



Passenger Rail Service Complaints 2016-17 Q4 Statistical Release

Publication date: 15 June 2017 (**Revised 4 August 2017**)

Next publication date: 26 October 2017

Background

This release contains information on **complaints** made by passengers regarding rail services in Great Britain with the latest quarterly data referring to January, February and March 2017.

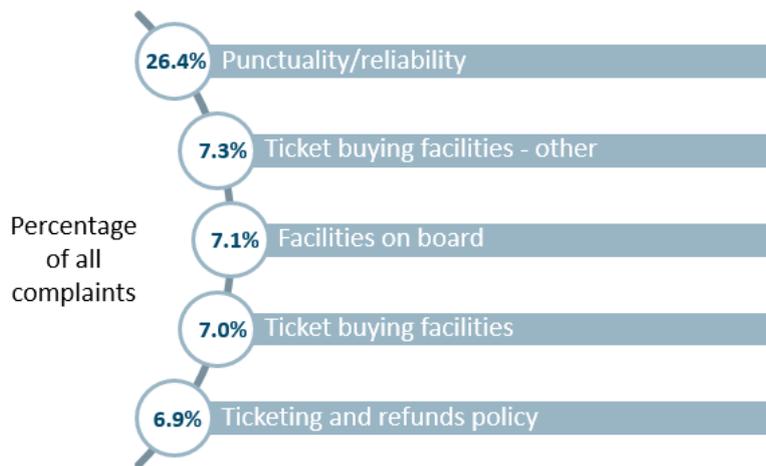
A complaints rate per 100,000 journeys is calculated for each train operating company (TOC). Complaints data for each TOC are provided by complaint category and by contact method. Also presented are the percentages of complaints answered within 20 days, a praise rate, the number of **complaint appeals closed** by industry watchdogs (Transport Focus and London TravelWatch) and the number of **calls to the National Rail Enquiries** telephone service.

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The rate of rail passenger complaints increased in 2016-17 by 7.5%. This trend was driven by train operating companies in London and the South East. Punctuality and the reliability of services was the most common source for complaints.

Top 5 reasons to complain (**Updated 4 August – previously 26.5% for punctuality/reliability and 6.8% for ticketing and refunds policy**):



Response times to complaints:

88% of complaints were closed within 20 working days, 3 percentage points lower than last year.

12 out of 23 TOCs closed 95% or more of their complaints within 20 working days.

How passengers complain:

The majority of complaints (69%) were made via email/webform in 2016-17.

Complaint appeals closed by passenger watchdogs:

4,133 appeals closed, this is 33% higher than the year before. 0.8% of complaints made in 2016-17 subsequently turned into appeals, up from 0.7% the previous year.

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Website: <http://orr.gov.uk/statistics/published-stats/statistical-releases>

1. Rail complaints

2016-17 annual

- There were **29.4 complaints per 100,000 journeys** in 2016-17 for franchised operators. This is 7.5% higher than the previous year (which had the lowest complaints per 100,000 journeys in the time series)
- However, complaints per 100,000 journeys in 2016-17 are just above levels seen in 2013-14 and 2014-15 (29.0 and 29.1 complaints per 100,000 journeys respectively).
- Overall this represents 540,000 rail passenger complaints in 2016-17 (both franchised and non-franchised).

A **complaint** in the rail industry is any expression of dissatisfaction by a customer or potential customer about service delivery or about company or industry policy. All the complaints data contained within this release are sourced directly from the train operating companies (TOCs). In the complaints rate statistics each communication is counted as a single complaint, regardless of how many topics are covered in the communication.

Complaints rate: the volume of complaint correspondence closed per 100,000 passenger journeys. Complaints are normalised by passenger journeys to allow effective comparison of data between time periods and train operating companies

Data available: Complaints rate data is available from 1998-99 nationally (franchised operators), and from 2007-08 by individual train operating company.

Factors which may have caused an increase in the complaints rate during 2016-17:



Punctuality of trains for 2016-17, as measured by the Public Performance Measure (PPM)¹, was the lowest since 2005-06. Nationally the PPM was 87.7%², a decline of 1.4 percentage points (pp) compared to the previous year. Punctuality and reliability was the main reason for complaint (with 27% of all complaints in 2016-17).



Passenger satisfaction with the overall journey declined over the past year. 81% of passengers were satisfied in autumn 2016, a significant decline compared to the previous year (83% satisfied). In addition passenger satisfaction with the punctuality/reliability of trains significantly declined (73%

¹ The Public Performance Measure (PPM) measures the percentage of trains that arrive at their final destination within five minutes of their scheduled arrival time (10 minutes for long-distance services).

² http://www.orr.gov.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0006/24756/passenger-freight-performance-2016-17-q4.pdf

satisfied in autumn 2016, compared to 78% the previous year) (Source: [National Rail Passenger Survey \(NRPS\)](#), Transport Focus, autumn 2016).



Operators with the biggest increase in complaints rate all operate in London and the southeast. Overall these five operators were responsible for 46% of all complaints in 2016-17, compared to 32% in 2015-16 (see page 6 for further detail). Without the increase at these TOCs, the franchised complaints rate would have continued to fall. The 2016-17 London and South East sector PPM was the lowest since 2004-05 with a PPM of 85.2%³. In addition, passenger satisfaction with their journey for the London and Southeastern sector significantly declined in autumn 2016, compared to the previous year (80% in autumn 2016 compared to 82% the year before)⁴.



There were more fares and retailing type complaints. Complaints about online ticket sales ('Ticket buying facilities – other') was the second most complained about category with 7.3% of complaints. Complaints about ticket buying facilities (such as ticket offices and ticket vending machines) was the fourth most complained about category with 7.0% of complaints. Complaints about smart cards were responsible for 2.6% of complaints.

³ http://www.orr.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/24756/passenger-freight-performance-2016-17-q4.pdf

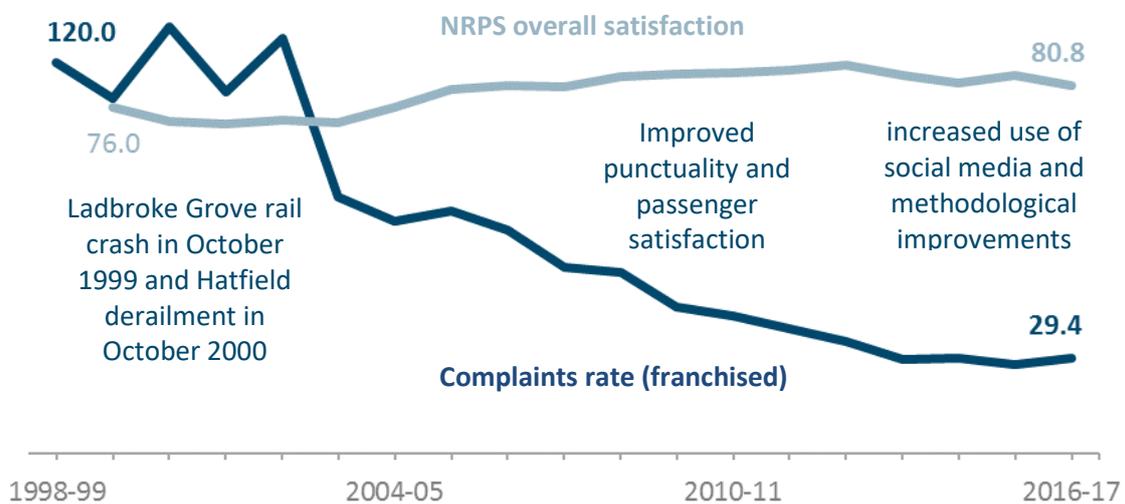
⁴ <https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research-publications/publications/national-rail-passenger-survey-nrps-autumn-2016-main-report/>

2016-17 Q4 results

There were 31.2 complaints per 100,000 journeys in 2016-17 Q4 for franchised operators, 6.5% higher than the same quarter last year. This was the highest quarter 4 complaints rate since 2013-14 Q4. (See page 8 for detail by TOC)

How the complaints rate has changed throughout the time series

Complaints per 100,000 passenger journeys (franchised operators) and National Rail Passenger Survey (NRPS), Great Britain, 1998-99 to 2016-17 ([Table 14.8](#))



Please note that the chart above shows the franchised complaints rate and not the national complaints rate. This national complaints rate started in 2015-16 Q1 when non-franchised operators were introduced. The latest NRPS data available is for autumn 2016.

