

Rail passenger numbers and crowding statistics: User feedback



Department
for Transport

Introduction

This note summarises feedback from users of DfT rail passenger numbers and crowding statistics, based on the responses received to an online feedback request and wider consultation over the period July 2012 to May 2013. It includes the Department's responses to issues raised by users.

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Note that the focus here is on the passenger count data collected by the Department from train operators, published in the annual passenger numbers and crowding statistics releases. User needs are also met through a variety of other sources, principally the quarterly and annual rail usage statistics published by the Office of Rail Regulation (ORR).

The published statistics include aggregate information for individual cities, London terminals and train operators. However, within government and the rail industry, with the permission of individual train operators, use is also made of the underlying data for individual train services. Therefore some of the uses of these statistics included in this note, and the responses received to the consultation, reflect the use of the train service data as well as the published statistics.

DfT has collected views on the published statistics and underlying passenger count data from a range of users, through meetings, by email and via an online feedback form (questions are shown in the Annex). In total, views were received from around 15 people/organisations. These reflected a range of different users, including organisations in the rail industry, central and devolved government, passenger groups, the media and members of the public. However, the following should be considered as a broad indication of users' views and it is not possible to quantify responses in a meaningful way.

We are grateful to all those who provided feedback to inform this analysis. The consultation with users has provided a good understanding of the use made of these statistics, and identified improvements that can be made to the published statistics.

Rail passenger numbers and crowding statistics can be found via the DfT Rail Statistics webpage: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-transport/series/rail-statistics>

Uses of these statistics

These statistics are the best source of information available showing day-to-day passenger numbers and crowding levels at particular points across the rail network, and how passenger numbers vary throughout the day. The Office of Rail Regulation publishes statistics showing the number of passenger journeys and passenger kilometres travelled on the rail network each quarter, based on ticket sales. The ORR statistics are the best source of information on the overall level of rail travel across the country and trends in rail travel over time.

The passenger numbers and crowding statistics and the underlying passenger count data are used within government and across the rail industry for a wide variety of uses. Within the Department for Transport these uses include:

- Informing Government policy on rail, including decisions on infrastructure, station and rolling stock investment. Recently this has included the proposals set out in the Rail Investment Strategy (also termed 'HLOS'), published by DfT in July 2012, which set out the Government's priorities for the rail industry for the period between 2014 and 2019. Passenger count data have also been used as part of the recent Fares and Ticketing Review to investigate the impact that current fares regulation may have on crowding.
- As part of the rail franchising process, informing the specification of new franchises and the models used in the assessment of franchise bids.
- Validating models of passenger demand used by DfT. This has recently included the Department's Network Modelling Framework and PLANET models.
- Assessing train plans and projects proposed by train operators.
- Monitoring crowding and the impact of previous policy and investment decisions.
- As part of briefings and to respond to ad hoc queries.

In the past DfT monitored crowding for London commuter services under a regime known as 'passengers in excess of capacity' (PiXC) and this has formed the basis of the crowding statistics published. Under the historic PiXC regime, DfT set limits on the level of acceptable PiXC at 4.5 per cent in one peak (morning or afternoon) and 3.0 per cent across both peaks. DfT now sets a variety of performance targets for its individual franchise holders, but continues to publish crowding statistics using the PiXC measure as this provides a consistent measure that allows crowding to be compared between different routes and over time.

Outside the Department for Transport, uses of these statistics include:

- Train operators collect the passenger count data and have a wide range of uses for it within their businesses. It is used in planning timetables and how rolling stock is deployed, including for the biannual timetable changes and in planning service provision during engineering works. Other uses include informing ticket pricing and marketing campaigns. This information also makes it possible for operators to providing information to passengers about the level of crowding on different train services, to assist them in making decisions on when to travel.
- Network Rail, the owner and operator of the national rail infrastructure, uses the data to understand current levels of passenger demand and as a baseline for forecasting future demand, in order to inform its long term planning.
- Devolved bodies responsible for local transport planning such as Passenger Transport Executives, Transport for London and local authorities use these statistics to monitor current crowding and passenger demand, and plan future services. Transport for London uses the statistics alongside statistics for other modes of transport in its Central Area Peak Count (CAPC), which provides information about the number of people travelling into central London on weekdays.
- The statistics are used to validate data from other sources, such as the station usage estimates published by the Office of Rail Regulation based on ticket sales data.
- Passenger groups use the statistics to understand crowding and identify areas where there are particular problems.
- Media organisations use the statistics to report on crowding.

User views of the statistics

In general users found the statistics useful, but that they did not completely meet all their needs. The main areas of feedback received are set out below. Our responses to areas identified where the statistics did not completely meet users' needs are set out in the next section.

