

USERS' EXPERIENCE OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE TRANSPORT STATISTICS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER IMPROVEMENTS

1 Introduction

1.1 The purpose of this paper is to seek the views of Members of the Committee on recent developments in Scottish Executive (SE) Transport Statistics, and their suggestions for further improvements.

1.2 Views are sought on:

- the updated *Scottish Transport Statistics* tables on the Transport Statistics Web site (paras 2.1 and 2.2);
- the new *Main Transport Trends* bulletin (paras 2.3 and 2.4);
- the "one page" / "high level" summaries" of statistics on particular topics on the Transport Statistics Web site (paras 2.5 and 2.6);
- possible improvements to *Scottish Transport Statistics* (section 3);
- other possible improvements to existing publications (section 4);
- whether there is a need for any new publications, or new formats for publications (section 5);
- possible improvements to the Transport Statistics web site (section 6);
- other possible outputs (section 7).

1.3 Members of the Committee are invited to comment on these matters, and on any other points that they wish to raise regarding SE Transport Statistics publications, other outputs and the Web site.

2 Recent developments in SE Transport Statistics

2.1 Members of the Committee will recall the discussion, at the meeting in October 2005, of the timing of publication of *Scottish Transport Statistics (STS)*. In the light of this, SE decided that *STS* would be published in December, in order that certain key statistics would not become out-of-date soon after publication. However, in order that users could get tables which appeared in August when *STS* was published then, updated versions of (almost) all the tables from *STS* were made available on the SE Web site in August, when *Main Transport Trends* was published. In addition, updated versions of *STS* tables have been made available on the Web site at other times, in "batches" which include tables for which updated versions have become available in recent weeks. For example, at the beginning of October 2006, the "September 2006" updated versions of *STS* tables were put on the Web site. These included updated versions of the tables on local bus passenger numbers and National Travel Survey results, following DfT's publication, in September, of new figures. The updated versions of *STS* tables are therefore fairly up-to-date - but may not be completely up-to-date in the case of figures produced by other bodies (it always takes time to request and obtain updated figures). The tables are available via www.scotland.gov.uk/transtat/stsupdate . The appearance of further "batches" of tables is announced by e-mails to Members of the Committee and to the ScotStat Transport and TRi-TSUG e-mail lists.

2.2 Members of the Committee are asked:

- **have they used the updated versions of *STS* tables?**
- ***if so*, are there improvements that they would like to suggest (e.g. to the way in which the spreadsheets are made available on the Web site, to the accompanying material, or to the method of announcing the availability of further updated versions of tables) that would make them more useful?**
- ***if not*, are there changes (e.g. to the spreadsheets themselves, to how they are accessed on the Web site, or to the accompanying material) that might make them useful?**

2.3 SE introduced *Main Transport Trends (MTT)* in August 2006 in order to

- provide users of the statistics with a handy printed summary, at that time of year, of the main trends which had previously been shown by *STS* when it was published in August;
- announce the availability, on the SE Transport Statistics Web site, of updated versions of (almost) all the tables from *STS*.

The first edition had 32 pages. The content was based upon that of the "Summary Transport Statistics" section of the 2005 edition of *STS*, with some changes (e.g. a table showing some trends from the Scottish Household Survey was added, and the "cross-border transport" table and the "notes and sources" section were dropped, as they are too "detailed" for inclusion in *MTT*). It is intended that *MTT* will remain a "slim" bulletin: there should be no need to expand it greatly, since (when it is published) many detailed figures are made available on the Web site in updated versions of *STS* tables. However, might there be a need for additional summary tables that users of *MTT* would find useful? or extra charts, to illustrate more clearly certain trends? or further text, to explain particular points more clearly? There will be scope to improve *MTT*, particularly if there are other "main" figures that users would prefer to have readily available in it than to have to find in updated versions of *STS* tables on the Web site.

