

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

The methodology used for the 2008 survey was essentially the same as that used for previous annual surveys. The survey was conducted by telephone by a market research agency between 27 May and 7 July 2008. The sample of 2,759 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 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.

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. 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'.

Each train user who rates both the importance and quality of an aspect of service can therefore fall into one of three categories: their expectations are *met*, their expectations are *not met* or they can be considered to have no expectations (because the aspect of service is of little importance to them). This report is only concerned with train users in the first two of these categories.

Best and worst aspects of service

Aspects of service can be ranked in order of the percentage of train users whose expectations are met and also in order of the percentage of train users whose expectations are not met.

The top five aspects of service ranked on expectations *met* can be considered to be the best aspects of service according to train users. They are listed below (with the percentage of train users whose expectations were met):

- CityRail website information service (91%)
- signs to help find your way around the network (86%)
- knowledge and helpfulness of staff (85%)
- politeness and friendliness of station staff (84%)
- 131-500 transport information phone line (84%).

It should be noted that, for the 131-500 service and the website, the proportions are based on only 51% and 70% of the sample, respectively. Many train users were not able to rate these services because they had not used them.

The top five aspects of service ranked on expectations *not met* can be considered to be the worst aspects of service according to train users. They are listed below (with the percentage of train users whose expectations were not met):

- crowding in trains at peak commuter times (55%)
- availability of secure car parking (42%)
- clarity of announcements on the train (38%)
- staff visibility on platforms in the evenings (38%)
- personal safety in train carriages in the evenings (36%).

Comparisons with 2007

Changes over time in the percentages of train users falling into the *expectations met* and *expectations not met* categories give an indication of whether aspects of service are perceived by train users to be improving or deteriorating.

Compared with the 2007 annual survey there were seven aspects of service with statistically significant changes in the percentage of train users *with expectations met*. Five are increases (improvements) and two are decreases (deteriorations). The changes are as follows:

- staff visibility on platforms in the evenings – an *increase* from 51% in 2007 to 56% in 2008
- punctuality – an *increase* from 68% in 2007 to 73% in 2008
- station information on arrival and departure times – an *increase* from 79% in 2007 to 84% in 2008
- quality of information about delays and cancellations – an *increase* from 68% in 2007 to 74% in 2008
- clarity of announcements on the platform – an *increase* from 64% in 2007 to 69% in 2008
- removal of graffiti – a *decrease* from 62% in 2007 to 58% in 2008
- signage telling you where to go at the station – a *decrease* from 85% in 2007 to 82% in 2008.

Compared with the 2007 annual survey there were seven aspects of service with statistically significant changes in the percentage of train users *with expectations not met*. All are decreases (improvements). The changes are as follows:

- staff visibility on platforms in the daytime outside peak commuter times – a *decrease* from 24% in 2007 to 18% in 2008
- staff visibility on platforms in the evenings – a *decrease* from 43% in 2007 to 38% in 2008
- punctuality – a *decrease* from 30% in 2007 to 25% in 2008
- delays and cancellations – a *decrease* from 35% in 2007 to 31% in 2008
- station information on arrival and departure times – a *decrease* from 19% in 2007 to 15% in 2008
- quality of information about delays and cancellations – a *decrease* from 30% in 2007 to 24% in 2008
- clarity of announcements on the platform – a *decrease* from 35% in 2007 to 29% in 2008.

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 2007 survey are only mentioned if statistically significant.

Train service:

- 12% 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; for train users who travel to or from work by train there was a decrease compared with 2007 (19% in 2008; 25% in 2007)
- 10% of train users said they were unable to board a train at least once a week, and a further 15% at least once a month, because of crowding – an increase compared with 2007 (9% at least once a week; 13% at least once a month)
- 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 2007)
- when asked to choose the highest priority out of punctuality, frequency and journey time, 38% of train users chose punctuality, 51% chose frequency and 10% chose journey time (similar to 2007)
- 46% of train users did not have to queue at all for their most recent ticket purchase, 20% queued for less than a minute and 19% queued for 1 to 3 minutes, that is, 84% of train users queued no more than 3 minutes (question not asked previously).

Potential effect of discounted ticket prices on travel behaviour:

- 76% of train users who usually travel between 7.00 am and 9.00 am on weekdays said that no amount of discount on the ticket price would persuade them to avoid travel at these times (question not asked previously).

Security and safety:

- 30% of train users reported feeling threatened by the actions of other people on a train or at a station (similar to 2007)
- 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 only, 2.5% as victims (similar to 2007)
- 26% of train users reported witnessing or being a victim of harassment or verbal abuse either at a station or on a train, most as witnesses only, 9% as victims (similar to 2007)
- 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 2007).

Access difficulties:

- 30% of train users reported having some difficulty getting onto or off platforms or trains (similar to 2007)
- crowding was the main reason given for access difficulties, affecting 21% of all train users, more than in any previous survey.

Complaints:

- 27% of train users reported wanting to make a complaint about some aspect of CityRail services (similar to 2007)
- 5% of train users reported they had actually made a formal complaint, less than in any previous annual survey.

Summary

The 2008 survey was undertaken at a time when train users had experienced more than 2 years of much improved operational performance from CityRail after introduction of a new timetable. However, the six-month survey reference period was also characterised by a substantial increase in petrol prices and in CityRail patronage.

The aspects of service with improvements in meeting customer expectations compared with 2007 include aspects related to security, on-time running performance of trains and communication with passengers, and probably reflect efforts by CityRail to improve these aspects of their service. The specific aspects of service with improvements are punctuality, staff visibility on platforms in the evenings, station information about arrival and departure times, the quality of information about delays and cancellations, and the clarity of announcements on platforms.

The perceived improvement in punctuality is supported by the finding that train users who travel to or from work by train experienced fewer delays in 2008 than in 2007 (or in any previous annual survey).

Crowding is the area of greatest concern for train users. There are three findings from the survey which support this conclusion. First, the level of crowding in peak hours only met expectations for 35% of train users, fewer than in any previous annual survey. Second, the frequency of train users' experiencing crowding has been increasing each year since 2005. Third, more train users nominated crowding as a reason for difficulty in getting onto or off platforms or trains, than in any previous survey. The crowding problem is also consistent with the increase in CityRail patronage.

As was the case in 2007, 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.