

2019

# Travel Survey for Northern Ireland: Statement of User Needs 2019

***User Consultation***

Analysis, Statistics and Research Branch  
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## INTRODUCTION

1. The Travel Survey for Northern Ireland (TSNI) is a continuous survey that has been running since 1999. It collects data on how and why people living in Northern Ireland travel. Two main reports are produced annually: [the Headline Report and the In-depth Report](#). A Technical Report detailing survey methodology etc. is published after the Headline Report. As the sample size is relatively small, three years of data need to be combined to ensure the analysis carried out is robust.
2. The In-depth Report was initially the only TSNI report. The first report was published in 2003 for 1999-2001 data. The report has always contained a wide variety of information on trends in personal travel, how people travel, why people travel and some other factors affecting travel. It has expanded over the years to include sections on travel difficulties, the Additional Tables Report (walking, cycling, public transport, Park & Ride) and the Urban-Rural Report. The report is now over 80 pages long. The most recent edition (2015-2017) was published in January 2019.
3. The Headline Report was first produced in 2010 for 2007-2009 TSNI data. It was set up to address a user need of producing key information as soon as possible after the TSNI databases are received from Central Survey Unit. The report contains key results such as number of journeys/ distance travelled/ journey length by mode of travel/ purpose of journey. From 2014-2016, it has included data to monitor Indicator 25 of the draft Programme for Government framework. The most recent report, published in July 2019, contains data for 2016-2018.
4. In recent years, Analysis Statistics and Research Branch (ASRB) has been increasing the use of infographics to present TSNI information. For the 2014-2016 TSNI data, we developed three themed factsheets on walking, cycling and public transport. These have been added to the annual TSNI outputs and the latest factsheets (2015-2017) were published in June 2019.
5. Although the content of the reports has changed over the years to include extra analysis in line with users' needs, the format has remained largely unchanged. ASRB already has a good understanding of the data needs of their internal policy customers, given their close working relationship on various policy areas. In contrast, much less was known about the extent to which the TSNI outputs met the needs of external users as there had been no recent direct dialogue between ASRB and external users (apart from correspondence on ad-hoc data requests).
6. In order to address this gap in knowledge, [between September and November 2018, ASRB conducted a number of face-to-face informal interviews with four key users of TSNI data, both internal and external to the Department for Infrastructure \(DfI\)](#). Following these interviews, it was decided to take forward a wider consultation process to engage as many users as possible in the most efficient way to gather as much information as possible. This information would be used to develop a way forward in the

evolution of the TSNI outputs, ensuring any direction was not against those expressed needs of users.

7. This report summarises the main requirements to emerge from these interviews and consultation process and how we hope to address these in the future. It begins by briefly highlighting the current uses of the data. It then considers the responses made across all recent consultations and the themes that have emerged in terms of user need. A table is then provided listing the main needs identified, if/how they will be addressed and likely timescales. Note that given the prime purpose of the TSNI reports are to inform progress against draft PfG indicators and support policy development within DfI and wider NI Departments, they may not always be the most appropriate vehicle to meet a highlighted need.
8. Furthermore, in some instances, a specific piece of analysis was requested by a single user which would not necessarily have a broader appeal to others. Identified needs will be prioritised in line with available resources and this will be kept under review. This statement of user needs will be published online so that users can see our plans and progress. Timescales for implementation will be reviewed on an annual basis, and the User Requirement table updated to reflect work carried out to date. It is envisaged that a further consultation will occur in future years, to ensure that our understanding of data requirements remains current. Again, the table will be updated, as necessary, to reflect new data needs identified and how ASRB plan to address them.

## CURRENT USES

9. Questions were asked to establish how the available data are currently being used. These formed part of the [key user interviews with internal and external customers and the later online user consultation survey](#). In addition, as stated previously, internal customers and their uses of the data, are already firmly established.

### Internal user interviews

A variety of internal users, linked to the provision and promotion of various travel modes, make use of the data that comes from the TSNI. As a rich source of a wide variety of travel information going back over nearly 20 years, it is an important part of evidence based policy making. It provides information on areas such as active travel, safe and sustainable travel, accessible transport and equality monitoring. Over the years, the TSNI has been used to provide monitoring data for number of key Departmental ambitions, most recently for Indicator 25 of the draft Programme for Government. This is therefore a key piece of data for relevant policy sections to monitor the impact of their interventions. Given the disparate nature of NI and its communities, there is a deeper consideration of the information from TSNI given the need to plan policy across the various sections of society and geographies within NI. TSNI reports and queries responded to each year underpin a lot of the policy development that takes place. Urban

/ rural and other geographical content are of particular interest, alongside demographic breakdowns particularly age and gender, travel to school/work and short journeys.

TSNI output is also used by internal policy colleagues to:

- inform senior management and Ministerial briefing, when required;
- answer queries; and
- help inform Departmental strategies and publications (such as NI Road Safety Strategy to 2020 Annual Statistical Report, Graduated Driver Licensing and Transport Statistics).

