

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

The 2007 survey included a sample of non-users of CityRail services, defined as persons aged 16 and over who did not travel on a CityRail train in the six months prior to interview. The 2004 survey is the only previous annual survey to include a non-user sample.

The methodology used for the 2007 survey was essentially the same as that used for previous annual surveys. The survey was conducted by telephone by a market research agency between 21 June and 17 July 2007. The sample of 2,755 train users and 515 non-users was drawn from suburban Sydney and regional areas covered by CityRail train services. The survey included questions for train users on the characteristics of their train use, questions where they were asked to rate the importance and the quality of various aspects of CityRail services, and questions relating to their own experience and perceptions in the six months prior to their interview. Non-users were asked about their main means of transport and their reasons for not using the train. Non-users were also asked to rate the importance of the same aspects of CityRail services rated by train users. All survey participants were asked demographic questions.

Importance and quality ratings

The core questions in the survey related to 37 separate aspects of service which, in the development of the first annual survey, were identified 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. Non-users were only asked to rate importance. 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 telling you where to go at the station (85%)
- politeness and friendliness of station staff (85%)
- signs to help find your way around the network (85%)
- knowledge and helpfulness of staff (85%).

It should, however, be noted that, for the website, the proportion is based on about two-thirds of the sample because many train users had not used the service and were therefore not able to rate the quality of service.

There were five aspects of service with statistically significant changes compared with the 2006 annual survey. All but crowding were increases. The changes are as follows:

- journey time – an *increase* from 74% in 2006 to 80% in 2007
- frequency of trains – an *increase* from 63% in 2006 to 69% in 2007
- punctuality – an *increase* from 64% in 2006 to 68% in 2007
- clarity of announcements on the train – an *increase* from 52% in 2006 to 57% in 2007
- crowding in trains at peak commuter times – a *decrease* from 41% in 2006 to 36% in 2007.

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 (55%)
- staff visibility on platforms in the evenings (43%)
- availability of secure car parking (42%)¹
- clarity of announcements on the train (40%)
- personal safety in train carriages in the evenings (36%).

There are three aspects of service with statistically significant changes compared with the 2006 annual survey, an increase and two decreases. The changes are as follows:

- crowding in trains at peak commuter times – an *increase* from 50% in 2006 to 55% in 2007
- frequency of trains – a *decrease* from 34% in 2006 to 29% in 2007
- journey time – a *decrease* from 20% in 2006 to 15% in 2007.

¹ Despite being ranked lowest in importance, availability of secure car parking was still rated as important or very important by 63% of train users and it also ranked second lowest in quality.

Crowding is the only aspect of service that train users perceive to have worsened in 2007 compared with 2006.

The improvements for journey time and train frequency build further on improvements that were observed in 2006, when compared with the 2005 survey results. The finding is interesting given that the new train timetable introduced in September 2005 provided less frequent services and slower journey times. The explanation may be that frequency and journey time are less likely to be issues for train users if they can depend on their train being on time.

Experience and perceptions

Apart from the importance and quality ratings, the questionnaire included a number of questions for train users on their specific experiences and perceptions in the six months prior to their interview. In summary, the findings are as follows. Changes from the 2006 survey are only mentioned if statistically significant.

Train service:

- 14% 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 (similar to 2006)
- 9% of train users said they were unable to board a train at least once a week because of crowding (similar to 2006)
- 1% of train users said they had been on a train which failed to stop at their destination at least once a week (similar to 2006)
- when asked to choose the highest priority out of punctuality, frequency and journey time, 41% of train users chose punctuality, 49% chose frequency and 9% chose journey time – a change from 2006 where 45% chose punctuality, 43% chose frequency and 10% chose journey time
- 71% of train users said that they used public transport to travel to major events
- 78% of train users thought that transport should be incorporated in ticket costs for all major events.

Security and safety:

- 27% of train users reported feeling threatened by the actions of other people on a train or at a station (similar to 2006)
- 21% 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 only, 2% as victims (similar to 2006)
- 24% of train users reported witnessing or being a victim of harassment or verbal abuse either at a station or on a train, 16% as witnesses only, 8% as victims (similar to 2006)
- 19% of train users said they were worried about being injured or being in an accident on a train or at a station (similar to 2006).

Access difficulties:

- 26% of train users reported having some difficulty getting onto or off platforms or trains (similar to 2006)
- crowding was the main reason given for access difficulties, affecting 18% of all train users (similar to 2006).

Complaints:

- 28% of train users reported wanting to make a complaint about some aspect of CityRail services (similar to 2006)
- 6% of train users reported they had actually made a formal complaint (similar to 2006).

Non-users

Nearly all non-users (89%) said that their main means of transport in the previous six months was by car.

The most common reason cited for not using trains was having more convenient transport available. Distance to the station and journey time were the main reasons given for trains being less convenient.

Thirteen per cent of train users said that dislike of some aspect of train service was their main reason for not using trains. When asked to nominate which aspects of service they disliked, the unreliability of trains and personal safety concerns were the main aspects mentioned.

Forty-eight per cent of non-users said they would be more likely to travel to and from work by train if they received a tax concession for using the train.

Punctuality, train frequency and journey time were all rated lower in importance by non-users than by train users.

Summary

The 2007 survey was undertaken at a time when train users had experienced more than 12 months of much improved operational performance from CityRail after introduction of a new timetable. Compared with the 2006 survey, there are improvements in train users' perceptions of journey time, frequency of trains, punctuality and clarity of announcements on the train. Each of these aspects of service was more likely to meet customer expectations in 2007 than in 2006. There is only one aspect of CityRail service which has deteriorated in the perception of train users, namely crowding in peak hour trains. The level of crowding in peak hour trains met customer expectations for only 36% of train users in 2007, compared with 41% in 2006.

Train users' reported frequency of experiencing delays and skipped stops in 2007 is lower than in any previous annual survey.

Out of punctuality, train frequency and journey time, frequency is now train users' top priority. In all previous annual surveys punctuality has been the top priority.

As was the case in 2006, the aspects of service where train users are most likely to give positive ratings to both the importance and the quality of the service are those relating to information services – the website and signage – and the politeness, friendliness, knowledge and helpfulness of CityRail staff.