

# Passenger Rail Service Complaints 2020-21 Quarter 1

29 October 2020

## Background:

This quarterly statistical release contains information on complaints made by passengers regarding rail services in Great Britain.

These statistics cover: **complaints volumes**, **complaints categories**, **complaint response time** within 20 working days and **appeals** made to passenger watchdogs.

**Sources:** Train Operating Companies, Transport Focus and London TravelWatch.

**Latest quarter:** 2020-21 Q1 (April 2020 to June 2020).

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**Next publication:**  
7 January 2021

During 2020-21 Q1, passenger rail service complaints have been affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. There was a substantial reduction in train services and passengers on the network which led to improvements in punctuality and reliability and subsequently a reduction in the volume of complaints closed.

Nationally there were **40,659 complaints closed** in 2020-21 Q1, this represents a decrease of 63.0% compared to 2019-20 Q1. Ticketing and refunds policy was the most complained about category, accounting for 24% of all complaints closed.

## Top five complaint categories, Great Britain, 2020-21 Q1 (Table 4130)

Type of complaint	% of all complaints	Percentage point change compared to 2019-20 Q1
 Ticketing & refunds policy	24%	17.8
 Punctuality/reliability	15%	-2.4
 Other ticket buying facilities – online ticket sales	11%	4.3
 Delay compensation claim rejected	6%	3.4
 Complaints not fully addressed/fulfilled by train operator	3%	1.8

Nationally, **84.6% of complaints were closed within 20 working days** in 2020-21 Q1. A total of 18 out of the 23 train operators met the industry requirement to close 95% or more of their complaints within 20 working days.

Passenger watchdogs closed **212 appeals** in 2020-21 Q1, a 46.2% decrease compared to 2019-20 Q1. The main reason to appeal was related to ticketing and refunds policy, with 61.3% of all appeals.

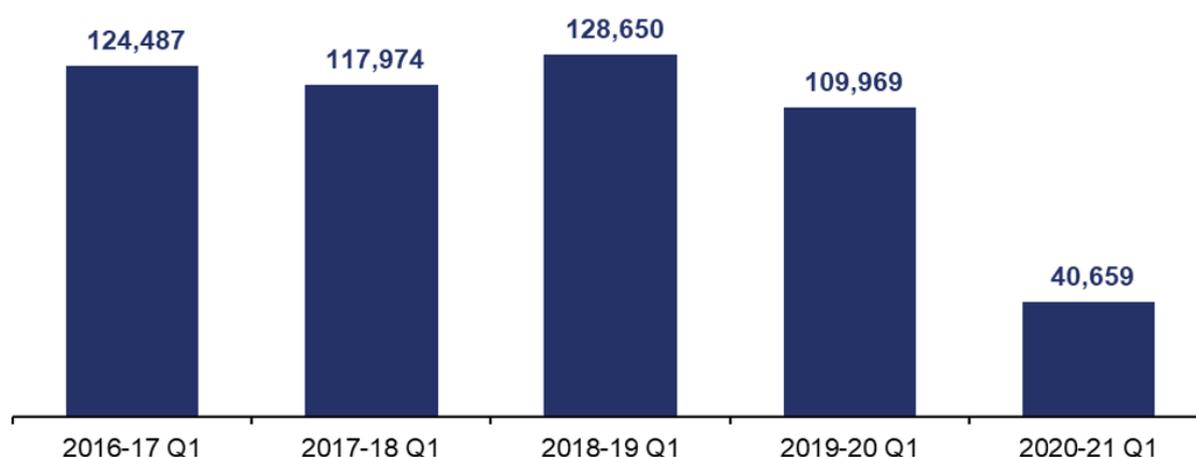
All data tables, a quality and methodology report and an interactive chart associated with this release are published on the [passenger rail service complaints page](#) of the ORR data portal. Key definitions are in annex 1 of this release.