Following the Hatfield derailment in October 2000 safety precautions and engineering works were implemented resulting in a sharp decline in punctuality across all sectors, especially the Long Distance sector. Punctuality reached its lowest level during 2001-02 Q2.

Potential reasons for the long term decline in complaints:

There was a sharp fall in complaints rate during 2003-04, followed by a long-term downward trend in the complaints rate. The franchised complaints rate reached the lowest in the time series in 2015-16 with 27.4 complaints per 100,000 journeys.

- The **improvement in punctuality** following 2001-02 may have reduced the number of complaints. Since 2001-02 the punctuality of trains, as measured by the Public Performance Measure (PPM), increased from 78.0% of trains on time in 2001-02 to a high

of 91.6% in 2011-12. Since 2011-12 PPM stayed at or above 90%, until 2014-15 where it dipped to 89.7% and 89.1% in 2015-16⁵. Transport Focus research indicates punctuality/reliability is the biggest driver of satisfaction⁶, so this may be a reason for the decrease in complaints. PPM for 2016-17 showed a decline to 87.7%, the lowest since 2005-06 (see page 2 for further detail).

- **Overall satisfaction** with the rail network increased from a low of 72% in 2001-02 (autumn 2001 survey) to a high in 2012-13 of 85% (autumn 2012 survey). Since then there have been small fluctuations in satisfaction levels, with the latest result for Autumn 2016 at 80.8% Source: [National Rail Passenger Survey](#)
- **Methodology improvements** may have also caused a decrease in complaints. Some operators previously included passenger charter, delay repay or other types of delay compensation as a complaint. Since ORR took over the data collection in 2009-10 we have worked with the industry to standardise definitions to ensure only complaints are included within the data submitted by operators.
- More recently the increased use of **social media** may have caused a decrease in the complaints rate. Over the past few years operators have set up social media accounts to interact with customers. These social media interactions are not included within these statistics. It may be that social media is either replacing the traditional way of making a complaint, or it allows operators to interact with customers and prevents a formal complaint being made.



Social media comments are excluded from these statistics. The number of complaints received via such sources, the definition of a 'complaint' and the resources that each train operator allocates to these social platforms vary significantly, and therefore they are excluded from the published figures. In March 2015 ORR published a [report](#) on the increasing use of social media amongst passengers and the challenges in capturing complaints. There is also a [blog](#) which highlights some of the issues of counting social media complaints.

⁵ [Public Performance Measure \(PPM\) by sector – table 3.43](#)

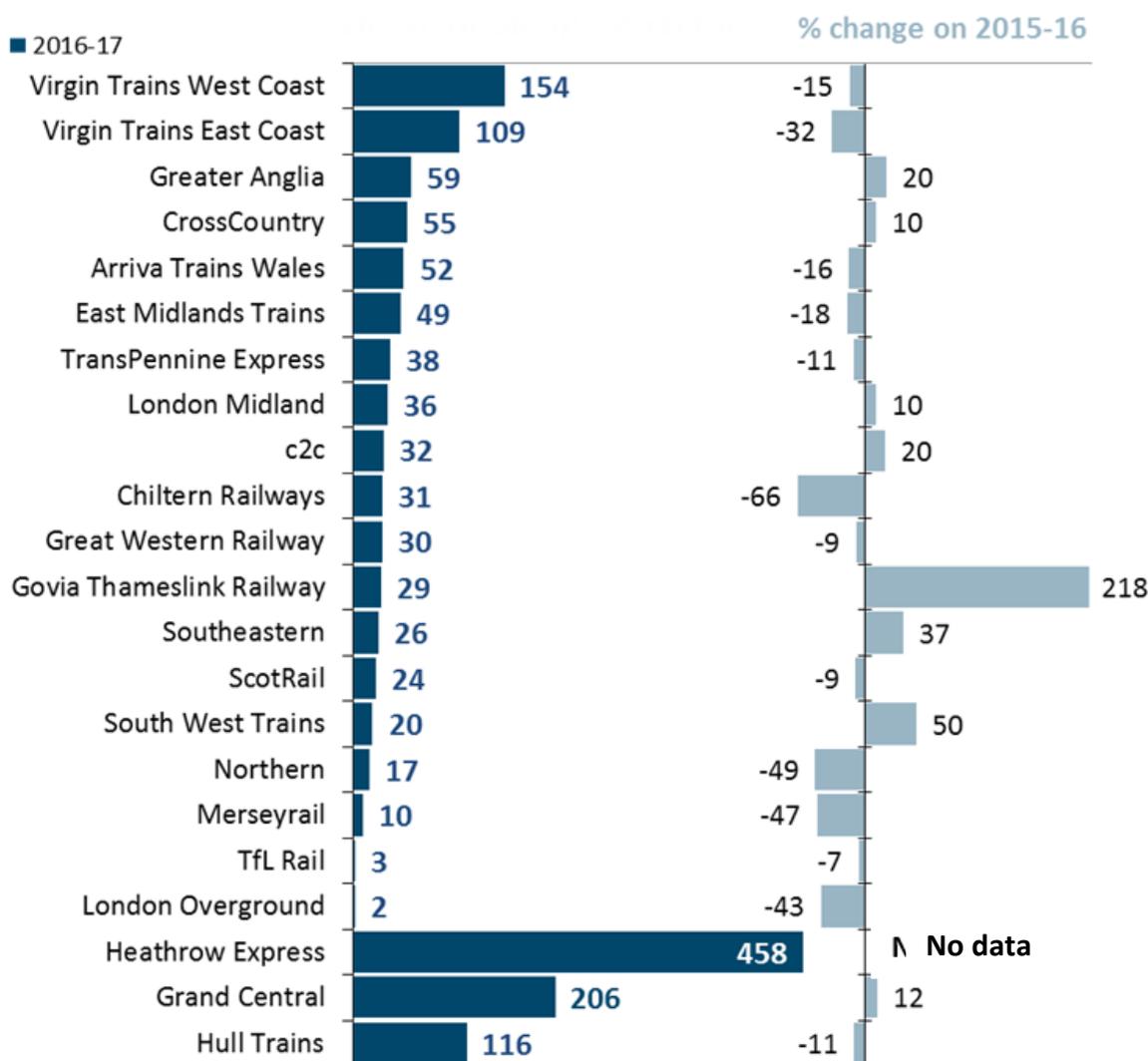
⁶ [National Rail Passenger Survey](#) (Page 57)

Complaints rate by train operating company

2016-17 annual

- Overall 13 train operators had a lower complaints rate than last year, and 8 train operators had a higher complaints rate than last year. Two operators (Caledonian Sleeper and Heathrow Express) provided data for the first time in 2016-17.
- TOCs with the biggest increase in complaints rate in 2016-17 operate in London and the South East. Five operators in London and South East were responsible for 46% of all complaints in 2016-17, compared to 32% in 2015-16. Without the increase at these TOCs, the franchised complaints rate would have continued to fall.

