



Rail infrastructure and assets: Quality and Methodology Report

Release Date: 7 November 2019



Introduction	3
Methodology	5
Historical background	9
Relevance	12
Accessibility and clarity	13
Coherence and comparability	13

Introduction

This is a report on the quality and methodology of the Rail infrastructure and assets statistical release and accompanying tables. It helps users to understand the quality of our statistics, and also ensures ORR is compliant with the three quality principles in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics¹.

The report covers the following areas:

- **Methodology** – detail on the various data sources and methodology used to compile the statistics
- **Historic background** – a background to each statistic and detail of changes throughout the time series
- **Relevance of the data** - the users of the statistics, and user-engagement we have done
- **Accuracy and reliability** – the accuracy of each statistic
- **Timeliness and punctuality** – our timelines for the production, quality assurance and publication of each statistic
- **Accessibility and clarity** – the format of our statistics and where they can be found
- **Coherence and comparability** – comparisons to similar statistics published elsewhere

¹ 1 Suitable data sources: Statistics should be based on the most appropriate data to meet intended uses. The impact of any data limitations for use should be assessed, minimised and explained. Sound methods: Producers of statistics and data should use the best available methods and recognised standards, and be open about their decisions. Assured quality: Producers of statistics and data should explain clearly how they assure themselves that statistics and data are accurate, reliable, coherent and timely. The Code of Practice can be accessed here: <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/code-of-practice/>

Please note that previous editions for this release were published under the name *Rail Infrastructure, assets and environmental*. The release has now been split into two, and environmental data is now published in a separate release: *Rail Emissions*.

The following data is in scope of this report:

- **Infrastructure on the railway** – The number of kilometres of route open and for passenger and freight traffic and the length of route which is electrified. The number of track kilometres is also shown. Source: Network Rail
- **Mainline stations in Great Britain** - Source: Network Rail from 1985-86 to 1996-97 and ORR's Estimates of Station Usage from 1997-98 to 2015-16;
- **Average age of rolling stock** – including rail vehicles leased to franchised train operating companies by rolling stock leasing companies (ROSCOs), but excludes locomotives and Driving Van Trailers. Source: Rail Safety & Standards Board (RSSB).

Methodology

Infrastructure on the railways

Route open for traffic

From 2017-18 onwards this data is sourced from the Integrated Network Model (INM). INM is a new system that provides a geospatial view of the rail network, enabling users to visualise how all the track assets on the network are connected. Data cleansing and improvement activity during the transition to INM from the previous system (GEOGIS) means there is a series break between 2016-17 and 2017-18. The INM database is still subject to ongoing review, and further changes in length due to refining data are expected.

In 2018-19 it was found that some data was incorrectly included sidings and depots in the total length, when these should have been excluded. The data was revised for 2018-19, so the length decreased but this was not due to actual physical track changes. Some routes used a new methodology to calculate electrified track length in 2018-19. These reasons mean any comparison of the current electrified route with previous years must be treated with caution. We are working on a time series showing changes due to electrification projects in Great Britain.

Between 2004-05 and 2016-17 the route open for traffic and the length of electrified route was derived from around a quarter of a million GEOGIS records. GEOGIS was Network Rail's infrastructure asset register database, which contained information on the physical location and type of track using four digit track ID's to identify each individual location by track direction, track use, and track number. There is a drop in the measure from 2004-05 to 2005-06 caused by data cleansing of GEOGIS during 2012-13.

Prior to 2004-05 route length data and electrification data was collected using various systems and collected on a semi-annual basis. These systems, whilst often the most accurate measures available at the time would not have provided as accurate a measure as the GEOGIS system and there is therefore a break in the time series between 2003-04 and 2004-05.

There is a break in the time series between 2006-07 and 2007-08 due to a new methodology where the route classification reference data was revamped.

Track kilometres on the rail network

Track kilometres are the total length of the track on the mainline network. This takes into account multiple track routes (e.g. for each route kilometre where there is double track, there are two track kilometres). The time series goes back to 1999-00, which is as far back as the data is available. Track kilometres are often used by Network Rail within their [annual return](#) to describe year-on-year changes in track.

