

## **DETR response to issues raised on the future of the NTS by the consultation with users and the ONS methodology review.**

### **Introduction**

1. The Steering Group of the National Travel Survey (NTS) Quality Assurance Review has two papers which raise issues affecting the survey, the report of the consultation with external users, and the methodology report.
2. This note gives brief details of the issues raised, and decisions made to date on these issues. Early decisions have been made on a number of issues, as these affect the tendering process. Other decisions have to wait until later.

### **Consultation with users**

3. The following sections are numbered to correspond to topics on the NTS consultation questionnaire. The responses were summarised Annex D.

#### Overall survey design (section 1)

4. Of the 61 users who responded to the NTS consultation, only five wanted any significant change in the overall format of the survey, as a household survey with a seven day diary completed by all household members. This basic design will therefore continue.

#### Sample size (section 7a)

5. 54 users wanted an increase in sample size. Needs included better information on an annual basis, and better breakdowns by area. An increased sample will also meet most of the needs of users within the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR).
6. Ministers have approved extra spending on the NTS from 2002, mainly to increase the sample size, but also to fund other improvements. The exact sample size is not yet known, but is likely to be set at between 12 and 15 thousand households, which will yield between 8 and 10 thousand fully responding households a year.

#### Sample design (section 2)

##### *Stratification*

7. A few users wanted changes to the current stratification. We are currently considering an increase in the number of geographic units in the first stage of stratification, including splitting regions into a few smaller sections. This is already done in some regions, where the old metropolitan county and the rest of the region are in separate strata.
8. Final details of other stratifiers will be decided when the new sample size is known, but likely candidates for 2002 are population density (to give an urban/rural dimension) and car ownership, both based on 1991 Census data. More work will need to be done to choose appropriate stratifiers when the results of the 2001 Census become available, so the stratifiers will probably change again in 2004.

*Sample frame*

9. Some users wanted to change the population sampled to include some people not living in households. We are planning to try to include students who live in halls of residence in term-time, by asking parents for contact details, and then sending students a diary and a questionnaire. This will be trialled in 2001. If successful, this will be continued from 2002. Note that students living in privately rented houses or flats, or at their parents' homes in term time, are already included.
10. No attempt will be made to sample non-GB residents, but separate discussions will be held with the Department of Culture, Media and Sport about how details of non-GB residents' travel in the UK can be compiled on a basis consistent with the NTS.

Questionnaire topics (section 3)

11. There was a wide range of suggestions, not all of which will be used. Decisions will not be made until later in 2001, when some will be piloted. It is essential to keep the interview as short as possible, to maintain good will with the household before the diaries are completed.

Diary data (section 4)*Short walks*

12. Many users wanted more information on walking. Full details of walking have been included in all relevant NTS tables for a number of years, and ad-hoc tables are available on request.
13. More specific suggestions included asking for details of short walks on every day, not just day 7. This has been considered very carefully by the Steering Group, and an alternative option of including short walks on two days was also considered.
14. The number of short walk stages recorded on day 7 in 1997/99 was 17,853. This was sufficient to do the necessary analysis. About three times as many short walks are recorded on day 7 as rail trips in a whole week. This number will increase in line with the whole sample size. Recording of short walks is quite a burden for respondents, as about a third more journey stages in total are recorded on day 7.
15. Introducing this on an earlier day may discourage respondents from completing the diary, and another advantage of day 7 is that the interviewer can remind respondents if they have omitted to record short walks. Therefore it has been decided that short walks will be recorded on day 7 only, as at present.

*Geocoding*

16. A number of users wanted more detail on the origins and destinations of journeys. Again, there are concerns about the burden on respondents, but it is planned to ask for extra details on day 7 of the diary only from 2002. Sufficient detail will be requested to geocode addresses. This will require using postcodes (if known) or full addresses for private addresses, and a description such as 'Sainsbury's, Clifton', or 'ABC Cinema, Purley', which could be geocoded with the help of commercially available databases. It may also be possible to give some route information for these journeys, by using commercial route planning software.