Complaints per 100,000 passenger journeys by train operating company, Great Britain, 2016-17 ([Table 14.9](#)) Updated on 4 August – see note below



Complaints rate by TOC (per 100,000 journeys)

The chart illustrating complaints rate per 100,000 **passenger journeys** on the previous page was revised on 4 August 2017. This was because Caledonian Sleeper started supplying data in 2016-17, but later inspection revealed that this data was only for the second half of the year: resulting in an artificially low complaints rate when divided by the total number of journeys for all four quarters of 2016-17.

As we do not have the equivalent subset of complaints for the first half of the year, Caledonian Sleeper have been removed from this presentation. This change does not impact upon any other results within this release.

TOCs with the biggest increase or decrease in complaints rate.

Govia Thameslink Railway's (GTR):

Just over one in four complaints (26%) was about **punctuality or reliability** of services, a 12 pp increase on last year. GTR had the lowest PPM out of all TOCs during 2016-17 (74.2%), a 7.3 pp decrease compared to the previous year¹.

Just over one in five (22%) complaints was about **delay compensation schemes**, compared to 6% nationally. This could partly be because Southern (part of GTR) were the first TOC to allow passengers to claim compensation for trains delays over 15 minutes (previously this was 30 minutes⁷). The low PPM and industrial action throughout 2016-17 may have also caused an increase.

South West Trains (SWT):

Complaints about **online ticket sales** 'ticket buying facilities – other' caused the biggest increase in complaints compared to last year. This was the second most complained about area (after punctuality) with 22% of complaints, a 20 pp increase compared to last year. SWT received the highest complaints about this out of all TOCs.

Southeastern:

Southeastern had eight per cent of complaints about **smartcards**, the second highest out of all TOCs (after C2C with 32%). Southeastern released the Key Smartcard during 2016-17, so this is a new area of complaint. Southeastern also received 12% of complaints about **delay compensation**; this is the third highest out of all operators (after GTR and Greater Anglia).

Chiltern:

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-announces-improved-compensation-scheme-for-rail-passengers>

Almost one in five complaints (19%) were about **punctuality or reliability** of services, compared to 65% the year before.

Northern

One in four complaints (25%) were about punctuality or reliability of services, a drop from around half (52%) the year before.

The punctuality of Northern's services increased marginally in 2016-17, 91.1% were 'on time', up by 0.4 pp compared to last year.

Merseyrail:

Merseyrail had the highest PPM out of all TOCs (95.8%) for 2016-17 and the highest franchised passenger satisfaction scores (95% satisfied)⁸.

2016-17 Q4 results

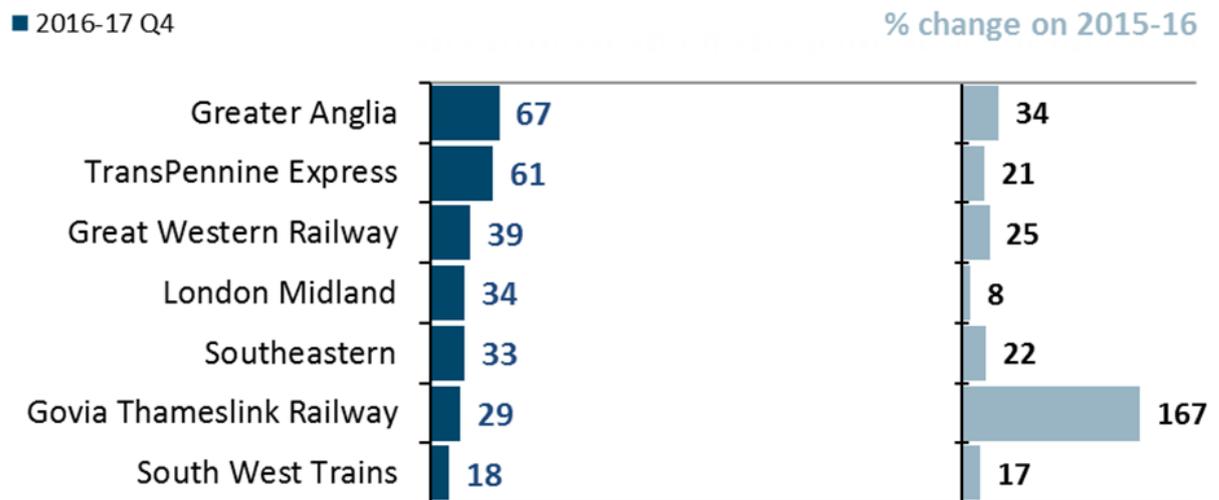
Seven operators had a lower complaints rate in 2016-17 Q4 than the year before.

Great Western Railways and **TransPennine Express** complaint increases could be because both operators had a backlog of complaints from earlier in the year which were answered during Q4.

Southeastern's complaints about smartcards increased towards the end of 2016-17, and were responsible for 21% of complaints in Q4.

⁸ <https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research-publications/publications/national-rail-passenger-survey-nrps-autumn-2016-main-report/>

Complaints per 100,000 passenger journeys by train operating company, Great Britain, 2016-17 Q4 ([Table 14.9](#))



Complaints rate by TOC (per 100,000 journeys)

Complaints shown for those operators with an increase in their complaints rate compared to last year.

- Complaints rate quarterly and annual data are available on the data portal in: [Table 14.8](#)
- Complaints by category quarterly and annual data are available on the data portal in: [Table 14.3](#)

Complaint by category

2016-17 annual

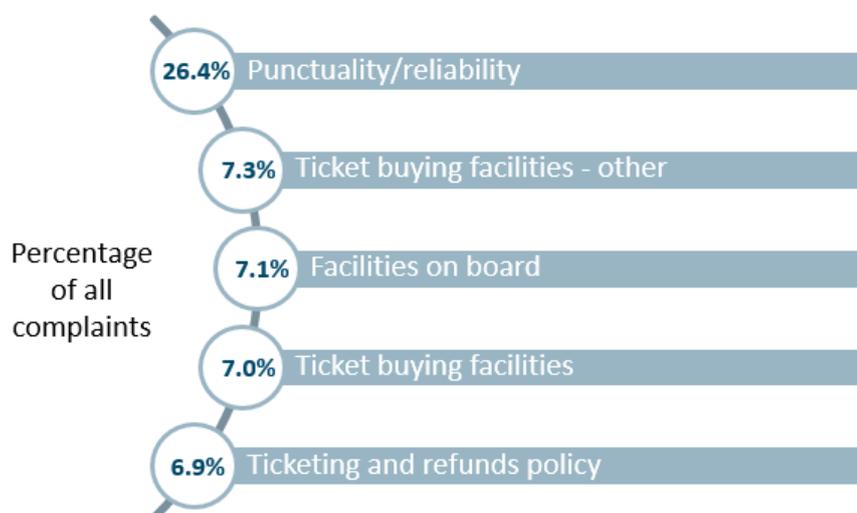
- Punctuality or reliability of services was the most complained about area with 26.4% of complaints in 2016-17.
- Fares and retailing type complaints increased in 2016-17, and account for two of the top four most complained about complaint categories. Complaints about online ticket sales ('Ticket buying facilities – other') was the second most complained about category with 7.3% of complaints. Ticket buying facilities (such as ticket offices and ticket vending machines) was the fourth most complained about category with 7.0% of complaints.
- Complaints on delay compensation schemes accounted for 6.2% of complaints. This is a new category introduced in 2016-17.

