem. One comment was that they were "**not sure how this could be improved**". Another comment was that it captured the market well, but requires improvement to reduce the need for weighting.

The main criticisms of the sample design were the inability to separate data geographically and the lack of data on small stations. This lead to one comment that NRPS could not be "**considered fit for purpose in presenting data to Rail North**". This came from a PTE who thought that the survey was set up for TOCs' benefit and not PTEs.

Other individual issues included:

- more use of average scores
- the question of how to differentiate between people's behaviours, perceptions and the values that lie behind their scoring
- clear methodology and timing to ensure a good peak/off peak split
- short journeys probably having a lower response rate which leads to a bias
- separation of passenger opinion regarding another TOC's station
- whether annoyed passengers are more likely to fill the questionnaire in
- some people look at spring against autumn (and ignore seasonal differences).

4.7 Building blocks

The majority of stakeholders found this organising of data to be very useful. It allows TOCs to identify the key parts of the business that need action. They will commonly compare NRPS building blocks with other research that splits the data in the same way.

Those that do not use them feel they are not relevant to their network, but may still look at them as a comparator with other TOCs. Some of them will do this in house due to the low sample sizes which they feel are insufficient to make investment decisions.

Most of the PTEs see this as an essential tool in being able to monitor and confer with TOCs and bidding groups where relevant. One PTE though was very critical and described the sample size as "**pitiful**" making the building block data unusable.

However the majority of stakeholders that use them were positive and some asked whether this could be done more and across as many TOCs as possible, if further disaggregation was seen to be appropriate.

One Stakeholder (non-TOC) felt that building blocks should align more with service groups, whilst another felt that some or a few blocks were hard to define and should therefore be revised.

4.8 Weighting

Around a third of stakeholders reported no issue with weighting, although once again it was sample size (and with it, and understanding of completion rates) that was seen as the underlying issue. However, this group felt that there was no strong argument against it at present and were comfortable with the data it creates. This is heightened as it often matches in house data which is similarly weighted. Some trusted the experience of the research staff, while feeling that the minimum amount of adjustment made to the data the better.

There was a significant proportion who commented that the main problem is that the methodology is not understood or communicated enough. Changing this could diffuse some of the negative criticism.

Some suggestions for change were to try to address perceived bias towards large stations, and therefore the networks they feature on. One stakeholder felt that profiling from origin and destination would be better, but another felt that journey purpose would be more appropriate.

If it was changed, there would be a concern whether the new findings would be attributable to methodology or genuine opinion. Consistency across the survey and year on year was thought to be an important consideration when implementing any change.

4.9 Fieldwork

Only four stakeholders had no issues with fieldwork methodology. Others recognized that it is a difficult job, but that there is a general belief that it is carried out well and wondered "**how much money would need to be thrown at this to see a significant difference?**" One TOC stakeholder had observed surveying on other TOC services and their manner was felt to be too pressurizing. However, there is no method to police how a questionnaire is filled in. Knowing when it was done would be a good test of significance.

Picking up on other areas of the discussion, it was noted again that the survey questionnaire is very long and the question posed as to whether it could be made easier to complete. Passengers should not rush filling in the questionnaire.

Having scheduled timings is not ideal. Other TOCs are thought to try to "enhance" activity at a station after effectively having been warned. This is annoying to others, but was balanced by one TOC asking for "**more courtesy in letting staffed stations know whether they are being surveyed.**"

One comment was that surveys should be assigned according to train boarded, and not the station. This was felt to ensure representative sample sizes. Although another point about possible on train surveying was that crowded trains will have lowest satisfaction, and will be the hardest to physically survey. Some TOCs are limited along a route meaning competitors are sampled at different stations. There is a concern that this might not provide a level comparison.

Use of technology was a common theme and a few reported that mobile devices need to be considered more. Paper is easy, but takes a long time to process. Other agencies have set up the survey on a tablet for passengers to fill in on the spot. "**Online deserves to fulfil its potential**" especially if NRPS is to improve response rates and engage young people. The demographic of users is felt to be changing and needs to be tapped into.

On the other hand, those who have experience of online surveying didn't find it particularly useful, and felt that on train would be more effective in capturing more station data in particular. A greater spread could be achieved efficiently and it would also reduce TOC influence on other TOC stations. An example of this problem is car parking measured at Manchester Piccadilly across three TOCs: the same facility but the scores are 35%, 35% and 75% *(note: probably a sample size issue).*

Another suggested change for the future was a downloadable app, to allow passengers to complete offline. Those that download must be interested and it would create loyalty with the surveyors. It would also give the opportunity to send tailored results to the respondents, creating a feedback loop.