# 1. Rail complaint volumes

[Passenger rail usage](#) in 2020-21 Quarter 1 was severely affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. This has therefore affected the complaints rate (complaints per 100,000 journeys) figures which are usually presented within this release. An alternative measure showing complaint volumes has been provided below with a time series back to 2016-17 Quarter 1. Comparisons between train operator complaint volumes should be treated with caution because the number of train journeys operated by each train operator varies. Complaint rate is normally used as it enables fair comparisons between train operators and comparisons over time to be made.

Nationally, there were 40,659 complaints closed by train operators in 2020-21 Q1, this represents a decrease of 63.0% from 2019-20 Q1 where there were 109,969 complaints.

**Figure 1.1 Quarter 1 complaint volumes closed, Great Britain, 2012-13 to 2020-21 (Table 4100)**

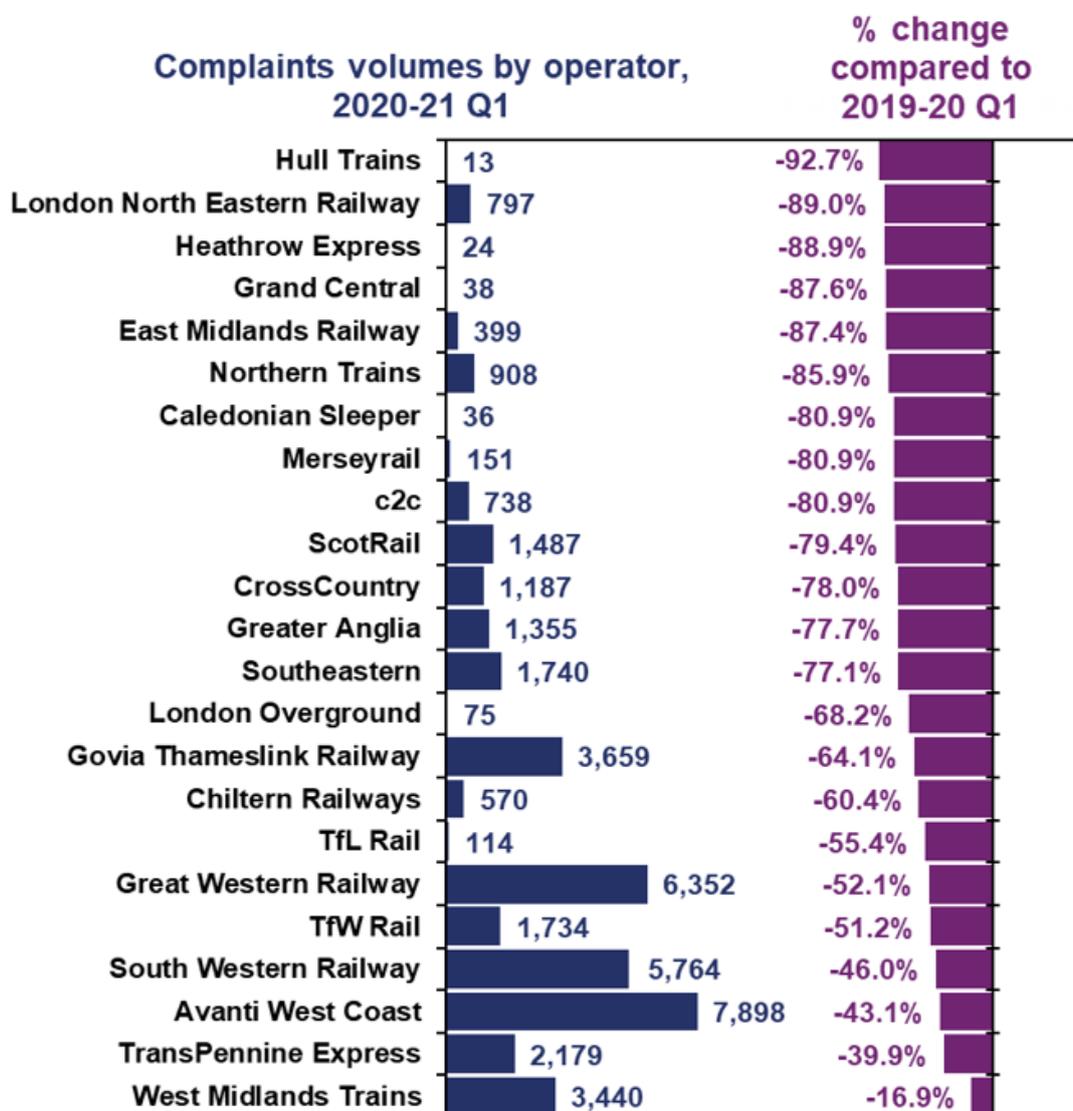


## 2. Complaint volumes closed by train operator

During 2020-21 Q1, all train operators experienced declines in complaint volumes closed compared to the same quarter in the previous year.

Hull Trains had the lowest number of complaints closed (13) and experienced the largest decrease, with a 92.7% reduction compared to 2019-20 Q1. Note that Hull Trains ran no trains during 2020-21 Q1. West Midlands Trains experienced the smallest decrease in complaints closed, with a 16.9% reduction compared to 2019-20 Q1.

**Figure 2.1 Complaints volumes closed by train operator, Great Britain, 2020-21 Q1 (Table 4100)**



Note: Hull Trains ran no trains during 2020-21 Q1 and Grand Central ran only a small number in the first few days of April. For these operators along with Caledonian Sleeper, it was not possible to estimate rail usage in 2020-21 Q1.

