

Participating authorities – NHTS FAQs Councils

1. What sort of data does the National Highways and Transport Survey generate?

The NHTS has been set up to collect public perspectives on, and satisfaction with, highway and transportation services in local authority areas. The data is used by local authorities to inform performance management and Local Transport Plans.

It involves leading market research company, Ipsos MORI, sending a questionnaire out to randomly selected households and processing the returns. Authorities are supplied with data and software designed by measure2improve to allow them to analyse, map, chart and benchmark their data against other participating authorities.

2. Who commissions the survey?

The survey was initiated in 2008 by the National Highways Benchmarking Club (NHBC) in collaboration with the South West Highways Service Improvement Group (SWHIG). Several authorities in the South West recognised that they were collecting satisfaction data in a number of different ways and that this created difficulties with benchmarking. They also identified the benefits in out-sourcing a resource-intensive activity, and securing efficiencies and savings.

The survey is managed by the National Highways and Transport (NHT) Network administrators, measure2improve.

3. What does the questionnaire cover?

The questionnaire is organised under themes linked to national shared transport priorities (Local Transport Plans) and other important highway and transport related topics: overall public satisfaction, accessibility, public transport, walking and cycling, tackling congestion, road safety and highways maintenance & enforcement. A copy of the latest questionnaire is available in the Library Section of the Web Site, www.nhtnetwork.org.

There is a substantial classification ('demographics') section including questions about age, sex, working status, car ownership, national free bus pass ownership, disability, Blue Badge ownership and ethnicity.

4. Who designs the questionnaire?

The questionnaire was originally designed for the first survey in 2008 by the National Highways Benchmarking Club (NHBC) and the South West Highways Service Improvement Group (SWHIG) with input from participating authorities and from Ipsos MORI. The questionnaire is reviewed annually by the NHT Survey Steering Group, which is made up of local authority representatives from all regions of England and Scotland. A common questionnaire is used for all local authority participants for the purposes of benchmarking but also to ensure efficiencies and cost savings. Versions with small variations for authorities that run a tram or metro service are also available and Scotland has a version that reflects the different terminology in use there.

Ipsos MORI graphic-design the questionnaire to make sure that it is respondent-friendly and encourages recipients to take part. The front cover of the questionnaire is co-branded with each authority's logo and a signatory.

5. How are respondents generated?

The survey is administered by Ipsos MORI who generate the sample from the Small Users File which is a sub-file of the Postal Address File (we do not use the electoral register because it is not an inclusive sampling frame). A random probability sampling approach is used. This means that each address has a known, and equal, chance of selection. This is the methodology that was used for the Government's Place Survey.

6. Who can take part in the survey?

The survey is open to anybody aged 16 or over living at an address which receives the NHTS questionnaire. This is made clear on the front of the questionnaire. It doesn't matter if the individual has just moved to the area, or doesn't pay Council Tax.

7. Why is the NHTS done using a postal 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 in nature in that they involve inviting respondents to take part. Achieved samples often over and under-represent certain types of people. In contrast, surveys involving quota sampling involve interviewers working to quotas designed to generate representative samples. At the same time, the random probability sampling

methodology used in the Place Survey and the NHTS is theoretically purer than quota sampling.

8. Is the survey accessible?

A pre-paid envelope is provided for recipients of the questionnaire to return it free of charge. The front page of the questionnaire signposts the availability of assistance for respondents via a telephone number at Ipsos MORI and an email address.

A large print version of the questionnaire is available on request.

The questionnaire also signposts the opportunity for recipients to take part in a language other than English by registering an interest by phoning or emailing Ipsos MORI who could either pass on the enquiry to the local authority or use their own interviewers to conduct the interview. The costs of any such interview would be passed on by Ipsos MORI to the authority.

9. How long do respondents have to take part?

The front page of the questionnaire provides a return deadline date. Recipients are given a six-week period in which to return their questionnaire. However, after three weeks a reminder is sent out to anyone who has not yet responded together with a complete reprint of the questionnaire. The intention is to strike the right balance between giving people too little/too much time which might dissuade response.