Complaint by category: the type of complaint received by the train operator. Each complaint within a complaint correspondence should be recorded. For example, a letter covering two complaints is counted as two complaints categories. However, this would only be recorded as one complaint correspondence within the complaints rate.

There are 65 detailed categories, mainly based on National Rail Passenger Survey (NRPS) satisfaction categories, which make up 14 high level complaint categories.

Changes for 2016-17: Delay compensation categories were introduced (complaints about the delay compensation process eg. Delay repay). Praise was removed, and produced as a separate praise rate (see page 15). Due to these changes, comparisons with previous years should be treated with caution.

Top five complaint categories, Great Britain, 2016-17 ([Table 14.9](#)) (Updated 4 August – previously 26.5% for punctuality/reliability and 6.8% for ticketing and refunds policy)



Punctuality/reliability category received the most complaints. Punctuality/reliability complaints vary by train operator, with London Midland receiving the highest proportion of complaints about this with 50.4% of all complaints, and Virgin Trains East Coast receiving the lowest proportion with 3.1% of complaints.

Six operators do not have punctuality/reliability of services as their highest complaint category.



C2C's most common complaint was on smartcards, with 32.2% of complaints, up from 16.2% last year.



Long distance operators generally get more complaints about facilities on board. Grand Central, Virgin Trains East Coast and Virgin Trains West Coast all had facilities on board as their highest complaint category, with 34.9%, 23.9% and 20.6% of complaints respectively.



Great Western Railway's most common complaint was on 'other policy', with 24.9% of complaints.



TransPennine Express most common complaint was on sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand with 21.2% of complaints.

Complaints about fares and retailing categories accounted for around a fifth of all complaints. This consists of the following categories:



Complaints about online ticket sales ('Ticket buying facilities – other') was the second most complained about category with 7.3% of complaints.



Ticket buying facilities complaints (ticket booking offices or ticket machines) accounted for 7.0% of complaints.



Complaints about smartcards accounted for 2.6% of all complaints.

(Updated 4 August – comparisons to previous year have been removed, as they are not on a like for like basis)

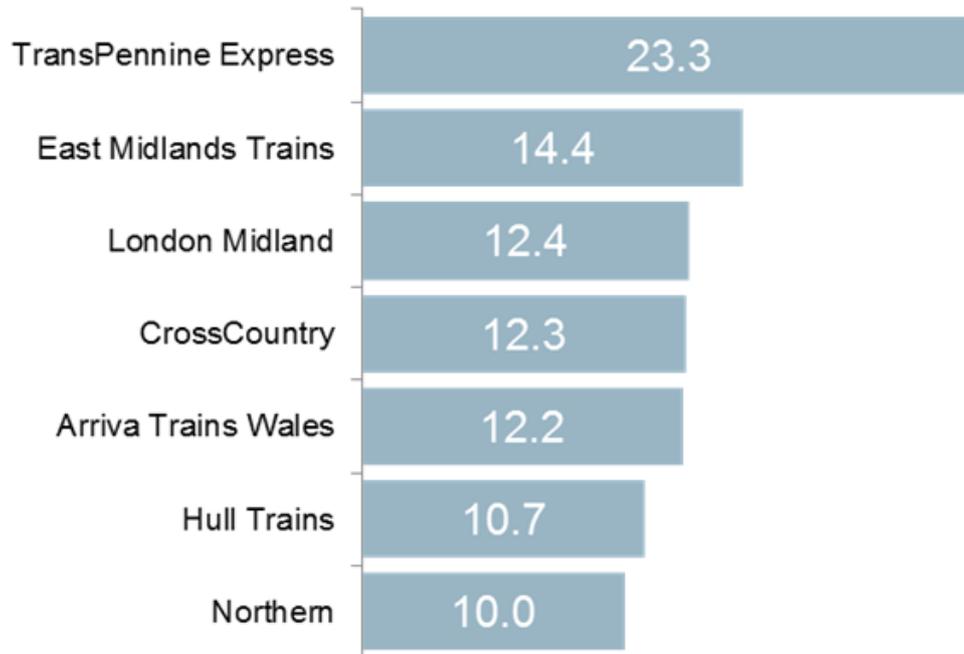
Delay compensation schemes complaints were responsible for 6.2% of all complaints. This is a new category introduced for 2016-17 in order to better record dissatisfaction with delay compensation schemes.

Complaints about **accessibility issues** were responsible for 1.0% of all complaints.

2016-17 Q4 results

Complaints in Q4 2016-17 generally reflected the annual trends. A new entry to the top five complaint categories for Q4 was sufficient room for passengers to sit or stand with 6.3% of complaints (this is ranked sixth overall in the annual data 2016-17).

Percentage of complaints about sufficient room for passengers to sit or stand, Great Britain, 2016-17 Q4 ([Table 14.9](#))



Complaints shown for TOCs with 10% of more of their complaints about sufficient room to sit or stand

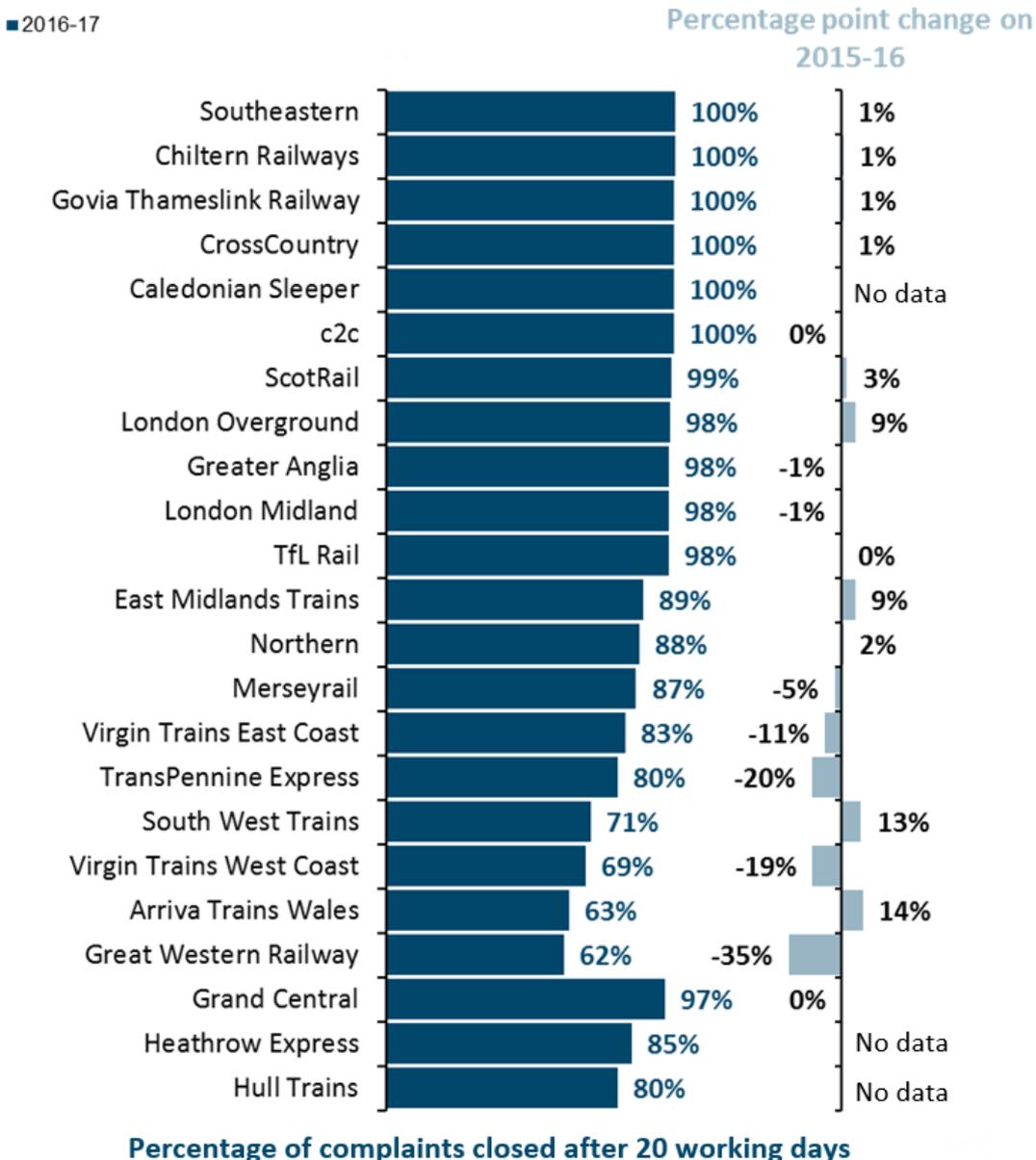
- Complaints rate by train operating company quarter data are available on the data portal in: [Table 14.9](#)
- Complaints by NRPS category and train operating company quarter data are available on the data portal in: [Table 14.5](#)

