

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents an analysis of data from the first in a series of monitoring surveys of CityRail customer services by the Independent Transport Safety and Reliability Regulator. The purpose of the surveys is to measure changes over time in the quality of Cityrail services from a customer perspective.

The content of the survey questionnaire was developed from focus groups and discussions with potential data users. The survey was carried out as a telephone survey between 24 June and 31 July 2004. A sample of 3,175 respondents aged 16 and over, comprising 2,702 train users and 473 non-users, was drawn from suburban Sydney and regional areas covered by CityRail train services.

Findings for train users

Priorities for improvement

When asked to nominate up to three areas for improvement, 66% of train users nominated more reliable or more punctual trains, or fewer delays and cancellations as one of their priorities.

Importance and quality ratings

The core questions in the survey related to 37 separate aspects of service identified in the focus groups as being of most importance to customers. Train users 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:

Train users whose expectations are NOT being met are those with disparity between their importance and quality ratings, where disparity is defined to be a high importance rating ('important' or 'very important') combined with a low quality rating ('poor' or 'very poor').

Train users whose expectations ARE being met are those with agreement between their importance and quality ratings, where agreement is defined to be a positive importance rating ('desirable', 'important' or 'very important') combined with a positive quality rating ('acceptable', 'good' or 'very good').

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

- delays and cancellations (56%)
- punctuality of trains, how well trains keep to the timetable (54%)
- crowding in trains at peak commuter times (53%)
- visibility of CityRail staff on the platforms in the evenings (42%)
- frequency of trains, how often they come (41%).

The first two of these aspects of service, delays and cancellations, and punctuality, are both related to on-time running. Crowding may also be related to on-time running when it results from train delays. It is no surprise that these three aspects of service rank highest, given that on-time running of CityRail trains was very poor in the months before the survey took place.

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

- signs to help you find your way around the train network to your destination (87%)
- CityRail web site information service (87%)
- the 131-500 Transport Information telephone service (84%)
- removal of litter from stations (84%)
- politeness and friendliness of station staff (83%).

It should, however, be noted that for both the web site 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.

Experience and perceptions

Apart from the importance and quality rating sections, 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.

Security and safety:

- about 30% of train users reported feeling threatened by the actions of other people on a train or at a station
- 20% of train users reported witnessing or being a victim of criminal activity or violent behaviour either at a station or on a train, most as witnesses – 3% of train users reported being victims
- 27% of train users reported witnessing or being a victim of harassment or verbal abuse either at a station or on a train; 10% of train users reported being victims
- nearly 60% of train users reported seeing Transit Officers once a month or more often
- 17% of train users said they were worried about being injured or being in an accident on a train or at a station.

Train service:

- 36% 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
- when asked to nominate an acceptable delay when catching a train to somewhere where they needed to be on time, 73% of train users nominated times between zero and five minutes
- when asked to choose their highest priority out of punctuality, frequency and journey time, 55% of train users chose punctuality, 39% chose frequency and 6% chose journey time.

Access difficulties:

- 24% of train users reported having some difficulty getting onto or off platforms or trains
- crowding was the main reason given for access difficulties, affecting 15% of all train users.

Complaints:

- 36% of train users reported wanting to make a complaint about some aspect of CityRail services
- 20% of those who wanted to complain (7% of all train users) actually did make a formal complaint.

Summary

Punctuality, train delays and cancellations, and crowding are the three issues of greatest concern to train users. This fact is clear from three pieces of evidence from the survey. First, these three aspects of service had the highest proportions of train users with a combination of high importance and low quality ratings. Second, punctuality and delays dominated the nominated priority areas for improvement. Third, substantial proportions of train users reported being delayed very often during the survey reference period. Punctuality, train delays and cancellations, and crowding all relate to on-time running. It is not surprising that these are the major areas of concern for train users given that on-time running was particularly poor in the months prior to the survey.

Based on the quality and importance ratings, other issues of concern to train users are train frequency, the clarity, timeliness and content of announcements about delays and cancellations, and security in the evenings.

Aspects of service where train users find the quality of service to be generally in line with its importance are those relating to signage for navigating the network and at stations, the web site and 131-500 information services, staff attitudes and knowledge, and cleanliness.

Findings for non-users

Non-users were defined to be people who had not caught a CityRail train in the six months prior to the survey. Their main reasons given for not using the train were a more convenient means of transport available for the kind of trips they made (47% of non-users) and reasons related to lack of relevance or need for the service (40% of non-users). Twelve per cent of non-users disliked some aspect of train travel.

Non-users' importance ratings differed from those of train users. Most notably, punctuality and train frequency were ranked much lower on the importance scale for non-users than for train users.