### External user interviews

External users stated varying degrees of use for the data within the TSNI output. Use is bespoke to their own needs and can range from use of a full document, a specific subset or theme or a single piece of data. Some, such as Belfast City Council, use the data from TSNI as part of their own monitoring systems, while others use it to inform decisions and give context to debate or discussion. While not interviewed as part of this process, the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs use TSNI data in their NI Environmental Statistics annual report and TSNI urban-rural tables are re-published on their website. In general, external users engaged with TSNI output on an ad hoc basis, generally only when needed for work at hand. Accessing TSNI information was mainly through outputs on the DfI website or direct to team members. Users tended to use the higher level data and not probe too deeply into any further analysis. They do not generally make much use of the Excel tables or any User Guidance available; instead the tables, text and charts included in the main body of the report are of most use.

### Online consultation (Internal and External users)

Given the nature of the method, online consultation did not give quite as much detail of user habits as the interviews but reached a wider number of users. It was clear from the results of the survey that both reports produced were among the main sources of TSNI information used and the recently established factsheets had also been picked up and were commonly used. The DfI website and general web searching were the main access points (perhaps somewhat surprising given the focus on and proliferation of social media, although this may be due to the type of person responding to a consultation). Main content used tended to focus on travel modes and travel purpose, with more detailed analysis on age, gender, geographies etc. being less commonly used. This suggests it is the overall NI picture that interests most users and the finer-grained analysis which may give more nuance and understanding of localised issues is not of as much interest. Again this may be due to the nature of the respondent and where their interests lie.

## KEY FINDINGS / SUGGESTIONS

10. Once their current use of TSNi data had been established, respondents to the online consultation were asked for their views on a number of suggested ways forward in relation to the content in the current outputs. These reflected some of the user needs expressed during the key user interviews in 2018 and mainly met with a largely positive response. Note that the sample size for these questions was reasonably small (30 or 31 respondents) and therefore we can't place the proposals in order of popularity as the majority of results are not significantly different. The only exception to this is the proposal "Themed publications" which received the most positive response. A summary of the results is below and a fuller list of user requirements can be found at the end of this report.

- a. Themed reports / sections

From the results of the online public consultation, 94% of respondents agreed with the addition of more themed content. This proposal received the most positive response of all the ideas presented in the survey. This was also a recurring comment when interviewing key users, who have certain specific interests such as particular modes or geographies. This has been an area under consideration for development in recent times, in fact the In-depth Report is already divided into themed sections and this response suggests this should be improved. As a first step in producing specific themed content, the factsheets on walking, cycling and public transport were developed and released in 2018. The National Travel Survey (NTS) also produces content on themes, both in its main statistical release and in subsequent ad hoc pieces. ASRB will look at the NTS reports for examples of best practice that can be considered when further developing TSNi reports. From needs expressed in recent user consultations, themed outputs are important to our users and will therefore be a key development in improving TSNi output. This will be considered both in terms of sections within the existing publications as well as possible further development or additions to the factsheets currently produced.

- b. Time Series / Trend data

As part of development work already started, fuller time series information has been provided to support the draft PfG indicator section in the TSNi Headline Report. The need to understand longer term trends is key for policy development. Currently, tables in the main body of the In-depth Report mainly present the most recent three years of data in tabular form although there are a number of tables with data from 5 years ago and 10 years ago. To improve content and modernise the aesthetics of the report and bring it in line with user need and other ASRB output, it is intended to develop time series charts to compliment tabular data. This links in with point (c) around more graphical content and also reflects best practice as shown in the National Travel Survey. This was supported both in the online consultation (68% agreeing with the proposal, 0% disagree) and in the key user interviews.

c. Graphical content

Across NISRA, there has been a strong movement away from traditional long form reports towards more accessible, engaging short form graphical reporting. That is not to say there is no place for text, tables, methodological and technical content but it is vital that user needs are up front while other content is still available to those who want/require it. Therefore, alongside existing infographics included within reports and separately through the TSNi factsheets, we will consider developing further graphical content to better communicate the findings expressed in our reports. Again, the proposal “More infographics and less text based reporting” met with support in the online survey (61% agreed, 6% disagreed) and in key user interviews (both internal and external customers).

d. Accessibility

There was support expressed in the consultation for the proposal to seek increased accessibility to data through the provision of datasets on available Open Data platforms (74% agreed, 0% disagreed). As part of the key users’ interviews, there was also interest in the availability of data through other sources, such as the NI Neighbourhood Information Service. The TSNi databases are complex and there is a responsibility on statisticians to ensure data is handled appropriately and within the boundaries of relevant legislation. Therefore, while the intention is to move towards providing more accessible data, the complexity means this will not be one of the more immediate changes to current practice. However, it is a service that will be under review and could develop in future years.