Complaints answered within 20 working days

2016-17 annual

- Overall in 2016-17 12 out of 23 TOCs met the industry target to close 95% or more of their complaints within 20 working days. 12 out of 21 TOCs closed 95% within 20 working days last year.
- Nationally 88% of complaints were closed within 20 working days, 3 pp lower than last year.

Percentage of complaints answered within 20 working days by train operating company, Great Britain, 2016-17 ([Table 14.2](#))



The standard industry target is to close 95% of complaints within 20 working days.

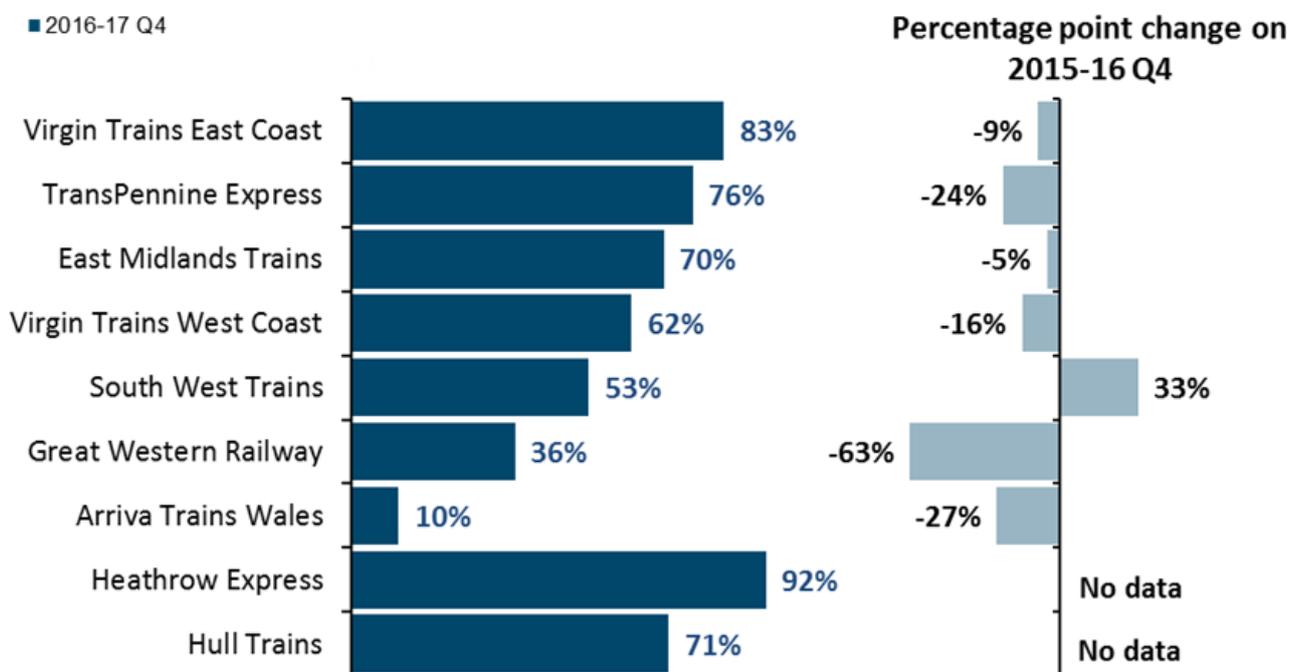
Quarterly data is available from 2007-08 Q4. Data on complaints closed within 20 working days and within TOCs own targets are also available on the data portal [Table 14.2](#)

2016-17 Q4 results

Nationally 83% of complaints were answered within 20 working days, down 3 pp from the same time last year.

Overall 14 out of 23 TOCs answered 95% of complaints within 20 working days for 2016-17 Q4 (the remainder did not). In the same period last year 12 out of 20 operators met this target (Caledonian Sleeper and Heathrow Express are new TOCs in the time series. Hull Trains did not provide the 20 day response rate last year).

Percentage of complaints answered within 20 working days by train operating company, Great Britain, 2016-17 Q4 ([Table 14.2](#))



Percentage of complaints closed after 20 working days

Response times shown for TOCs who answered fewer than 95% of complaints within 20 working days.

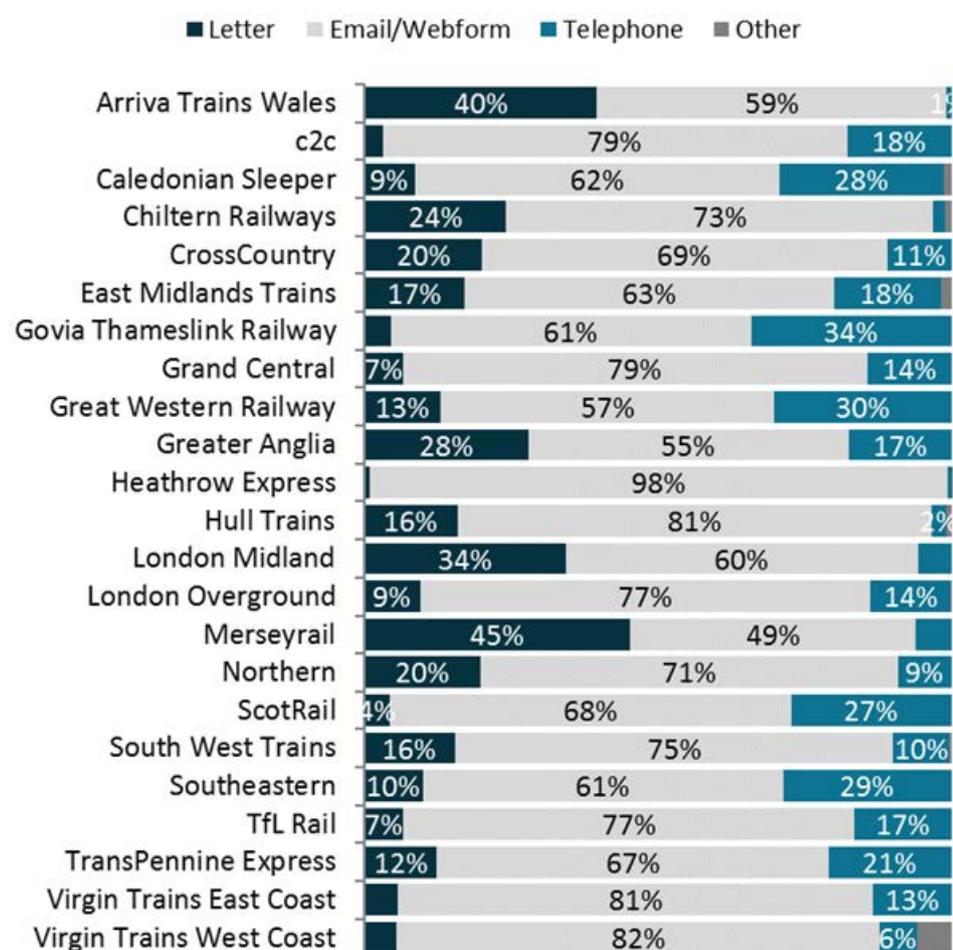
- Complaints answered within 20 days by quarter data are available on the data portal in: [Table 14.2](#)

Complaints by contact method and train operating company

2016-17 annual

- The majority of complaints (69%) were made via email/webform in 2016-17.
- Complaints made via letter continued to decrease. 13% of complaints were made via letter, a decline from 23% the previous year.

