
Mark Pont, Assessment Programme Lead

Julie Brown
Head of Profession for Statistics
Department for Transport
(by email)

27 October 2017

Dear Julie

STATISTICS ON RAIL PASSENGER NUMBERS AND CROWDING IN ENGLAND AND WALES

Thank you very much for the positive engagement of yourself and the Rail Statistics team as we undertook our recent short review of these statistics. We reviewed the statistics against the three pillars – trustworthiness, quality and value – that are fundamental to supporting public confidence in statistics and form the basis of National Statistics status. This letter confirms our findings.

On the whole, the statistics are presented clearly and offer insight into passenger numbers and crowding in a range of cities in England and Wales. The main demand in this area is for detailed data for use within DfT and the rail industry. Against that backdrop, we commend your efforts to bring the statistics to a wider audience by developing an accessible and helpful statistical release. Some of the main positive features that we found with the statistical release are:

- The inclusion of helpful contextual statistics from a range of other sources
- Clear definitions and illustrative examples of the key concepts that relate to the statistics
- Helpful and clear presentation of the statistics for each of the cities concerned
- A helpful summary of strengths and weaknesses of the statistics including links to supplementary documentation

I also want to reflect positively on the scale of ambition showed in developing a new database system. We understand that this will offer significant potential for you to enhance the range of analyses available from the rail passenger data, while also reducing the burden on Train Operating Companies (TOCs) in providing the data. We support your efforts to bring further TOCs into this system, and wish you every success in this endeavour.

Overall we found your quality assurance processes to be appropriate to the data and to the use made of the statistics. We acknowledge that there is wide expertise within the industry around the provision and use of these data, which mitigates many risks to quality. I recommend that you formally review your quality assurance processes against our [Quality Assurance of Administrative Data](#) standards to consider whether there are ways that you may be able to enhance them, particularly in the following two areas:

- The instructions given to TOCs around exclusion of atypical days from the data. We acknowledge that TOCs' local knowledge is important in their classification of atypical days, but wonder whether there could be an opportunity for you to enhance comparability between the statistics for different TOCs by providing more-detailed instructions to TOCs?
- Your internal quality assurance checks. We found these to be comprehensive, including a range of automated checks within your data spreadsheets supplemented with comprehensive desk notes. Some checks are not automated, and these may benefit from more automation to complement manual checking.

Such a review would also be helpful as you develop the new database and have access to a wider range of more-disaggregated data.

We also consider that your user engagement seemed appropriate to the statistics and demonstrated a good understanding of the uses made of the statistics, and the needs of those users. The statistical release includes a helpful short summary of the use made of the statistics, and is accompanied by a more-detailed statement of user feedback. The user feedback document is now four years old. It may be worth considering how you can keep published information about users and uses up-to-date, for example by incorporating and updating the most salient points into the bulletin's summary of use.

Finally, we reviewed the pre-release access list for these statistics. We note that it has lengthened slightly over recent years, and welcome your team's commitment to take a harder look at the list for the next publication to consider where it might be reduced. You are already aware that the National Statistician recently decided to stop pre-release access to the statistics produced by the Office for National Statistics. We encourage all statistical producers to consider whether the public benefit likely to result from pre-release access to their statistics is outweighed by the detriment to public trust in those statistics that may result from such access.

Once again, thank you for engaging effectively with us during this short review. Please let me know if there is any aspect of this letter that you wish to discuss.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Pont', with a horizontal line underneath.

Mark Pont
Assessment Programme Lead