

Guideline 5 - Passenger perceptions

Using the National Passenger Survey

An important aspect of the accreditation process is gauging passenger perceptions of the station. It is crucial to the credibility of the Scheme that stations given accreditation are perceived by passengers to be secure.

In order to facilitate the process of gauging passenger perceptions, the Scheme will make use of existing data obtained by the National Passenger Survey (NPS).

The National Passenger Survey is administered¹ twice a year, in the early Spring and the Autumn. Passengers are asked for their opinion on many aspects of the rail journey, including how safe they feel at the station. It is carried out across the country, currently at 620 of the 2,500 rail stations. The benefit of using the NPS, in addition to the convenience of utilising an existing resource, is that it provides independent, reliable and consistent data that enables national comparisons to be made.

The NPS is a paper-based questionnaire that is distributed to passengers with a pre-paid envelope for return. The questionnaire is too long to administer through an interview. Passengers' age, gender, journey purpose, disability and frequency of travel are collected. Results from the NPS are adjusted for each station to ensure that they are representative of weekday and weekend users. Questionnaires are distributed until 10.00pm.

The results of the NPS for the previous 2 years (i.e. the last 4 surveys) will be available to the station operator for the purposes of gauging passenger perceptions for Secure Stations accreditation. Station operators should make requests for data to Peter Thompson, Customer Research Manager at Passenger Focus (email address Peter.Thompson@passengerfocus.org.uk). Data will normally be supplied within 10 working days.

Stations with a sufficient sample from the NPS will no longer have to undertake a separate survey. Those that cannot achieve a large enough sample from the NPS will have to carry out or commission a new survey, as they currently do.²

¹ Continental Research, an independent market research agency, has carried out the NPS since spring 2003, and are used by some Passenger Transport Executives to carry out booster surveys.

² The largest sample required will be 100 respondents. Where this is only partially yielded by the NPS, the operator will need to conduct a survey to make up the shortfall. However, given the small numbers involved, they may find it no more costly to conduct or commission a full sample as opposed to a partial one.

Any survey carried out under the Scheme, where the NPS results do not provide an adequate sample, will need to ask the same question as that used in the NPS (see below) regarding rating of personal security at the station, in order to enable the results to be used in the accreditation process.

Where a new survey is required, station operators are encouraged to use an independent agency to conduct it. This will ensure independence, and will have the benefit of being administered by skilled and experienced staff. The station operator may decide to commission the agency carrying out the NPS for this purpose.

If the NPS for the previous 2 years does not yield an adequate sample and the operator decides to conduct or commission a booster survey rather than a full one, this should be carried out at the same time of year as the NPS, so that passengers are influenced by the same external factors that could affect their response (e.g. weather, daylight hours, etc). All booster surveys using NPS data should be undertaken within one month of the NPS survey.

Sample sizes

The sample sizes are:

- For stations with less than 300 passengers a day, 30 responses³
- For stations with between 300 and 1,000 passengers a day, 10% of the daily throughput
- For stations with more than 1,000 passengers a day, at least 100 responses

In terms of statistical accuracy, even given a very high passenger throughput, from a survey with 100 responses will provide results to within 10%⁴. This 'confidence bound' will be factored into the scoring for the survey. Since most of the big (and busier) stations will get more than 100 responses through the NPS anyway, results would be more reliable than this confidence bound, based on 100 results, suggests.

Survey question: the Scheme requirements

Only the following question is required under the Scheme:

³ A sample of 30 is a minimum both to protect confidentiality and to ensure a meaningful result. However, special consideration might be given to very small stations that struggle to get 30 passengers a day in total.

⁴ For example, if the survey showed that 64% of people that were asked said they felt either safe or unsafe you would be confident that the opinion of all users of that station would be between 54% and 74%.

- How do you rate the station in terms of your personal security while using it:
 - very good
 - fairly good
 - neither good nor poor
 - fairly poor
 - very poor
 - no opinion

Station operators are encouraged to reflect the NPS methodology in any passenger surveys that they conduct, and to ensure that respondents are representative of their customer base.

Given that only one question is to be asked, station operators are recommended to administer the survey through face-to-face questionnaire. This approach will probably be cheaper and yield a higher response than distributing paper questionnaires.

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London Underground use their Customer Satisfaction Survey (CSS) to provide passenger survey data. Although the CSS is not station-specific the sample taken is designed to be representative of all journeys. All other survey requirements of the CSS reflect the NPS methodology.

Costs

Where the NPS does not cover the station or does not provide an adequate response for the Scheme, the cost of the survey or booster survey will be met by the station operator. The costs will vary across the stations:

- Those where NPS produced an adequate sample – no cost
- Those where NPS produced an inadequate sample – some additional cost
- Those not covered by NPS – full cost.

Re-accreditation

The survey requirements outlined in this paper will also apply to re-accreditations.