

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents findings from the third annual survey of CityRail customer services by the Independent Transport Safety and Reliability Regulator. The report's findings are compared with results from previous annual surveys and, where appropriate, the mini survey conducted in November 2005 to assess the impact of CityRail's new train timetable introduced in September 2005.

The methodology used for the 2006 survey was essentially the same as that used for the 2004 and 2005 surveys. The survey was conducted by telephone by a market research agency between 22 June and 24 July 2006. The sample of 2,760 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.

The reference period for the survey was the six months prior to interview. During this period CityRail's on-time running was much improved compared with the reference periods for the two previous annual surveys. There was also increased patronage compared with the corresponding period twelve months previously and increasing petrol prices during the reference period. A CityRail fare rise took effect on 1 July 2006; this occurred during the interviewing period for the survey.

### 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 met***

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

- CityRail website information service (90%)
- signs to help find your way around the train network (87%)
- politeness and friendliness of station staff (84%)
- knowledge and helpfulness of staff (84%)
- 131-500 Transport Information telephone service (83%).

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.

There were nine aspects of service for which there were statistically significant changes in the proportions of train users with expectations met. All were increases; there were no significant decreases. The increases are as follows (the November 2005 percentages are noted if they were measured in the mini survey):

- politeness and friendliness of station staff – an increase from 80% in 2005 to 84% in 2006
- knowledge and helpfulness of CityRail staff – an increase from 78% in 2005 to 84% in 2006
- frequency of trains – an increase from 52% in 2005 to 63% in 2006 (75% in November 2005)
- punctuality – an increase from 38% in 2005 to 64% in 2006 (78% in November 2005)
- journey time – an increase from 69% in 2005 to 74% in 2006 (77% in November 2005)
- delays and cancellations – an increase from 38% in 2005 to 59% in 2006 (67% in November 2005)
- information provided at the station about arrival and departure times – an increase from 66% in 2005 to 78% in 2006
- quality of information provided about train delays and cancellations – an increase from 57% in 2005 to 69% in 2006
- timeliness of announcements about delays and cancellations – an increase from 58% in 2005 to 67% in 2006.

### ***Expectations not met***

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

- crowding in trains at peak commuter times (50%)
- clarity of announcements on the train (44%)
- staff visibility on platforms in the evenings (44%)

- availability of secure car parking (42%)
- delays and cancellations (38%).

There are a number of aspects of service with statistically significant changes compared with the 2005 annual survey. The aspects of service with significant *increases* in the proportion of train users with expectations not met are as follows:

- comfort of the temperature in carriages – an increase from 19% in 2005 to 22% in 2006
- removal of litter from the train – an increase from 17% in 2005 to 20% in 2006
- visibility of CityRail staff on the platform in the evenings – an increase from 38% in 2005 to 44% in 2006.

The aspects of service with significant *decreases* in the proportion of train users with expectations not met are as follows (the November 2005 percentages are noted if they were measured in the mini survey):

- knowledge and helpfulness of CityRail staff – a decrease from 15% in 2005 to 10% in 2006
- frequency of trains – a decrease from 47% in 2005 to 34% in 2006 (21% in November 2005)
- punctuality – a decrease from 59% in 2005 to 33% in 2006 (19% in November 2005)
- journey time – a decrease from 26% in 2005 to 20% in 2006 (14% in November 2005)
- delays and cancellations – a decrease from 59% in 2005 to 38% in 2006 (28% in November 2005)
- information provided at the station about arrival and departure times – a decrease from 32% in 2005 to 20% in 2006
- quality of information provided about train delays and cancellations – a decrease from 41% in 2005 to 30% in 2006
- timeliness of announcements about delays and cancellations – a decrease from 40% in 2005 to 31% in 2006.

Most of the aspects of service with increases in expectations met and decreases in expectations not met relate directly or indirectly to trains running to schedule. These changes probably reflect the improved on-time running performance of CityRail services. However, the changes observed in the November 2005 mini survey, conducted soon after the new timetable was introduced, have not been sustained to the same extent.

