

DTLR Quality Review of bus and coach statistics

Project Initiation Document

Background

1. The White Paper 'Building Trust in Statistics' sets out the framework for quality assuring National Statistics. This involves a programme of quality assurance reviews which have been established to ensure that, as far as possible, National Statistics and other official statistical outputs are fit for purpose and that avenues for further quality improvements are identified and appropriate action taken forward. Emphasis is placed on ensuring that information needs of users are being met and that the data collection systems provide accurate statistics in a cost-effective manner without undue burden on data providers.

Information Sources

2. There are currently five separate DTLR surveys collecting information on aspects of bus or bus and coach operations. The statistics collected are used widely within and outside government, brief details are provided below.

3. The five primary sources are as follows:

- a) Annual survey of Public Service Vehicle operators; operators are sampled according to their size (number of operator discs) with a 100 per cent sample of the largest operators. Main outputs are estimates of bus patronage (passenger journeys), vehicle mileage, vehicle stock and passenger receipts.
- b) Quarterly survey of bus fares; a panel of around 100 large operators provides information on fare changes which is used in compiling a bus fares index.
- c) Bus passenger satisfaction; survey of bus passengers undertaken by National Opinion Polls (NOP) on a three year contract. Survey started in May 2000 in response to an initiative by the Deputy PM at the Bus Summit in November 1999. Passengers are asked to rate a number of aspects of the bus journey they have just made. Coverage is England outside London (Transport for London (TfL) conducts a related survey in London, which we use to generate figures for England as a whole).
- d) Bus reliability; a panel of around 100 large operators in England outside London provide quarterly information on lost scheduled bus mileage. TfL provide information for London to enable us to generate an England figure. The information is used to monitor a target for lost mileage set at the Bus Summit.

- e) Assaults on bus crew and passengers, vandalism on buses; three separate surveys involving a panel of GB bus operators, the police and TfL. DTLR administers the bus crew and vandalism surveys (quarterly and annual respectively). Collation of data and analysis, the police survey and TfL aspects have been contracted out for a number of years, most recently to Oscar Faber (contract ended in July 2001, no follow-up to date).

4. The results of these surveys are published in two DTLR publications, the annual 'Bulletin of Public Transport Statistics GB' and the quarterly 'Bus Quality Indicators', both are available on the DTLR transport statistics web site, www.transtat.dtlr.gov.uk. Statistics are also published in the annual 'Transport Statistics GB' and 'Transport Trends'.

Other sources of information are:

- a) Bus and coach journey information collected in the National Travel Survey (NTS).
- b) DVLA data on age of the bus fleet; administrative data derived from DVLA vehicle registration database. A target for the age of the bus fleet was set at the Bus Summit, this was the most convenient source of information at the time.
- c) ONS Corporate Services Price Index covering private coach hire.
- d) The range of data held by Traffic Commissioners on local bus service registration, operator licensing and monitoring.
- e) Health and Safety Executive statistics on assaults on bus crew.

Questions to answer

5. The review will address the following questions in the consultation phase:

General Questions

- Who are the data users?
- What are the users' needs from the output and does the output meet those needs?
- Are we efficient and effective in meeting user needs?
- If not, what improvements should be introduced?
- Are there aspects of timeliness or cost effectiveness that can be improved? (e.g. electronic data supply).

- Are the inputs and methodologies used appropriate, and are they of sufficient quality to meet purposes?
- Is the burden on data suppliers justified and held at the minimum required level?
- Can any of the information on quality which is made available to users be improved?
- Are there alternative data sources? (including non National Statistics sources of sufficient quality/reliability).

Scope of the review

6. The topic areas to be covered by the Review are:

i) Local bus use

This includes patronage, vehicle kilometres and passenger receipts from the annual PSV survey. Characteristics of local bus users and journey purpose from the NTS.

Some specific areas for investigation:

- Usefulness of financial questions in PSV survey.
- PSV survey; is it possible to collect reliable sub regional patronage statistics/ is there a demand for such statistics?
- Are NTS data consistent with PSV survey data? Is the operator measurement of passenger journeys accurate/consistent?
- Is there a demand for data on service volume (vehicle km) by peak/off peak, weekday/weekend?
- How reliable is the NTS rural accessibility indicator?

ii) Coach travel and other non local bus use (including contracts, charters and tours).

Coach data from the PSV survey and NTS.

Some specific areas for investigation:

- Is there a case for producing patronage data, could NTS be used to provide accurate estimates?
- Or is PSV survey the best source? How could data collection/response be improved?
- What further information is needed on these services?

iii) Local bus fares/pricing

Information collected in the DTLR quarterly survey and used in the RPI.
Pricing information used by ONS in price indices.