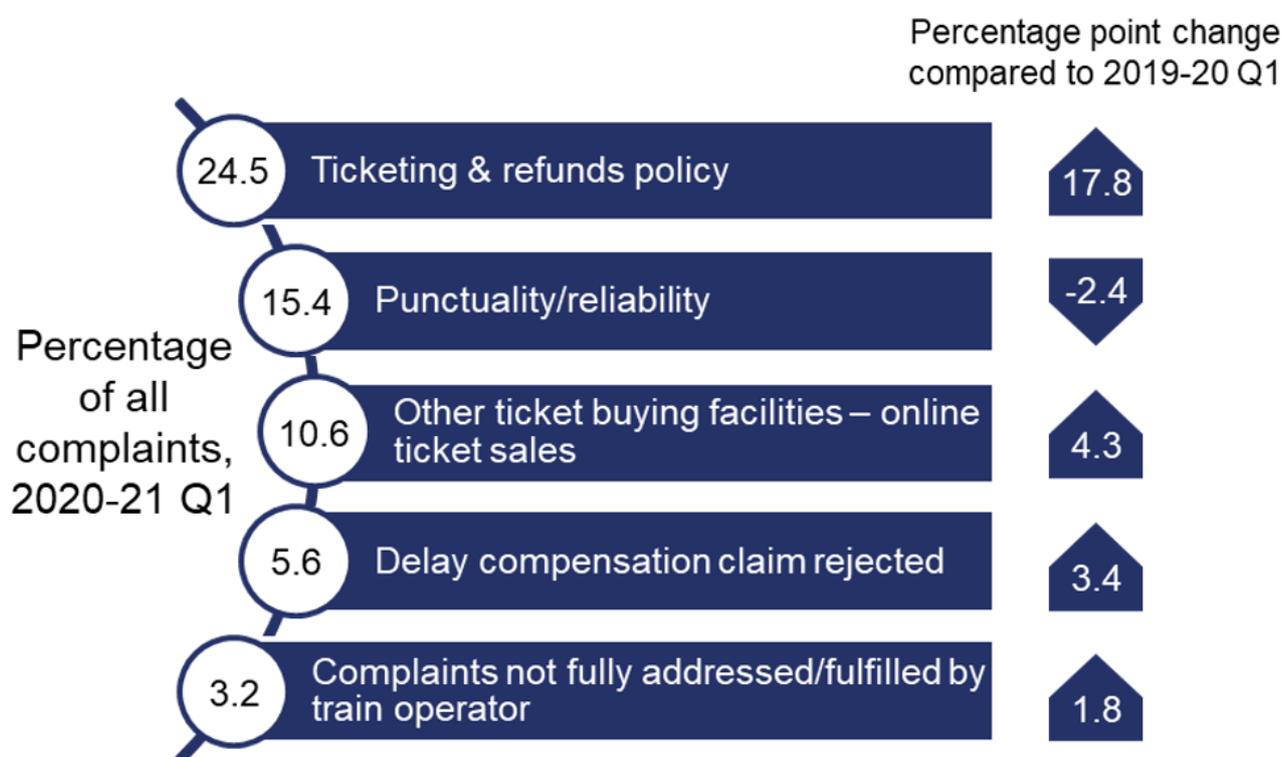
### 3. Complaints by category

During 2020-21 Q1, ticketing and refunds policy was the most common cause to complain to train operators, accounting for 25.4% of all complaints closed (up 17.8 percentage points (pp) from 2019-20 Q1). This was likely due to passengers applying for season ticket refunds as a result of reduced travel due to coronavirus (COVID-19).

Complaints about punctuality and reliability was the second most common cause of complaint, with 15.4% of all complaints made (down 2.4pp from 2019-20 Q1).

This is the first quarter that punctuality and reliability has not been the most complained about category (since the franchised time series started in 2013-14). During 2020-21 Q1 there was reduced travel in order to limit the impact and transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19) which also led to improvements in punctuality and reliability. Overall, [rail passenger journeys](#) in Great Britain for 2020-21 Q1 fell to 8.1% of the level seen in 2019-20 Q1. ORR [train punctuality statistics](#) for 2020-21 Q1 show that nationally 99.6% of recorded station stops were arrived at early or within 15 minutes after the scheduled arrival time. This is an increase of 0.7pp (i.e. better) from the same quarter in 2019-20.

**Figure 3.1 Top five complaint categories by percentage, Great Britain, 2020-21 Q1 (Table 4130)**



## Largest increases and decreases in complaint categories between 2019-20 Q1 and 2020-21 Q1

The largest increase in 2020-21 Q1 compared to 2019-20 Q1 was regarding ticketing and refunds policy, a 17.8pp increase.

**Figure 3.2 Top three increases in complaints category in 2020-21 Q1 compared with 2019-20 Q1, Great Britain (Table 4130)**

	2020-21 Q1 percentage of all complaints	pp change from 2019-20 Q1
 Ticketing and refunds policy	24.5%	 17.8
 Other ticket buying facilities (online ticket sales)	10.6%	 4.3
 Delay compensation claim rejected	5.6%	 3.4

The largest decrease in 2020-21 Q1 compared to 2019-20 Q1 was regarding facilities on board the train, a decrease of 9.5pp.

**Figure 3.3 Top three decreases in complaints category in 2020-21 Q1 compared with 2019-20 Q1, Great Britain (Table 4130)**

	2020-21 Q1 percentage of all complaints	pp change from 2019-20 Q1
 Facilities on board	2.6%	 -9.5
 Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand	2.5%	 -5.7
 Smartcards	1.2%	 -3.2