Residents that receive a questionnaire through the post have the option to complete it on-line if they prefer. In order to access the on-line questionnaire, provided by m2i, respondents have to enter the code printed on the front of the questionnaire they have received in the post so that Ipsos MORI can identify where that data set has come from.

9a. Can a Local Authority use the link to the on-line questionnaire on their own website?

Unfortunately it is not possible to have an open link to the survey available for anyone to complete please see Q9. Using the selection process detailed in Q5, Ipsos MORI can identify from which area each respondent comes and m2i is therefore able to provide the data spatially on maps

10. What response rate is expected?

An average response rate of 22.5% was achieved across the local authorities who took part in 2015. There is though considerable variation in response rates. Authorities will get an idea about their likely response rates from last year's survey as well as their own evidence from BVPI and Place surveys. Response rates cannot be guaranteed by Ipsos MORI.

11. Is there a minimum number of returns?

There are no minimum return requirements for the NHT survey. In 2008, 4,500 questionnaires were mailed out in each local authority area for the sake of speed and consistency (and because it was the first such survey). Since 2014 authorities have been invited to consider their own mail-out sizes and these range from 3,300 to 9,000 with one reminder.

12. What are the advantages of a large sample size? (What sample size should a participating authority seek to get?)

The larger the number of returned questionnaires, the greater the statistical reliability of the findings generated by the survey (see question 18). The sampling tolerance, sometimes called the 'margin of error', is larger for smaller sample sizes and smaller for larger sample sizes.

Most of the surveys done by Ipsos MORI seek a minimum of 800-1,000 responses/interviews as these deliver statistical reliability of ± 3 at the aggregate level, as well as the scope to look at differences among sub-groups, such as younger vs older residents, with confidence.

In the past three years we have invited authorities to consider their own mail-out sizes taking into account response rates in 2008 and the statistical reliability required, as well as the extra investment required for larger sample sizes.

13. Can local authorities stratify the sample/mailout?

Since 2009, we have offered greater flexibility by allowing authorities to move beyond the standard 3,300 mailout and to expand their sample and to use a stratified sampling approach. This involves boosting disproportionately the size of a mailout in certain areas

within the authority (e.g. district areas within a county) and using a non-random approach to sampling, in order to maximise returns in smaller areas.

14. How are response rates maximised?

We use a number of strategies including co-branding by Ipsos MORI and the local authority, a well-presented questionnaire, clear signposting of the importance and utility of the survey, reassurances about the confidentiality of responses and support for respondents (a telephone number and an email address).

We also use a prize draw with £500 for the first prize, £150 for the second, £50 for the third.

15. Are the results confidential?

One of the conditions of local authorities taking part in the NHTS is the disclosure of aggregate and indicator data to other participating authorities for benchmarking purposes (one of the primary purposes of the survey), but respondent data is anonymised.

Local authorities receive data from respondents in their area but this does not include names (if provided) or postcodes. This means that no-one can be identified as having taken part.

16. How is the data captured?

The questionnaires are received by Ipsos MORI who use scanners to capture the data. A chief advantage of scanning is that this aspect of the data process can be delivered at a lower cost, quicker and with no human errors. Unique barcodes enable the data to be processed as one dataset. Ipsos MORI use a numbering system to differentiate between questionnaires particular to specific local authorities.

17. Is NHTS data weighted?

Yes. All surveys are estimates of the 'truth' this being the views/behaviours of the 'universe' – in this case, every 16+ year old resident in a particular local authority area. The findings derived from the NHT survey are generated from a sample of residents and we will use the data to draw conclusions about the 'universe' subject to sampling error, standard error, confidence intervals etc.

