

The GIPA Act and Open Data

2015/16 saw many developments in Open Data, both in NSW and nationally. The GIPA Act provides the authority for release of this information by agencies. Highlights are outlined below.

Appointment of the Information Commissioner as Open Data Advocate

In April 2016, the Minister for Innovation and Better Regulation, the Hon. Victor Dominello, appointed the Information Commissioner as NSW Open Data Advocate. This appointment coincided with the launch of the NSW Open Data Policy.

The Open Data Advocate plays a key role in ensuring that the NSW Open Data Policy is successfully implemented. As Open Data Advocate, the Information Commissioner encourages the proactive public release of government information by agencies in ways that are respectful of data sharing safeguards, as well as providing information, advice and assistance to agencies and members of the public on access to government information.

Open Data is an important aspect of Open Government that provides the public with access to information in a variety of formats. Increasing the amount of government data that is available improves transparency and accountability within government, supports evidence-based policy development and provides a platform for innovation.

Open Data can be made available on individual agency websites or at www.data.nsw.gov.au, which brings together a list of NSW Government datasets in one searchable website.

Open Data Advocate priorities

The nexus between Open Government and Open Data is clear, and together these aspirations deliver a better, more transparent, participatory and effective system of government.

Working to deliver a contemporary and inclusive approach to Open Government, the Information Commissioner has, following consultation, prioritised three outcomes:

- Guidance to agencies and citizens in promoting the availability of open access data.
- Contributing to the development of indicators and measures to better recognise the most effective Open Data practices.
- Promotion of Open Data as a cornerstone of Open Government.

These outcomes are being delivered through a program that maximises proactive release of information through a number of mechanisms that include:

- Agency Information Guides (AIGs)
- providing guidance into Open Data, its meaning and application
- conducting research to better understand community attitudes and evaluate the optimal legal, regulatory and policy setting to ensure that government data is open.

Proactive release under the GIPA Act and Open Data

Issue Highlight: Proactive release insights from agencies' responses in this report (page 24) includes responses provided by agencies in the government, council and university sectors in this reporting period on proactive release. It also indicates the progress that has been made in achieving the legislative intent of authorised proactive release.

Open Data Infographic

In October 2016 the IPC produced an Open Data Infographic. The first of its kind in Australia, this resource was developed to assist the community in understanding Open Data and what it means to them. The Infographic provides users with a simple explanation of Open Data, how it can be used, the benefits it offers, and some of the processes available for ensuring data is eligible to be made 'open'. The Infographic includes links to case studies of Open Data in action to service communities. The Infographic is available on the [IPC website](#).

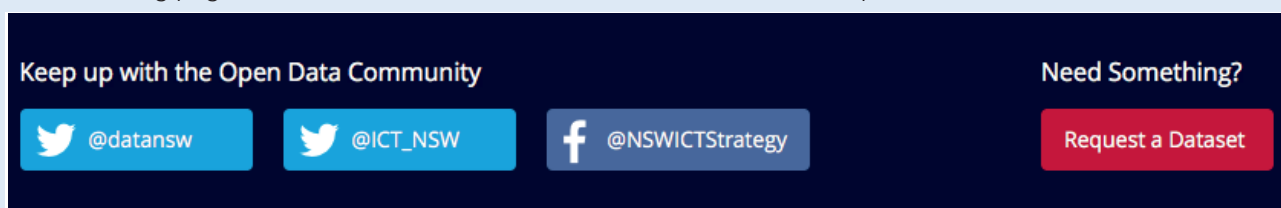
Research into enabling an Open Data culture

The IPC has research underway to identify international legal, policy and regulatory settings that enable Open Data and promote a culture of data sharing. The research project is intended to produce a practical reference paper to identify and consider the conditions enabling Open Data and promoting a data sharing culture and a description of the positive outcomes in Open Data application. The aim is to move from a focus on barriers to strategies to overcome those barriers, drawing on international best practice.

OPEN DATA CASE STUDY: Request a Dataset

The Department of Finance, Services & Innovation (DFS) hosts the website www.data.nsw.gov.au, which brings together a list of NSW Government datasets available in a searchable website.

On the landing page of the website is a 'red button' that can be used to request additional datasets.



