

## **National Travel Survey (NTS) review**

### **Q&A**

#### **Q&A about the review process**

##### **What other reviews are planned?**

An indicative schedule of reviews planned across National Statistics is available on the National Statistics website.

##### **What reviews are planned within DETR and in the Transport Travel and Tourism theme?**

The following reviews are currently running or planned (DETR unless otherwise stated):

<b>2000/01</b>	<b>Road freight surveys</b>
<b>2001/2</b>	<b>Bus and coach surveys, Vehicle licensing statistics</b>
2002/3	Road accident statistics, International Passenger Survey (ONS and DCMS) Tourism statistics (DCMS)

##### **Who was involved in the review, who was consulted, why was it carried out by internal staff?**

The steering group comprised members from DETR, representatives of both internal and external users, and an independent methodological expert. Members of the team actively consulted with a wide variety of users, including other government departments, local government, academics, transport consultants and others. This consultation was carried out by means of a questionnaire and seminar.

##### **Have reviews been carried out in the past?**

In recent years, major reviews of the NTS were carried out in 1993 and 1996. The 2000 review has consulted more widely than in the past, and the review quality has been assured by an external academic expert.

##### **Do you think that the review has looked at the most important issues?**

Yes. The review looked at all of the main aspects of the NTS. Its purposes were:

- to establish users' requirements regarding the outputs from the NTS; and
- to evaluate, taking account of best practice, whether any improvements could be made to the main NTS processes in order to improve the quality of the data.

These tasks were agreed by the project steering group, which includes non-DETR representatives. The NTS will be subject to a further quality review as part of the cycle of National Statistics Quality Reviews.

### **What was the Minister's role in the review?**

Ministers are aware of the programme of reviews as outlined in the White Paper. Ministers have not been involved in the detail of the review, but the Transport Minister has been briefed on its main findings.

### **What is the role of the Statistics Commission in this review? What role will the Commission have when it receives this report?**

The Statistics Commission did not have a direct role in this review. They are, of course, being sent a copy of the report [and the DETR is offering the Commission the opportunity to be briefed on the review]. The Commission will be free to comment on this review if they chose to do so.

### **Q&A about contents of the NTS report**

#### **What is the NTS?**

The NTS is a household survey, commissioned by DETR, that provides users with information on personal travel within Great Britain, by residents of GB. Respondents complete a detailed seven-day travel diary. The fieldwork is currently conducted by the Social Survey Division of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), but analysis and publication of results are the responsibility of DETR.

Outputs include annual publications and fact sheets containing details on how and why people in different groups of the population travel, and a database used to answer ad hoc enquiries. In the past, 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. From 2002, the sample size will increase to about 15,000 households a year, to enable analysis for single years.

Within DETR, the survey is used to inform policy making decisions in a variety of areas relating to personal travel.

#### **Has the review identified any problems?**

Although the overall assessment is that the NTS is of good quality and meets most user needs, the review has identified a range of areas where improvements could be made. However, while the review highlights a number of recommendations for change, none of these is such as to cause major concerns about quality, or to suggest that the survey is not fit for purpose. We believe that the recommendations in the report are sensible and appropriate, and are to be welcomed.

**How far does the review address the needs of non-DETR users?**

The DETR has many users in other central government departments, local authorities, transport consultants, and academic research. As part of the review we conducted a survey of users both within and outside the DETR and their replies are summarised within the report.

**Non-response as an issue. Does this mean that there is bias in the outputs from the NTS?**

There will be a major check in possible bias in 2002/3, when characteristics of non-responders will be compared with those of responders, using 2001 Census data. This exercise was also carried out following the 1991 Census, and no major bias was detected. However, since non-response has increased during the 1990s, it is now likely that there is some non-response bias, and weighting of the NTS is now being considered to minimise the effects of this.

**The review appears to recommend an increase in respondent burden through the addition of geocoding. Can this be justified?**

The review recommends that geocoding be looked at further. This will only be added after appropriate testing and piloting.

**What effect will the proposed changes to the NTS have on personal travel statistics?**

There will be some small changes to the information available, with more regular data.

**When will the DETR start its review of imputation and weighting?**

The programme of further work following the review has already begun. It is expected that final decisions will be made, on imputation and weighting the survey results, in early 2002.