One stakeholder felt that the Passenger Focus needs to brief more to ensure good public interaction, and also that we should ensure that we engage more with TOCs

to prevent survey saturation or even the chance of a passenger being sampled twice on the same journey.

As before, sample size was felt to be the crucial factor in making improvements. A larger and more even spread across the network was noted as being desirable, but there was appreciation that this is difficult without additional budget. Therefore the survey goes to where the larger customer experience exists. This stakeholder suggested a pilot using matched funding.

4.10   Accuracy, reliability and credibility

NRPS is overwhelmingly thought to be credible and reliable. It is seen as tried and tested as *the* industry comparator prompting one TOC to say "**We use it as 'The Bible'**" and another "**As with ONS figures for other aspects of UK society, it is seen as the de facto standard. It has been copied in other countries and surveys as the scale and professionalism is so sound.**"

Data is consistent which suggests stability and the stringent methodology means it is seen as reliable.

Headline figures clearly show a good comparison between TOCs and one stakeholder described how at an intuitive level, they work. But, they went on to say trust is reduced the more you drill down.

Not everyone was complimentary or as trusting. "**Far too much weight is placed on it given small sample sizes. Significant changes should be made very clear, not fluctuations of 2% that could be entirely random.**"

Sample size once again is seen as the biggest factor that would lead to improvement. Those critical of the current level admitted to being amazed that NRPS data is consistent with TOC data that has five times the sample size.

Other stated concerns were:

- other TOCs impacting on station scores
- questions about elements not necessarily provided (toilets/car parking)
- anomalies, for example comfy seat results that fluctuate without action suggesting influence of other scores
- results are clearly affected by performance.

Finally, some were frustrated that NRPS is journey specific and does not gauge reputation. This informed their opinion that NRPS is "**credible, for what it is**".

4.11   Report format and timing

There is very little consistency in the way TOCs use the various reports. When commenting on the reports we produce, there was a mixture of those who read and use anything and everything provided ("**It's our encyclopaedia**"), and those who use the main report and may even prefer more of a cut down executive summary ("**main focus is on high level results**"). For this second group, league tables, traffic light coding and graphs were gratefully received.

There was little agreement on the preferred format of reports. Most useful were variously named as, PDF, Excel, hard copy, zipped files, CD ROM, data stick or downloadable from our website/dropbox.

A small number of stakeholders would move everything from the issued format in order to carry out their own analysis in a more familiar format. The most popular application mentioned was QPS. This was often used alongside other third party data.

When asked about timing of the reporting, around a third were content, particularly if expectations had been set. Of the others, only three thought it was time efficient, with the rest feeling it should be quicker for various reasons. The most critical described it as "**a massive problem**" and felt the data was already out of date, creating difficulty in reporting to other organisations. They were also frustrated that boosted data was not published.

The amount of analysis was broadly felt to be about right and there was an understanding that more could always be requested if it was necessary. On the other hand, some felt they were already "swamped", and any more might be ignored or wasted on them.

There was a request for a report where each TOC is presented in a dashboard to be easily digestible. This was alongside another comment that the reports should focus more on factors within TOC control.

The main criticism, only mentioned by two, was that the reports seem to be trying to achieve the impossible by being all things to all TOCs. They felt TOCs would be better drawing their own conclusions rather than having too heavy a reliance on the reports.

One stakeholder felt there should be more focus on peak/off peak analysis and more use of the recontacts database. They also asked whether the minimum sample size of 50 in the main report is appropriate and whether more data should be 'hidden' in the reports.

One stakeholder was 'slightly annoyed' that NRPS publication did not coincide with publication of their own reports, whilst another wondered whether 'special early pre-release' could be extended to be longer than three weeks before publication.

4.12 Cross-analysis and extra analysis

About half of the stakeholders regularly request extra analysis and all were impressed with the quality and time this took. Of this group, the only slight concern was that this was not done as a matter of course. The other half either didn't need extra analysis, had a colleague liaise with Passenger Focus, or carried out their own analysis.