2.4 Members of the Committee are asked:

- **have they used *Main Transport Trends*?**
- ***if so*, are there improvements that they would like to suggest (e.g. to the tables, charts or text) which would make it more useful?**
- ***if not*, are there changes that would make it useful?**

2.5 When the SE Web site was restructured in June 2006, "one page" summaries of "High Level Statistics" were added to the "home" pages of each of the topic areas. The purpose of the "one page" summaries is to provide users of the statistics with:

- a brief summary of the main figures on each of the topics; and
- references to publications which contain more detailed figures on those topics.

There are 20 "Transport" summaries, which can be found at www.scotland.gov.uk/transtat . They are updated following the appearance of new editions of relevant SE publications or the making available on the SE Web site of further updated versions of *STS* tables. They will, therefore, be reasonably up-to-date, but may not be completely up-to-date (e.g. because of the inevitable delays in requesting and receiving figures from other bodies).

2.6 Members of the Committee are asked:

- **have they used the "one page" / "High Level" summaries on Transport topics?;**
- ***if so*, are there improvements that they would like to suggest which would make them more useful?**
- ***if not*, are there changes that would make them useful?**

3 Improving *Scottish Transport Statistics (STS)*

3.1 Members of the Committee will recall discussions at previous meetings, following which various improvements have been made to *STS* - e.g. the inclusion of new tables and an index, and the expansion of some tables to provide more information.

3.2 The 2006 edition of *STS* will be finalised in mid-November, for publication before Christmas, so discussions at the meeting will *not* affect it. Some improvements are being made, including:

- adding some separate "time-series" tables of SHS results;
- adding road freight "tonne-kilometre" figures to Tables 3.4 to 3.7 inclusive, which hitherto have given only "tonnes lifted" figures;
- subject to the estimates becoming available in good time for inclusion, adding tables showing carbon dioxide emissions allocated to Scotland in the forthcoming Greenhouse Gas Inventory, and showing emissions per passenger-kilometre for various modes of transport.

3.3 As *STS 2006* will have over 300 pages, it is *not* envisaged that it should expand *greatly* in future. The survey of users in 2004 did not identify any tables which no-one used, but some are clearly of interest to more people than others. If necessary, room for new tables could be made (e.g.) by dropping some of the more "specialised" ones, by putting much of the material in one of the larger chapters into a separate publication on that topic, or by using a smaller font size for the "Notes and Definitions", "Sources" and "Further Information" sections. SE is always willing to consider suggestions for possible improvements. **Members of the Committee are therefore asked: what, if any, improvements would they like made to *STS*? and why?**

4 Other possible improvements to existing publications

4.1 SE continues to improve its other publications, as and when appropriate. For example, SE amended the *Household Transport* bulletin, and will amend the *SHS Travel Diary results* and *Transport Across Scotland* bulletins, in order to include some results of new questions that were added to the SHS in 2005. SE is adding analyses of contributory factors, and other data collected with effect from 2005, to *Road Accidents Scotland*. **What other improvements would Members of the Committee like made to Transport Statistics publications?**

4.2 Views would be welcomed on two "more general" points on the content of Transport Statistics publications. First, publications' commentaries have traditionally concentrated on describing the figures, and not said much about the **background or context**. This may be due to an implicit assumption that those who use the publications will have a good knowledge of the subject. The publications do, of course, refer to *some* factors which have had a marked effect on the figures - e.g. the chapters in *Scottish Transport Statistics* mention:

- that the volume of traffic in 2000 was affected by the "fuel price" protests;
- the problems which caused falls in rail passenger numbers in 2000-01 and 2001-02; and
- the introduction and extension of the national minimum standard arrangements for concessionary fares.

However, the "air transport" chapter does not refer to (let alone try to quantify) the growth in cheap flights, and the commentaries on the various sets of freight statistics do not attempt to chronicle the rise/fall of particular types of traffic and their effects on the figures. Annex A of *Road Accidents Scotland* is a calendar of events affecting road traffic, but the commentary generally does not relate these to changes in the numbers in certain years (in any case, it may be many years before some changes have their full effects - e.g. before improvements in vehicle safety work their way through the fleet). In general, the publications present a wide range of results from their main source(s) *without* much "background/context". For example, the sections in *Household Transport* which comment on the percentages who:

- use buses and trains do *not* refer to (say) the trends in their total numbers of passengers, developments in the industries or relevant SE policies; and
- travel to work and school by different modes do *not* refer to (say) the rising proportion of households with cars, SE policies or related issues (e.g. concerns about children's health, views on the relative safety of different modes of travel to school).