The screenshot shows a dark blue footer with the text "Keep up with the Open Data Community" on the left and "Need Something?" on the right. Below the text are three social media buttons: a blue Twitter button for "@datansw", a blue Twitter button for "@ICT_NSW", and a blue Facebook button for "@NSWICTStrategy". To the right of these is a prominent red button with white text that says "Request a Dataset".

Users of the data.nsw website can use this button to contact DFSI and informally request the addition of a dataset or other information held. Under the informal release pathway in the GIPA Act (2009), an agency is authorised (but not required) to release information in response to an informal request, unless there is an overriding public interest against disclosing the information.

The informal release pathway is complementary to the proactive release pathway. Agencies have the opportunity to periodically identify the types of information requested and released allowing such information to be provided proactively. Information about the datasets that are requested is used to inform the datasets that are published under DFSI's proactive release program.

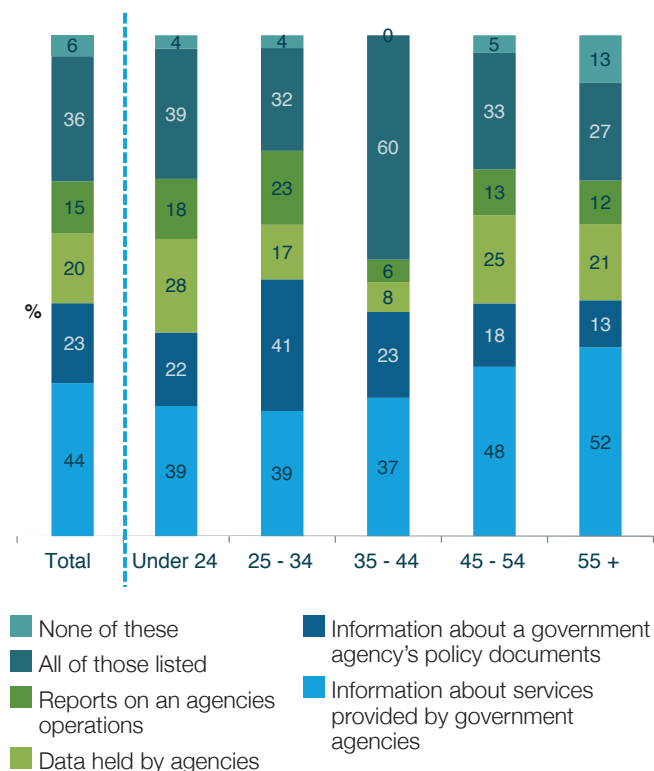
The GIPA Act and Open Data (cont.)

Survey of community attitudes to Open Data

During 2016, the IPC conducted a community attitudes survey on accessing government information, with a special focus on Open Data.

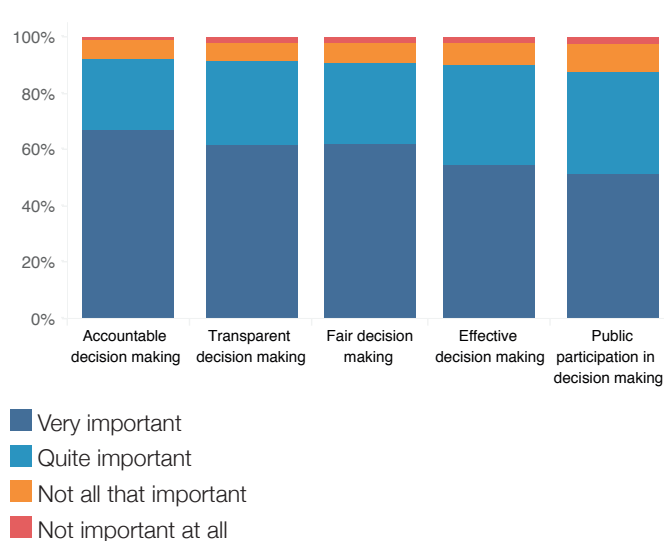
The survey found that the community is overwhelmingly interested in accessing a range of information, particularly about services provided by government and a government agency's policy documents. In total, 67% of respondents are interested in accessing information about those two agency functions (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Information most interested in accessing



Respondents were also asked their views on how important is allowing public access to information held by government for a number of purposes. **Over 85% of respondents considered it was 'quite important' or 'very important' to have access in order to support accountable, fair, transparent and effective decision-making as well as to support public participation.**

