



INDEPENDENT
TRANSPORT
SAFETY AND
RELIABILITY
REGULATOR

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RELIABILITY REGULATOR**

**SUBMISSION TO INDEPENDENT PRICING AND
REGULATORY TRIBUNAL HEARINGS FOR
DETERMINATION OF CITYRAIL FARES FOR 2006**

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Summary

Background

- ITSRR was established to regulate rail safety and advise on public transport *reliability*. In its work on reliability ITSRR has a focus on rail services supported by the NSW Government, especially those provided by CityRail.
- ITSRR monitors performance against standards set by Government. It does not recommend or set standards.
- ITSRR has no views on fares, recognising that for CityRail key issues include the relative contributions of taxpayers and passengers to costs. It also has no opinion as to how service quality should relate to fares.

ITSRR views on service quality

- In ITSRR's view, service quality relates to the non-price (or non-fare) elements of public transport.
- ITSRR conducts regular surveys of CityRail customer satisfaction. These are independent of CityRail and the methodology was developed with assistance from transport survey experts.
- The first survey was in June-July 2004 and a second survey was in June-July 2005. A mini survey was conducted in November 2005. These surveys aim to identify issues of importance to customers, and aspects of service where customer expectations are or are not being met.
- ITSRR's first and second surveys of customers were conducted at times of poor CityRail on-time running performance. Results of these surveys included that customers viewed operational performance, including on-time running, as the highest priority for improvement.

- CityRail introduced a new timetable in September 2005 for all lines other than Bondi Junction-Cronulla-Waterfall and South Coast. Since then, on-time running has greatly improved and is the order of 90%.
- ITSRR conducted a “mini survey” of CityRail customers in November 2005. This aimed to understand perceptions and experience of services under the new timetable. Both the perceptions and experience were positive in most respects, most notably for on-time running. The perceptions and experience of transit time and crowding were more positive than in June-July 2005.
- The mini survey indicates some improvement in service quality in the early months of the new timetable. Data from RailCorp is consistent with these results.

Other matters

- IPART has posted on its website a report prepared by LEK recommending a series of performance indicators for CityRail services.
- ITSRR generally is supportive of the LEK recommendations. It suggests that some indicators should differentiate among peak and the various off-peak periods. There is some research regarding railway passengers that appears to be amenable to development of a service quality index when used in conjunction with the result of ITSRR’s surveys.

Introduction

The present inquiry by the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) is the review of CityRail fares. IPART has provided an opportunity to the Independent Transport Safety and Reliability Regulator (ITSRR) to provide a submission to this review in relation to the *reliability*¹ of CityRail services.

In June 2005, ITSRR made a submission to IPART's review of bus and ferry fares. That submission outlines the charter and role of ITSRR in relation to the reliability of public transport and indicated ITSRR's interest in rail.

ITSRR's reliability role essentially is to monitor performance and report to the Minister for Transport against standards set by the Government. An Annual Reliability Report is to be made publicly available.

ITSRR has previously reported analyses of CityRail on-time running and the impacts of freight on CityRail delays.² In addition, ITSRR undertakes CityRail customer satisfaction surveys, which are the focus of this submission.

The submission to the IPART review of bus and ferry fares emphasised that ITSRR does not advise on the level and structures of fares. As such, it has no views on these matters to present to IPART.

¹ Reliability under the legislation establishing ITSRR includes punctuality and other aspects of service quality, as well as asset management. See: *Transport Administration Act (1988)* s.42A.

² *Review of on-time running of CityRail services*, June 2004 and *Impacts of freight incidents on CityRail passenger service reliability – Interim Report – Stage 1*, July 2005.

CityRail service quality

Background

In its submission to the IPART review of bus and ferry fares, ITSRR indicated its view that service quality comprises non-price (fare) influences on demand. The main areas of service quality in public transport could be classed as:

- operational performance eg. certainty of service and on-time running;
- timetable eg. frequency of services and transit times; and
- amenity eg. comfort, convenience and security of services.

Indicators that relate to these factors or to passenger perceptions may be important to understanding service quality in passenger rail.

