

Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

Transport Statistics Compendium Publications

(produced by the Department for Transport)

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About the UK Statistics Authority

The UK Statistics Authority is an independent body operating at arm's length from government as a non-ministerial department, directly accountable to Parliament. It was established on 1 April 2008 by the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*.

The Authority's overall objective is to promote and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good. It is also required to promote and safeguard the quality and comprehensiveness of official statistics, and good practice in relation to official statistics.

The Statistics Authority has two main functions:

1. oversight of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) – the executive office of the Authority;
2. independent scrutiny (monitoring and assessment) of all official statistics produced in the UK.

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ASSESSMENT AND DESIGNATION

The *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007* gives the UK Statistics Authority a statutory power to assess sets of statistics against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*. Assessment will determine whether it is appropriate for the statistics to be designated as National Statistics.

Designation as National Statistics means that the statistics comply with the *Code of Practice*. The *Code* is wide-ranging. Designation can be interpreted to mean that the statistics: meet identified user needs; are produced, managed and disseminated to high standards; and are explained well.

Designation as National Statistics should not be interpreted to mean that the statistics are always correct. For example, whilst the *Code* requires statistics to be produced to a level of accuracy that meets users' needs, it also recognises that errors can occur – in which case it requires them to be corrected and publicised.

Assessment Reports will not normally comment further on a set of statistics, for example on their validity as social or economic measures. However, Reports may point to such questions if the Authority believes that further research would be desirable.

Assessment Reports typically provide an overview of any noteworthy features of the methods used to produce the statistics, and will highlight substantial concerns about quality. Assessment Reports also describe aspects of the ways in which the producer addresses the 'sound methods and assured quality' principle of the *Code*, but do not themselves constitute a review of the methods used to produce the statistics. However the *Code* requires producers to "seek to achieve continuous improvement in statistical processes by, for example, undertaking regular reviews".

The Authority may grant designation on condition that the producer body takes steps, within a stated timeframe, to fully meet the *Code's* requirements. This is to avoid public confusion and does not reduce the obligation to comply with the *Code*.

The Authority grants designation on the basis of three main sources of information:

- i. factual evidence and assurances by senior statisticians in the producer body;
- ii. the views of users who we contact, or who contact us, and;
- iii. our own review activity.

Should further information come to light subsequently which changes the Authority's analysis, it may withdraw the Assessment Report and revise it as necessary.

It is a statutory requirement on the producer body to ensure that it continues to produce the set of statistics designated as National Statistics in compliance with the *Code of Practice*.

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1 Summary of findings

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This is one of a series of reports¹ prepared under the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*². The report covers the following compendia publications produced by the Department for Transport (DfT):

- *Transport Statistics Great Britain (TSGB)*³
- *Transport Trends*⁴
- *Regional Transport Statistics*⁵.

1.1.2 Assessments of compendium publications against the Code of Practice relate to the processes involved in preparing the publication, rather than in producing the statistics that are included. Those sets of statistics will normally be subject to separate assessment. Designation of a compendium publication as National Statistics therefore means that the producer body has, for example: identified and met user needs in terms of the content of the publication; considered the appropriateness of each series for inclusion; and written appropriate commentary.

1.1.3 This report was prepared by the Authority's Assessment team, and approved by the Board of the Statistics Authority on the advice of the Head of Assessment.

1.2 Decision concerning designation as National Statistics

1.2.1 The Statistics Authority judges that the statistics covered by this report are readily accessible, produced according to sound methods and managed impartially and objectively in the public interest, subject to any points for action in this report. The Statistics Authority confirms that the publications listed at para 1.1.1 are designated as National Statistics, subject to DfT implementing the enhancements listed in section 1.5 and reporting them to the Authority by December 2010 (October⁶ for Requirement 6).

1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

1.3.1 At a national level, *TSGB* and *Transport Trends* provide a good statistical overview of transport from many different angles, drawing in data from both inside and outside the department. *Regional Transport Statistics* is less supported by metadata and commentary, but goes some way towards meeting the demand for more local information. Users of the publications appreciate the opportunity to compare across countries and between modes of travel.