*Other diary information*

17. Long distance journeys outside GB will be added to the long distance journey diary (which is completed for the 3 weeks before the main diary week) on a trial basis in 2001. If successful, this will be included in 2002.
18. A number of other smaller additional requests for extra diary information will be considered at a later date, bearing in mind the need to make the diary easy to use, and to avoid too great a burden on respondents.

Data processing (section 5)*Non-response survey*

19. It has been decided that a non-response survey needs to be included as part of the NTS fieldwork from 2002. The exact form will need to be decided, and this is an area that will be left to tenderers to make suggestions.

*Weighting*

20. A number of users wanted NTS data to be weighted in future to try to compensate for non-response bias. It is planned that some weighting will be used from 2002. The exact form is not yet decided. Further work may be needed at a later stage, when the results of a planned study to use 2001 Census data to investigate the characteristics of non-responding households on the NTS and other government surveys become available.

*Partially responding households*

21. Household, individual and vehicle data from these households will be used from 2002. No attempt will be made to impute diary data from these households. Raw data sent to Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) will clearly mark these households.

*Imputation*

22. Some missing data items are currently imputed. The imputation methods will be reviewed and documented before 2002.

*Other data*

23. A 'tours' database will be developed as soon as possible by linking series of journeys starting and finishing at home. The aim is to publish some simple tables next year.
24. It is already possible to analyse NTS data by ACORN code. The possibility of linking other address related data (relevant to transport) to NTS data will be investigated.

Data access (section 6)

25. Most users were satisfied with current access arrangements, although there are a few points that we are considering. It is already possible to produce raw data in SPSS format, although it is not very convenient to use because of the hierarchical nature of the data. SPSS data are available from ESRC for academic users, or on CD-ROM direct from DETR for other users. However, for occasional users it is usually better to request the necessary tables from the NTS branch.
26. The major new development to be able to run tables via a web-interface is nearly ready. Because of the costs of setting up and maintaining this site, a charge will

be made for this facility, probably in the form of an annual licence fee. The site could be improved, but users are keen for this facility, so every effort will be made to complete the necessary work soon.

Core/ rotating design (section 7b)

27. This idea has been welcomed by the majority of users, subject to the details of which questions will be in the core. This will need to be decided later.

New technologies (section 7c)

28. Tenderers will be invited to suggest ways to encourage young people to take part, by use of technology such as hand held PCs or an Internet/ CD version of diary.

**Response to ideas suggested in ONS methodology report**

29. Section numbers on the following comments refer to sections in Annex E, the methodology report. Only sections where the report suggests some changes to the current survey are discussed below.

Rolling three year data (section 2.1)

30. It was suggested that more data should be presented on a three year rolling basis, in order to detect changes more rapidly. This will be done for some variables in the next publication.

Optimal sample design (section 2.2)

31. A panel type survey design, keeping primary sampling units (PSUs) in the survey for two years was suggested. This would be particularly advantageous for geographic variables, such as the bus service variable which is used as a target. This suggestion has been accepted.

32. The NTS sample has been boosted in London because of poor response rates, and this will continue. However, regional weighting will also be used from 2002 to achieve the most reliable national results.

33. In addition to the London boost, some local authorities are interested in 'buying in' additional sample in their own areas. In principle, this will be possible, and will be included in the tender. In practice, this is unlikely to happen often because of the high cost, and also because interviewers may not be available in the particular area.

Choice of strata (section 2.5)

34. See paragraphs 7 and 8 above.

Primary sampling units (PSUs) (section 2.6)

35. The current plan is to continue to use PSUs of about the same size from 2002 as at present, 23 households. This is a convenient number for the work load of a single interviewer, but the exact number is a matter for the contractor.

Diary length (section 3.1)

36. No change is planned in the number of diary days.

Weighting (section 3.3)

37. The need to weight the NTS from 2002 has been accepted in principle. Exact details will be considered later, but it is likely that the recommendations of the methodology report will be followed. It is already planned that the 1991 Census comparison should be repeated following the 2001 Census.

Partial response (section 3.4)

38. It is planned to use interview data from partially responding households from 2002.