In some cases, any additional "background / context" might have to be at the expense of some of the more detailed analyses (due to staff time constraints, and some bulletins having 80 pages, the maximum the printers recommend). On the other hand, more "background / context" could improve some users' understanding of the figures. **Do Members of the Committee think that Transport Statistics publications should have more "background / context"? If so, what kind(s) of material do they think should be added, and why?**

4.3 The second general point on which views would be welcomed is the **balance between commentary, tables and charts**. Traditionally, publications have had "long" commentaries. Again taking *Household Transport* as an example (and not counting the "main points" etc at the start), the commentary extends to about:

- 2 pages on driving licences and frequency of driving (which have 2* pages of tables);
- 3 pages on views on motoring taxes and charges, traffic growth and congestion (4 pages of tables);
- 2 pages on the use of Traveline Scotland and Transport Direct (2 pages of tables);
- 2 pages on walking and cycling (2* pages of tables); and
- 5 pages on travel to work, study and school (4* pages of tables).

(NB: trend tables are not counted in the *'d numbers because they are subject only to brief comments.) In total, there are about 20 pages of commentary on 20 pages of tables (again, not counting main points and trend tables). Some of the commentary is essential: for example, to describe how the information is collected (in cases where users need to know this for a proper understanding of the figures), to identify the main points shown, to caution against over-interpretation (if figures are not particularly soundly-based), and so forth. However, should the commentary cover many points which most users could see for themselves if/when they look at the tables and charts? Would shorter commentaries be better, as that might allow the inclusion of more background/context material or more tables or more charts? **Members of the Committee are asked for their views on the balance between commentary, tables and charts - do they feel that it should be changed? and, if so, how and why?**

4.4 There are other SE and Transport Scotland publications which include statistics about aspects of Transport in Scotland, for which the Transport Statistics branch is not directly responsible, such as *Transport Indicators for Scotland* (or whatever succeeds it - although the branch provides the statistics, "editorial control" lies with policy colleagues and Ministers), Transport Scotland's "congestion monitoring" reports, the "transport-related" *SHS Topic Reports* (see below) and the *SHS Annual Report* (the branch contributes to decisions on the

content of SHS publications, without having "editorial control" over them). **If Members of the Committee wish to suggest improvements to such publications, the Transport Statistics branch will be happy to pass their comments on to, or put them in touch with, the appropriate people within SE or Transport Scotland.**

4.5 **Views would be welcomed on possible subjects for further SHS Topic Reports.** These provide "in depth" analysis of particular topics, focus on the results which are relevant to particular policy issues, and look at the SHS's results in the context of information available from other sources. They are written by external experts (e.g. academics or transport consultants), and are based mainly on SHS data and results (up to a third of the analysis can be based on non-SHS statistics). As the survey has been running for almost eight years, the large accumulated sample enables Topic Reports to look in detail at (e.g.) particular sub-groups of the population. The first three "Transport" Topic Reports were on "Accessibility and Transport", "Mode Choice" and "Long-Distance Commuters". **Members of the Committee are therefore asked: what other topics should such reports cover? and why?**

5 Possible new publications

5.1 At previous meetings, Members of the Committee have been asked if there was a need for new publications, and (if so) what topics should they cover. For ease of reference, some of the material which appeared in last year's paper appears below, with some points from previous discussions. Clearly, there is no point in the Committee going over the same ground again - on the other hand, there may be other points that Members of the Committee would wish to make this year.

