

NTS User Consultation Seminar 6 September 2000

This seminar was arranged as part of an external review of users' needs for the National Travel Survey (NTS). It was attended by 50 external users of the NTS. The external review is one component of a general National Statistics 'Quality Assurance' review of the NTS.

The first part of the seminar was chaired by Peter Capell, the project manager for the NTS QA review, and consisted of short presentations by:

- Mike Hughes, head of the statistics profession in the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR), on the background to the review, particularly on the objectives of National Statistics, and the quality review programme.
- Barbara Noble, the statistician responsible for the NTS within DETR, on the NTS background, and the consultation questionnaire

A copy of the slides used is available on request from barbara_noble@detr.gov.uk

The seminar then divided into 5 groups. Each group had about 50 minutes to discuss what they wanted from the NTS, and were requested to produce 3 bullet points on aspects of the NTS:

- that users would like unchanged
- where users would like changes.

These points were then reported back in a plenary session, chaired by Peter Jones of the University of Westminster. The seminar finished with a general discussion.

Group outputs:

Group A (Chair John Polak, Imperial College London)

Suggested changes/additions:

- Non-response treatment - non-response needs to be investigated and, where it is found to be causing bias, adjustments should be made via weighting and possibly altering the survey design
- Mixed methods of data collection - different population and behavioural subgroups could be targeted with different methods of data collection, which might lead to them being more willing to respond
- Guidance to Local Authorities on compatibility - providing local authorities with the opportunity to conduct their own surveys which can then be used in conjunction with NTS results to provide more detail in their area, on the subjects of their interest

Suggested continuities:

- Keep 7 day diary - important to be able to understand what people do within the week; also issues around recording if only go to one weekday and one weekend day; also would single day analysis be compatible with earlier data?
- Retain stage detail - the detail on the NTS, as compared to other large travel surveys, is vital in it remaining useful

Group B (Chair Gordon Stokes of Steer Davies Gleave)

Suggested changes/additions:

- Increase sample size - more lower level detail and timeliness would be useful
- Support suggested changes outlined by Barbara Noble earlier - (note, mention any specifics)
- Link with other surveys - eg Census

Suggested continuities:

- Standards and quality - important to keep the rigour currently found in the survey, even/especially if large changes are recommended and made
- Friendly staff - even though new methods are being provided (eg web-based tabulations), need to keep the current good service for ad-hoc requests

Group C (Chair Neil Paulley of the Transport Research Laboratory)

Suggested changes/additions:

- Support the idea of a core set of questions with rotating modules of less time-critical questions
- Origin and destination data for journeys, include data on road types used to traverse between the two
- Increased sample size to provide more detail, and year on year data if possible
- More information on walking, cycling and international journeys

Suggested continuities:

- Basic sample design - the general set-up of the survey works well and should be retained for the sake of continuity over time
- Most of the current questions - by and large the survey is asking the right things and no fundamental change is required

Group D (Chair David Champion of DETR- Bus and coach statistics)

Suggested changes/additions:

- Need to widen sampling base to look beyond private households; a particular area of interest is students
- More information on international destinations - where people make long journeys to airports/ports, context is required of where they are going to
- Increase sample size - more detail is better, although no consensus on how far we need to go now

Suggested continuities:

- Time series of comparable information - if major changes are made, it is important to provide some kind of backdated time series
- Short trip information should be retained - no loss of detail should be conceded here in trying to reduce the respondents' burden
- Regional breakdowns - these are increasingly important

Group E (Chair Ros Weatherall of the Pedestrians' Association)

Suggested changes/additions:

- Enable provision of more detailed geographic areas in outputs, either by altering sample design or sample size
- Alternative 'main mode', by time rather than distance or stages - feeling that time spent travelling by a mode may be a key factor to people, rather than (as well as) distance
- Enabling local authorities to 'buy in' sampling within their area, to boost detail for their own purposes

Suggested continuities:

- Keep calendar year data - fiscal years not particularly helpful
- No reduction in survey detail; especially important to keep walking data the same

Discussion Session points

- Useful to have data on travel not made - why people don't make journeys and what those journeys would have been
- Comparison with tourism surveys - possibly linking to things like International Passenger Survey?
- Data on children crossing main roads as part of their journey; data on how far parents allow them to travel alone, and under what circumstances
- Data on types of road being travelled on during journeys
- Further data on company cars, eg self employed business travel

Request for addition to publications - percentile (decile) distributions of journeys per person per year, distance per person per year, average journey length etc.

Peter Jones's summing up points, using format of questionnaire

1. Basic format is okay
 2. Expand data beyond households
 - students
 - perhaps NTS of travel in GB (including that by foreign tourists) and travel abroad by GB residents
 3. Wider topics - eg variety of data on e-commerce
 4. Diary detail is okay; other information on car availability at time of journey (assessing impact this has on mode use), road types traversed in journey, whether other members of the household travelled together on the journey
 5. Tour data desired; non-response survey needed, with subsequent treatment of bias
 6. Data access - keeping people up to date with changes/publications via use of email users list, as well as usual means (Transport Statistics User Group etc)
 7. Increasing sample - debate as to whether this should be done on a uniform basis or boosting particular areas (such as rural areas)
- Technology - web-based diaries - technology is now okay, although specific to certain parts of the sample