e. Cross-tabulations / data breakdowns

In line with the intentions expressed in the draft PfG, there is increased interest in understanding the sections within our communities alongside the broader NI picture. During the key user interviews, there were needs expressed in relation to geographical and demographic information to help focus in on specific issues that may exist. The consultation also received support for the proposal for more cross-tabulations (65% agreed, 3% disagreed). There are a number of existing tables that do present information of this kind and others are produced for specific requests. Any inclusion of additional content will increase report production timelines so a balance must be struck to achieve timely release while meeting customer need.

f. Comparisons to other UK travel surveys

This is an issue which arose in the key user interviews and, when included in the consultation, received strong support but also a reasonably high response in terms of ‘disagree’ (73% agreed, 13% disagreed). TSNi producers will consider the merit of any such inclusion, in particular, the comparability of these data, the value of including such data, the appropriateness of highlighting any such comparisons and the impact it may have on production timescales. However, this proposal is not seen as a priority in the context of other potential improvements highlighted above. It should be noted, to assist users with finding similar UK travel data, links to these data sources have been included in TSNi In-depth Reports since 2015-2017.

g. Removal of content from TSNI reports

As part of the consultation, there were two sections within the current TSNI Headline and In-depth Reports that were put forward for removal. These sections were:

- Method of travel to school from the Headline Report; and
- Car ownership from the In-depth Report.

Information on these topics is already produced, for single years, through questions placed on the Continuous Household Survey ([travel to school](#) and [car ownership](#)) and the Young Persons Behaviour and Attitudes Survey ([travel to school](#)). There is potential for resource saving through reducing duplication of work already presented through other sources. For both sections, the majority of respondents reported that removal would not have a negative impact (81% for travel to school and 82% for car ownership) and negative impacts appeared to be addressed by the provision of links to the alternative sources. This will be considered by TSNI producers during the development of future publications.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

11. ASRB are committed to continuous improvement and the comments given as part of these consultations provide valuable feedback for assessing the value of the TSNI and for future planning. Each of the potential improvements identified will be considered; however, as stated previously, it is unlikely that all requests can be met immediately or within available resources. The list of user requirements (Table 1, page 9) summarises the various user requests, highlighted in the Key Findings section above. The table sets out: the type of amendment/data/analysis requested; whether or not it can be accommodated; how best to address it; and an anticipated timeframe. The list will be reviewed prior to the development of each TSNI In-depth Report - it is a living document and will be updated annually with details of progress made against each request and the work that is planned for the upcoming year.
12. It is essential that users are given the opportunity to continue to provide feedback on our publication and services on an ongoing basis and to make us aware of any further data needs as they arise. Resulting from this, a new User Engagement Strategy has been developed and published on [ASRB website](#).



**TABLE 1: LIST OF USER REQUIREMENTS – PLANNED ACTIONS**

ASRB have developed a list of user requirements and actions that we will take forward in the given timescales, as detailed in the table below. The 2020 Statement of User Needs will give an update of this table detailing the work undertaken to meet these requirements.

<b>User Requirement</b>	<b>ASRB Response &amp; Actions</b>	<b>Timescales</b>
Themed reports / sections	The publication of the TSNI factsheets has been a step in the direction of themed outputs. ASRB will reconsider the current layout and presentation of the In-depth Report due in early 2020 to move more in line with the needs expressed in recent consultations and will consider best practice elsewhere.	Include development in 2016-2018 In-depth Report due in early 2020
More time series / trend data	Identify key indicator tables which could be presented with a longer time series than currently included in reports and present such time series in chart form alongside continued provision of data tables.	Develop time series presentation of data in publication, including selected key variables in 2016-2018 In-depth Report due in early 2020 and additional content development in following years
Graphical content	The inclusion of infographics within reports and publication of the TSNI factsheets has been a step in the direction of more graphical outputs. ASRB will reconsider the current layout and presentation of the In-depth Report due in early 2020 to move more in line with the needs expressed in recent consultations and will consider best practice elsewhere.	Include development in 2016-2018 In-depth Report due in early 2020
Accessibility	Consider TSNI databases and data publication requirements with a view to moving to more accessible data provision through relevant platforms.	Keep under review

User Requirement	ASRB Response & Actions	Timescales
Cross-tabulations / data breakdowns	Identify key indicator tables which could be split out at sub-NI level with a view to including such breakdowns in future statistical reports.	Keep under review with the potential for some inclusion in 2016-2018 In-depth Report and with further development in future reports
Comparisons to other UK travel surveys	Consider practical value, robustness and suitability of providing such comparisons with available data from other jurisdictions and if value warrants the inclusion of such content.	Keep under review with the potential for some inclusion in 2016-2018 report and with further development in future reports
Removal of content from TSNI reports	Consider removal from the headline report of the section on method of travel to school, and removal from the in-depth report of the car ownership section and provision of links to Continuous Household Survey ( <a href="#">travel to school</a> and <a href="#">car ownership</a> ) and the Young Persons Behaviour and Attitudes Survey ( <a href="#">travel to school</a> ).	Keep under review with the potential for change in 2016-2018 In-depth Report and with further development in future reports