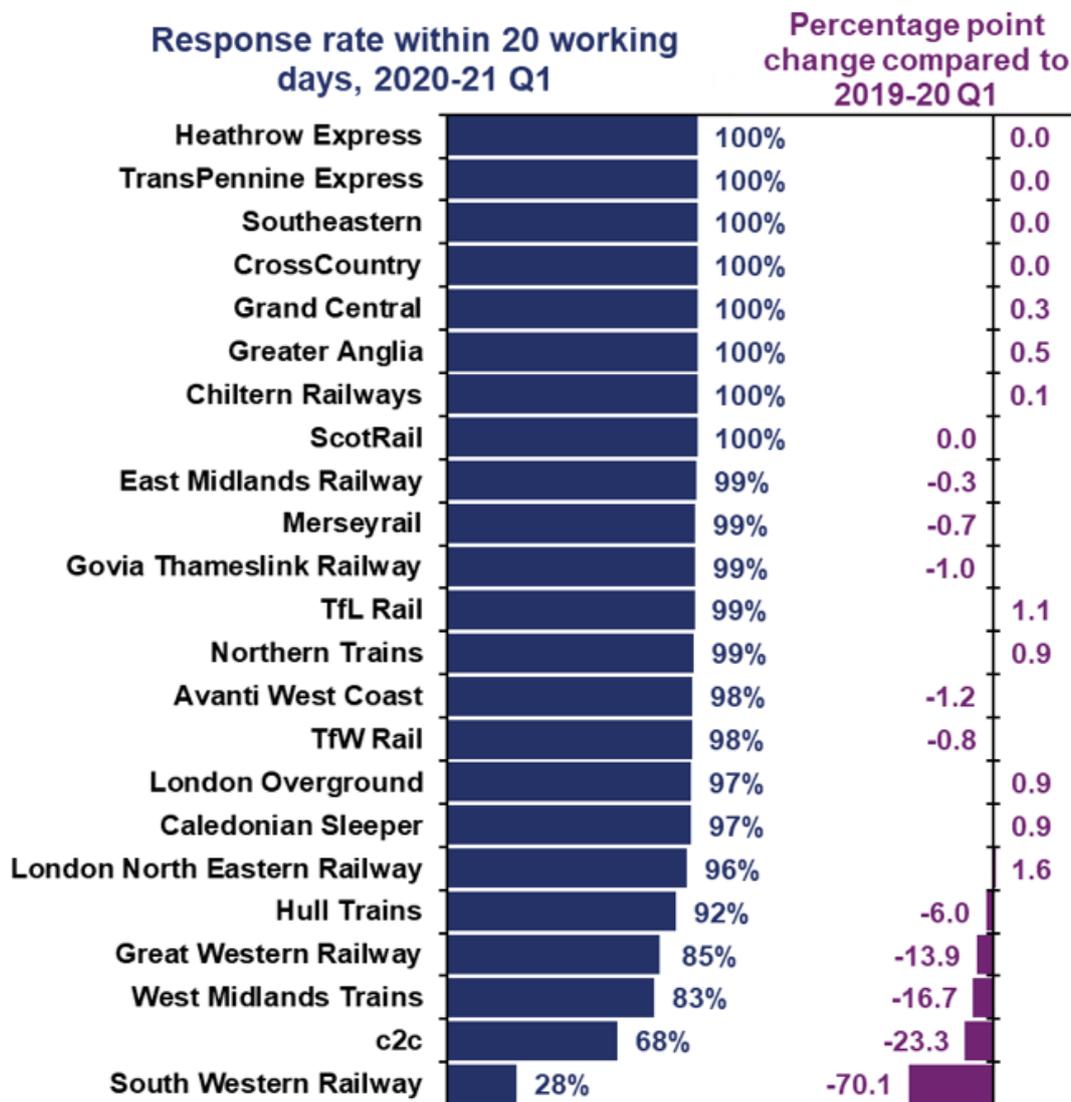
# 4. Complaints answered within 20 working days

Nationally, 84.6% of complaints closed were answered within 20 working days in 2020-21 Q1. This represents a decrease of 13.9pp compared to 2019-20 Q1.

In 2020-21 Q1, 18 out of the 23 train operators met the industry requirement to answer at least 95% of their complaints within 20 working days. In Q1 last year, 21 operators met this requirement.

There were five operators who did not meet the industry requirement (Hull Trains, Great Western Railway, West Midlands Trains, c2c and South Western Railway).

