

Action for Public Transport (NSW)

www.aptnsw.org.au

PO Box K606
Haymarket NSW 1240

13th January 2008

The Chief Executive Officer
Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal of NSW
PO Box Q290
Queen Victoria Building NSW 1230

Dear Mr Cox,

REVIEW OF THE CITYRAIL REGULATORY FRAMEWORK PASSENGERS' ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Introduction

Last December, at the request of your staff, I compiled a list of criteria by which passengers might assess CityRail's performance. This was discussed with your staff at a meeting on 14th December, when it was suggested that I re-format the list as a submission to the current review.

Your discussion paper notes three major dimensions of service quality – Operational Performance, Timetable and Amenities – and I have allocated each of the 25 points I raised into one of these “dimensions”.

Explanatory Notes

I have tried to avoid defining an acceptable level of service in each area. This would vary from person to person, from hour to hour, from suburb to suburb, etc.

The items are roughly in priority order although, as above, this would vary from person to person.

Passengers assess a service against two distinct measures - the provider's own published standard, and the passenger's expectations or desires. These are not always the same.

Some warnings:

There are lies, damned lies and statistics. CityRail's statistics should never be accepted at face value. The reader should investigate the source, the definitions, the inclusions, the exclusions, the time period, the sample, the averaging, etc, before relying on anything. And sometimes the reader should step outside the arithmetic and use some common sense.

On the other hand, passengers' comments can also be coloured or exaggerated. “These trains are always late,” I once overheard as a train pulled in to the station right on time.

1. OPERATIONAL PERFORMANCE

1.1 On-Time Running

Trains should arrive and depart at the scheduled time – not earlier or later.

Data should be recorded all day – not just at peaks – in both directions, and including weekends.

The data should include consequent delays to passengers when services are cancelled or skip stops. Although the next train may be on time, the passenger has been delayed. Late-running figures needs to reflect the passengers' experience not just operational numbers

1.2 Reliability

Usually this is taken to mean whether the advertised train turns up or is cancelled, either totally or skips stops.

Reliability can also be measured in other areas of service – ticket vending machines, toilets (on trains or platforms), electronic information screens.

1.3 Wet Weather Performance

- leaks in carriages
- trees on tracks
- signals fail frequently during rain

1.4 Safety – mechanical

Usually not something the passengers worry about, except after an accident.

2. TIMETABLE

2.1 Frequency

How long is the time between scheduled trains?

Does the passenger need to look at a timetable, or just turn up and expect a short wait?

Is it easy to remember the timetable?

2.2 Hours of Operation

Do trains run 24 hours a day, 18 hours, 12 hours, or what? Are there early morning and late night trains on weekends and holidays.

Not really a problem in Sydney, but is still a criterion. Trains on almost all lines operate from before 5 am to after midnight seven days a week. (Airport and Carlingford lines excepted). NightRide buses fill the midnight to dawn void (mostly).

2.3 Speed of Trains

Speed of travel, or time of journey. Does the journey seem slow?

Journey time is affected by train dwell times (or waiting times) at stations. Trains run faster than the timetable allows.

2.4 Connections

Are connections to other trains or buses required to complete a journey?

Will the other train or bus wait?

No connections at certain times.

3. AMENITY

3.1 Over-crowding

Are there enough trains, enough carriages, enough seats?

3.2 Safety – personal

The threat to safety is often more perceived than real, but many people will not travel on trains (all trains or just some lines) at night.

On trains - presence of patrolling guards

On platforms – lighting, presence of station staff

3.3 Cleanliness

- internal - seats, floors, windows, toilets
- external - graffiti - not as important. It doesn't smell or get your clothes dirty.
- platforms, toilets, subways, etc

3.4 Access to Stations

Stairs, subway, lifts, lighting.

Stairs – number of staircases, number of steps, width of steps

3.5 Comfort

On trains - seats, armrests, lights, legroom, temperature control, toilets

On platforms – shelter, seats, rubbish bins, toilets, excessive and repetitive announcements

3.6 Price

The price of tickets (expensive or cheap) may be a deciding factor in whether a person (or a whole family) uses the train.

3.7 Tickets

This is different from price.

Is the ticketing system simple or complex?

Is it inadequate? (Can you go from A to B and then to C and home to A on the one ticket.)

Our current ticket system is very complex and may deter people.

On the other hand, tickets like DayTripper and TravelPass make it easy for novices to get around.

3.8 Buying a Ticket

The ease of buying a ticket (as distinct from types and prices of tickets).

This has to do with the availability of staff or vending machines to sell tickets.

It would also include on-line facilities for season tickets or for smart-cards, if we had one.

3.9 Station Staff

Presence or absence

Public access to staff

Responsiveness

3.10 Information (normal service)

- on board – usefulness – clarity (both language and sound quality) – should say “Next station – Stanmore” and NOT “Stanmore, next station”
- on platform – displays - is the information useful? time of next train, number of minutes to next train, distinguish between scheduled and expected time
- on platform – is it reliable? We can all tell of watching the “number of minutes” change randomly like the drops of the lotto balls
- on platform announcements. Waiting passengers don’t like:
 - o Simultaneous announcements on adjacent platforms, garbling the messages so that waiting passengers understand neither of them.
 - o Playing taped messages at inappropriate times - a frequent occurrence. Platform staff do not understand, or don’t care about, the importance of timing.
- on platform – timetable posters, maps, are they up-to-date
- up-to-date leaflets available
- telephone enquiries – answered promptly and correctly
- computer enquiries – correct information given

3.11 Information (during disruptions)

- on board - what has happened, when will it be fixed, what are the alternative plans
- on platform – when will my train come, where is the special bus

3.12 Bustitution During Trackwork

This can be such a nuisance that people will defer non-essential travel on such days.

3.13 Undesirable Characters

This is not a very charitable criterion, but it exists nevertheless. Some people do not wish to share the trains or platforms with persons who do not meet their standards of social acceptability. It is more a question of perceived comfort or status than of personal safety.

3.14 Station Car Parks

Presence or absence.
Patrolled

3.15 Response to Complaints

Speed of response
Quality of response

Generally, customers will consider CityRail is inadequate when things they have complained about repeatedly, sometimes for years, are not fixed. For instance, not holding trains at Central for cross-platform interchange - the fact that it's impractical to do so is not understood by passengers.

3.16 Video “Entertainment”

On-board or on platform. Some people like it. Some can't stand it.

3.17 Hi-tech Facilities

The Hong Kong Airport Line (and others) have hi-tech gadgets on-board. Some passengers might consider lack of such facilities here a drawback.

Please contact me if you have any queries. We have no objection to this paper being made public.

Yours faithfully,

Allan Miles
Secretary
Action for Public Transport (NSW)