

Statistics Governance Group

Date: Wednesday 5 December 2012
Location: Fleetbank House
Salisbury Square
London EC4
Time: 1230-1400

Present

Colin Foxall CBE
Nigel Walmsley
Philip Mendelsohn*
Deryk Mead CBE**

CF Chairman
NW Board Member
PM Board Member
DM Board Member

David Sidebottom
Ian Wright
Jon Carter
Jon Clay
Murray Leader
Keith Bailey

DS Passenger Team Director
IW Head of Research
JC Head of Business Services
JCI PTE Team Leader
ML Senior Research Advisor
KB Research Advisor

Apologies

Anthony Smith
David Greeno

AS Chief Executive
DG Senior Passenger Researcher

* SGG member designate

** not an SGG member

1. Welcome and apologies

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted apologies from Anthony Smith and David Greeno.

2. Minutes

The Group approved the minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2012, subject to a minor correction to paragraph three of part four, and authorised the Chairman to sign them.

3. Action matrix

The action matrix was noted as all items were not due until the next meeting in June. NW reported, however, that he had attempted to conduct checks on five different fieldworkers during the most recent wave and had been unable to find them; plausible explanations had been provided for most, but not all, no-shows. Moreover, neither of the two telephone numbers provided as helplines were staffed. The Chairman expressed some concern over this apparent failure and asked IW to investigate. PM wondered if board members could be asked to help out with fieldwork checks, given the difficulty in covering the more remote areas (e.g. Scotland) and was concerned at the point in the minute which suggested that Board members should not do checks as this could be perceived to be at odds with their non-executive position. The Chairman did not rule this out completely and suggested the minute should be interpreted flexibly.

SGG 57	01/05/13	Fieldwork checks	Investigate voicemail helplines and report back	DG / IW	June 2013	
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National Rail Passenger Survey

4. Contract management update

IW reported that Dave Chilvers had recently retired from BRDC-C having been associated with the NPS since Passenger Focus had inherited the survey in 2005. He had however been retained as a part time consultant. The transition to a new account manager had been carefully planned with full participation from Passenger Focus. Mr Chilvers had provided IW with feedback on the operation of the NPS in its current form.

IW reminded the group that the NPS contract was now approaching its final year and a decision would have to be made before too long about whether to exercise the option of a one year extension. The Group agreed that this decision should be based primarily although not exclusively on contract performance and looked forward to a proposal from IW in due course.

5. Feedback from Ministerial discussions

CF reported back on discussions with Ministers in respect of development options for the NPS. The initial meeting with Simon Burns and Norman Baker (which should also have included the Secretary of State and Stephen Hammond but unfortunately their diaries were conflicted) had not been as helpful as had been hoped, partly due to a pre-briefing prepared by officials which had resulted in the loss of the initiative on our part. Ministers were clearly concerned about the then recent Which? report and, notwithstanding the recommendations of the Brown review, had no further funds at their disposal to boost NPS sampling.

Furthermore, there was a developing concern amongst the Ministerial team that levels of public trust in the railway and its governance might not be where they should be. The publicly specified but privately delivered railway depended to a large extent on brand integrity and if this suffered it could negatively impact on the franchising process.

A subsequent discussion with Norman Baker had been much more satisfactory – we had discussed a trust survey proposal and enhanced NPS presentation ideas with him. Importantly, we had also discussed engagement, and although there appeared to be some objection to ‘marketing’ engagement opportunities, the DfT appeared to understand that franchising was not just about financial premium, it was also about service specification, and passenger engagement was critical to getting this right.

NW wondered if the interest in engagement and trust might be somewhat superficial given the dire state of the public finances. CF believed it was in fact increasingly important; the NPS is becoming more and more embedded in the franchising process and its effectiveness as a franchise management tool must be seen in the context of passengers level of trust of the system – headline announcements of 4% fare rises where in fact some fares increased by 11% are simply not tenable in the longer term. The Group also discussed and agreed upon the need to be absolutely objective in collaborating in this kind of research – there must be no suggestion of painting a picture of sincerity where one did not in fact exist. The Chairman added that this work should focus on *why* passengers might be sceptical of the way in which services were specified and/or delivered and **not** try to help them to be less sceptical.