ITSRR's approach to monitoring CityRail

ITSRR's approach to monitoring CityRail is essentially at a system wide level. That is, ITSRR does not intensively monitor the performance of individual rail lines, stations or particular train services. However, given the size of the system and its task, it is cognisant of the need to understand issues at a suitable degree of disaggregation, and for this reason, its analysis includes some sub-division of the system. Chief among these are the 3 rail sectors³:

- sector 1. This is to the south and east of Sydney with lines passing through Bondi Junction, Cronulla, Waterfall and the Illawarra area;

³ These sectors extend to the relevant "intercity" lines eg. Gosford, Newcastle and Lithgow in sector 3.

- sector 2. This is to the south and west of Sydney with lines passing through Bankstown, Sydney Airport, East Hills, Liverpool and Campbelltown; and
- sector 3. This is to the north and west of Sydney with lines passing through Hornsby, Sydney's north shore and Emu Plains.

This division is particularly important to the present analysis, since the new timetable introduced on 5 September 2005 relates only to sectors 2 and 3. A new timetable for sector 1 is to be introduced in May 2006.

ITSRR undertakes its monitoring role using information from a variety of sources, the principal of which are reports by RailCorp and its own surveys of CityRail customers.

ITSRR's Surveys of CityRail customers

Prior to ITSRR's establishment at the start of 2004, surveys of CityRail customers were conducted by RailCorp and its predecessor the State Rail Authority. Early in 2004, ITSRR decided to undertake its own survey, annually, and established the methodology that incorporated the advice of transport survey experts. The purpose of the surveys is to measure changes over time in the quality of CityRail services from a customer perspective.

The methodology used is a periodic survey of customers, that is, passengers.⁴ The surveys aim to understand the importance of various aspects of service quality to these people, and monitor changes in service quality. They also aim to identify those aspects of service quality where CityRail's performance meets or does not meet their expectations. This allows an analysis of issues where improvements are important to customers.

The surveys also include questions about customer experience of delays, crowding and skipped stops.

⁴ Potential passengers were also canvassed in the first survey.

The first surveys were conducted in June and July 2004 and June and July 2005. These were prior to the introduction of the new timetable, and at times when CityRail operational performance was poor. Among the results of these surveys was that two-thirds of train users nominated more punctual trains as a high priority for improvement. Other results included that passenger expectations were not being met in terms of matters such as delays and cancellations, punctuality, crowding and service frequency.

Given the expectation that the new timetable, introduced in September 2005, would change operational performance in sectors 2 and 3, ITSRR decided to conduct a survey after its introduction, in November 2005, in addition to its annual surveys. This would provide a point of comparison with the pre (new) timetable situation. This is referred to in this submission as the “mini survey”, reflecting a more narrow focus of questions and fewer respondents.

It is emphasised that both surveys were conducted independently of CityRail, and both are statistically “valid”. Summaries of the surveys are at Appendix 1.

First survey of CityRail customers – mid 2004

At the time of the first survey, peak on-time running was averaging 62%. While it is not possible to infer improvements in performance from this survey, as there is no baseline to compare it with, it did show some important results:

- “Operational” issues⁵ were perceived by passengers as being in most need of improvement. Punctuality was seen as the most important area in which expectations were not met;
- Most respondents, 73%, regarded an acceptable delay as being up to 5 minutes;

⁵ In this discussion the words “operational”, “timetable” and “amenity” refer to ITSRR’s classification of service quality issues. That is, operational performance relates to certainty of service and on-time running; timetable relates to the frequency and transit times of services and amenity relates to comfort, convenience and security of services.

- “Timetable” issues, such as transit times, while significant, were not seen to be of the same degree of priority as operational matters. The timetable issue of greatest concern was crowding. In comparison, service frequency and transit time were seen as far lower priorities; and
- For “amenity”, the issues of greatest concern to passengers were the clarity, timeliness and content of announcements, and personal safety in the evenings, both on station platforms and in train carriages.

In summary, at the time of the first survey in mid 2004 customers viewed improvements in operational performance as the top priority.