The number of stations on GB mainline rail network

From 2015-16 ORR changed the data source for the number of mainline stations which are open in Great Britain. This is now sourced from [Estimates of station usage](#), which is also published by ORR. Previously the number of stations was sourced from Network Rail via the Operational Property Asset System (OPAS). OPAS was not designed for this type of statistical reporting and the estimates of station usage data is of higher quality for the following reasons:

Station usage data includes mainline stations only. This includes stations managed by Network Rail, Transport for London (TfL), and other organisations on the mainline railway. Only stations opened throughout the year are included, and closed stations are excluded.

Station usage data excludes those on the tram network. Both the Greater Manchester tram network and Tyne and Wear metro are excluded from station usage as they are not on the mainline rail network. However, they were included in the data provided by Network Rail.

No double counted stations within station usage data. Each station is counted once in the station usage dataset; whereas the Network Rail source had some double counting due to a station being counted twice as higher and lower levels.

Station usage data has clear methodology documentation for every year. Whereas the Network Rail data has a lack of documentation and some data quality issues throughout the time series.

Not all new stations are recorded in the Network Rail source. Network Rail source the data from Operational Property Asset System (OPAS). Stations are included if they were deemed to be “live” and those with an operation status of “operational”, “null” and “combined”.

Comparison of the time series between the two data sources

Year	Source: Network Rail	Source: ORR's Estimates of Station Usage
1985-86	2,385	
1986-87	2,405	
1987-88	2,426	
1988-89	2,470	
1989-90	2,471	
1990-91	2,488	
1991-92	2,468	
1992-93	2,468	
1993-94	2,493	
1994-95	2,489	
1995-96	2,497	
1996-97	2,498	
1997-98	2,495	2,518
1998-99	2,499	2,515
1999-00	2,503	2,491

Year	Source: Network Rail	Source: ORR's Estimates of Station Usage
2001-02	2,508	2,496
2002-03	2,508	2,497
2003-04	2,507	2,498
2004-05	2,508	2,504
2005-06	2,510	2,508
2006-07	2,520	2,522
2007-08	2,516	2,522
2008-09	2,516	2,522
2009-10	2,516	2,529
2010-11	2,532	2,535
2011-12	2,535	2,537
2012-13	2,532	2,539
2013-14	2,550	2,541
2014-15	2,552	2,543
2015-16	2,556	2,557

Average age of rolling stock

From 2017-18 onwards the average age of rolling stock is sourced from the industry standard data which is available in the R2 system managed by the Rail Safety & Standards Board (RSSB). R2 was created by the merger of two previous systems, the Rolling Stock library, which held data on the different types of trains, and Ravers, which held data relating to the maintenance of trains.

Within R2 each vehicle has an exact date for when it entered service. The age of a vehicle is calculated as the time between the date of entry into service and the last day of the financial year. For example, a vehicle which entered service on 30th September 2017, at the end of 2018-19 would be 1.5 years old². The average age of rolling stock is calculated by adding up the individual ages of all rail vehicles in service and dividing by the total number of rail vehicles. R2 also contains data on rolling stock used by non-franchised operators, which have been included since 2017-18.

² Any vehicle that has been given a new vehicle number, will have its entry into service date changed to reflect the date into service with the new classification.

Within the R2 database there is no mapping of rail vehicles to rail sector (London & South East, Long-distance, Regional). Therefore, from 2017-18 onwards the statistical release will no longer report on or reference the average age of rolling stock by sector. This means the associated data portal table ([Table 2.30](#)), will also no longer be updated.

Prior to 2017-18 the average age of rolling stock was sourced from a manually curated data set held by the Department for Transport (DfT). This data set was not as accurate as the R2 data, and therefore there is a break in the time series between 2016-17 and 2017-18. The difference between the two data sources for 2016-17 is shown in the table below.