Percentage of complaints by contact method and train operating company, Great Britain, 2016-17 (Table 14.6) (Updated 4 August – Nexus (Tyne & Wear) have been removed)



Complaints by contact method: the method of communication passengers use to complain.

Quarterly data is available from 2010-11 Q1.

The majority of complaints (69%) were made via email/webform in 2016-17. This reflects a shift away from letters as the most common contact method. At the start of the time series in 2010-11 letters were the most common method for complaints for all but three train operators. This move from letters to other forms of communication is likely to be reflection of both the changing communication habits of the population and also the contact methods offered and promoted by operators.

- Complaints by contact method and train operating company by quarter data are available on the data portal in: [Table 14.6](#)

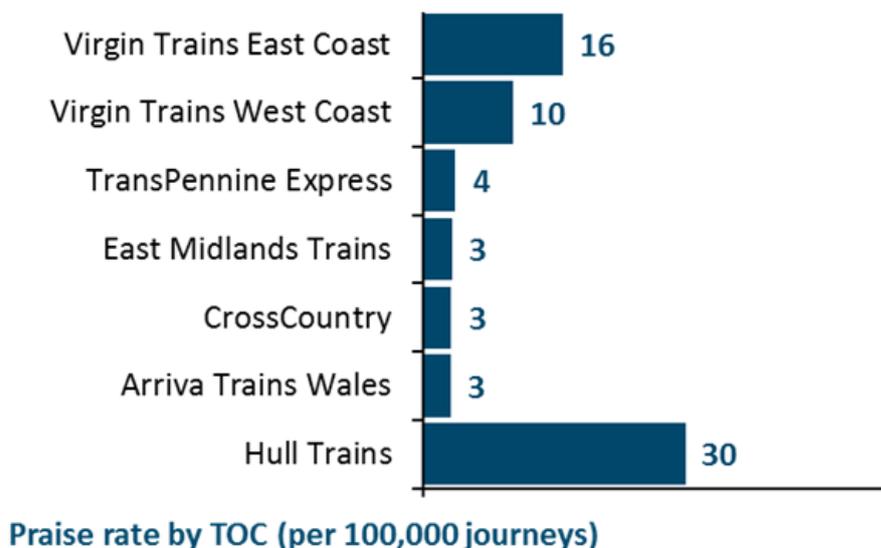
Praise comments received by train operating company

- Long distance operators tend to receive more praise comments for their services (per 100,000 journeys) than other operators.

Praise comments per 100,000 passenger journeys by train operating company, Great Britain, 2016-17 ([Table 14.9](#))

Praise is shown for those operators with a praise rate of 3 or more praise per 100,000 journeys.

■ 2016-17



Long distance operators may generate more praise because this type of service encourages a higher rate of customer correspondence (both complaints and praise), and also generates more active engagement with customers before and after the journey (for example, e-mail communication and marketing following advanced ticket purchasing).

- Praise rates by train operating company quarterly data are available on the data portal in: [Table 14.17](#) (*This is a new table from 2016-17 Q1*).

Praise comments received per 100,000 passenger journeys.

This can include praise comments within complaints, or separate correspondence with praise.

Praise should only be counted if there is specific satisfaction shown about service delivery, or about company or industry policy. General phrases such “thanks” or acknowledgement or receipt of the TOCs reply should not be counted.

Praise comments are normalised by passenger journeys to allow effective comparison of data between time periods and train operating companies.

2. Appeals

2016-17 annual

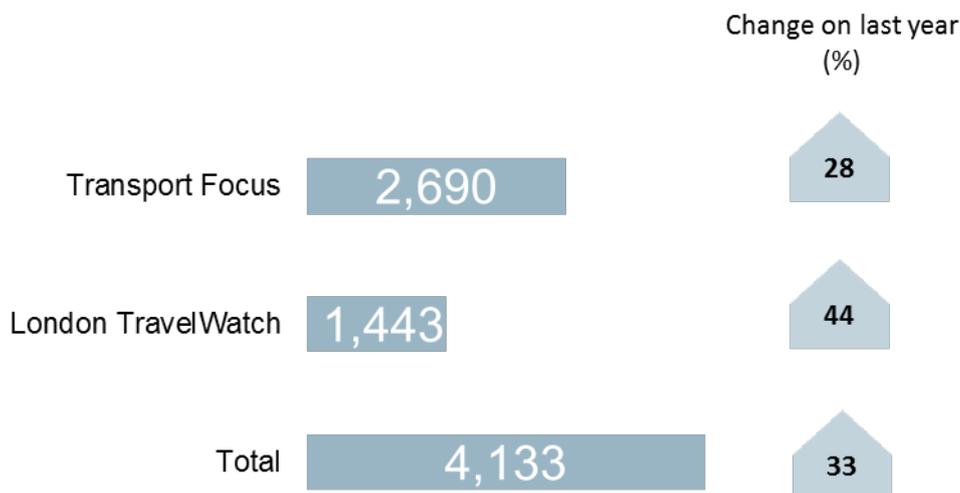
- The passenger bodies closed 4,133 appeals during 2016-17; this was 33% higher than the year before.
- 0.8% of complaints made in 2016-17 subsequently turned into appeals, up from 0.7% the previous year.

Appeals closed: the number of complaint appeals closed by Transport Focus or London TravelWatch for each train operating company (including all non-franchised), ATOC and Network Rail, and the number of complaints categories for appeals closed.

The independent passenger watchdogs, Transport Focus and London TravelWatch, may open an appeal on behalf of a rail passenger whose initial complaint to the train operating company has not been resolved to their satisfaction.

Quarterly data on appeals closed is available from 2013-14 Q1 for Transport Focus and 2015-16 Q1 for London TravelWatch. Quarterly data on appeals categories is available from 2014-15 Q1 for Transport Focus and 2015-16 Q1 for London TravelWatch.