Figure 2: Important reasons for access to public information

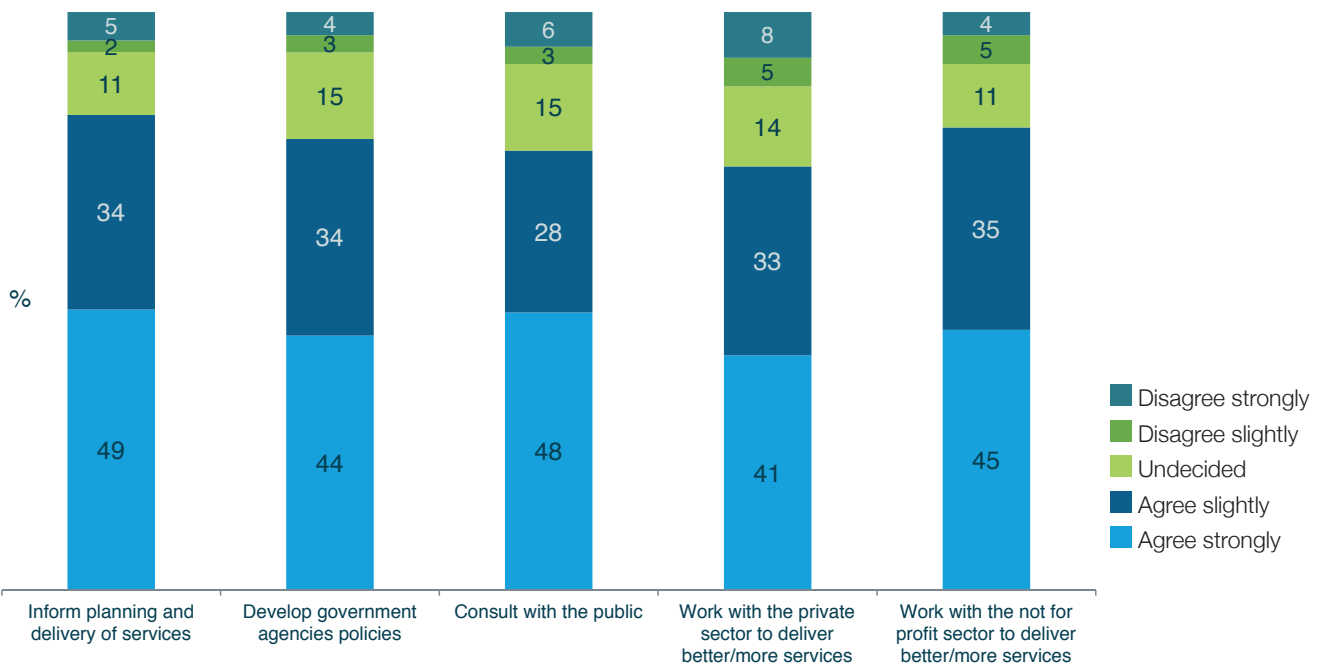


De-identified information is increasingly recognised as an important input to support open, transparent government. Respondents were asked whether they agreed with its use and the overwhelming majority agreed it should be used to:

- inform planning and delivery of services
- develop government agencies' policies
- consult with the public
- work with the private sector to deliver better/more services
- work with the not-for-profit sector to deliver better/more services.

In particular, 83% of respondents agreed that de-identified information should be used to inform the planning and delivery of government services and enhance collaboration with the public in the development of government agencies' policies (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Agreement with uses of de-identified information



More details about the survey appear in the section, *The Right to Information - 2016 Community Attitudes* (page 14).

The GIPA Act and Open Data (cont.)

OPEN DATA CASE STUDY Improving travel - Transport for NSW Train Loads Survey: September 2015

The Bureau of Transport Statistics within Transport for NSW proactively releases transport data, advice and analysis online at www.bts.nsw.gov.au. A link to the Bureau of Transport Statistics is published on www.data.nsw.gov.au. In May 2016, Transport for NSW released the Train Loads Survey: September 2015. The primary purpose of the Train Loads Survey is to support service planning and rail timetabling.

