

Quality review of National Travel Survey: Project definition document

Introduction

1. The National Travel Survey (NTS) is a household survey of personal travel which provides users with information on personal travel by residents within Great Britain. Outputs include annual publications and fact sheets with details on how and why people in different groups of the population travel, and a database used to answer ad-hoc enquiries.
2. The NTS has run continuously since mid-1988 with no major changes in structure or sample size. The sample size was designed to produce reliable estimates of the main survey variables at GB level by the aggregation of data over a three year period. The current fieldwork contract with the ONS expires in October 2001. This provides an opportunity to consider if changes are needed so that the survey meets the needs of its users in the most cost effective way.
3. Following a DETR internal review of Transport Statistics as a whole, a series of consultations have been undertaken with DETR users of NTS data. Many of the needs identified could be met by expanding the sample size of the NTS.
4. Following the launch of National Statistics on 7 June, it has been agreed that the NTS should be the subject of an early review as part of new programme of Quality Assurance.
5. As a considerable amount of work has already been done to identify DETR user needs, the QA review will concentrate on consulting external users, although internal users will be represented on the Review Steering Group. This paper sets out the proposed arrangements for this review and outlines the scope for the review.
6. There are three key factors which have a bearing on the scope of the review:
 - The timescale available is shorter than that recommended as general practice for a QA review. This is dictated by the need to complete the review by October 2000 in order to maintain the proposed timetable for re-tendering the NTS contract.
 - The scope for changing the NTS must give due weight to the practical burden imposed on interviewees and interviewers, in the particular context of falling response rates for household surveys.
 - The need for continuity for reliable estimates of the degree of change over time in key aspects of personal travel behaviour, eg mode shares for journeys, journey length, and purpose of travel.

Organisation of the Review

7. The review has been organised in accordance with the suggestions made in the National Statistics Quality Assurance Programme Board guidance paper "Commissioning a National Statistics review". It is in the first tranche of reviews in the Transport, Travel and Tourism Theme Working Group.
8. The **review sponsor** is Mike Hughes, head of the statistics profession within DETR.

9. The work of the Review Study Team will be overseen by a **Project Board/Steering Group**:

Mike Hughes	Transport Statistics (Head of Profession)
Professor Kay Axhausen	ETH, Zurich (External academic advisor)
Professor Peter Jones	University of Westminster (External user)
Bronwyn Hill	Transport Strategy Division (Internal user)
Caroline Bustard	ONS (Quality Assurance Programme Manager)

10. **The project manager** will be Peter Capell, Head of TSPT Division, DETR

11. The review will be carried out by a **review study team**:

Barbara Noble	NTS Statistician, DETR
Dave Elliott/ Charles Lound	Methodologist, ONS
Neil Paulley (TRL)	Transport Statistics Users' Group (TSUG)
Drew Hird	Assistant statistician, DETR

12. The overall **aims of the review** are to identify the following:

- Coverage of the NTS (particularly to make sure there are no gaps in provision of travel data that could be filled by the NTS)
- Fitness for purpose of the NTS outputs
- To consider the sample size
- Appropriateness of the survey methodology
- Methods of dissemination.

13. The **role of the Steering Group** is to:

- Agree the scope of the review described in this document
- Agree resources to be used for the review
- Ensure the products are delivered to the agreed standards on schedule
- Approve completion of each stage of the project
- Arrange for dissemination of progress and final reports.

14. Peter Capell and Barbara Noble will also attend Steering Group meetings, and Drew Hird will act as Secretary.

15. Further details of the Review Study Team tasks are given below and in Annex A.

Elements of review

16. DETR will issue a **questionnaire** to external users covering the following topics:

- Respondent's details and current use of NTS
- Current format of NTS
- Survey methodology details
- Questionnaire topics
- Diary format
- Data processing
- Data access
- Dissemination of results.

17. As part of the consultation process, a **seminar** for users will be held on 6 September, under the auspices of DETR and TSUG.

18. The Review Study Team will consider the implications for users of different sample sizes, eg increases of 50%, (to enable aggregation over two years, instead of 3), or 200% (to enable production of annual results).

19. The Review Study Team will consider **aspects of NTS methodology**, including:

- Sample Size and Design
- Diary Length and Placing Pattern
- Weighting
- Imputation.

20. The Review Study Team will prepare a **summary** of users' responses to consultation.

21. The Review Study Team will issue a **response** to users' suggestions.

Review Timetable

22. The proposed timetable is designed to meet the requirement to send out tender documents by mid- November to contractors bidding for the fieldwork of the NTS.

Action	Date
Send out consultation document	17 August
<i>First Steering Group meeting</i>	<i>24 August</i>
Hold seminar	6 September
Final date for comments on consultation	15 September
Recommendations from methodologist	29 September
Summary of consultation prepared by DETR/ TSUG	29 September
<i>Second Steering Group meeting</i>	<i>4 October</i>
Reply to external consultation/ methodology report	12 October
<i>Third Steering Group meeting</i>	<i>19 October</i>
Decisions on changes to survey	27 October
Tender documents sent out	13 November
Final report for submission to National Statistician/ Statistical Commission	December

Annex A**Review Study Team Roles****All members:**

- Agree scope of review
- Agree arrangements for consultation
- Agree format of seminar
- Agree consultation covering letter and questionnaire
- Agree timing of review
- Assist in production of an action plan for the NTS

TSUG representative

- Assist with the production of summary of consultation

Note: in addition to Neil Paulley, Kit Mitchell and Glyn Rhys-Tyler have also agreed to help summarise results of the external consultation.

ONS Methodologist

Prepare advice on:

- Precision of level and change estimates for different sample sizes and designs
- The appropriateness of various aspects of NTS methodology both for the current sample size and any possible future increase in sample size. These aspects will include:
 - Sample design
 - Diary length and placing pattern
 - Non-response and other weighting
 - Imputation

External Academic Advisor Role

- Overview of the consultation documents
- Comments on proposals arising from the methodological advice and external consultation