Weighting is used to correct for any imbalances between the survey sample profile and the profile of the 'universe'. Similarly, in the case of postal surveys such as this one, each respondent has been given a weight in order that the results are representative of the profile of residents in each local authority area. This is to ensure that we are drawing conclusions

about the 'universe' from a sample which reflects it in terms of key demographic variables and that we are benchmarking authorities on a like-for-like basis.

To view a full note on the weighting scheme currently in use please click [here](#)

18. How is the data weighted?

Responses from each individual completing the survey – i.e. each respondent – are given a weight in accordance with several categories: age (in four categories – 16-24, 25-34, 35-54 and 55+); gender (male vs. female); ethnicity ('white' vs. BME); and work status (working full-time vs. not working full-time).

Ipsos MORI sources population profile data from the Office for National Statistics Census Mid-Year Estimates. 'Rim' weighting has been used and any respondent who did not answer any of the weighting categories is weighted neutrally with a factor of 1.0.

To view a full note on the weighting scheme currently in use please click [here](#)

19. How (statistically) reliable is the data?

All surveys are estimates of the 'truth' this being the views/behaviours of the 'universe' – in this case, every 16+ year old resident in a particular local authority area. The variation between the sample results and the "true" values (the findings which would be obtained if all 16+ year olds had taken part) can be predicted from knowledge of the sample sizes on which the results are based and the number of times that a particular answer is given.

The confidence with which we can make this prediction is usually chosen to be 95%, that is, the chances are 95 in 100 that the "true" values will fall within a specified range. For example, For example, with a total sample of 1,000 where 50% give a particular answer, the chances are 19 in 20 that the "true" value (which would have been obtained if the whole population had taken part) will fall between 47% and 53% (i.e. within the range of plus or minus 3 percentage points from the sample result).

To view a full note on the weighting scheme currently in use please click [here](#)

20. How reliable are comparisons between local authorities?

The differences between results for authorities may be "real", or may occur by chance (because not everyone took part in the survey). To test if the difference is a real one – i.e. if it is "statistically significant" – we again have to know the size of the samples, the percentage giving a certain answer and the degree of confidence chosen.

A full note on statistical reliability is available [here](#).

To view a full note on Statistical Reliability please copy and paste the following link to your web browser window:

To view a presentation on Statistical Reliability please click [here](#)

21. How reliable is it to look at the responses of sub-groups and sub-areas?

The differences between results for sub-groups of respondents, such as the differences between men and women, may be “real”, or may occur by chance (because not everyone took part in the survey). To test if the difference is a real one – i.e. if it is “statistically significant” – we again have to know the size of the samples, the percentage giving a certain answer and the degree of confidence chosen.

To view a presentation on Statistical Reliability please click [here](#)

22. Can I have the raw data?

Participating Authorities

A participating authority may order a .csv file of the raw data from the NHT Public Satisfaction Survey, from measure2improve, at a cost of £100, on the understanding that it is not passed to a third party that is not directly involved in the survey.

e.g. should authorities in a region wish to share their raw data with one another and agreement is reached between them that is acceptable. However, any requests from external organisations e.g. Bus Companies should be referred to the Network Administrator, measure2improve.

Authorities may also obtain a SPSS data file from Ipsos MORI at a cost of £250.00. Requests should be channelled through measure2improve.

Non-participating Organisations

With the permission of the participating Council(s), the raw data file may be released to a third party by measure2improve. An administration fee will be charged plus an additional amount which will be used to further develop the Survey reporting. The fee for the current year's data per Council is £500. Data from all previous years can be supplied at an additional cost of £250.00.

23. How can a local authority take part and what does it cost?



Survey
Public Satisfaction

The cost for taking part in the 2016 NHT survey was £8200.00, authorities that took part in the previous year, are entitled to a £250.00 discount. This is for the minimum sample size of 3,300 plus one full re-print reminder to non-respondents (see question 9).

A Survey Participation form (no obligation) is available from the 'How to take part' page on the NHT Survey web site or please click [here](#)

For any additional information please email info@nhtnetwork.org