

Report on changes to the 2017 NHT Public Satisfaction Survey

NHT Public Satisfaction Survey 2017

Introduction

2017 will be the 10th year for the NHT Public Satisfaction Survey. The survey was originally devised in 2008 by the South West Service Improvement Group (SWHIG), with the help of measure2improve (m2i) and market research company, Ipsos MORI (IM), and was based on a collation of numerous disparate surveys used by authorities across England.

A 12-page questionnaire covers: Accessibility, Public Transport, Walking & Cycling, Tackling Congestion, Road Safety and Highway Maintenance. Whilst the survey content has changed several times since 2008, the Steering Group, which comprises local authority representatives from all the regions of England, has consistently adhered to the original fundamentals.

The survey involves systematic social research in which invitations to take part are confined to selected addresses, as distinct from more open 'have your say' consultations or exercises engaging user groups, stakeholders or organised customers (including citizens' panels). The survey sits alongside other sources of evidence about customer sentiment. Whilst these are all useful sources of evidence and insight, it should be recognised that each has limitations and applications.

The design features of the survey are as follows:

- A postal mailing methodology,

Postal surveys are a robust, cost-efficient way of undertaking survey research and are used for a number of important Government surveys such as the National GP Patient Survey. Postal surveys are, however, self-selecting, they involve inviting respondents to take part and achieved samples often over and under-represent certain types of people. In contrast, surveys involving quota sampling where interviewers work to quotas designed to generate representative samples.

- Random probability sampling of residential addresses using the Postal Address File,

The random probability sampling methodology used in the NHT Survey is theoretically purer than quota sampling and a quota survey using telephone or face-to-face methods would typically cost an authority at least five times the investment required to participate in the NHT Survey (with the inherent benefits of economies of scale).

- Weighting of data to ensure that the achieved sample is fully representative and better reflects the known population profile.

All surveys are estimates of the 'truth', the views/behaviours of the 'universe' – in this case, every 16+ year old resident in a particular local authority area. Weighting is used to correct for any imbalances between the survey sample profile and the profile of the 'universe'. Each respondent is given a weight so that the results are representative of the profile of residents in each local authority area. Responses from each individual completing the survey are given a weight in accordance with their: age, gender, ethnicity, and work status. A full note on the weighting scheme currently in use is available on the NHT website at www.nhtnetwork.org

- Fieldwork during summer months

To date the Survey has enjoyed better than average response rates, and above those originally predicted by Ipsos MORI. A slow decline in responses rates, a trend common with postal surveys, was addressed four years ago by the introduction of a reminder, sending a letter and a further copy of the questionnaire, to the sampled households that have not yet returned the questionnaire.

There have been other experiments to increase response rates including the printing of council logos on outer envelopes, the use of an additional postcard reminder, and different versions and lengths of questionnaire.

An on-line option is offered and 7% of respondents chose to answer the questionnaire electronically last year.

An achieved sample size of 800-1,000 is required for Self-assessment, and while the average achieved in the Survey in 2016 was 911 this was pulled up by a few outliers and a third of participating authorities received fewer than 800 returns. Those authorities should consider taking a higher sample than the minimum of 3,300.

Consultation

The Steering Group agreed that this 10th year would be an opportune time to undertake a full review of the survey methodology and questionnaire content to ensure that it continues to fulfil the needs of participating authorities, meets the requirements of Self-Assessment and reflects the challenging financial restrictions facing councils.

The consultation process began at the 2016 NHT Conference, where delegates used an online voting app to record views on the following questions about survey;

Question	Very Useful	Fairly Useful	Not very useful	Not at all Useful
How useful or not is it for your authority to get a customer perspective on highways & transport service	76%	22%	2%	-
How would you rate the NHT Survey in terms of helping your authority to measure performance in terms of highways & transport services	39%	57%	4%	-
How would you rate the benchmarking provided by the NHT survey	35%	49%	16%	
How would you rate the NHT survey in terms of helping your authority secure funding for highways and transport service	14%	52%	32%	2%
How would you rate the NHT Survey in terms of helping your authority manage contractors and their performance	2%	24%	53%	22%

In the workshop sessions that followed, delegates split into small groups to discuss how they used the survey and how they thought it could be improved, a summary of the feedback was as follows:

- Questionnaire needs to be shorter
- Improve the demographic, encourage younger respondents
- Use less technical language
- Move to on-line
- Improve the visual appeal
- Remove elements over which authorities have no control
- Free text comments provide limited value

- Review order of questions
- Support with media campaign
- Simplify
- Focus on responses from respondents that are using a service

The review at the NHT Conference provided the basis for gathering the views from all participating councils up and down the country, and a questionnaire was circulated in early December. An analysis of the results are included in Appendix 2.