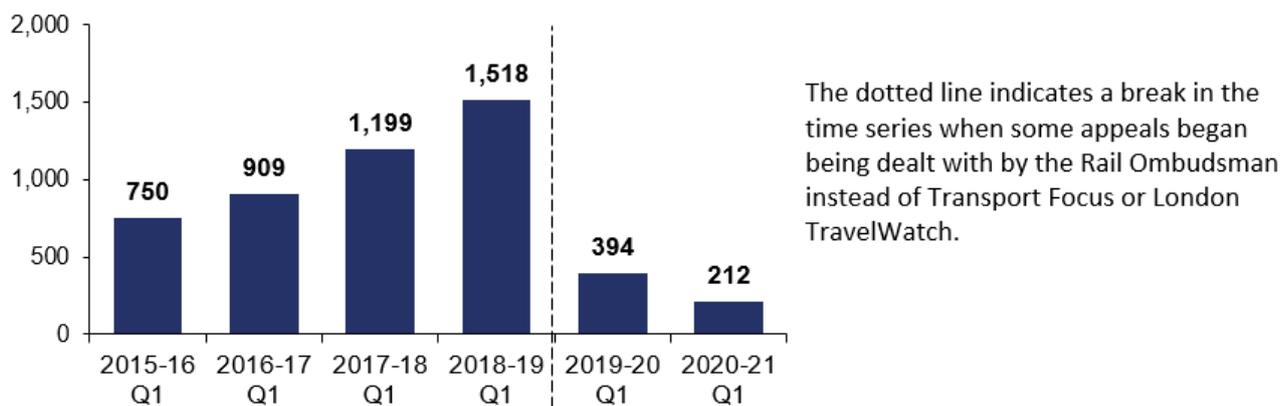
**Figure 4.1 Percentage of complaints answered within 20 working days by train operator, Great Britain, 2020-21 Q1 (Table 4153)**



# 5. Appeals

Passenger watchdogs closed 212 appeals during 2020-21 Q1, this represents a decrease of 46.2% compared with 2019-20 Q1.

**Figure 5.1 Appeals closed by passenger watchdogs, Great Britain, 2015-16 Q1 to 2020-21 Q1 (Table 4163)**

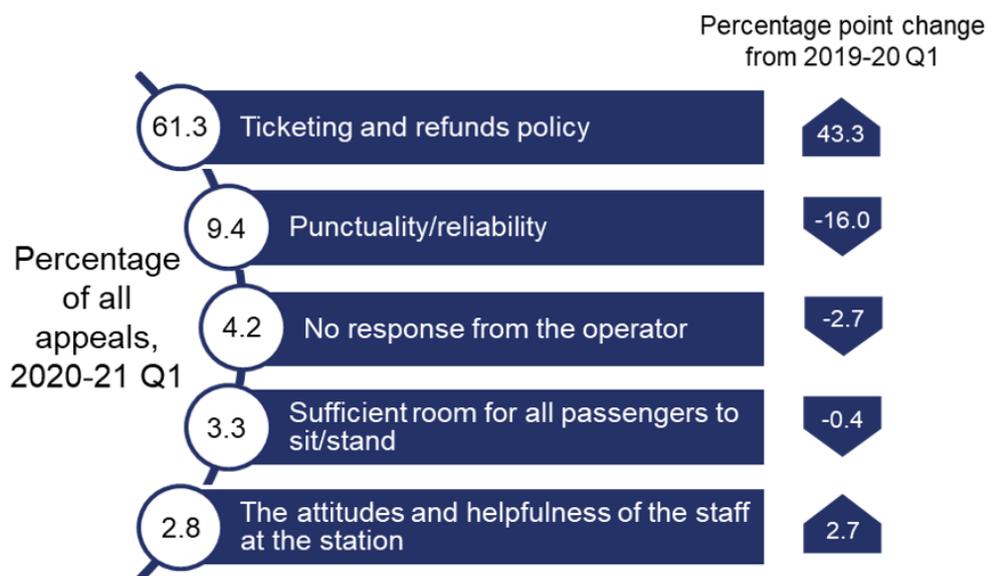


## Appeals by category

Appeals about ticketing and refunds policy were the most appealed about complaint category with 61.3% of appeals closed being about this category in 2020-21 Q1. This was a 43.3pp increase from the same quarter last year.