Train operating company	2016-17		Difference
	DfT data set (2016-17 data source)	R2 (2017-18 data source)	
Arriva Trains Wales	26.99	26.52	-0.47 years (-1.8%)
c2c	14.85	15.05	0.20 years (1.4%)
Caledonian Sleeper	42.38	37.48	-4.90 years (-11.6%)
Chiltern Railways	23.15	24.35	1.20 years (5.2%)
CrossCountry	18.60	18.38	-0.22 years (-1.2%)
East Midlands Trains	25.30	23.20	-2.10 years (-8.3%)
Govia Thameslink Railway	15.70	14.18	-1.52 years (-9.7%)
Great Western Railway	31.98	30.06	-1.92 years (-6.0%)
Greater Anglia	27.59	26.02	-1.57 years (-5.7%)
London Overground	14.70	14.71	0.01 years (0.0%)
Merseyrail	38.25	37.34	-0.91 years (-2.4%)
Northern	28.21	27.58	-0.63 years (-2.2%)
ScotRail	20.81	20.71	-0.10 years (-0.5%)
South Western Railway	20.93	19.82	-1.11 years (-5.3%)
Southeastern	17.44	17.17	-0.27 years (-1.6%)
TfL Rail	37.25	35.75	-1.50 years (-4.0%)
TransPennine Express	9.18	10.78	1.60 years (17.4%)
Virgin Trains East Coast	31.28	30.71	-0.57 years (-1.8%)
Virgin Trains West Coast	12.39	12.53	0.14 years (1.1%)
West Midlands Trains	13.08	12.75	-0.33 years (-2.5%)
National (franchised)	21.08	20.24	-0.84 years (-4.0%)
Heathrow Express	n/a	16.72	n/a
Hull Trains	n/a	14.95	n/a
Grand Central	n/a	26.73	n/a
National (non-franchised)	n/a	19.52	n/a
National (all)	n/a	20.23	n/a

The differences in the above table are mostly due to the assumptions and accuracy of the original data source. The original data sources included information taken from rail magazines, the Rail Delivery Group (RDD) and rolling stock companies. The main differences are due to the fact that the previous data source provided most of the assumed entry into service dates as a year, rather than the exact date, and for the entire fleet rather than individual vehicles.

A vehicle drops out of the calculation when its lease either expires or is terminated.

Historical background

Infrastructure on the railways

Route open for traffic and track kilometres

Route kilometres are the total extent of routes available for trains to operate. This is different to track kilometres which takes into account multiple track routes (e.g. for each route km where there is double track, there are two track km).

As of 2017, Great Britain has the 4th longest rail network in Europe, with the total length of railway lines only shorter than Germany, France, and Poland.³ Since the first locomotive-hauled public railway opened in 1825 the network has been continually developing with the total length of the network reaching a peak of 37,720 km in the 1910s.

Historically one of the most significant impacts on the length of route was the effect of British Railways Board reports *The Reshaping of British Railways* (1963) and *The Development of the Major Railway Trunk Routes* (1965) which were written by Dr Richard Beeching and led to cuts to the network more commonly known as the “Beeching cuts”. The first of these reports recommended that 9,700 km, mostly rural and industrial lines, should be closed whilst the second concluded that only 4,800 km of the trunk railway network, now mainline network, (out of a total of 12,100km) should be invested in. Although not all the recommended closures were implemented, the railway network length decreased dramatically. A number of the closed lines have been reopened over the past 20 years, however the length of the network remains much lower than at its peak.

The entire rail network is not open to both passenger and freight traffic as some routes are open to freight traffic only and as such the length of route open for each type of traffic is reported. Some of the network is only open for freight train movements as it is deemed that there is not adequate passenger demand for passenger services to be operated on these routes.

The entire network is not electrified, with non-electrified route requiring trains to be powered by diesel or other non-electrical methods. The electrification of routes has the benefit of lower fuel and maintenance operating costs compared to diesel, higher performance leading to journey time reductions, higher reliability and availability and lower leasing costs. Electric trains also tend to be quieter and have a significant role in reducing carbon emissions, both of which are beneficial to users, and non-users, of the rail network.