The most important objectives identified by the survey review were to try to improve the demographic profile of respondents and to increase the number of respondents. To do this it will be important to engage a younger demographic and to find ways that would make the questionnaire more appealing for younger people to complete, with an emphasis on improving the on-line offering.

The themes that were most important to keep in the survey every year were 'Highway Maintenance' 100% and 'Road Safety' 82%, the themes that more than half of the respondents felt could be omitted some years were 'Accessibility' 71% and 'Public Transport' 59%.

The responses to the questions about which KBIs were important to keep varied quite widely although there were two KBIs that all respondents voted to keep: KBI 23 - Condition of Highways and KBI 24 – Highways Maintenance, and KBI 09 - Taxi/Minicab Services and KBI 10 - Community Transport were the two that most respondents were willing to lose from the survey.

These results, together with trying to find ways to obtain sufficient responses, in line with Self-Assessment requirements of between 800 – 1000 per authority, became the focus for the Steering Group.

The Case for Change

The Steering Group readily acknowledged the appetite for change expressed by participating authorities during the consultation exercise, and shared the view that there were several ways in which the survey can be modernised and improved. However they also had a strong interest in retaining what the survey has been able to provide since its inception. In particular, continuing to achieve affordable access to participation, robust measurements of customer satisfaction, and the ability to benchmark and trend these over time.

The focus for change was to improve response rates and the demographic profile of respondents and to consider alternate survey methodologies and data collection methods.

Options considered for improving response rates were as follows:

- the introduction of a second reminder mailing, which would require an extension to the survey fieldwork period and incur additional cost,
- to reduce the 'ask' of respondents by streamlining the questionnaire from 12 to 8 pages, regarded as the quickest route to boosting the response rate and enhancing the value of the survey
- increase the minimum sample size. This would generate additional returns, something which directly affects the statistical robustness of survey findings and the degree to which we can confidently detect change over time. It also supports the robust disaggregation of data by geography, demography, user groups etc.

Actions Agreed

The views and comments submitted throughout the consultation process were discussed, initially by the Questionnaire Sub-Group at a meeting on 14th December, the feedback from this meeting on what action to take to change the questionnaire or the way in which it is delivered, was then put to the full NHT Survey Steering Group when it met on the 12th January 2017. The following was decided at the meeting:

- Reduce the questionnaire to 8 pages

It was hoped this would:

- Improve the value for money of the survey; it would potentially increase the number of returns generated by each £1 of investment relative to the existing 12-page questionnaire.
- Reduce the volume of data collected, thereby reducing the burden on local authorities as consumers and users of the data.
- Free some resources to invest in innovation and improvement of the survey.

A further meeting of the Questionnaire sub-group was held at the beginning of February when the 12-page questionnaire was reviewed in detail and decisions made about which questions could be removed to create an 8-page version and have the least impact on the KBIs and BIs. See Appendix 2 for details.

Note: Whilst the unit price for an 8-page questionnaire is lower than that for a 12-page version, the savings are not proportionate; that is, they are much lower than the 1/3 reduction in length. This is because of the structure of costs; the reduced length makes little difference to most of the survey processes, while there are no savings in respect of the biggest cost, postage, at all. There has been inflation in printing, postage and other costs, unit prices have run at below inflation for all but two of the nine surveys conducted to date, and freezing prices is not sustainable.

- Improve the online option

Since its introduction in 2013, there has been growing uptake of the online option for completing the survey. There is room for improvement and m2i has developed a new system which enables the online platform to be device-agnostic, such that people can participate by using tablet and smartphone devices as well as laptops/desktop PCs. This will support ambitions to widen the accessibility of the survey to younger audiences, but there is a need to be realistic about what greater promotion of online can achieve, and the results this year will be carefully monitored.

- Pilot 'push to web'

To better promote the online option through communication to sampled addresses, it is proposed piloting a 'push-to-web' design. This will involve trialling a first mailing signposting the online platform with the postal questionnaire confined to a second mailing. This methodology has been used recently for large Government surveys. Use of a postcard at different stages of the mailing process is also to be trialled.