Areas for investigation:

- Index methodology
- Clarity of the bus fares survey form
- Alternative methodologies
- Quality of price indices used by ONS.

iv) Local bus passenger satisfaction

Quarterly surveys of bus users in London and rest of England.

Areas for investigation:

- The rating scale: are there better alternatives?
- Usefulness of an extra question on service availability? (e.g. number and frequency of services off-peak and at weekends).
- Should importance of aspects of service be ranked? How would this information be used?
- Survey frequency, should it be less frequent?
- Should published data be more disaggregated?
- Should London and non London results be compared? Are there better geographical comparisons?
- Should there be a simple satisfied/not satisfied question? What form would it take?
- Is there a need for satisfaction data on ticketing (cash/smartcards/prepaid tickets)?

v) Local bus reliability

Quarterly surveys of operated bus mileage and data collected by Traffic Commissioners on number of services and punctuality.

Areas for investigation:

- Comparison of reporting in London and elsewhere – treatment of losses due to traffic congestion.
- Alternative methods of measurement.
- Traffic Commissioners' data supporting new reliability standards.
- Local Authority data.
- Extent of existing collection of data on bus punctuality (including by bus operators).
- Scope for collection of data on bus lane enforcement.

vi) Bus related safety and security issues

Surveys of assaults on bus passengers and crew and vandalism, HSE statistics.

Areas for investigation:

- Establish whether there is still a need for these statistics.
- If so, how can the information be collected most effectively? Specifically statistics covering assaults on bus passengers.
- Alternative data sources, e.g. HSE, bus company insurance records, Home Office statistics.
- Should more be collected on fear of crime?
- Reliability of vandalism cost estimates.
- London and outside London, are there data collection differences?

vii) Vehicle statistics

Number and age of buses and coaches, low floor buses.

Areas for investigation:

- Age of Fleet; scope for regional or London/non London data.
- Alternative sources, e.g. SMMT, TAS consultancy.
- Scope for data to be collected from operators?
- Quality of DVLA data base?
- Stock of vehicles; which is best source (PSV survey, DVLA, other?).
- Low floor fleet; best data source?
- Possibility of separate data for bus and coach; age and fleet size.
- Data on Euro emission standard.

viii) Light rail use

Detailed statistics on all light rail systems are collected annually as part of the PSV survey. The Review Board considers that these should be part of the review, as light rail is seen as providing a service similar to local buses.

Areas for investigation:

- Methods used by operators to produce patronage estimates.

Timing

Appointments to the Review Board have been made (see Annex 1) and an introductory consultation meeting was held with members of the Transport Statistics Users Group on 16 January. The Review is likely to run for around six months. A fuller timetable is set out in Annex 2.

Outputs

The Review report will contain the following:

- A summary of the review covering, for example, its scope and objectives, its modus operandi, the individuals involved (including external representatives) and its main findings.
- A succinct description of the outputs covered by the review, directing readers to the ONS's analyses of current practice templates if they require greater detail.
- Details of users' requirements for the outputs. User consultation should form a substantial part of each review and consequently a substantial section in the report.
- An assessment of the quality of the outputs, such as an overview of the current methodology used and/or specific reference where concerns have arisen, and any other available quality measures.
- A list of costed recommendations resulting from the review, listing areas and proposals for improvement, prioritised where possible.
- Details of the time (person hours) spent on the review, and the costs involved.

The final report will be placed on the National Statistics web site as well as being published as a hardcopy publication.

Comments on this PID or other matters relating to the review can be posted on either the National Statistics web site at:

ns.quality.reviews.team.ldn@ons.gov.uk

Or direct to DTLR at bus.statistics@dtlr.gov.uk

ANNEX 1

REVIEW BOARD

| Name | Organisation |
|------------------|---|
| Hilary Hillier | DTLR –Transport Statistics |
| Ann Godfrey | DTLR – Bus Policy |
| David Harley | Confederation of Passenger Transport |
| Martin Higginson | Transport Research Laboratory |
| Catherine Mason | Arriva plc |
| Peter White | University of Westminster |
| Andrew Thompson | Transport for London |

Attending meetings:

David Champion DTLR, TSPT1 – Review Manager

Mark Dickson DTLR, TSPT1

Paul O'Hara DTLR, TSPT1

ANNEX 2

Review timetable

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| January-February 2002 | Recruit Review Board, hold first meeting (31 January), finalise PID and contractor specification. |
| 16 January | Initial consultation with Transport Statistics Users Group – seminar at DTLR. |
| February | Recruit contractor to carry out review. |
| March–April | Main consultation phase – contractor interviews users and suppliers, seeks comments from other interested parties. |
| 9 April | Review Board meets. |
| May | Production of draft report |
| June | Review Board considers draft report. |
| July | Final report. |
| August | Action plan published. |