¹ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment-reports/index.html>

² http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2007/pdf/ukpga_20070018_en.pdf

³ <http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/statistics/datatablespublications/tsgb/>

⁴ <http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/statistics/datatablespublications/trends/>

⁵ <http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/statistics/datatablespublications/regionaldata/>

⁶ This is the target date set in Assessment Report 40 (Statistics on Road Conditions in England, May 2010)

- 1.3.2 The inclusion of a wide range of sources in these National Statistics publications is appropriate, but DfT could do more to inform readers whether the statistics from other sources are broadly comparable in terms of quality with National Statistics, and they could ensure that there is a similar level of information about all the statistics in the publications – particularly in relation to how they are compiled, and any limitations they may have.
- 1.3.3 DfT has limited information about how and where *TSGB* and *Transport Trends* are being used, and as a result it is unclear whether traditional print publication is still the most effective means of dissemination.

1.4 Detailed recommendations

- 1.4.1 The Assessment team identified some areas where it felt that DfT could strengthen its compliance with the Code. Those which the Assessment team considers essential to enable designation as National Statistics are listed in section 1.5. Other suggestions, which would improve the statistics and the service provided to users but which are not formally required for their designation, are listed at annex 1.

1.5 Requirements for designation as National Statistics

Requirement 1	Take steps to develop a more complete understanding of the use made of the statistics, the needs of current and potential users, and user views on the service provided. Publish the relevant information and assumptions and use them to better support the beneficial use of the statistics (para 3.3)
Requirement 2	Explain the distinction between National Statistics and the other types of statistic that are in the compendia, and comment on the extent to which they are reliable (para 3.7)
Requirement 3	Include information on unweighted sample sizes in <i>TSGB</i> (para 3.20)
Requirement 4	Ensure that users of <i>Regional Transport Statistics</i> have access to the same metadata as users of the other compendium publications (para 3.21)
Requirement 5	Include the name and contact details of the responsible statistician in <i>Regional Transport Statistics</i> (para 3.27)
Requirement 6	Revise and complete DfT's Statement of Administrative Sources so that it identifies all of the elements required in the Code (para 3.28)

2 Subject of the assessment

- 2.1 *Transport Statistics Great Britain (TSGB)* is an annual compendium covering all aspects of transport - road, rail, air and water; freight and passenger; vehicle and driver licensing; accidents and casualties; investment and expenditure; energy consumption and the impact on the environment. Most of the statistics are at GB or UK level (depending on availability) and there are some international comparisons. The publication consists of detailed reference tables with ten year time series where possible. Each chapter starts with a notes and definitions section, but there is no commentary. *TSGB* was first published in the 1970s; the latest edition published in November 2009 was the 35th. It is a print publication, with PDF and Excel versions available on DfT's website. Much⁷ of the data come from external sources, including transport operators, regulators, and other government departments.
- 2.2 *TSGB* is complemented by a companion volume, *Transport Trends*. This uses colour charts and bullet point commentary to illustrate trends in transport and travel over the last two or three decades. *Transport Trends* originally resulted from a commitment in a 1998 White Paper to monitor progress against key indicators. The current edition includes trends in relation to the former government's Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets and those sustainable development indicators that are most relevant to transport. Like *TSGB*, *Transport Trends* includes previously published data from a range of DfT and external sources. Copies are printed in-house and made available on demand. It is available as a PDF on DfT's website, where the data underlying the charts can also be obtained in Excel format.
- 2.3 *Regional Transport Statistics* brings together a range of statistics for different parts of the UK, Government Office Regions and, where possible, former Metropolitan Counties. It consists of tables, with no commentary and with fewer notes and definitions than the other compendia. Not all the regional breakdowns of national data will have previously been published, but any new tables are confined to DfT data. *Regional Transport Statistics* was last produced as a single annual edition in 2008. In 2009, in order to deliver a more timely service to users, it was converted to a web only publication. Each chapter is released as an Excel file when the relevant source material becomes available, according to a timetable⁸ that is published on the DfT website. Each table also contains a note of when it has been published, and when the next update is expected.
- 2.4 *TSGB* and *Transport Trends* are used extensively within DfT, mainly because they facilitate comparisons between transport modes, between parts of the UK, and over time. They are used in forecasting, policy development, responding to queries and for briefing purposes. Users outside DfT who responded to our consultation said that they used the publications for briefing, and dealing with general or media enquiries. *Regional Transport Statistics* and *TSGB* are used

⁷ Around 70 tables in the volume (nearly half the total) carry a footnote stating that some or all of the figures are outside the scope of National Statistics.

⁸ <http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/statistics/datatablespublications/regionaldata/rtslivetables>

in local government and Government Offices for monitoring and comparison purposes.

