

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents findings from the second annual survey of CityRail customer services by the Independent Transport Safety and Reliability Regulator.

The methodology used for the 2005 survey was essentially the same as that used for the 2004 survey. The survey was conducted by telephone by a market research agency between 16 June and 24 July 2005. The sample of 2,755 train users was drawn from suburban Sydney and regional areas covered by CityRail train services. The survey included questions on the characteristics of the respondents and of their train use, questions where respondents were asked to rate the importance and the quality of various aspects of CityRail services, and questions relating to the respondents' own experience and perceptions in the six months prior to their interview.

Importance and quality ratings

The core questions in the survey related to 37 separate aspects of service which, in the development of the 2004 questionnaire, were identified as being of most importance to customers. Respondents were asked to rate both the importance and the quality of these aspects of CityRail services. Rating was on a five-point scale ranging from 'not at all important' to 'very important' on the importance scale, and from 'very poor' to 'very good' on the quality scale.

Because each of the importance and quality ratings could take five possible values there were 25 possible combinations of the two sets of ratings. Selected groupings of these 25 possible combinations are used to indicate whether or not train users' expectations are being met. For a specified aspect of service:

Train users whose expectations are NOT being met are those who rate the service as high in importance ('important' or 'very important') but low in quality ('poor' or 'very poor').

Train users whose expectations ARE being met are those who rate both importance and quality positively, that is, who rate importance as 'desirable', 'important' or 'very important' and quality as 'acceptable', 'good' or 'very good'.

Expectations not met

The following five aspects of service had the highest percentages of train users with expectations *not* being met:

- punctuality of trains (59%)
- delays and cancellations (59%)
- crowding in trains at peak commuter times (48%)
- frequency of trains (47%)
- clarity of announcements on the train (42%).

Given the poor on-time running performance of CityRail services throughout the survey reference period it is not surprising that these aspects of service are the ones where expectations are least likely to be met. Each of these aspects of service is related to on-time running. Punctuality, and delays and cancellations are directly related to on-time running. Crowding can occur in the peak when there are train delays. Train frequency can also be affected when there are train delays. Announcements on trains of most relevance to passengers are probably those that relate to on-time running.

Compared with 2004, there are statistically significant changes in the proportions of train users with expectations not met, for each of the following aspects of service:

- punctuality – an increase from 54% in 2004 to 59% in 2005
- crowding – a decrease from 53% in 2004 to 48% in 2005
- train frequency – an increase from 41% in 2004 to 47% in 2005
- quality of information provided about train delays and cancellations at stations – an increase from 35% in 2004 to 41% in 2005
- information provided at the station about train arrival and departure times – an increase from 27% in 2004 to 32% in 2005
- personal safety on stations in the evenings – a decrease from 32% in 2004 to 26% in 2005
- journey time – an increase from 20% in 2004 to 26% in 2005
- facilities for calling for help – a decrease from 34% in 2004 to 27% in 2005.

Despite the decrease for crowding, it still rated third highest, as it did in 2004, of the aspects of service with high proportions of train users with expectations not met. The other aspects of service with increases are probably again a reflection of the poor on-time running performance of CityRail. The decreases for personal safety on stations in the evenings and facilities for calling for help may be due to the increased presence of Transit Officers.

Expectations met

The following five aspects of service had the highest percentages of train users with expectations being met:

- CityRail website information service (87%)
- signs to help find your way around the train network (86%)
- personal safety on stations in peak commuter times (82%)
- 131-500 Transport Information telephone service (82%)
- removal of litter from stations (82%).

It should, however, be noted that for both the website and the 131-500 information services these proportions are based on only about half the sample. Many train users were not able to rate these services because they had not used them.

If there is an increase in the proportion of train users with expectations *not met*, there is likely to be a corresponding decrease in the proportion of train users with expectations *met*, and vice versa. Not surprisingly, therefore, there were statistically significant changes in the proportions of train users with expectations met for many of the aspects of service which had statistically significant changes in the proportions of train users with expectations not met. This was the case for personal safety on stations in the evenings, facilities for calling for help, journey time, information provided at the station about train arrival and departure times, quality of information provided about train delays and cancellations at stations, train frequency and punctuality.

There was one additional aspect of service with a significant change. For knowledge and helpfulness of CityRail staff there was a decrease from 83% in 2004 to 78% in 2005 in the proportion of train users with expectations met.

Experience and perceptions

Apart from the importance and quality ratings, the questionnaire included a number of questions on specific experiences and perceptions in the six months prior to interview. In summary, the findings are as follows. Changes from the 2004 survey are only mentioned if statistically significant.

Train service:

- 40% of train users said delays and cancellations had made them more than 10 minutes late, for somewhere they needed to be, at least once a week – an increase from 36% in 2004
- 12% of train users said they were unable to board a train at least once a week because of crowding (not asked in 2004 survey)
- 4% of train users said they had been on a train which failed to stop at their destination at least once a week (not asked in 2004 survey)
- when asked to choose the highest priority out of punctuality, frequency and journey time, 52% of train users chose punctuality, 40% chose frequency and 7% chose journey time.

Security and safety:

- 69% of train users expressed positive feelings towards seeing Transit Officers on their train or at their station (not asked in 2004 survey)
- 30% of train users reported feeling threatened by the actions of other people on a train or at a station
- 21% of train users reported witnessing or being a victim of criminal activity or violent behaviour either at a station or on a train, 18% as witnesses only, 3% as victims
- 27% of train users reported witnessing or being a victim of harassment or verbal abuse either at a station or on a train, 17% as witnesses only, 10% as victims
- 22% of train users said they were worried about being injured or being in an accident on a train or at a station – an increase from 17% in 2004.

Access difficulties:

- 59% of train users said they had arrived at their station to find trains were not running at least once because of trackwork (not asked in 2004 survey)
- 58% of train users said they had changed their travel plans at least once because they knew trackwork was scheduled (not asked in 2004 survey)
- 30% of train users reported having some difficulty getting onto or off platforms or trains – an increase from 24% in 2004
- crowding was the main reason given for access difficulties, affecting 18% of all train users.

Complaints:

- 44% of train users reported wanting to make a complaint about some aspect of CityRail services – an increase from 36% in 2004
- 10% of train users reported they had actually made a formal complaint – an increase from 7% in 2004.

Summary

Punctuality, train delays and cancellations, and crowding remain the three issues of greatest concern to train users. These three aspects of service had the highest proportions of train users with a combination of high importance and low quality ratings. Train users' experience backs up these findings. Large proportions of train users reported being often delayed, or often unable to board a train because of crowding, during the survey reference period. Punctuality, train delays and cancellations, and crowding all relate to on-time running. Given that CityRail's on-time running performance had not improved since the 2004 survey reference period, it is no surprise that aspects of service related to on-time running are the major areas of concern for train users.

Aspects of service where train users are most likely to rate both importance and quality positively are those relating to signage for navigating the network and at stations, the website and 131-500 information services, personal safety in the daytime at stations and on trains, and removal of litter.

A series of bomb attacks occurred on the London Underground on 7 July 2005. Interviewing for this survey continued until 24 July, so a substantial number of the survey's respondents would have been interviewed between 7 July and 24 July. The increase in the proportion of train users worried about being injured in an accident may well be due to the concern about terrorist attacks on CityRail in the wake of the London bombings.