## **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 2005 survey are only mentioned if statistically significant.

#### Train service:

- 17% 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 – a decrease from 40% in 2005
- 9% of train users said they were unable to board a train at least once a week because of crowding – a decrease from 12% in 2005
- 1% of train users said they had been on a train which failed to stop at their destination at least once a week – a decrease from 4% in 2005
- when asked to choose the highest priority out of punctuality, frequency and journey time, 45% of train users chose punctuality, 43% chose frequency and 10% chose journey time – a change from 2005 where 52% chose punctuality, 40% chose frequency and 7% chose journey time
- 18% of train users who use the train to go to or from work used trains more frequently in the six months prior to interview than in the previous six months; 10% used trains less frequently
- 15% of train users who don't use the train to go to or from work used trains more frequently in the six months prior to interview than in the previous six months; 20% used trains less frequently
- a change in where they live, work or study was the main reason for increased train use (44% of train users who used trains more frequently in the last six months) followed by increased petrol prices (13%).

#### Security and safety:

- 71% of train users expressed positive feelings towards seeing Transit Officers on their train or at their station (similar to 2005)
- 28% of train users reported feeling threatened by the actions of other people on a train or at a station (similar to 2005)
- 18% of train users reported witnessing or being a victim of criminal activity or violent behaviour either at a station or on a train, 16% as witnesses only, 2% as victims (similar to 2005)
- 24% of train users reported witnessing or being a victim of harassment or verbal abuse either at a station or on a train, 15% as witnesses only, 9% as victims (similar to 2005)
- 17% of train users said they were worried about being injured or being in an accident on a train or at a station – a decrease from 22% in 2005 but the same as in 2004 (the 2005 result was probably influenced by the London Underground bombings which occurred during the interviewing period).

#### Access difficulties:

- 24% of train users reported having some difficulty getting onto or off platforms or trains – a decrease from 30% in 2005 but the same as in 2004
- crowding was the main reason given for access difficulties, affecting 15% of all train users (similar to 2005).

#### Complaints:

- 31% of train users reported wanting to make a complaint about some aspect of CityRail services – a decrease from 44% in 2005 and 36% in 2004
- 7% of train users reported they had actually made a formal complaint – a decrease from 10% in 2005, but the same proportion as in 2004.

#### **Fare rise**

Following a determination by the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal, CityRail fares increased on 1 July 2006, which was during the interviewing period for the survey. There was no difference in train users' value for money ratings of the cost of train travel either before or after the fare rise, or when compared with the 2005 survey.

#### **Summary and comment**

The three aspects of service of greatest concern for train users in 2006 (i.e. of high importance and low quality) are:

- crowding in trains in peak hours
- the clarity of announcements on trains
- staff visibility on platforms in the evenings.

Compared with the 2004 and 2005 surveys, when CityRail's on-time running performance was poor, there are substantial changes in train users' perceptions of punctuality, delays and cancellations, and train frequency. For each of these aspects of service the proportion of train users whose expectations are not being met has decreased considerably. Nevertheless at least a third of train users still consider these aspects of service to be important but poorly delivered. There have also been changes in train users' experience. They have experienced delays, skipped stops and crowding less frequently than in 2005.

These findings are probably a direct result of the improvement in CityRail's on-time running since the introduction of the new timetable. Two of the findings, those relating to train frequency meeting more customers' expectations and the reduced frequency of experiencing crowding, may seem at odds with a new timetable which delivers fewer services. These two findings probably indicate that, when on-time running was poor, the frequent delays led to many crowded trains and trains which came with unpredictable frequency.

Aspects of service where train users are most likely to rate both importance and quality positively are those relating to information services – the website, signage for navigating the network and the 131-500 information phone line – and the politeness, friendliness, knowledge and helpfulness of CityRail staff.