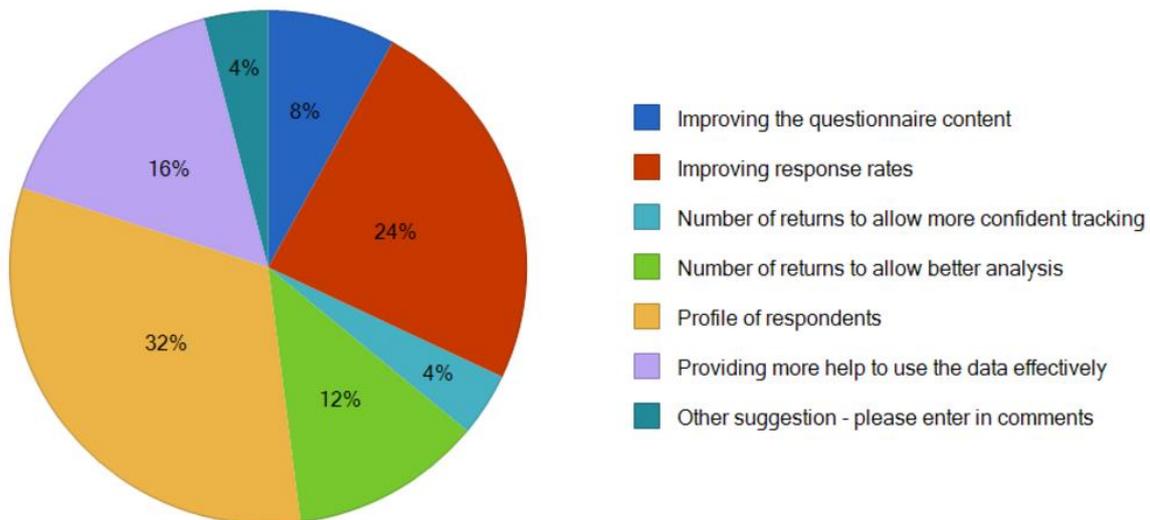
- Undertake cognitive testing

A small-scale qualitative exercise allowing us to 'test' questions and customer agendas will be undertaken by IM to ensure that the new, shorter questionnaire is fully comprehended by customers and is grounded in their realities.

Subsequent to this meeting, and after further reflection, it was decided that authorities would be given the option to continue to choose the 12 page questionnaire at a slightly increased price, which reflects increases in costs for printing and postage.

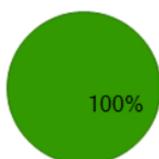
Appendix 1 – Survey consultation results