Second survey of CityRail customers – mid 2005

The survey in June-July 2005 was conducted against a background of peak on-time running averaging 64%. Main results of this included:

- The aspects of service quality which had the highest percentages of respondents with expectations not met included punctuality, delays and cancellations, and crowding;
- For punctuality, and delays and cancellations, the proportion of respondents whose expectations were not met increased compared with 2004; and
- Aspects of service where CityRail rated highly in meeting customer expectations included signage, the website and 131500 information services, personal safety at daytimes, and removal of litter.

It was concluded that:

“Given that CityRail’s on-time running performance had not improved since the 2004 survey reference period, it is no surprise that aspects of

*service related to on-time running are the major areas of concern for train users”.*⁶

In summary, the second survey in mid 2005 confirmed the high priority customers attached to improving CityRail’s operational performance.

Third survey of CityRail customers – “mini survey” November 2005

By the time of the “mini survey”, November 2005, peak on time-running had improved to around 93%. It focused on aspects of operational and timetable performance, rather than aspects of amenity.

The mini survey found in comparison with the mid 2005 survey:

- Improvements in the perceptions of a large proportion of respondent passengers about punctuality, delays, cancellations and train frequency;
- Smaller improvements in perceptions about other aspects of service including travel time and crowding; and
- Substantial increases in the proportion of customers whose expectations were met.

For sectors 2 and 3, the survey showed large reductions in the frequencies of passengers who actually experienced delays, skipped stops and crowding. There were generally no equivalent changes for passengers on sector 1. As the timetable had not changed for sector 1, this is supportive of the validity of the results of the survey.

It is emphasised that the mini survey is statistically valid in aggregate, and for the sectors. However, the results cannot be extrapolated to particular lines, stations or trains.

⁶ *Survey of CityRail Customers 2005* at p.8.

Comments on the surveys

ITSRR is aware of comments questioning the results of the most recent survey, in particular drawing attention to punctuality and crowding. In response, ITSRR notes:

- The timing of the surveys. In particular, the mini survey was conducted in November 2005. ITSRR intends to conduct a further survey in June-July 2006;
- The broad consistency of the survey results with published CityRail on-time running statistics. ITSRR previously had undertaken some research regarding on-time running statistics⁷;
- The broad consistency of the mini survey results with internal CityRail estimates of train loads, or crowding. ITSRR commented on 2004-05 train load estimates in the most recent Transport Reliability Report. It is pursuing these comments with RailCorp⁸;
- The broad aggregate nature of its survey results. Not all passengers and trains will have uniform or “average” experiences; and
- The surveys were conducted independently of RailCorp and CityRail.

⁷ *Review of on-time running of CityRail services June 2004.*

⁸ *Independent Transport and Reliability Regulator Annual Report 2004-05, NSW Transport Reliability Report.*

LEK report and research into service quality

ITSRR is aware of IPART placing on its website the recommendations from consultants LEK regarding a monitoring framework for CityRail. The purpose of the framework is to assist IPART in its fare determination role.

The monitoring framework is concerned with the efficiency of RailCorp. It proposed quantitative as well as qualitative indicators. There is considerable overlap between that framework and service quality as outlined in this submission.

ITSRR is supportive of RailCorp pursuing the LEK framework but makes two suggestions aimed at enhancing this work:

- separation of relevant reporting by peak and off-peak, including among the various times in the off-peak such as interpeak and weekend. The purpose for this is to understand performance and customer preferences at these various times; and
- linking any work on advancing the LEK indicators with research that has been or is to be undertaken for CityRail or for other major urban rail systems in Australia.⁹

⁹ ITSRR is aware of research undertaken for other rail systems, and indeed for CityRail, on the passenger valuation of service quality factors. This includes values of the importance to passengers of a range of service quality factors including on-time running, standing on trains, air conditioning, etc. RailCorp prepares a *Compendium of CityRail Travel Statistics* every few years containing some such data and other relevant information. Similarly, there are studies of the elasticity of service quality characteristics see for example: *Transportation Cost and Benefit Analysis - Travel Time Costs* Victoria Transport Policy Institute at table 5.2.8 and Douglas NJ, Franzmann LJ and Frost TW *Estimation of Demand Parameters for Primary Public Transport Service Attributes in Brisbane* paper to the 26th Australasian Transport Research Forum 2003.