The survey information is released as a data visualisation, using charts that help users to interact with the data. Users are able to select a peak period (AM or PM), a main line (for example, the T2 Airport, Inner West & South Line) and a sub line (for example, the Inner West Line). A chart is then displayed representing the load factor for certain times of the peak period. A load factor of 100% means there is a seat for each passenger. A load factor of 135% is the benchmark beyond which passengers experience crowding and dwell times can impact on-time running.

There are a number of benefits that, over time, flow from effective proactive release of information by agencies, including improved service delivery, increased community participation in government processes and decision-making, a better informed and energised community, reduced costs and more effective use of resources.

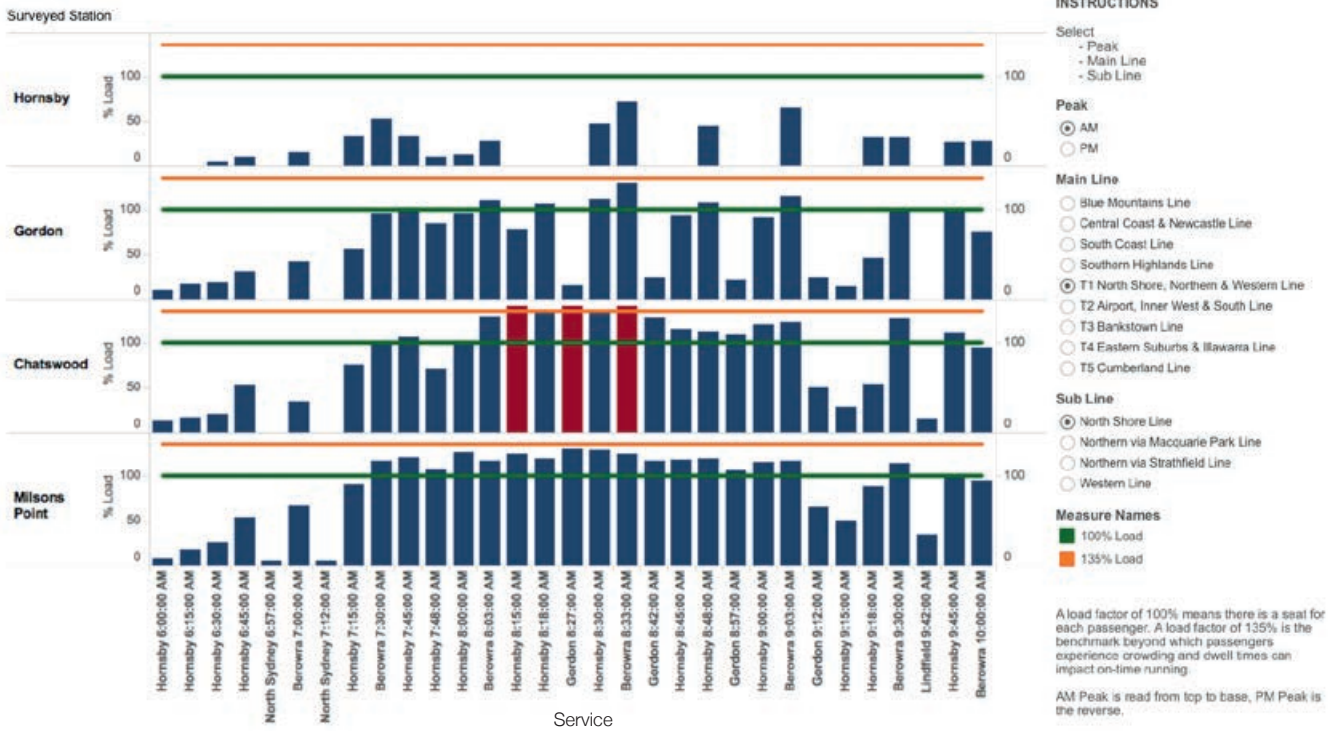
The GIPA Act provides four release pathways and information that is released by agencies, including data, can be provided through a number of mechanisms.

Access the statistics [here](#).

Train Loads Survey: March 2016 - By Line

Progressive Passenger Loading on T1 North Shore, Northern & Western Line in AM Peak

North Shore Line



AM Peak = Origin Station and Central Arrival Time. PM Peak = Destination Station and Central Departure Time