Question 2 - Most important objective for improving the NHT Survey

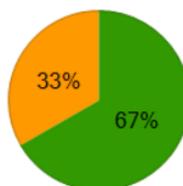


Question 3 - Theme Inclusion every Year

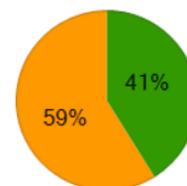
Highway Maintenance



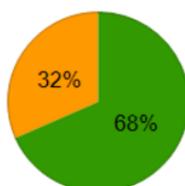
Walking & Cycling



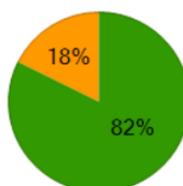
Public Transport



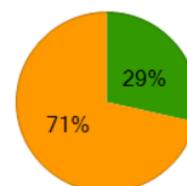
Tackling Congestion



Road Safety

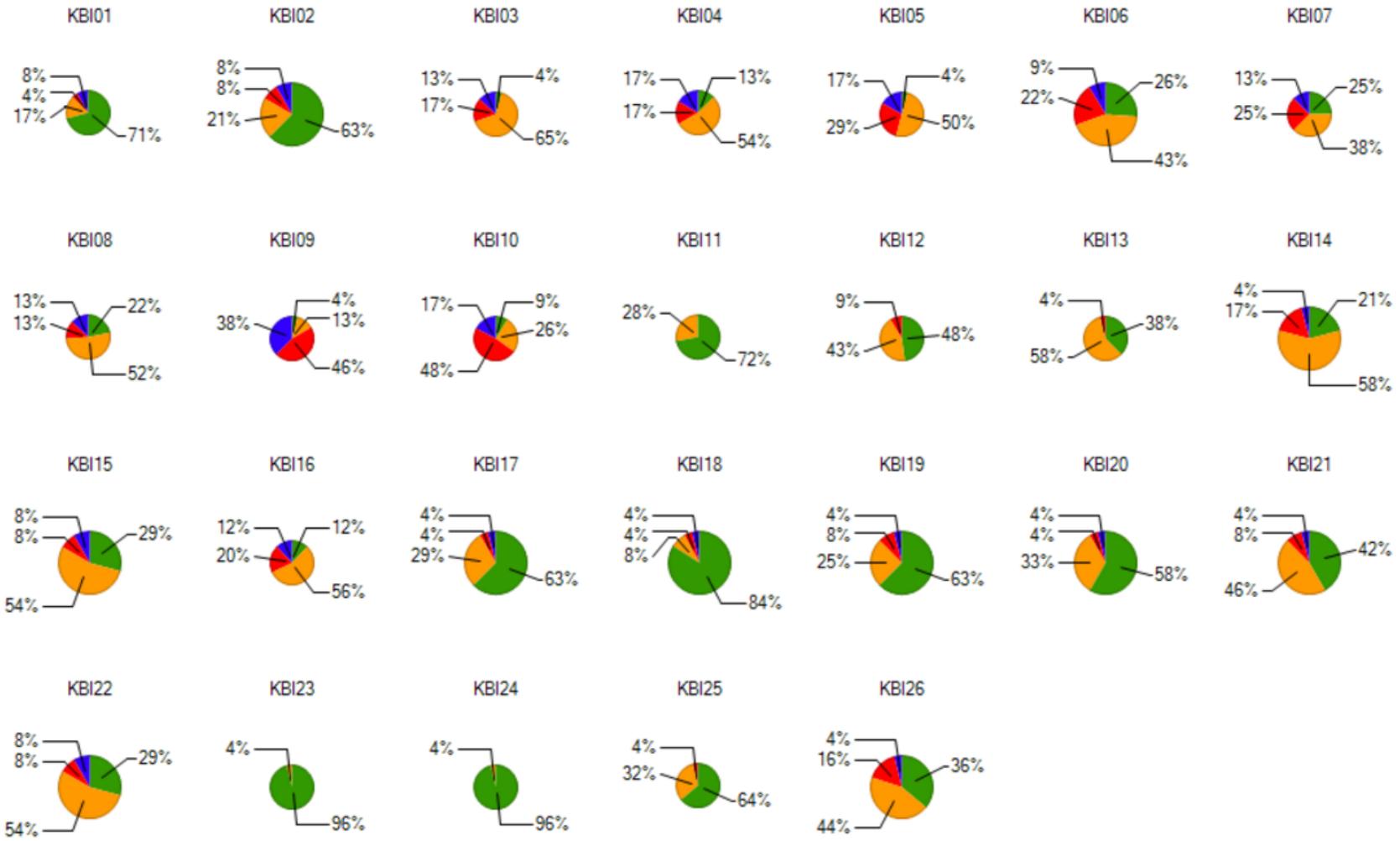


Accessibility



■ In every year
 ■ Omit some years

KBI - Important to keep analysis



■ Very important to keep
 ■ Important to keep
 ■ Not important to keep
 ■ Not Used

Appendix 2 - Summary table of changes to the 2017 Questionnaires

NHT Survey 2017: Changes to provide 8 & 12 page Questionnaires				
Question Numbers			Comments	KBI or BI affected
Original 12 Page	New (2017) 12 Page	New (2017) 8 Page		
Q 1 & 2	Q 1 & 2	Q 1 & 2		
Q3 & Q4	Q3	Q3	Existing Questions 3 & 4 combined, double column answers	None
Q5	Q4	Q4		None
Q6	Q5	Q5		None
Q6a	Q6	Q6		None
Q11c	Q7	Q7		None
Q7	Q8	Q8	Item 7.9 Removed	None
Q11a & 11b	Q9	Q9	Combined to create Q9 for 8 page version	
Q12	Q10	Q10		None
Q8	Q11	Q11	Loses: 'Cycle training (e.g. at schools') and 'Cycle facilities at place of work (e.g. racks, showers etc)	None
Q15	Q12	Q12	Now Q12 combines: 'Safety of walking' and 'Safety of Cycling' as one sub-question. 'Safety of children walking to school' and 'safety of children cycling to school' as one sub-question.	RSBI 4 & 5 will now be combined, as will RSBI 6 & 7
Q17a and Q17b	Q13	Q13	Combined to create Q13	None
Q17c	Q14	Q14		None
Q9	Q15	No question		KBI07, PTBI 1 - 12 8 page only
Q10	Q16	No question		KBI08, TCBI 1 -7 8 page only
Q11b	Q17	No question		None
Q13	Q18	No question		KBI19 TCBI 8-14 8 page only
Q14	Q19	No question		No KBIs PTBI 21 -25 8 page only

Q16a	Q20	No question		KBI16 WCBI 17 - 23 8 page only
Q16b	Q21	No question		None
Q18	No question	No question		None
Q19	Q22	Q15		None
Q20	No question	No question		None
Q21	No question	No question		None
Q22	Q23	Q16		None
Contd/.....				
Q23	Q24	Q17	Extra sub questions: Car or Van as driver & Car or Van as Passenger	None
Q24	Q25	Q18		None
Q25	No question	No question		None
Q26	Q26	Q19		None
Q27	Q27	Q20		None
Q28	Q28	Q21		None
Q29	Q29	Q22	Both versions lose: On a Govt training scheme, Full time education, Unemployed, Permanent sick/disabled, Wholly retired, Looking after the home, Doing something else.	None
Q30	Q30	Q23		None