APPENDIX 1: SURVEYS OF CITYRAIL CUSTOMERS SUMMARIES

FIRST SURVEY – JUNE-JULY 2004

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 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 the 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 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).

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.

SECOND SURVEY – JUNE-JULY 2005

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

The methodology used for the 2005 survey was essentially the same as that used for the 2004 survey. The survey was conducted by telephone by a market research agency between 16 June and 24 July 2005. The sample of 2,755 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.

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 not met

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

- punctuality of trains (59%)
- delays and cancellations (59%)
- crowding in trains at peak commuter times (48%)

- frequency of trains (47%)
- clarity of announcements on the train (42%).

Given the poor on-time running performance of CityRail services throughout the survey reference period it is not surprising that these aspects of service are the ones where expectations are least likely to be met. Each of these aspects of service is related to on-time running. Punctuality, and delays and cancellations are directly related to on-time running. Crowding can occur in the peak when there are train delays. Train frequency can also be affected when there are train delays. Announcements on trains of most relevance to passengers are probably those that relate to on-time running.

Compared with 2004, there are statistically significant changes in the proportions of train users with expectations not met, for each of the following aspects of service:

- punctuality – an increase from 54% in 2004 to 59% in 2005
- crowding – a decrease from 53% in 2004 to 48% in 2005
- train frequency – an increase from 41% in 2004 to 47% in 2005
- quality of information provided about train delays and cancellations at stations – an increase from 35% in 2004 to 41% in 2005
- information provided at the station about train arrival and departure times – an increase from 27% in 2004 to 32% in 2005
- personal safety on stations in the evenings – a decrease from 32% in 2004 to 26% in 2005
- journey time – an increase from 20% in 2004 to 26% in 2005
- facilities for calling for help – a decrease from 34% in 2004 to 27% in 2005.

Despite the decrease for crowding, it still rated third highest, as it did in 2004, of the aspects of service with high proportions of train users with expectations not met. The other aspects of service with increases are probably again a reflection of the poor on-time running performance of CityRail. The decreases for personal safety on stations in the evenings and facilities for calling for help may be due to the increased presence of Transit Officers.

Expectations met

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

- CityRail website information service (87%)
- signs to help find your way around the train network (86%)
- personal safety on stations in peak commuter times (82%)
- 131-500 Transport Information telephone service (82%)
- removal of litter from stations (82%).

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.

If there is an increase in the proportion of train users with expectations not met, there is likely to be a corresponding decrease in the proportion of train users with expectations met, and vice versa. Not surprisingly, therefore, there were statistically significant changes in the proportions of train users with expectations met for many of the aspects of service which had statistically significant changes in the proportions of train users with expectations not met. This was the case for personal safety on stations in the evenings, facilities for calling for help, journey time, information provided at the station about train arrival and departure times, quality of information provided about train delays and cancellations at stations, train frequency and punctuality.

There was one additional aspect of service with a significant change. For knowledge and helpfulness of CityRail staff there was a decrease from 83% in 2004 to 78% in 2005 in the proportion of train users with expectations met.

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 2004 survey are only mentioned if statistically significant.

Train service:

- 40% 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 – an increase from 36% in 2004
- 12% of train users said they were unable to board a train at least once a week because of crowding (not asked in 2004 survey)
- 4% of train users said they had been on a train which failed to stop at their destination at least once a week (not asked in 2004 survey)
- when asked to choose the highest priority out of punctuality, frequency and journey time, 52% of train users chose punctuality, 40% chose frequency and 7% chose journey time.

