

Interim Report to Modifications Panel February 1998

Review Group 0122 - Query Management

Introduction

In addition to the normal monthly status report, this paper provides an overview of the interim views of the Review Group as requested by the Modification Panel. This is prefaced by a review of the history of the Review Group.

Review Group history

The Review Group was formed in February 1997, originally in response to work being undertaken by Review Group 0027 looking at Standards of Service. Transco recognised the need to review the management of queries, in particular those requiring input from more than one department. The group was set up to examine and recommend improved methods of handling queries with particular emphasis on the specification of an automated Query Management System (QMS) to facilitate the process.

Initial meetings of the group quickly recognized that automation alone, eg electronic submission of queries, would not provide an effective and efficient query handling capability, rather it was more important to focus on the business processes and practices being used to manage queries.

With this in mind, the first major deliverable of the Review Group was a "Query Definition" paper which was agreed in October 1997. This document provided the Review Group's:

- * Definition of a query as distinct from a request for information (RFI). The recognition of the difference is important; it provides the basis for the appropriate treatment of each (it generally is more important to address genuine queries), it helps to demonstrate one reason why Transco has struggled to excel in query management (resources are often "bogged down" responding to RFIs), and it enables the separate development of initiatives to help reduce the number of RFIs made (dedicating more time to the resolution of queries).
- * Description of the "life-cycle" of a query, the key aspect of which recognizes that a query is not "closed" until after it has passed through all the necessary Transco departments.
- * Sixteen query management principles which state both Transco and Shipper responsibilities which, if properly implemented, would provide the foundation for effective and efficient query management.

In parallel with this activity, Transco undertook a feasibility exercise to assess the likely costs of developing a fully functional, cross-Transco QMS. The Review Group agreed that with uncertainty over post-DCIII query volumes, the likely cost of £5.8m did not represent a sound investment for Transco or the industry as a whole. However, the Review Group did endorse

Transco's decision to develop and implement an interim QMS to provide a common query database for use by both the Meter Reading and Customer Portfolio Management (CPM) Service Providers. Such a system will provide greater control, improved management information and can provide a driver for common processes across query handling teams in both departments. As such it represents a timely (given the roll-out of DCIII) move towards the adoption of some of the principles agreed in the "Query Definition" paper. Transco expect Shippers to benefit from more effective management of operational queries, which, in turn, will enable Shippers to offer an improved service to their customers.

In October, the Review Group decided there was value in extending its work to build upon the principles established in the "Query Definition" paper. Three areas of work were identified:

- (i) To define the cross-Transco query management business processes that would provide an effective and efficient query management process which fully supports the previously defined Query Management Principles. As well as providing the basis for the adoption of common and good practice across Transco, this work also provides the foundation for the development of Standards of Service; see (iii).
 - (ii) To define the management information that should be shared between Transco and its customers to facilitate the management of queries. A key factor here will be the agreement of a consistent approach to monitoring query status thus allowing more effective reconciliation of Shipper and Transco understanding of the status of queries.
 - (iii) To define reasonable and balanced Standards of Service applicable to both Transco and its customers in the management of queries. The clear benefit here is the provision to Shippers of a reasonable expectation of the "turnaround time" for their queries. There is an added industry benefit for those queries which are initiated by gas consumers, as Shippers could then provide their customers with an expected resolution date.
- Review Group recommendations to-date

The interim Review Group recommendations that have been established to-date are as follows:

- (i) Both Transco and Shippers should recognize the definitions and principles established in the "Query Definition" paper, namely:
 - there should be a recognition of the difference between genuine queries and requests for information (RFIs)
 - Transco should adopt a "total life-cycle" view of the status of queries; for example, a query cannot be "closed" until it has been dealt with by all departments involved in its resolution
 - both Transco and Shippers should work towards the adoption and implementation of the sixteen query management principles.

- (ii) At this stage, Transco should not seek to develop a "fully functional" QMS as there is no clear cost/benefit case. In the meantime, Transco should develop an interim QMS to provide a common system to be used by the Meter Reading and CPM Service Providers. However, there is a need to review this position once the effectiveness of the interim QMS has been established and there is a better understanding of post-DCIII roll-out query volumes.
- (iii) To help reduce the number of RFIs and hence allow resources to focus on genuine queries, Shippers should seek to provide the answers to RFIs from their own resources where possible. Transco should also consider means, probably technology based, of providing Shippers with improved access to operational data to help reduce the need for RFIs.
- (iv) There should be clear and consistent business rules which allow for the fair escalation of the priority of certain queries, eg those of high financial value or those that have been outstanding for a long period of time. The Review Group has recognized the difficulty of working through the details of comprehensive and equitable business rules and recommend that this is held in abeyance for the time being; it is more important to establish achievable Standards of Service for query management. However, as an interim measure, the Review Group recommends the development and adoption of a simple and consistent query escalation arrangement across Transco departments, which should be used with all Shippers.
- (v) Transco should consider the feasibility of using the Information eXchange Network (IXN) for the submission of queries and subsequent communications during the resolution process. This would provide: a consistent framework for the submission of queries and the required supporting information, facilitate query status and performance reporting, and, would eliminate some non-value adding query handling activities.

Achievements since the last report

Although the Review Group has not met since the last report, work has continued and several achievements have been made.

- (i) Work has been undertaken to investigate the detailed practicality and implications of using the Information eXchange Network (IXN) for electronic query submission and subsequent communications.
- (ii) A presentation on the current status of the Review Group was made to the UK Link Committee.
- (iii) The "maps" and descriptions of the (ideal) Target Query Management Processes have been finalized and issued to Review Group members.
- (iv) A draft of the Query Classifications and required submission information for Portfolio and Meter Read queries has been prepared and issued for comment to Review Group members.

(v) The development of the interim QMS for Portfolio and Meter Read queries has continued and remains on schedule for implementation in March 1998.

Plans for the future

The main outstanding topic for the Review Group is to develop a set of reasonable and balanced Standards of Service for Query Management; also identifying changes in both Transco and Shipper business processes needed to perform against the service standard. The planned approach is for Transco to develop proposals which can then be reviewed by the Review Group. The development of this work at the planned January meeting of the Review Group was postponed as it was felt inappropriate to start to discuss long term Standards of Service with Review Group 122, whilst short term proposals for invoice query performance monitoring and Standards of Service were being discussed through other industry groups.

In parallel with the development of Standards of Service, work will continue in the following areas:

- (i) Continued investigation and presentation of the detailed practicality and implications of using the IXN.
- (ii) Presentation of ideas for interim query escalation arrangements.
- (iii) Further development of Query Classifications and required submission information; in particular, for queries related to Commercial Operations and Billing.
- (iv) Development of proposals for management information to be shared between Transco and Shippers in the management of queries.