Bus Passenger Survey

6. March 2013 wave – feedback

ML briefed the Group on issues that had arisen during the latest BPS wave. Timings had been very tight, as around 50 stakeholder briefings had been held with the industry between the end of fieldwork and the public launch. The plan next time was to launch and *then* hold the stakeholder briefings. The Group were concerned that the reputation of the BPS could be damaged if the industry was not able to validate or query the data before launch – there would be a clear risk of publicly aired dissent. NW wondered about the length of the gap between end of fieldwork and launch; ML said that this time it was somewhere between three and four months (including the Christmas and New Year period). The Group **agreed** that this should allow sufficient time dealing with queries or challenges from the industry before a public launch and on this basis the stakeholder meetings could take place subsequently.

ML also described the work necessary to post the stakeholder briefings to the website and thought that in light of the possibilities provided by the open data project it would no longer be necessary to provide this level of detail in this way. The Group concluded that this would be a shame but recognised the amount of work involved.

The Group also agreed with a proposal to bring forward the start of the fieldwork by 1-2 weeks; to convene a stakeholder forum chaired by DS for the purposes of gaining structured industry feedback; and to plan for regional briefings / events on publication of future waves.

Other matters

7. Open data board

The Group **agreed** with JCI's proposal that the remit for open data - including official reporting of Passenger Focus complaints data – be folded into that of SGG between now and the end of the life of the open data project board. JC and JCI would develop updated terms of reference for the Group's approval.

SGG 58	01/05/13	Terms of reference	Update to accommodate open data	JC / JCI	June 2013	
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8. Complaints data sent to ORR

JCI briefed the Group on the errors identified with the complaints data sent to ORR where it formed part of an official statistic – National Rail Trends (NRT). The errors were not great but would result in a mismatch between NRT and our own published data. The Chairman observed that many datasets – including GDP data – were subsequently revised when better quality information emerged and that the correcting of previously published datasets was not in itself problematic provided the information was communicated in good faith. Although certain irregular practices had been uncovered two years ago these related primarily to customer satisfaction monitoring and there was no reason to conclude that the errors in the data sent to ORR were caused by anything other than inaccurately developed formulae or inadequate checking. Clearly systemic miscalculations needed to be resolved but the Chairman reminded the Group that data input often depended on judgement and individuals did not always reach the same conclusions. The Group welcomed and endorsed JCI's proposals for dealing with the matter but further required that ONS rules on data revision be first checked and then scrupulously observed and that the process for future extraction and transfer of data – including any formulae or algorithms used - to ORR could be internally developed but then externally validated and then subject to an appropriate audit later in the year. As a matter of good practice the Group required sight of both the validation statement and the audit report.

SGG 59	01/05/13	ONS rules on data revision	Check and report back	JCI	June 2013	
SGG 60	01/05/13	Process validation	Arrange and report back	JCI	September 2013	
SGG 61	01/05/13	Process validation audit	Arrange and report back	JC	December 2013	

9. Tram Passenger Survey

KB briefed the Group on the Tram Passenger Survey (TPS) pilot which, following detailed feedback to Centro, had been deemed by all parties to have been a success. Overall satisfaction was generally very high (especially when compared to the 2012 regional bus scores) although value for money was less so (although again better by comparison to bus).

Four options had been trialled for survey completion resulting in 682 paper based and 153 online interviews.

The pilot had sampled journeys based on timetable frequencies (in part to 'match' BPS methodology) but demonstrated that this produced a sample that closely matched patronage data. For the future we needed to decide if we would be happy to use patronage data where available and timetable frequency where not.

Some trams had been too crowded for interviewers to board/distribute questionnaires so for the pilot, some shifts were conducted 'at stop'. Some then had low passenger volumes and interviewer resource was wasted. Going ahead we need better 'rules' for coping with individual overcrowded trams rather than conducting full shifts at stops.

The Group warmly welcomed this important pilot and thanked KB for his briefing.

10. Any other business

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 1400 hrs.

Minutes

Signed as a true and accurate record of the meeting:

Colin Foxall CBE
Chairman

Date: _____