Researching, creating and trialling a common framework for rail to measure and understand its social impact consistently

Aims

The creation and management of social sustainability is increasingly driven by funders and external stakeholders (such as local authorities) and understood to be important by the industry. Historically, there was an absence of a robust methodology to baseline, measure, monitor and evaluate social impacts of rail. This had resulted in inconsistencies across the industry and little trust in existing metrics. This research project was commissioned to address these challenges and develop a common framework for understanding and measuring social value impacts across Great Britain’s rail industry organisations, projects and programmes.

Findings

Review of social value monetisation frameworks, tools and techniques found that the most robust approach to monetise social value is cost-benefit analysis. This measures the change in wellbeing resulting from intervention(s), by taking account of all the positive and negative impacts, standardisation of quantitative values (including weighting factors), scalability, assessment of benefits timeframe, additionality and deadweight. This approach is advocated by the UK Treasury Green Book and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Development and trialling of a Common Social Impact Framework (CSIF) on eight rail projects indicated that rail industry stakeholders are relatively immature in their approach to measuring and reporting social impacts, particularly compared to, for example, the social housing sector.

Rail industry stakeholders are more inclined to recognise benefits than dis-benefits when considering social impacts. Business benefit is frequently perceived, incorrectly, by rail stakeholders as social impact.

In finalising the CSIF, we concluded that:

- A very large number of measures are required to capture the full scope of rail industry activities, what stakeholders want to report and what social impact good practice indicates they should aim to report.

- Research around certain rail benefits and dis-benefits has been inadequate, to date, to allow development of robust monetised values appropriate to rail and may require additional analysis and/or primary data collection to robustly capture these benefits. This includes light pollution, air pollution, green space, urban regeneration around large-scale station redevelopments, loneliness, major volunteering initiatives, STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) work with schools and colleges, crime and
anti-social behaviour management at stations, participation in and access to heritage and art, attributes of station experience, community use of station assets, community empowerment to influence rail decision-making, accessibility, affordability of rail travel, suicide and trespass full impact evaluation.

The CSIF has significantly helped the rail industry to improve the maturity in which it reports and measures social value. The framework has provided us with one consistent approach to using financial metrics across the industry. Where financial metrics are not available or robust, this provides a consistent way of reporting on qualitative inputs. The CSIF will, alongside other industry-led initiatives, help to develop social value reporting and best practice in rail.”

Sarah Borien, Sustainability Strategy Manager, Network Rail

Impacts and benefits

The research has resulted in the creation of a Common Social Impact Framework (CSIF) for rail using a common set of measures, monetised values and qualitative approaches. The CSIF has been developed in Microsoft Excel and is available for use across the industry.

It is intended for use by any rail organisation (infrastructure operators, contractors and suppliers, train and freight operating companies and community rail partnerships) that needs to plan, measure and report the creation of social impact benefit and their management of risk of dis-benefit.

It includes libraries of measures relating to ten categories of social impacts of rail and guidance around qualitative measurement and reporting.

This framework will help the rail industry and its community rail partners to do more and better in terms of serving customers and communities.

It plugs a gap in understanding the implications of current activities and enables the rail industry and its community partners to plan better, deliver more efficiently and ultimately help the rail industry to make the maximum contribution to society.
The framework provides the basis for rail partners to have informed conversations about social impact. This could be particularly useful when it comes to matters like:

- engaging with external stakeholders; for example, planning authorities and lobby groups
- planning how to meet client requirements, for example during a tender process or project delivery.

The measures and qualitative approaches within the framework help improve understanding and appreciation of rail and promote it more positively. Importantly it also helps to overcome negative perceptions which can exist on some rail projects.

The framework has been developed as a comprehensive library of how community might understand and measure the social impacts of rail activity. Like in any library partners simply need to select the aspects which are of most relevance to them.

**Where to find out more**

The Common Social Impact Framework (CSIF) for rail, user handbook and a short video explaining how to use it, is available for download from RSSB’s website and SPARK.

Literature Search Report: Social value monetisation, tools and techniques is available from SPARK.

For any other technical questions, contact enquirydesk@rssb.co.uk