Security and safety:

- 69% of train users expressed positive feelings towards seeing Transit Officers on their train or at their station (not asked in 2004 survey)
- 30% of train users reported feeling threatened by the actions of other people on a train or at a station
- 21% of train users reported witnessing or being a victim of criminal activity or violent behaviour either at a station or on a train, 18% as witnesses only, 3% as victims
- 27% of train users reported witnessing or being a victim of harassment or verbal abuse either at a station or on a train, 17% as witnesses only, 10% as victims
- 22% of train users said they were worried about being injured or being in an accident on a train or at a station – an increase from 17% in 2004.

Access difficulties:

- 59% of train users said they had arrived at their station to find trains were not running at least once because of trackwork (not asked in 2004 survey)
- 58% of train users said they had changed their travel plans at least once because they knew trackwork was scheduled (not asked in 2004 survey)
- 30% of train users reported having some difficulty getting onto or off platforms or trains – an increase from 24% in 2004
- crowding was the main reason given for access difficulties, affecting 18% of all train users.

Complaints:

- 44% of train users reported wanting to make a complaint about some aspect of CityRail services – an increase from 36% in 2004
- 10% of train users reported they had actually made a formal complaint – an increase from 7% in 2004.

Summary

Punctuality, train delays and cancellations, and crowding remain the three issues of greatest concern to train users. These three aspects of service had the highest proportions of train users with a combination of high importance and low quality ratings. Train users' experience backs up these findings. Large proportions of train users reported being often delayed, or often unable to board a train because of crowding, during the survey reference period. Punctuality, train delays and cancellations, and crowding all relate to on-time running. Given that CityRail's on-time running performance has not improved since the 2004 survey reference period, it is no surprise that aspects of service related to on-time running are the major areas of concern for train users.

Aspects of service where train users are most likely to rate both importance and quality positively are those relating to signage for navigating the network and at stations, the website and 131-500 information services, personal safety in the daytime at stations and on trains, and removal of litter.

A series of bomb attacks occurred on the London Underground on 7 July 2005. Interviewing for this survey continued until 24 July, so a substantial number of the survey's respondents would have been interviewed between 7 July and 24 July. The increase in the proportion of train users worried about being injured in an accident may well be due to the concern about terrorist attacks on CityRail in the wake of the London bombings.

THIRD SURVEY – NOVEMBER 2005

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents findings from a survey of CityRail customers conducted by the Independent Transport Safety and Reliability Regulator in November 2005. The survey was designed to assess the impact on customers of the new rail timetable introduced by CityRail on 4 September 2005.

The methodology for the survey was similar to the methodology used for the 2004 and 2005 annual monitoring surveys conducted in the months of June and July. The survey was administered by telephone by a market research agency between 17 and 24 November 2005. The sample consisted of 1,006 train users, aged 16 and over, who had caught a CityRail train since the introduction of the new timetable. The sample was drawn at random from the same regional areas as the 2004 and 2005 annual monitoring surveys.

The survey consisted of a subset of questions from the annual monitoring surveys but was substantially smaller in scope. It focussed only on aspects of service likely to be affected by the new timetable, namely punctuality, train frequency, delays and cancellations, journey time, standing time on the train, and crowding. Respondents were asked to rate the importance and quality of each of these aspects of service. They were also asked about their experience of delays, crowding and skipped stops. In addition, there were some open-ended questions seeking respondents' unprompted views about train services since the introduction of the new timetable.

To assess the effect of the new timetable, comparisons were made with the annual monitoring survey conducted in June and July of 2005.

The Sydney metropolitan train network consists of three sectors. The timetable changed only for Sectors 2 and 3 (the West, North, South, Bankstown and East Hills corridors). There was no change for Sector 1 (the Eastern Suburbs, Illawarra and South Coast train lines). For this reason results are disaggregated by sector.

Aspects of service liked and disliked

Survey respondents were asked what aspects of service they liked and disliked about the train service since the introduction of the new timetable.

When asked about aspects they liked, more than half the train users either did not nominate any specific aspect or had not noticed any change. Thirty-six per cent of train users nominated an aspect related to improved reliability, such as trains now being on time, fewer delays, fewer cancellations or fewer skipped stops. For Sectors 2 and 3 the proportion of train users who nominated improved reliability was 41%.

