

The National Rail Passenger Survey Methodology

What is the National Rail Passenger Survey?

Since 1999 the National Rail Passenger Survey (NRPS) has measured customer satisfaction consistently between different train operating companies in England, Scotland and Wales.

The sample size is large enough to identify statistically significant changes in satisfaction ratings and to recognise meaningful trends in perceptions over time.

The survey is carried out twice a year (in two waves). The same questions are asked each wave, except that a few sections/questions are only included once a year (in either the spring or autumn). Broadly similar rail companies are compared and satisfaction can also be compared on different routes and by different size bands of station.

Results of other surveys may differ from NRPS as the timing, questions asked, weighting and sample size may be different and produce different data.

Who is surveyed?

All franchised rail companies in Great Britain are obliged to take part and all non-franchised or open-access operators also choose to take part at their own expense.

Rail companies (or any other stakeholder) can pay for further shifts to increase the number of passengers surveyed. If the additional shifts are added in a representative way these can be included in the main tables of results.

What is NRPS used for?

Many stakeholders use NRPS alongside Public Performance Measures (PPM) to:

- Drive up standards in the rail industry by informing the franchising process.
- Create an environment of continuous improvement. Most rail companies create action plans (often in consultation with Passenger Focus) to improve where NRPS indicates that they are underperforming.
- Ensure passenger priorities are understood in all rail planning and improvement activity. Passenger Focus uses NRPS when responding to consultations to ensure we represent the passenger's perspective. Bidders for franchises use it to identify where resources should be focused.

- Identify areas of underperformance for further investigation. Analysis of what drives satisfaction and dissatisfaction in NRPS allows Passenger Focus to target its resources where it matters most to passengers. We therefore prioritise work to improve punctuality, fares and value for money, and how the industry deals with delays (passenger information).
- Target resources at stations. Network Rail uses the NRPS to identify how performance varies across stations and to target resources for improvements.
- Help the British Transport Police target resources using NRPS information that identifies where personal security at stations is a particular concern.

What questions are asked in the Survey?

Questions cover passengers' experience both at the station and on the train. We ask how passengers rate overall satisfaction, overall satisfaction with the station and train, and satisfaction with 34 specific aspects of service.

The aspects of service include punctuality / reliability, train frequency, personal security, cleanliness, provision of information, station facilities, staff, complaints, ticket purchase, maintenance and repairs, etc.

Most questions ask passengers to rate services using a five-point scale, for example, possible responses to the question 'How would you rate that station for facilities for car parking?' are *'Very good, Fairly good, Neither good nor poor, Fairly poor, Very poor'*.

The survey also includes several other questions. For example: how passengers get to the station, security at stations, catering, compensation, questions about delays, etc.

When is the survey carried out?

The National Passenger Survey is done twice a year in the spring (usually late January to the end of March) and the autumn (September to early November). Each wave takes place over approximately two months (10 weeks).

How is the survey carried out?

Questionnaires are distributed at approximately 700 stations at different times of day and across all days of the week. Stations are selected to be representative of the entire network and although most are large (in terms of footfall), a limited number of small volume (footfall) stations are also included.

Independent research fieldworkers approach a diverse range of passengers who are about to start a train journey and give them a copy of a self-completion questionnaire with a reply paid envelope.

Face-to-face interviews are not used as the time pressures on train passengers and the wide geographical distribution of the rail network makes interviews at stations impractical and not cost effective.

Most NRPS questions are journey based and ask about the journey the passenger was undertaking at the time they were given a questionnaire.

How does personal information from those taking part help further analysis?

Passengers' age, gender, broad occupational category, journey purpose, disability, ethnicity and frequency of travel are collected. This is done to check that we survey a diverse and representative group of passengers and to place responses into context. This also allows analysis, for example, of satisfaction for those who told us that they had a disability or who were older or younger.

What is the average response rate?

About 35% of the questionnaires handed out in each wave are returned. However, some of these are missing crucial information, so the actual response rate is around 32 to 33%. This is considered good for this type of survey.

What is the sample size?

Nationally (for franchised rail companies), at least 25,000 questionnaires are returned in each wave. If open access (non-franchised) rail companies are included, the overall sample size is at least 27,000 passengers.

For the majority of rail companies their results are based on responses from 1,000 passengers in each wave. There is a minimum sample size so even the smallest rail company has a sample size of 500. For the largest operator 2,750 passengers are surveyed.

Why and how do we weight the data?

Data is weighted to ensure that the sample represents the proportion of commuting, business and leisure journeys made for that operator. The data is also weighted for

each train company to reflect the weekday/weekend split of journeys, the percentage of passengers who use different sizes of station and different routes.

What is a building block?

Building blocks are particular routes selected to be representative across particular rail companies. They may not be a single journey or route and may include a number of separate sections of route.

What is a sector type?

The results of NRPS for individual rail companies are often presented alongside an appropriate sector type. We group rail companies into sectors according to their similar characteristics and these are: Long Distance, Regional, and London and South East Operators. This enables comparisons of rail company's results with those other companies that provide broadly similar services.

We are also able to compare different types of routes within rail companies.

How are findings published?

The spring results are published in June and the autumn results are published in January. Various reports are produced providing a variety of analysis and most are available on the website.

Information about security is provided to the British Transport Police and other special reports are provided to a variety of organisations.

Most reports are available on the Passenger Focus website here: <http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/research/national-passenger-survey-introduction>

Is more detailed data available?

There is an on-line analysis tool called 'Reportal' where users can access data themselves for the main NRPS questions for all the franchised rail companies for the last three years (six waves). In addition there is a 'verbatim comments system' where all the free text answers can be viewed for all rail companies for the latest wave. Access to both these systems is available via the website www.npsreportal.org.uk.

Full databases of NRPS records can also be supplied if requested – in SPSS or Quanvert format. These are IT packages that enable users to run more complex and detailed analysis.

What review of the National Rail Passenger Survey is done?

The National Rail Passenger Survey is an Official Statistic and must comply with rules about quality, access to data and pre-release access. It is constantly being reviewed; the need to provide meaningful trends over time is balanced against suggested changes. Where changes are identified that will improve the survey, they are implemented and we follow the recommendations of regular independent reviews.

How do changes affect the continuity of data?

Passenger Focus is aware of the value of viewing long term trends in satisfaction with rail journeys. Changes will only be made to the survey after proper consideration and where the benefit of the change outweighs any lack of continuity.

There are some questions that are used extensively, such as those rating the train and station. However, there may be questions that are not used enough to justify their inclusion and there will be options to remove, cut down or place the question in the survey less frequently.

Can questions be added to the National Rail Passenger Survey?

The survey is already long and additional questions are not desirable as they may reduce the good response rate and lead to respondent fatigue. However, where there are clear national issues that are not covered in the survey at present, their inclusion will be considered.

Issues which are specific to one rail company only will not be included because the same questionnaires are given out to all passengers of all rail companies across Great Britain.