Appeals closed by passenger bodies, Great Britain, 2016-17 ([Table 14.5](#))



Appeals may be increasing due to the following reasons:

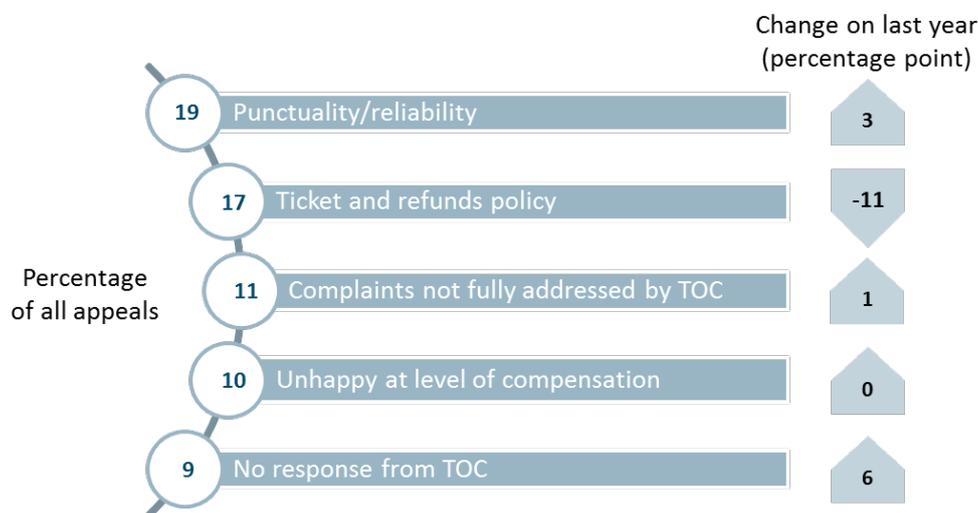
ORR started to collect data from TOCs on the number of complainants who were referred to the passenger bodies. This may be driving the TOCs to ensure more complainants are referred, and therefore more complainants are appealing.

The **complaints rate increased** by 7.5% in 2016-17 compared to last year. Higher complaints volume may have caused an increase in appeals.

The main reason to appeal is due to the **punctuality/reliability** of trains, which is also the main reason for complaint. Punctuality as measured by PPM is at its lowest annual rate recorded since 2005-06 (see page 2).

Slightly fewer complaints were answered within 20 working days in 2016-17 than the year before. 88% of complaints were answered within 20 working days, compared to 90% the year before. This may be why two of the top five appeal categories are about the TOCs complaints handling.

Top five appeal categories (Transport Focus and London TravelWatch), Great Britain, 2016-17 ([Table 14.16](#))



TOCs with most appeals (Transport Focus and London TravelWatch), Great Britain, 2016-17 ([Table 14.5](#))



2016-17 Q4 results

There were 1,343 appeals in Q4 2016-17, a 54% increase from Q4 the year before. This included 981 appeals closed by Transport Focus, the highest number of appeals ever closed in a quarter since the time series began, and 78% higher than the same time last year.

The main reason for the increase is due to more appeals for **Great Western Railway (GWR)**. There were 320 appeals in Q4 (both Transport Focus and LTW), a 644% increase from last year. This could be because GWR had a backlog of complaints (50% closed within 20 days in Q3, and 36% in Q4 2016-17), which resulted in more appeals.

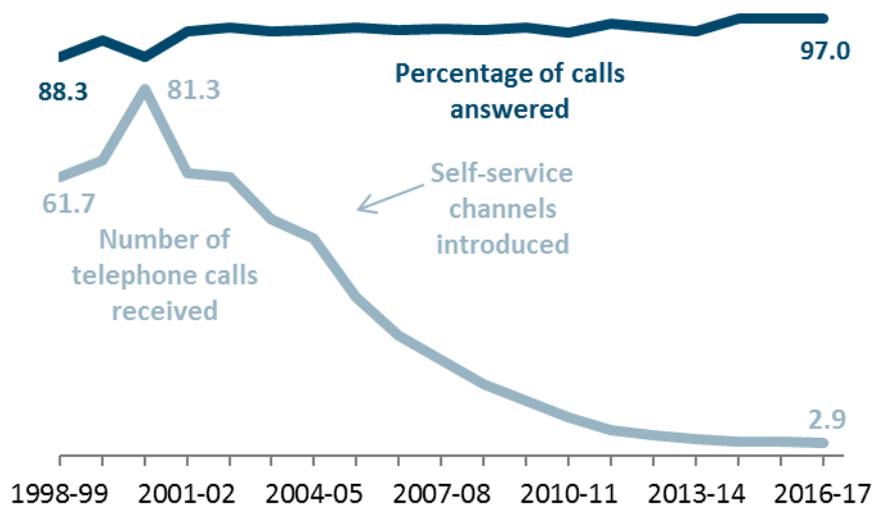
- Appeals closed by Transport Focus and London TravelWatch by TOC quarterly data are available on the data portal in: [Table 14.15](#)
- Complaint categories for appeals closed by Transport Focus and London TravelWatch quarterly data are available on the data portal in: [Table 14.16](#)

3. National Rail Enquiries telephone service

Annual 2016-17

- There were 2.9 million calls made to the National Rail Enquiries telephone service during 2016-17, a decrease of 7.2% compared to the previous year. This is a reduction of 95.4% since the start of the time series in 1998-99, when 61.7 million calls were made.

National Rail Enquiry telephone services (calls received and percentage of calls answered), Great Britain, 1998-99 to 2016-17 (Table 14.13)



National Rail Enquiries (NRE): the total number of calls made to National Rail Enquiries (NRE).

National Rail Enquiries is part of the Rail Delivery Group (RDG), who provide the data for this section of the release. Enquiries to NRE can be made through numerous different channels, however the data presented in this statistical release relates to enquiries made through the NRE telephone service only.

Quarterly data is available from 1997-98 Q2.

The decline in the number of calls made to the NRE telephone service is mainly due to the introduction of more ways of accessing train information and the increasing use of these methods, such as self-service channels like websites and apps.

2016-17 Quarter 4 Results

The NRE telephone service received 596,193 enquiries in 2016-17 Q3, a decrease of 12% compared to 2015-16 Q4. Of the calls received 97.4% were answered while 2.6% was abandoned.

- National Rail Enquiries telephone service quarterly data is available on the data portal in: [Table 14.13](#)

Annex 1 – List of pre-created reports available on the ORR Data Portal

All data tables can be accessed on the data portal free of charge. The ORR data portal provides on screen data reports, as well as the facility to download data in Excel format and print the report. We can provide data in csv format on request.

Complaints

- Complaints rate – [Table 14.8](#);
- Complaints rate by TOC – [Table 14.9](#);
- Praise rate by TOC - [Table 14.17](#);
- Complaints by category – [Table 14.3](#);
- Complaints by category and TOC – [Table 14.5](#)
- Complaints responded to within 10 and 20 working days by TOC – [Table 14.2](#); and
- Complaints by contact method and TOC – [Table 14.6](#)

Appeals

- Appeals closed by Transport Focus and London TravelWatch by TOC - [Table 14.15](#);
- Complaint categories for appeals closed by Transport Focus and London TravelWatch - [Table 14.16](#); and
- Complaint appeals opened by Transport Focus and London TravelWatch - [Table 14.14](#) (*data available until 2012-13 Q4 only*)

National Rail Enquiries

- National Rail Enquiries (telephone enquiries received) – [Table 14.13](#)

Annex 2

Statistical Releases

This publication is part of the statistical releases which cover the majority of reports that were previously released through the [Data Portal](#). The statistical releases consist of four annual and four quarterly themed releases:

Annual:

- Rail Finance & Rail Fares Index;
- Rail Safety Statistics;
- Rail Infrastructure, Assets and Environmental;
- Regional Rail Usage.

Quarterly:

- Passenger and Freight Rail Performance;
- Freight Rail Usage;
- Passenger Rail Usage;
- Passenger Rail Service Complaints.

A full list of publication dates for the next twelve months can be found in the [release schedule](#) on the ORR website.

National Statistics

The United Kingdom Statistics Authority designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

National Statistics status means that official statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value.

All official statistics should comply with all aspects of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They are awarded National Statistics status following an assessment by the Authority's regulatory arm. The Authority considers whether the statistics meet the highest standards of Code compliance, including the value they add to public decisions and debate.