The most frequently mentioned aspects not liked by train users were fewer trains or less frequent trains (26% of all train users; 28% of Sector 2 and 3

train users), slower trains (15% of all train users; 16% of Sector 2 and 3 train users) and trains being more crowded (12% of all train users; 13% of Sector 2 and 3 train users). About 12% of train users (10% of Sector 2 and 3 train users) mentioned trains not being reliable, either not on time or trains cancelled or stops skipped.

Ratings of aspects of service

Survey respondents were asked to rate the importance and quality of six aspects of CityRail service likely to have been affected by the timetable changes. The six aspects were:

- punctuality of trains
- frequency of trains
- level of delays and cancellations experienced
- journey time considering the distance travelled
- length of standing time on the train
- level of crowding in trains at peak commuter times.

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 not met

When compared with the June-July survey in 2005, there were significant decreases in the percentages of train users with expectations not met for all six aspects of service. Between June-July 2005 (before the new timetable) and November 2005 (after the new timetable) the percentage of train users with expectations not met:

- decreased from 59% to 19% for punctuality
- decreased from 47% to 21% for frequency
- decreased from 59% to 28% for delays and cancellations
- decreased from 26% to 14% for journey time
- decreased from 29% to 20% for standing time on the train
- decreased from 48% to 40% for crowding.

These percentages are for all train users. For Sectors 2 and 3 there were similar decreases.

For Sector 1 there were significant decreases for all aspects of service except standing time on the train and crowding. This result may seem surprising

given that Sector 1 had no change in timetable. The explanation may be that Sector 1 train users travel on other parts of the network (they are assigned to Sector 1 on the basis of the stations used on their last trip) or that, given the publicity given to the new timetable, they perceived CityRail to be providing a better service.

Expectations met

Not surprisingly, the results for expectations met are complementary to those for expectations not met. There were significant increases in the percentages of train users with expectations met for all aspects of service.

Between June-July 2005 (before the new timetable) and November 2005 (after the new timetable) the percentage of train users with expectations met:

- increased from 38% to 78% for punctuality
- increased from 53% to 75% for frequency
- increased from 38% to 67% for delays and cancellations
- increased from 69% to 77% for journey time
- increased from 56% to 62% for standing time on the train
- increased from 41% to 45% for crowding.

By sector the results mirrored the results for expectations not met, that is, significant increases for all aspects of service for Sectors 2 and 3, and for all but standing time on the train and crowding for Sector 1.

Experience

Survey respondents were asked how often:

- train delays and cancellations had made them more than 10 minutes late for somewhere they needed to be
- they had been unable to board a train because it was too crowded
- they had been on a train which had failed to stop at their destination.

There were significant reductions in the frequencies with which train users experienced all three of these problems. Between June-July 2005 (before the new timetable) and November 2005 (after the new timetable) the percentage of train users having these experiences at least once a month:

- decreased from 65% to 52% for delays of 10 minutes or more
- decreased from 29% to 20% for being unable to board a train because of crowding
- decreased from 12% to 9% for being on a train which failed to stop at their destination.

For Sectors 2 and 3 there were significant reductions in the frequencies of experiencing delays, crowding and skipped stops for train users who travel to or from work by train, and in delays and crowding for train users who don't travel to or from work by train.

With one exception, there were no significant changes in frequencies for Sector 1 train users. The exception was a reduction in the frequency of

experiencing crowding, for Sector 1 train users who travel to or from work by train.

Priorities

Survey respondents were asked to nominate their top priority out of punctual trains, frequent trains, and journey times as short as possible.

There was no change between mid-year and November for Sector 1 train users. For Sectors 2 and 3 there was a significant change, with relatively fewer train users nominating punctuality as the top priority.

Summary

The survey findings indicate that, since the introduction of the new CityRail timetable in September 2005, there has been a marked improvement for customers. For aspects of service related to the timetable there are substantial decreases in the proportions of customers whose expectations are not being met and complementary increases in the proportions of train users whose expectations are being met.

Train users' experience, as reported in the survey, backs up the changes in their perceptions. They have experienced delays, crowding and skipped stops less often since the introduction of the new timetable.