

A dual approach to the National Rail Passenger Survey in Scotland - Spring and Autumn 2017 waves

Methodology

Some methodological changes were made to the National Rail Passenger Survey (NRPS) from Spring 2017. This includes a shorter NRPS questionnaire, changes to the questions, and offering passengers the choice of completing the survey on paper or online. Considering these changes there was concern that the time series of NRPS results could be affected.

A robust pilot of the new approach that Transport Focus and our agency conducted in Spring 2016 suggested that the methodological changes had resulted in only minor/insignificant changes to the results nationally. However, it was not possible to look at results by train operating company due to the sample size at individual operator level.

In order to ensure that the results would not be affected, we used a dual methodology in Spring 2017 and Autumn 2017 on ScotRail, so that results for the NRPS under the new methodology could be compared to results to the old methodology that was used up to Autumn 2016.

The dual methodology involved carrying out 'duplicate' or parallel shifts of the main NRPS shifts on ScotRail. So, for each main NRPS shift during the Spring and Autumn 2017 waves a separate shift was arranged on a different day on the same day of the week at the same time as the main shift and if possible using the same fieldworker. The parallel run shift was at most two weeks later or the week before the main NRPS shift.

Results

A summary comparing the main (official) NRPS and the parallel run is given below:

NRPS factor	Difference between the new NRPS methodology and the parallel run (new – parallel)	
	Spring 2017	Autumn 2017
Overall journey satisfaction	-1%	-1%
Overall station satisfaction	-6%	-3%
Overall train satisfaction	-4%	-3%
Punctuality/reliability	0%	0%
Value for money for the price of your ticket	-6%	-4%
Cleanliness of the inside of the train	-6%	-4%
How well train company deals with delays	17%	6%
Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand (old methodology) vs level of crowding (new methodology)	-1%	-3%

Note: The NRPS factors related to crowding changed between Autumn 2016 and Spring 2017.

Full results for all station and train factors are available on request.

Comparing results between the two methodologies

Comparing the Main NRPS and parallel run results for Spring and Autumn 2017 the vast majority of scores are within plus or minus 6 per cent suggesting that the main station and train scores (and overall satisfaction) are little or no different under the two different methodologies.

A few factors had a slightly bigger difference in the percentage of passengers satisfied, with the biggest significant difference for the variable 'how well the train company dealt with delays' in Spring 2017. In the official Spring 2017 results 54 per cent of passengers said ScotRail dealt with delays very or fairly well, compared to 37 per cent in the ScotRail parallel run project. The most likely reason for the difference is the difference in timing between the main and parallel run shifts. In Autumn 2017 the difference in results between the main and parallel run was less (6 per cent) for this factor.

There were also significant differences in satisfaction for the variables ‘the attitudes and helpfulness of the staff’, ‘facilities for car parking’, and ‘upkeep and repair of the train’ in Spring 2017, and for ‘shelter facilities’ and ‘availability of seating’ in Autumn 2017. The difference for these factors appears to be largely due to differences in the proportion of commuters and leisure travellers in the two surveys.