

EBSR NEWSLETTER – Issue no. 7

TransXChange, Publisher & NaPTAN Upgrade

1 Background

EBSR has now been in use since September 2007 when it became a VOSA operational service following successful initial testing. Since then more than 7,000 EBSRs have been submitted by various operators and local authorities. Those EBSRs have included all types of services and all types of operations. Inevitably the experiences of working with these different services have led to suggestions for changes to TransXChange (TXC), the Publisher and NaPTAN as users have encountered situations where TXC didn't fully cater for the peculiarities of the service.

Some seventy odd requests for changes have been made and all of them have been considered and reviewed by the PTIC Group (*Public Transport Information Coordination Group*) which is made up of representatives of Transport Direct, suppliers, operators, local authorities and other users of TXC. PTIC agreed the relative priorities for these requested changes and earlier this year Transport Direct agreed to fund the work required to implement them.

2 What is Changing?

A number of new features are being added to TransXChange. All of them are optional and all existing documents can be processed unchanged. Use of the new features will typically require suppliers to add support for the features to the tools that output TransXChange, at which point they will become available for use. The Publisher is being enhanced to support some of the new features and also to improve certain aspects of its existing behaviour. There will also be some minor changes made to NaPTAN schema. In addition all of the associated documentation has been updated.

TransXChange Schema– The changes include a significant technical restructuring of the internals that will make TransXChange easier to maintain and evolve – these changes are transparent to users and do not affect the structure of actual TransXChange documents. Of greater interest is a number of functional enhancements; many of these are minor additions of simple attributes; a few involve more complex model improvements to plug functional gaps in TXC, or to simplify the handling of complex conditions that users have encountered. Amongst the changes that users of the data should find helpful include:-

- Improved route descriptions
- The explicit representation of journey times post-midnight on late night services, such as a “Monday to Friday” service that actually runs at 1 am on Saturday morning.
- Better control over the grouping of journeys, including user defined timetable matrixes.
- The ability to have different Blocks, Duty Crew codes etc for the same journey on different days of the week

- Being able to specify the layover time on Layovers.
- Improving the handling of flexible services.
- Updates to holiday support to include all bank holidays in England, Wales & Scotland (including the new St Andrews Day holiday), as well as all “displacement” days (i.e. when a bank holiday falls on a weekend and the holiday is “displaced” to next working day).
- Adding the ability to provide details of vehicle equipment e.g. low floors etc.
- Support for all National Operator Database elements (see separate Newsletter Article).
- Support for Serviced Organisations/School Codes (see separate Newsletter Article) and additional data elements.
- Better control of the display of frequency-based services.
- The ability to mark parts of a route as commercial or tendered.

The Publisher – The Publisher has been amended to accommodate a number of the new or revised schema features - though not all of the schema changes need support by Publisher. Other changes purely affect publishing and can be useful for existing 2.1 documents. Specific changes being made to the Publisher include:-

- Improvements to the labelling sequencing of stop names on maps. (Useful for 2.1 documents)
- Support for the grouping of journeys and the display of frequency-based services.
- Improved route descriptions.
- Supporting additional flexible services elements.
- Improvements to the footnotes. Improvements to the labelling sequencing of stop names on maps. (Useful for 2.1)
- Support for some National Operator Database elements in the particulars.
- Support for additional Serviced Organisations/School terms elements.
- Enabling the Publisher to be installed on a network. Improvements to the labelling sequencing of stop names on maps. (Useful for 2.1)

NaPTAN – There are also some consequential changes needed in NaPTAN, although these are limited in their scope:-

- Provision is being made to cope with stops sited in private locations
- The alpha-only constraints on NaPTANCode is being relaxed to allow for the numeric SMS codes used in London and Yorkshire
- Addition of a list of “preferred indicators”
- Revised interpretation of stop availability, so that a stop which is transferred or suspended temporarily remains ACTIVE in NaPTAN (and thus remains available for use in EBSRs)

Documentation - The documentation for all of these has also had a major overhaul, which will hopefully make things clearer and more understandable.

The draft schemas and draft documentation for this new version (which will be Version 2.4, although they are currently described as Version 2.4a for consultation purposes) are available at:-

<http://www.dft.gov.uk/transxchange/schema/schemas.htm>

A full list of all of the changes being made can be found in the release notes available from the above website, including a reference to an example and the section in the revised TransXChange user guide that describes it.

3 *What Happens Next?*

All of these proposed changes were made available for consultation and comment. There was a technical workshop in May which considered detailed technical comments. Final revisions are now being made and the updated schemas are expected to be released in July 2010.

4 *How Will These Changes Affect Me?*

These changes have all been done to ensure backwards compatibility with existing systems. Put simply, they should not therefore have any direct impact on users at all until you choose to upgrade your systems to take advantage of these new capabilities. Obviously if users do want to take advantage of the new features that have been included, they will need to upgrade.

The only exception to that will be the Publisher. Once everything has been finalised a new version of the Publisher will be made available for users to download. This is one new item of software that users should find helpful. The Publisher has been updated to include many of the new features of TXC, and because of this, it may be prudent to upgrade to the new version to ensure that any TXC file produced in V2.4 can be fully displayed. The Publisher will automatically detect the version of a document (2.1, 2.2a or 2.4) and process it accordingly.

The new version of the publisher should be made available in a few months time. A beta is available now on the TransXChange site – this has some known bugs but can be used to preview the major new features such as journey grouping. Look out for more news on this in a future edition of the EBSR Newsletter.

5 *Further Information*

For further information about this newsletter or any other aspect of EBSR, please email Transport Direct at ebsr@dft.gsi.gov.uk

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