Electrified route can be either supplied by alternating current (AC) or direct current (DC). Alternating current is supplied from overhead power lines, usually at 25,000 volts. AC

³ Eurostat – [Total length of railway lines](#)

electrification through overhead lines can be seen on the East Coast Main Line between London and Edinburgh and West Coast Main Line.

Direct current electricity is supplied from additional rails at track level (often called “3rd rail” though some systems also feature a 4th rail) which are in contact with electricity collection equipment on the train, not its wheels, with current usually supplied at 650 volts. DC electrification can be seen on the routes in Sussex and Wessex. There is also 37 km of electrified route which is supplied through overhead DC at 1,500 volts which powers the Tyne and Wear Metro. This is the only system left in UK using this type of electrification.

In addition to the measures of route open to passenger and freight traffic and the length of route, electrified network capability is also measured by linespeed capability, gauge capability, route availability and electrified track capability.

- Linespeed capability - a measure of the length of running track based on speed bands;
- Gauge capability – a measurement of the length of route capable of accepting different freight vehicle types and loads by reference to size;
- Route availability – a measurement of the length of track capable of accepting different loaded vehicle types; and
- Electrified track capability – a measure of the length of running track.

These measures of network capability are not presented in the associated statistical release but can be found in the [Network Rail Annual Return](#).

Passenger Stations

The number of passenger stations serving the rail network grew initially as the network grew in the latter half of the 19th Century and early part of the 20th Century, but as was experienced with the reduction in route length the number of stations decreased dramatically following the Beeching cuts. The cuts recommended closing over 2,300 stations on lines which were to close and also some on lines which were to remain open. As with the recent reopening of some routes, a number of these stations have also been reopened over the past 25 years. The overall number of stations provides an indication of catchment of rail services with an increased number of stations indicating a growth in the catchment area of the rail network and associated opportunity for increased rail usage.

Stations, particularly National Hubs and National Interchanges are playing an increasingly important role; not just acting as a point of access to the rail network, but a growing number are also becoming transport hubs integrating with other modes of transport. The growth of retail and eating outlets at stations also indicates the increasing role stations are playing both for passengers, and non-passengers, in serving needs other than just travelling, as well as acting as a vital income source for Network Rail.

The rail network has over 2,500 open stations which are owned and operated by either Network Rail or a train operating company. Network Rail own and manage 20 stations; nine “National stations” which serve large cities outside of London and 11 “London Stations” which are the main terminus of routes into London.⁴ Whilst Network Rail remain the landlord for almost all other stations they are managed by train operating companies, tending to be those which operate the most services using the station. A list of the station facility owners (SFOs), i.e. who manages the station, can be found in the [Estimates of station usage](#) statistics produced by ORR, which also provides estimates of the number of entries, exits and interchanges at each station.

To assess the average condition of stations the station stewardship measure (SSM) is used, which is calculated by assessing the remaining life of key elements of the station by visual inspection and combining into an overall score. SSM data can be found in the following tables:

- Station stewardship measure for category A stations - [Table 2.94](#)
- Station stewardship measure for category B stations - [Table 2.95](#)
- Station stewardship measure for category C stations - [Table 2.96](#)
- Station stewardship measure for category D stations - [Table 2.97](#)
- Station stewardship measure for category E stations - [Table 2.98](#)
- Station stewardship measure for category F stations - [Table 2.99](#)

Average age of rolling stock

Since the privatisation of British Rail in 1994 the rolling stock is mostly owned by three private rolling stock leasing companies (ROSCOs)⁵. These companies lease the rolling stock to the train operating companies (TOCs) who then deploy it on their services. For the most part, the train companies procure the rolling stock directly from the rolling stock companies. In recent years the Government has also procured large rolling stock orders directly from manufacturers for schemes such as the InterCity Express Programme, Thameslink and Crossrail.