Half of the stakeholders either did not use or only rarely used the online data tools. Those who explained why mentioned:

- they preferred in house tools (QPS or just the CD ROM)
- they use hard copy
- this task falls to other colleagues
- they are unaware of these tools
- Reportal in particular is "clunky"
- they would use them, but need guidance to develop some expertise
- they would prefer a single tool that covers everything.

The verbatim comments system seems to be the least known, although two stakeholders mentioned that their station staff will look at it. Their feedback has been that it is difficult to search within the system.

Reportal is tolerated despite its perceived limitations, but one comment was that they have used it more after some guidance was provided. Could training be provided?

Those few who have used the Open Data tool like the quick results it provides, although two stakeholders felt it was too basic and should contain more (e.g. station data and/or multivariate analysis). One stakeholder added that they wondered whether there is any new (or novel) way of presenting data that might be used.

4.13 Going forward

Sample size again featured in this section. If investment decisions are going to be made to make improvements, there needs to be more trust in the strength of opinion expressed in numbers. One stakeholder described how they felt the potential quality of NRPS was compromised by the small sample numbers. For station data, there

was a request that even if the sample size is under the level of statistical significance, it should still be made available.

Only one comment reflected contentment with the survey to continue in its current form – "**No need for major changes, just streamlining extraneous questions which could be done with the industry**".

The other individual comments were a summary of much of what had been discussed previously, where every improvement possible was mentioned by at least one stakeholder:

- "**Embrace the digital age**". Use of technology both in fieldwork and reporting would make noticeable improvements in quality and speed
- The reporting process needs to be quicker and more concise. Otherwise it needs to be sent in its raw form so the organisation can do its own analysis
- The survey needs to be more frequent and contain more analysis of the key drivers
- Verbatim comments need to be encouraged and more easily searchable to analyse in order that the necessary detail of what drives the top level scores is identified
- Sampling needs to be wider, more randomised and done on train more. This is necessary to make station data more robust
- There was a request that Passenger Focus give a presentation so staff can fully appreciate the NRPS application and the tools with which it can be analysed.

4.14   Stakeholder attitude

The perception is that the other stakeholders and the industry in general, hold NRPS in high regard and will use it at the very least, as a comparator. The word "benchmark" featured heavily in this section, throughout most discussions and reportedly at a cross-TOC communications development group. Some felt that NRPS receives a mixed reception at certain TOCs due to the results and the particular agenda that that TOC is looking to address. "**NRPS is 'Marmite' – when it works for you, you shout about it, when it doesn't you pick holes**".

NRPS' place in the media spotlight was also commented upon. Some stakeholders felt that the media naturally liked negative stories and some TOCs were very sensitive to this and worried that there was a lack of knowledge that fuelled this. Some felt that NRPS was more appropriate to be covered by the media – "**A shame that "Which?" get more press. More media attention is needed to embed the idea of a benchmark among the public as well as the industry**".

As well as media scrutiny, the Department for Transport (DfT) and the Office of Rail Regulation (ORR) are seen to play a part in raising both profile and validity of NRPS. DfT incorporating elements of the survey into franchise bids was seen as particularly powerful. ORR frequently reference NRPS data in their presentations to industry.

Enhancements in output would improve attitude further but especially if TOCs feel confident that they can affect the scores most in the public eye.

Even for those who were not the greatest advocates of NRPS, its influence had to be acknowledged – "**It has a higher standing than other, more valid customer feedback**" and another comment being "**It is seen as a necessary evil**".

The final suggestion, by three of the stakeholders was for Passenger Focus to set up a forum of TOC analysts. This would be to push NRPS, to provide feedback and to share best practice. This could be an annual event, a blog or an online forum to find the gaps and initiate discussion.

4.15 Internal stakeholder opinion

As part of this review we also sought feedback from internal stakeholders, asking Passenger Focus staff for their opinion on the same areas covered earlier in this report and for any general comments they wished to make.

The NRPS is seen as invaluable to the organisation and it is used for various purposes. In terms of the areas of the survey most used; respondents mentioned various things including the core station and train factors, route analysis, station rankings, the multivariate analysis, journey purpose analysis, peak and off-peak analysis and some analysis by region.

There was some desire to shorten the questionnaire if possible, though there were also suggestions for additional questions and revisions to some questions. One respondent felt there should be short and long versions of the questionnaire.

In terms of limitations there is a desire to cover more stations and to know more about stations, though there was an awareness that an increased sample size would also be needed.