- 2.5 As stated in paragraph 2.3, DfT publishes *Regional Transport Statistics* on a chapter by chapter basis on its website. It is considering the same approach for *TSGB* and *Transport Trends*. This would provide more timely access to parts of the publication and improve consistency between the Excel tables (which are updated during the year) and the PDF files for each chapter.

3 Assessment findings

Principle 1: Meeting user needs

The production, management and dissemination of official statistics should meet the requirements of informed decision-making by government, public services, business, researchers and the public.

- 3.1 In February 2010 DfT published a User Service Statement⁹ setting out the mechanisms by which it engages with users. DfT discusses its plans and developments across the range of its statistics with two established user groups: the Transport Statistics User Group¹⁰ (TSUG) and the Central and Local (Government) Information Partnership Transport Sub-group¹¹ (CLIP-TS). TSUG is an independent group which holds regular seminars and produces a newsletter. Its membership includes transport operators, manufacturers, trade associations, consultants, universities, local authorities and research organisations. CLIP-TS meets quarterly and provides a forum for local government users and data suppliers to comment on and discuss transport statistics. Its membership also includes passenger transport authorities.
- 3.2 Engaging with users and documenting their needs and experiences are primarily tasks for those statisticians who are responsible for producing the first releases in each area of transport statistics. However, the producers of compendium publications still need to ensure that they have identified and met user needs in terms of the content of the publication; considered the appropriateness of each series for inclusion; and written appropriate commentary (see para 1.1.2). DfT told us that feedback is invited in the publications themselves, and that account is taken of requests for data through enquiry points. Information about the purchasers of *TSGB* is currently withheld by the publisher (TSO) on commercial grounds. Users within DfT are consulted via emails and meetings, and via a customer satisfaction survey that covers transport statistics as a whole. The move to chapter by chapter web publication of *Regional Transport Statistics* was made in response to the perceived user need for more timely data.
- 3.3 As part of the designation as National Statistics, DfT should take steps to develop a more complete understanding of the use made of the compendia publications, the needs of current and potential users, and user views on the service provided, and publish the relevant information and assumptions and use them to better support the beneficial use of the statistics¹² (Requirement 1). This might be done, for example, by analysing enquiries and web hits in a more systematic way; obtaining more feedback from within DfT; initiating discussions at TSUG and CLIP-TS; and pressing the publisher of *TSGB* for more information about purchasers.

⁹ <http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/statistics/standardsreview/userservice.pdf>

¹⁰ <http://www.tsug.org.uk/>

¹¹ <http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/statistics/committeesusergroups/centralandlocalgovernmentinf5088>

¹² In relation to Principle 1 Practice 2 of the Code of Practice

Principle 2: Impartiality and objectivity

Official statistics, and information about statistical processes, should be managed impartially and objectively.

- 3.4 The choice of statistics for inclusion in all three compendia is based on a judgement about their usefulness and on availability. The commentary in *Transport Trends* is impartial.
- 3.5 All three compendia are available from DfT's website without charge. Printed copies of *TSGB* retail at £39 (2009 edition).

Principle 3: Integrity

At all stages in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics, the public interest should prevail over organisational, political or personal interests.

- 3.6 No incidents of political pressures, abuses or complaints relating to professional integrity, quality or standards were reported to or identified by the Assessment team.

Principle 4: Sound methods and assured quality

Statistical methods should be consistent with scientific principles and internationally recognised best practices, and be fully documented. Quality should be monitored and assured taking account of internationally agreed practices.

- 3.7 A number of tables in each compendium (or charts in the case of *Transport Trends*) are marked as 'outside the scope of National Statistics' because they are produced by transport operators, regulators, private sector or international bodies. Some of these bodies are producers of official statistics while others are not. The compendia do not explain these distinctions and the accompanying notes do not always provide information about how these statistics are compiled, or comment on any limitations¹³ they may have. Their inclusion helps to provide a more rounded and complete picture for users, but as part of the designation as National Statistics, DfT should include an explanation of the distinction between National Statistics, other official statistics and statistics that are not official and comment on the extent to which they are reliable¹⁴ (Requirement 2).
- 3.8 All three compendia include data for the devolved administrations where possible. DfT told us that there is an annual meeting of transport statisticians from all four administrations and bilateral meetings between statisticians in different topic areas. DfT is not aware of any specific examples of data collections being changed in ways that might reduce UK comparability.
- 3.9 There are notes and footnotes in all three compendia that draw attention to changes in methods and to revisions that might affect comparability or introduce discontinuities into the data.
- 3.10 Although much of the data and commentary are prepared by the teams who are responsible for each topic area, compendia publications require high editorial standards in order to ensure that the format and style are consistent, and to challenge errors and ambiguities. DfT may wish to consider ensuring that it has a set of desk notes describing the proof-reading and other checks that are required to maintain the current standards.
- 3.11 Some data are taken from external websites and DfT informed us that the producers of these data are not routinely asked to check the data or proof-read the associated commentary or metadata. We suggest that this step be taken in the future.