- All areas of the statistics were used and they were generally seen to be well presented, with the accompanying commentary and notes and definitions document helpful in aiding users understanding of the statistics.
- The publication of statistics for cities outside London and more detailed information than had previously been published was welcomed. However, many users requested more detailed information than is currently published, in particular statistics for individual routes and train services.
- Some users suggested that including more information about the accuracy of the data would be useful.
- A couple of users said that more timely data would be helpful, as the statistics are currently published in July based on counts carried out in the autumn (September to December).
- One user said that more frequent publications than the current annual release would be useful, reflecting passenger loadings at different times of year.
- Some users had problems finding the statistics on the www.gov.uk website and navigating between pages in the statistics section of the website.
- A small number of suggestions were received on how to improve particular aspects of the commentary and notes accompanying the 2011 statistics, in particular making clearer in the commentary in the statistical release some points that are explained in the notes and definitions document.

DfT's responses to the issues raised in user feedback are as follows:

- Many users requested statistics for individual routes and train services to be published. This information is collected by train operators and is used to calculate the aggregate statistics that are published. Due to the commercial nature of this data it is not published at this level, as making it available would have a negative impact on the train operators that collect the data. Rather than publishing sensitive passenger count information, DfT has been encouraging train operators to look at whether they can make more information about crowding on individual train services available to passengers, either online or through posters at stations, to allow passengers to make more informed choices about when to travel.
- More information about data quality and other factors affecting the statistics has been included in the notes accompanying the latest statistics, and in the statistical release in particular, as previously this information was predominantly only included in the accompanying notes and definitions document.

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- There is currently a time lag between when the passenger counts are collected and when the statistics are published due to the length of time it takes for train operators to compile the data to send to DfT and for DfT to carry out quality assurance of the data. It is not anticipated that this will change in the near future. However, DfT is in the process of procuring a new database for use by DfT and the train operators which would automate much of this process, so in the long term this may allow the statistics to be produced more quickly than they currently are.
 - There are no current plans to publish statistics more frequently than annually due to the level of resources this would require. However, as increasing levels of automatic passenger count equipment mean that data are being collected throughout the year on many routes this is a possibility in the future, particularly once the new passenger counts database has been introduced. Statistics are currently published for the autumn period because this is the time of year that commuter demand is generally at its highest, and is relatively stable across the period.
 - DfT moved from its previous website to www.gov.uk in November 2012 as one of the first two Government departments to do so, so this feedback was received in the first few months after the website was launched. There were a number of initial problems with navigation around the website. Subsequent efforts have been made to improve this and are continuing to be made, both at a high level, with prominent links to statistics sections being added to departmental homepages, and also within the DfT statistics section.
 - In producing the latest release of these statistics we have taken on board comments received about particular aspects of the 2011 publication and have made changes to improve the explanations of the statistics included in the commentary.

Contact details

We welcome further comments and suggestions about the rail passenger number and crowding statistics. These can be addressed to the Rail Statistics branch at the Department for Transport:

Telephone: 020 7944 2419

Email: rail.stats@dft.gsi.gov.uk

Annex: User feedback questionnaire

Q1 Please indicate the areas of the statistics that are of interest to you

	Essential	Desirable /useful	Don't use
London peak passenger numbers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
London all day passenger numbers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Regional cities' peak passenger numbers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Regional cities' all day passenger numbers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
London peak crowding by train operator	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
London peak crowding by terminal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Regional city peak crowding by train operator	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Regional city peak crowding by city	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Capacity information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q2 Why are these statistics of particular interest to you? Please give brief details of how you use them

Q3 How well do the current statistics meet your needs? (choose one)

Completely	<input type="checkbox"/>
Well, but not completely	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not well	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not at all	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q4 If you have indicated that the statistics do not completely meet your needs, why is this? How could they be improved?

Q5 Please rate the following aspects of the publication

	very good	good	neither	poor	very poor
Overall content	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The tables included	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Notes and definitions document	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Commentary on the statistics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Coverage of the statistics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Overall presentation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Data quality – passenger numbers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Data quality – crowding statistics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Overall length of release	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Publication frequency	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Timeliness of the publication	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Accessibility	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q6. For each rated poor or very poor, why do you say that?

Q7: Are there any changes to the publication or tables that you would like to suggest? (e.g. improvements to content, presentation, access to the statistics, commentary or explanation of methods)

Q8: Please choose the category that best describes the context in which you use the statistics (tick one):

Central Government

☐

Local Government

☐

Media

☐

Public transport/industry organisation

☐

Research/academic organisation

☐

Member of the public

☐

Other (please specify)

Q9: If you are willing to be contacted in future to discuss your views on the statistics in more detail, please enter your contact details below.