At a minimum the survey needed to be done as now in terms of frequency (i.e. twice a year), but there was also a strong desire for it to be more frequent (e.g. quarterly or three times a year and one respondent asked about the possibility of a rolling survey) so that changes or improvements on the rail network could be more quickly picked up, but there was a recognition that additional funding would probably be needed.

On design and methodology, the issue of sample sizes was again mentioned with a view to making the results more robust. Possibly more use of technology could be made. One respondent also mentioned that an internal 'education session' might be useful so that staff are more aware of, for example, the methodology (and where NRPS material was kept on internal systems).

Being able to show satisfaction by 'Building Block' was seen as very important, though one respondent felt the usefulness was slightly diluted in that some Building Blocks were by groups of stations rather than by origin and destination of trains. He felt that they should all be defined in a similar way.

There was little comment on how the survey was weighted.

In terms of fieldwork, paper based was felt to be OK, though two of the three respondents mentioned potential greater use of technology, although it needs to be done correctly. Also, could there be short and long versions of the questionnaire? Could more fieldwork be done on train?

In terms of accuracy the survey was felt to be accurate for the sample size.

Regarding the reports produced there were some contrasting views expressed, although the paper format was still felt to be useful by all. One staff member felt the main report still looked fresh and was happy with it, though perhaps there could be some use of infographics. But another member of staff felt the main report contained too much data. A third staff member did not really use the main report much, preferring to use other reports for NRPS data (especially trend data which is not included in the main report). TOC reports were appreciated and he also suggested they could perhaps be disseminated more (though TOC reports are actually disseminated quite widely pre-release). It was also mentioned that dissemination of NRPS results within some larger stakeholders (e.g. Network Rail and ORR) appears to be limited/difficult. One final comment on the full report was that although the design has been improved, it is now more difficult to actually extract data to then produce graphs (as the new format contains too much formatting). Other comments were that the guest question in the main report is felt to be useful as is trend analysis in other reports.

The speed of access to extra or ad-hoc analysis was felt to be very good. The open-data tool was thought to be good (although one respondent felt it should contain more and also felt the column order should be reversed for the trend data). Reportal was used occasionally by one respondent – it was described as nice to have, though not that intuitive.

Going forward comments were:

- can more be done to get other non-core parts of the questionnaire to be used?
- how about a dissatisfaction report?
- can more be disaggregated?
- can the process be speeded up to get earlier publication of results (i.e. broader, deeper, faster) in a cost effective way?

Appendix A – The consultees

We consulted the following stakeholders in either face-to-face meetings or during telephone discussions.

Train operating companies
- Arriva Trains Wales   Dr Chris Williams, Yield and Data Analyst
- East Coast Main Line   Jim Muir, Insight Manager
- East Midlands Trains   Stuart Hammond, Business Excellence Manager
- First Great Western   Jeremy Clarke, Senior Insights Manager
- First Hull Trains   Tracey Parkinson, Customer Services Officer
- First ScotRail   Kenny McAlpine, Research & Pricing Manager
- First Transpennine Express   Paul Burton, Customer Innovation Director
- Grand Central   Celia Knott, Customer Experience Manager
- LOROL   Kevin Philpott, Customer Service Development Manager
- Merseyrail   David Print, Business Development Manager
- Southwest Trains   Arthur Pretorius, Acting Customer Service Director
- Virgin Trains   Ella Gardiner, Head of Insight and Planning

(Note: All TOCs were invited to take part)

Other organisations
- Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC)
                                      Adrian Chapman, Market Research Manager
- Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC)
                                      Billy Denyer, Head of Business Analysis
- British Transport Police   Dr Keely Gunson, Research & Development Manager
- Department for Transport (DfT)   Margaret Shaw, Rail Statistician
- Department for Transport (DfT)   Rachel Kelly, Future Rail Policy Manager HS2
- Department for Transport (DfT)   Rachel King, Commercial Manager – Intercity
- Department for Transport (DfT)   Peter West, Commercial Manager - Intercity
- Department for Transport (DfT)   Marianna White, Franchise Design
- Department for Transport (DfT)   Mike Biskup, Sponsorship Manager (Passenger Focus)
- Greater Manchester PTE   Sally Holgate, Senior Research Officer
- London Travelwatch   Tim Bellenger, Director, Policy and Investigation