¹³ For example, whether the data are thought to be reasonably complete, and whether there are any known problems with systematic error or bias.

¹⁴ In relation to Principle 4 Practices 1 and 2 of the Code of Practice

Principle 5: Confidentiality

Private information about individual persons (including bodies corporate) compiled in the production of official statistics is confidential, and should be used for statistical purposes only.

3.12 This principle is not directly applicable to compendia publications, as they rely on the steps taken by the producers of the original statistical series.

Principle 6: Proportionate burden

The cost burden on data suppliers should not be excessive and should be assessed relative to the benefits arising from the use of the statistics.

3.13 This principle has limited application to compendium publications, as they rely on the steps taken by those responsible for producing the original statistical series. We received comments from three producers outside DfT, who told us that the work involved in supplying and checking data in the format required for the compendia was minimal, and that they were satisfied with the way DfT liaised with them.

Principle 7: Resources

The resources made available for statistical activities should be sufficient to meet the requirements of this Code and should be used efficiently and effectively.

- 3.14 There are four main statistics teams in DfT, embedded within policy directorates. We were told that separate business plans are held for each of these directorates, and these plans include details of the allocation of resources to statistics.
- 3.15 DfT informed us that there are monthly meetings with Directors to discuss finances and staffing and that staff resources are managed on a day to day basis by a Transport Statistics Management Group. This group produces a transport statistics business plan which seeks to identify areas where there are pressures to meet new and changing demands or a need for long term investment.
- 3.16 We have been assured that statistical work complies with departmental arrangements for financial stewardship and procurement.
- 3.17 Appropriate recruitment and development policies are in place to ensure that suitably skilled people are employed in the statistical production process. These policies include the completion of Continuous Professional Development logs, personal development plans and a system of mentoring.
- 3.18 DfT told us that there is continuing demand for hard copies of *TSGB* and *Transport Trends*, especially within the department, and that this justifies incurring the additional publication costs. We suggest that DfT review the costs and benefits of continuing to provide *TSGB* and *Transport Trends* in print format, after obtaining information from the publisher about the number of sales and the composition of the market for hard copies of *TSGB*.

Principle 8: Frankness and accessibility

Official statistics, accompanied by full and frank commentary, should be readily accessible to all users.

- 3.19 DfT's website is easy to navigate and makes access to the statistics straightforward. *TSGB* and *Transport Trends* are well presented, with clear tables and charts and a helpful commentary. The introduction to *Transport Trends* refers to *TSGB* as the 'main reference volume' but *TSGB* does not refer readers to *Transport Trends*. We suggest that this be done, since the latter is more suited to those users who wish to browse and obtain a quick overview of trends.
- 3.20 The notes and definitions in *TSGB* and *Transport Trends* explain the terms that are used, inform users where the data come from, provide a brief description of the methods used in their production and signpost users to further information. We thought these notes were generally very clear and helpful. However, we could not find any information in *TSGB* about the sample size of the National Travel Survey. The tables that are based on other survey data do not include unweighted sample sizes. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DfT should include information on unweighted sample sizes in *TSGB*¹⁵ (Requirement 3).
- 3.21 *Regional Transport Statistics* is produced as a series of Excel files containing tables and footnotes. While many users of the regional data will know where to find definitions and explanations, this may not always be the case. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DfT should ensure that users of *Regional Transport Statistics* have the same access to metadata as users of the other compendium publications¹⁶ (Requirement 4).
- 3.22 The print format restricts *TSGB* to a ten-year time series, although earlier editions are available. At the time of the assessment, the links to Excel tables did not work; DfT informed us that this was a temporary problem and the links have since been reinstated. Users who responded to our consultation wanted tables that can be exported into formats such as Excel
- 3.23 There were also user requirements for access to longer time series and for more local data (local authority areas and parliamentary constituencies). DfT told us that they are piloting a more web-based presentation of tables and that this should in due course enable access to longer time series from *TSGB*. Local data are available through DfT's website (for those administrative and other data sources that support lower geographies) but information about where to find such data is not currently brought together in one place. We suggest that DfT provide a guide to availability. DfT told us that it is considering the inclusion of some local authority data in *Regional Transport Statistics*.
- 3.24 DfT confirmed that the compendium publications are deposited with The National Archive.

