
Director General for Regulation

Louise Coward
Head of Profession for Statistics
Transport Focus
(by email)

8 January 2020

Dear Louise

ASSESSMENT OF STATISTICS FROM THE NATIONAL RAIL PASSENGER SURVEY (NRPS)

We have today published our National Statistics assessment report covering these statistics. I am grateful for the positive contribution and engagement from you and your team throughout the assessment process.

The NRPS is a unique data source, providing a consistent and comparable measure of rail passenger journey satisfaction in Great Britain and is the only publicly available measure for understanding rail passenger satisfaction across the rail network. The NRPS is a valued data source for the rail industry, in particular for franchised train operating companies (TOCs), as NRPS results are used as a key performance indicator in TOCs franchise agreements. The user community of the NRPS is also wide-ranging and it is valued by many as an important insight tool.

Our report identifies some areas of good practice, particularly around user engagement. We heard that the statistics team is approachable, helpful and engages positively with users. We also recognise that Transport Focus have taken steps to develop and innovate the NRPS to ensure that its statistics remain relevant and fit for purpose.

Statistics that inform and drive improvements across the rail network across Great Britain really matter and it is important that they are accurate, quality assured and reflect the everyday experience of rail passengers. It is our view that statistics derived from the NRPS do not currently meet these expectations. We highlight a number of our concerns in our report, but in our view the survey has two main limitations.

Firstly, the NRPS does not reflect the continuous customer experience of rail travel in Great Britain throughout the year as its results are produced only for the spring and autumn. Therefore, any seasonal differences in passenger satisfaction, falling outside of the fieldwork periods, including those following the May 2018 and December 2019 timetable changes, short-term effects following the annual fare increases each January, and extreme weather events at other times, are not captured. We acknowledge that you have proposed a more frequent NRPS in the past. However, considerable additional investment is needed to achieve this. Secondly, the NRPS measures rail passengers' satisfaction based on last rail 'journey', and not passengers' overall satisfaction with a rail operator, though the primary use of the NRPS is to measure rail operators' 'overall' performance. We understand that there are benefits in using the journey-based approach, though we consider that there is a substantial risk of misinterpretation and misuse due to these differences.

We judge that due to these limitations, the NRPS statistics in their current form cannot be designated as National Statistics. Our report identifies 14 requirements across the three pillars of the Code of Practice for Statistics which are designed to enhance the public value, quality, and trustworthiness of the statistics. We have agreed that you will publish an action plan in January 2020 which outlines how you propose to address the requirements.

We note that potential changes to rail industry following the Williams Rail Review may directly impact on your plans for addressing the requirements. However, we are clear that further

development of the NRPS is required so that its statistics can remain relevant and valued in the context of an evolving rail industry.

Please feel free to discuss any aspect of this assessment with me or my team at any time.

I am also writing to the Chair of the Transport Committee to highlight the findings from this assessment and copying this letter to Ian Knowles, Head of Profession for Statistics at the Department for Transport.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ed Humpherson', written in a cursive style.

Ed Humpherson
Director General for Regulation