It is ORR's responsibility to maintain compliance with the standards expected of National Statistics. If we become concerned about whether these statistics are still meeting the appropriate standards, we will discuss any concerns with the Authority promptly. National Statistics status can be removed at any point when the highest standards are not maintained, and reinstated when standards are restored.

For more details please contact the Statistics Head of Profession Lyndsey Melbourne on 020 7282 3978 or contact rail.stats@orr.gsi.gov.uk.

The Department for Transport (DfT) also publishes a range of rail statistics which can be found at [DfT Rail Statistics](#).

Annex 3 – Quality and methodology

Changes to TOCs

On 31 May 2015 a new franchise known as TfL Rail began operating services into and out of London Liverpool Street. This operator is the precursor to Crossrail and the services were transferred from Greater Anglia. At the same time, a number of Greater Anglia services were transferred to London Overground. Complaints data for TfL Rail has been collected from 2015-16 Q2 onwards. We are not able to remap historical complaints data for Greater Anglia and London Overground therefore for this quarter the data for these TOCs are not fully comparable with data from previous years.

The new Northern and TransPennine Express (TPE) franchises commenced operation on 1 April 2016. As part of this services between Manchester Airport and Blackpool North/Barrow-in-Furness and between Oxenholme and Windermere were transferred from TPE to Northern. Therefore, as these two operators run slightly different services, the data presented are not fully comparable with data from previous years.

Effect of methodology changes

In 2016-17 ORR introduced some improvements to the way it collects complaints data from the train operators. Because of this the methodologies for how a number of the metrics in this statistical release are calculated have been updated. In this annex the effect of these changes are discussed, and where possible measured by comparing the old and new methodology. For further information on the changes to data collection for this year please see the [Quality Report](#).

Complaints rate

Train operators report their complaints data to ORR after each railway period (every 28 days). In general there are two ways by which this can be done:

1. Complaints received: i.e. complaints received by the operators within a period and handled either within that period or at a later date
2. Complaints closed: i.e. complaints fully closed by the operators within a period, which were received either earlier in that period or in previous periods

Prior to 2016-17 there was a mix of the two different reporting methods across the different operators, partly because of differing internal reporting needs by the operators and partly because of lack of clarity in the guidance provided by ORR. For 2016-17 all operators agreed to provide data based on the complaints closed methodology^{9,10}.

⁹ This method was chosen as it was favoured by the majority of TOCs and the most commonly used in previous years

Over a long time series (particularly quarterly and annually), this change is unlikely to have any substantial impact on the complaints rate, as ultimately the same number of complaints would be received and closed, and therefore recorded by each method. The most likely impact is the introduction of a time lag in reporting of complaints. For example, if a TOC received a large number of complaints in January, but didn't close the majority of these until March, these would be reported in the March data rather than January. However, with the aggregation to quarterly and then annual data the impact of this should be minimised.

There is a chance that for those operators who changed methodology some complaints could have been double counted in our statistics. For example a complaint received in March and recorded under complaints opened (and thus recorded under 2015-16 Q4) and closed in April (and thus recorded under 2016-17 Q1). However, because the TOCs implemented this change at the start of the year, there should be no double counting within the 2016-17 Q1 results.

A further refinement to the data collection guidance for 2016-17 was emphasizing that praise related communications should not be counted under the complaint statistics. Previously some TOCs had included these communications, which would have inflated the complaints rate.

It is difficult to quantify the number of praise comments included previously in complaints statistics because ORR does not receive the number of unique praise correspondence. Therefore we cannot quantify the effect of this methodology change. However, for those operators for which praise communications were being included in the complaints rate, the removal of praise would lead to a reduction in the complaints rate.

New delay compensation scheme categories

For 2016-17 ORR has introduced six new categories to capture complaints related to delay compensation schemes (see [Quality Report](#) for more detail). In 2016-17 Q1 these new categories accounted for approximately 1.9% of all complaints. It is likely that complaints in these new categories would previously have been classified under the ticketing and refunds policy category, which in 2016-17 Q1 was the fifth most common category for complaints with a 6.7% share of the total. Previously this category has ranked more highly in the categories for complaints. The introduction of the new categories for delay compensation may have contributed to a decrease in the share of complaints under the ticketing and refunds policy category compared to previous years.

¹⁰ Merseyrail were unable to implement this change until after 2016-17 Q1. Therefore there will be a slight discontinuity in the data for that operator for this year.

Praise

For 2016-17 praise has been removed as a category within the complaints by category tables. This is due to the introduction of a new praise rate table (see below) and methodology change described above which ensures praise is not counted as a complaint.

The impact of this is to increase the percentage share of every other complaint category because praise is now excluded. The table below presents the 2016-17 Q1 data using both the old and new methodology. The table below shows the percentage point change for the top 10 complaints categories following the removal of praise. The relative difference between the complaint categories remains unchanged between the different methods.

Complaint category (top 10)	Previous methodology (with praise included)	2016-17 methodology (without praise)	Percentage point increase per category
Punctuality/reliability (i.e. the train arriving/departing on time)	24.1%	25.6%	1.5pp
Facilities on board	7.8%	8.3%	0.5pp
Ticket buying facilities - other	6.9%	7.3%	0.4pp
Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand	6.5%	6.9%	0.4pp
Ticketing and refunds policy	6.3%	6.7%	0.4pp
Ticket buying facilities	6.1%	6.4%	0.4pp
Praise	6.1%	-	-
The attitudes and helpfulness of the staff at station	3.5%	3.7%	0.2pp
Other policy	2.9%	3.1%	0.2pp
The helpfulness and attitude of staff on train	2.7%	2.9%	0.2pp
Provision of information about train times/platforms	1.8%	1.9%	0.1pp

The general effect of the methodology changed described above is consistent for all TOCs, however the size of the increase in percentage share varies between operators depending on the volume of praise they receive.

Praise rate

Following the removal of the praise comments from the two measures discussed above, ORR has introduced a new metric of praise rate. This is calculated using a similar methodology for the complaints rate. Praise is normalised by per 100,000 passenger journeys. This provides a praise rate metric that is comparable between operators. This metric has been back calculated to the start of 2015-16 in order to provide a short time-series. This can be found on the data portal in Praise rate by TOC - [Table 14.17](#).

Complaints by contact method

Prior to 2016-17 complaints by contact method was calculated using complaints category data. In this each topic covered in a communication would be assigned as a single complaint by that contact method.

For 2016-17 we have adjusted the methodology for this to use complaint correspondence data; i.e. each communication (e.g. letter, email) is counted only once, regardless of the number of topics covered. This change was implemented because it is considered that this is a more accurate representation of the frequency by which operators are contacted by the different methods. Under the previous method results were skewed by those contact types more likely to include multiple complaint categories.

The table below shows the 2016-17 Q1 national data using both methodologies. The new methodology slightly increases the percentage share of telephone complaints, while reducing the share for email/webform and letter. Emails and letters are the types of communication that are more likely to include multiple topics of complaint, hence why their share reduces after the methodology change.

	Email/Webform	Letter	Meet the Manager	Online Forums	Telephone
2016-17 methodology	63.6%	16.9%	0.0%	1.0%	18.5%
Previous methodology	64.8%	17.1%	0.0%	0.9%	17.2%

Complaints answered within 20 working days

As discussed above, ORR has taken measures to ensure that praise related communications are not included within the complaints rate data for 2016-17. This may have a slight effect on the complaints answered within 20 working days statistics. However we cannot quantify the effect of this as we do not know how praise communications were being considered as answered in the previous data. However the effect is likely to be minimal as relatively few praise comments are received compared to complaints (in 2016-17 Q1 there was approximately one praise comment for every 16 complaint comments).



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