¹⁵ In relation to Principle 8 Practice 1 of the Code of Practice

¹⁶ In relation to Principle 8 Practice 1 of the Code of Practice

Protocol 1: User engagement

Effective user engagement is fundamental both to trust in statistics and securing maximum public value. This Protocol draws together the relevant practices set out elsewhere in the Code and expands on the requirements in relation to consultation.

3.25 The requirements for this Protocol are covered elsewhere in this report.

Protocol 2: Release practices

Statistical reports should be released into the public domain in an orderly manner that promotes public confidence and gives equal access to all, subject to relevant legislation.

- 3.26 The statistics are released according to a published timetable and are accessible from the National Statistics Publication Hub. None of the three compendium publications requires a pre-release access list as the data have previously been published (albeit at a higher geography in the case of *Regional Transport Statistics*).
- 3.27 *TSGB* includes the name and contact details of the editor and of the statisticians in each topic area. There is also a telephone contact number at the foot of each table. *Transport Trends* contains the name and contact details of the editor. *Regional Transport Statistics* has one or more telephone contacts at the foot of each table, but no named statistician or editor. As part of the designation as National Statistics, *Regional Transport Statistics* should include contact details for a named statistician¹⁷ (Requirement 5).

¹⁷ In relation to Protocol 2 Practice 6 of the Code of Practice

Protocol 3: The use of administrative sources for statistical purposes

Administrative sources should be fully exploited for statistical purposes, subject to adherence to appropriate safeguards.

3.28 DfT has published a general overview of Administrative Sources, with detailed statements about four data sources. It plans to add a wider range of administrative systems to this list. There are also other elements required by the Code which are missing from the statement. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DfT should revise and complete its Statement of Administrative Sources so that it identifies all of the elements required in the Code¹⁸ (Requirement 6). This requirement is the same as that made in an earlier assessment report¹⁹.

¹⁸ In relation to Protocol 3 Practice 5 of the Code of Practice

¹⁹ Statistics on Road Conditions in England, Assessment Report 40, May 2010

Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to the transport statistics compendia produced by DfT, in the interest of the public good. These are not formally required for designation, but the Assessment team considers that their implementation will improve public confidence in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics.

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| Suggestion 1 | Ask all producers of data taken from external websites to check the statistics reproduced in the compendia, together with any associated commentary or metadata (para 3.11) |
| Suggestion 2 | Review the costs and benefits of continuing to provide <i>TSGB</i> and <i>Transport Trends</i> in print format (para 3.18) |
| Suggestion 3 | Ensure that <i>TSGB</i> and its web page signpost readers to <i>Transport Trends</i> (para 3.19) |
| Suggestion 4 | Provide a guide to the availability of local data on DfT's website (para 3.23) |

Annex 2: Summary of assessment process and users' views

A2.1 This assessment was conducted from March to July 2010.

A2.2 The Assessment team - Jill Barelli and Amanda Charles - agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of DfT in March. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 16 April. The Assessment team subsequently met with DfT during May to review compliance with the Code of Practice, taking account of the written evidence provided and other relevant sources of evidence.

Summary of users contacted, and issues raised

A2.3 Part of the assessment process involves our consideration of the views of users. We approach some known and potential users of the set of statistics, and we invite comments via an open note on the Authority's website. This process is not a statistical survey, but it enables us to gain some insights about the extent to which the statistics meet users' needs and the extent to which users feel that the producers of those statistics engage with them. We are aware that responses from users may not be representative of wider views, and we take account of this in the way that we prepare assessment reports.

A2.4 The Assessment team received 19 responses from the user consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:

DfT	6
Local government	6
Devolved administrations	4
Parliamentary	2
Other	1

A2.5 Users who responded to this assessment particularly praised the comprehensiveness of the compendia publications and the helpfulness of the DfT statisticians. Users appreciated the opportunity to compare across countries and between modes of travel. However, some expressed frustration about the timeliness and accessibility²⁰ of the statistics, and there was a desire for smaller geographical breakdowns and for longer time series to be made more readily available.

Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document

²⁰ This was in relation to the absence of Excel versions of the TSGB tables (see para 3.22)