5.2 One possibility for developing a **new publication** would be to take the material from one of the chapters of *STS*, and use it as a starting-point for a separate publication on that topic. Depending upon the availability of additional data on that topic, such a publication could also include a lot of extra material (e.g. *Bus and Coach Statistics* covers much more than the "bus and coach" chapter of *STS*). If a new publication were created in that way, one might well "prune" the corresponding chapter of *STS*, as there would be no need for it to "duplicate" some of the material in the new publication (*STS* does not cover bus and coach statistics, road accident statistics or SHS results in detail, because SE has other publications on those topics). "Aviation" and "maritime statistics" were suggested by one or two members, but others did not support them. "Rail" might now be the leading candidate, following the devolution of responsibilities - but, as Transport Scotland leads on "rail" matters, it might be more appropriate for it to produce any "*Scottish Rail Statistics*" publication.

5.3 Is there a need for **new publications which are *not* based on *STS* topics** (which generally reflect modes of transport and/or sources of data)? For example, DfT has a series of "*Focus on ...*" publications on (e.g.) "personal travel", "public transport", "roads", "freight" and "ports". Each brings together figures from a range of sources (e.g. *Focus on Personal Travel* contains many National Travel Survey results, plus some statistics on personal travel from other sources). Such publications do not appear annually and, by their nature, may not provide up-to-date figures: their purpose is to provide a "broad overview" of the statistics on a particular topic. "Freight" might be the best candidate: the "freight" content of *STS* is split between several chapters (apart from some overall totals in the "Summary" section) and it is a topic which could benefit from careful consideration of the available data and how best to

present the results. To date, SE Transport Statistics has spent little time on freight statistics, due to the limited amount of staff time available and to users having generally much greater interest in the figures on other topics.

5.4 Should there be **publications prepared by academic and/or industry experts**? For example, a "general Transport statistics" bulletin could include a commentary, by a named external expert author, drawing on information from various sources and include his/her assessment of what lay behind the trends (e.g. why the lengths of shopping trips have grown), and their implications. The timescale within which the figures for *Main Transport Trends* are gathered, and the rules governing the release of National Statistics, make it unlikely that an external author could receive all of the figures for such a publication sufficiently early to enable the commentary to be produced in time to be published on the same day as *Main Transport Trends*. (This would be less of a problem in the case of *STS*, because updated versions of almost all of the *STS* tables should have appeared on the SE Web site well before the printed version is published in December.) Similarly, an expert on (say) freight could be commissioned to produce a statistical publication on freight which would "get behind" the figures far more than existing SE Transport Statistics publications. However, some members noted that the selection of points would be subjective, and emphasised the need to distinguish between the data and their interpretation.

5.5 Members of the Committee were also asked for views on the **formats / styles** which might be used for new publications. DfT's "*Focus on ...*" publications have what may be considered a more "user-friendly" format than "traditional" statistical publications: a "coffee-table" style, with a mixture of text, small tables and small charts. They also use colour and graphics, but that is not essential: one could produce them in the same efficient and economical way as our current publications (i.e. in black-and-white, using Word and Excel), although they might then have less "visual impact". In previous discussions, members have appeared content, in general, with the current format/style of SE Transport Statistics publications.

5.6 **Members' views on these matters would be welcomed. For example:**

- **are any new publications needed?**
- **if so, what topics should they cover?**
- **and what formats / styles should they have?**

6 Transport Statistics Web site

6.1 Members of the Committee are reminded that the Transport Statistics part of the SE Web site provides access to (e.g.)

- the "on-line" version of every Transport Statistics publication since Spring 1998;
- Excel spreadsheet versions of all the tables in the latest edition of each publication;
- Excel spreadsheet versions of some tables in some earlier editions of some publications;
- updated versions of many tables from *STS*;
- some extra road accidents statistics tables;
- other relevant information, and links to other Web sites.

6.2 All this material can be found at www.scotland.gov.uk/transtat . More information about the Web site is given on page 296 of *STS*, which also gives "shortcut" addresses that can be used to go direct to certain parts of the site.

6.3 Members of the Committee who have used this site are invited to comment on it. Members of the Committee are also asked to suggest any additional material that they feel should be provided there.

7 Other possible outputs

7.1 Would Members of the Committee like the SE Transport Statistics branch to produce other kinds of output? If so, what would they like to see produced, and why it is needed?