- Network Rail   Andrew Regan, Senior Market Research
                                              Specialist
- Office of Rail Regulation   Nigel Fisher, Head of Operations and
                                              Network Regulation
- Passenger Transport Executive Group (PTEG)
                                              Pedro Abrantes, Senior Economist
- Transport for London   Alan Smart, Principal Planner – Rail
                                              Development
- Transport Scotland   Allan Anderson, Rail Policy, Rail Directorate
- University of West of England   Professor Glenn Lyons, Associate Dean
                                              (Research and Knowledge Exchange) and
                                              Professor of Transport and Society

<u>Passenger Focus</u>
- Mike Hewitson   Passenger Issues Manager (with
                                              questionnaire ideas also received from two
                                              team members)
- David Sidebottom   Passenger Team Director
- Anthony Smith   Chief Executive

Appendix B - Discussion guide

The following areas were covered and responses were prompted with the attached questions.

How the NRPS is used and its impact on standards:

- How is the NRPS used within your TOC/organisation?
- Is the NRPS a factor in driving improvements in standards and in customer satisfaction either directly within your organisation or indirectly?
- How useful is the NRPS to your organisation?

Which parts of the NRPS are used most and which least:

- Which parts of the NRPS results are most useful or valuable to your organisation?
- Are there any NRPS results that are never looked at?

NRPS questionnaire content:

- Is there anything missing from the questionnaire?

Limitations of the NRPS:

- Is there anything that you would like a future NRPS to allow you to do, that is not possible now?

NRPS frequency and seasonality:

- Do you have any comments on the NRPS frequency?
- Do you have any comments on the NRPS seasonality (i.e. spring survey mostly in February and March, and autumn survey from September up to at latest mid. November)?

NRPS Design and Method:

- Do you have any general comments on NRPS design and methodology?
- Do you have any comments about NRPS sample sizes?
- Do you have any comments on the sample design?

Building Blocks:

- Is the way overall TOC results are broken down into building blocks useful?

Weighting:

- Do you have any comments about the way the NRPS is weighted?

Fieldwork methodology:

Questionnaires are handed out at stations (and on a few routes on-train) with the vast majority of passengers returning questionnaires in the post (though on-line completion is also possible)

- Do you have any comments on the NRPS fieldwork methodology?
- Going forward would you like to see any changes?

NRPS accuracy, reliability and credibility:

- Do you have any comments on the reliability and accuracy of NRPS data?

NRPS report format, contact and timing:

- What do you think of the various NRPS reports that are produced?
- What do you think of the timing of the release of the data for the two waves?
- Are you happy with the amount of analysis that is contained within the various reports?

NRPS cross-analysis and extra analysis:

- How about the ease and speed of access to extra analysis?
- Do you use any of the on-line tools to access NRPS data (i.e. Reportal, the Open Data tool and the verbatim comments system)?
- If yes, what are your overall views on that system (or each of the systems)?

The NRPS going forward:

- How would you like to see the NRPS methodology or reporting evolve in future to make it more useful or valuable, or more effective in driving up standards?

Overall assessment of the NRPS:

- How do you think the NRPS is regarded by stakeholders generally?

Appendix C – Suggestions for additional questions

- How good was information when you were disrupted?
- How useful do you find the TOC app?
- What one thing would've improved your experience?
- Would you recommend (TOC)?
- Purchases on the train – What was available and was it good value?
- Was Wi-Fi available? Was it reliable?
- Was the catering of a good standard and value?
- How do you spend your time on the train? Was it valuable?"
- How do you rate the TOC website content?
- Do you engage with the TOC via social media? How good is it?
- How effective are posters in giving you information?
- What are your expectations? How well are they met?
- How satisfied were you with your 1st class provision?
- How did your experience compare with your expectation?
- More questions on online ticket buying
- End-to-end journey time
- More questions about whole journey (not just the leg of the journey they were on when given the questionnaire)
- Postcode of origin (for this journey)
- Postcode of destination (for this journey)
- Satisfaction with signposts/wayfinding
- Satisfaction with charging points on the train
- Satisfaction with help points/remote assistance and info/computer terminals
- Satisfaction with meeting space
- What other future train facilities would be useful
- Cost of ticket?
- Do you trust the industry?
- Question on 'general satisfaction' with the TOC (not focused on the particular journey the passenger was undertaking)
- Verbatim question regarding station satisfaction
- Prevailing weather at the time the passenger was given a questionnaire