⁴ Stations owned and run by Network Rail – [Our stations](#)

⁵ The three ROSCO’s are [Angel Trains Ltd](#), [Eversholt Rail Group](#) and [Porterbrook Leasing Company Ltd](#)

Relevance

The degree to which the statistical product meets the user in both coverage and content.

This statistical release and the accompanying data published on our data portal are used by a range of individuals for planning, analysis, decision making and data validation.

More detailed information on users of ORR statistics and meeting the needs of users is available on our [user engagement webpage](#)

Accuracy and reliability

The proximity between an estimate and the unknown true value.

Infrastructure on the railways

Please see the [methodology](#) section for detail on changes in methodology throughout the time series which affects the accuracy and reliability.

Average age of rolling stock

Please see the [methodology](#) section for detail on the average age of rolling stock.

Timeliness and punctuality

Timeliness refers to the time gap between publication and the reference period. Punctuality refers to the gap between planned and actual publication dates.

The data contained within this statistical release is published on the ORR data portal approximately seven months after the end of the financial year.

The [publication schedule](#) outlines the publication dates for all ORR's National and Official Statistics (quarterly and annual) up to 12 months in advance.

These publication dates are determined by availability of the data and are the earliest possible dates which we can publish the information. Sufficient time is required to collect, process, quality assure and sign off the data and to prepare the data report itself. In the event of a change to a pre-announced release date, attention would be drawn to this on the data portal and the publication schedule, together with a full explanation of the reason for the change.

Accessibility and clarity

Accessibility is the ease with which users are able to access the data, also reflecting the format in which the data are available and the availability of supporting information. Clarity refers to the quality and sufficiency of the metadata, illustrations and accompanying advice.

All rail statistics can be accessed on the [ORR Data Portal](#) free of charge.

The procedures and policy used to ensure sound confidentiality, security and transparent practices.

ORR is fully compliant with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2008 and principle 4 of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. More information is available on our [user engagement](#) webpage.

Coherence and comparability

Coherence is the degree to which data that are derived from different sources or methods, but refer to the same topic, are similar. Comparability is the degree to which data can be compared over time and domain.

Rail infrastructure

Rail infrastructure data is obtained from a single data source, Network Rail's Integrated Network Model (INM). The average age of rolling stock is also obtained from a single source (RSSB) for each TOC.

Network Rail also publish a range of infrastructure statistics available in the [Network Rail Annual Return](#).

Passenger station data are sourced from ORR's Estimates of station usage rather than Network Rail as the data is of better quality. See the [methodology](#) section for more information.

Comparability to European data

The objective nature of transport infrastructure and assets data means that comparable data can be obtained across the majority of European countries. Eurostat are the statistical office of the European Union and comparable data on railway transport infrastructure and measures of railway transport equipment and available from the Eurostat database.

As of 2017, Great Britain has the 4th longest rail network in Europe, with the total length of railway lines only shorter than Germany, France, and Poland.⁶

⁶ Eurostat – [Total length of railway lines](#)

Length of Comparable Time Series

Measure	Time Series	Data Portal Table
Average age of rolling stock by sector – quarterly data	2000-01 Q2 to 2016-17 Q4 This dataset was discontinued from 2017-18	Table 2.30
Average age of rolling stock by franchised train operating company – annual data	2007-08 to 2018-19 There is a time series break from 2016-17	Table 2.31
Infrastructure on the railways – annual data	1985 to 2017-18 for route open data. There are time series breaks between 2003-04 and 2004-05, 2006-07 and 2007-08, 2016-17 and 2017-18, and 2017-18 and 2018-19	Table 2.52
Mainline stations in Great Britain – annual data	1985-86 to 2018-19 From 2015-16 the source of the data has changed. From 1997-98 onwards ORR’s Estimates of Station Usage is used. Prior to this Network Rail data is used the source. Please see the methodology section for more information.	Table 2.53



© Crown copyright 2019

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3.

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

This publication is available at orr.gov.uk/

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at <https://orr.gov.uk/contact-us>