Appeals about punctuality and reliability were the second most appealed about complaint category with 9.4%. This was a decrease of 16.0pp from the same quarter last year.

**Figure 5.2 Top five appeal categories, Great Britain, 2020-21 Q1 (Table 4160)**



# 6. Annexes

## Annex 1 – Definitions

- **Complaints:** In the rail industry a complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction by a customer or potential customer about service delivery or about company or industry policy.
- **Complaint volumes:** The volume of complaint correspondences closed. Each communication with the customer is counted as a single complaint, regardless of how many topics are covered in the communication.
- **Complaints rate:** The volume of complaint correspondences closed per 100,000 passenger journeys. Each communication with the customer is counted as a single complaint, regardless of how many topics are covered in the communication.
- **Complaints by category:** The type of complaint received, where each complaint category within the 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 volumes and complaints rate.
- **Appeals:** When a customer is unhappy with a train operators' response, they can appeal against their operators' decisions to a passenger watchdog.

## Annex 2 – Quality and Methodology

### Data sources

The complaints data contained within the passenger rail service complaints statistical release and data tables are sourced from administrative data submitted by train operators. Appeals data is sourced from passenger watchdogs - Transport Focus and London TravelWatch. National Rail Enquiries data is sourced from the Rail Delivery Group (RDG).

Train operators record information on complaints they receive within their own internal complaints management systems. ORR collects this aggregated data every rail period (i.e. every 4 weeks). In order to ensure consistency between train operators ORR issue [technical guidance](#) and a standard [data collection template](#).

### Social media comments

Social media comments are excluded from these statistics. However, there may be circumstances in which the feedback on social media lends itself to further investigation. The train operator will then assist the complainant in making a formal complaint which will then be dealt with in accordance with the licence holder's Complaints Handling Procedures (CHP). For example, this may involve signposting the complainant to a webform or providing an email address at which they can log a formal complaint. This complaint will then be in scope to be included within these statistics.

### Complaints by category

There are 71 detailed categories, mainly based on National Rail Passenger Survey (NRPS) satisfaction categories, which make up 14 high-level complaint categories. A full list of all complaint categories and the percentages attributed to each category is available on the [ORR Data Portal](#) in Table 4130. This data is also available by individual train operator in Table 4133.

### Response times to complaints

For each rail period train operators provide the ORR with the percentage of complaint correspondences they have closed within 20 working days. The CHP licence requirement is for train operators to close 95% of complaints within 20 working days. From 2015-16 Q1, ORR have also collected data on the percentage of complaints responded to within 10 working days, as well as the percentage responded to within the operators' internal target. The response times reported on are for first full substantive responses only.

### Appeals

This data provides the number of complaint appeals closed by Transport Focus or London TravelWatch for each train operator and some other rail bodies.

The independent passenger watchdogs may open an appeal on behalf of a rail passenger whose initial complaint to the train operator has not been resolved to their satisfaction.

This data does not include appeals made to the Rail Ombudsman.

The type of appeals dealt with by Transport Focus and London TravelWatch have changed since the Rail Ombudsman was introduced. For example, appeals regarding ticketing and refunds policies are 'out of scope' for the Rail Ombudsman so are dealt with by Transport Focus or London TravelWatch, but appeals about the complainant being unhappy at type/level of compensation are 'in scope' for the Rail Ombudsman. Therefore, comparisons on appeal categories with previous years should be treated with caution.

A full list of all appeals categories and the percentages attributed to each category is available on the [ORR Data Portal](#) in Table 4160.

## Revisions

There have been no revisions to historic data. Further details on historic revisions can be found in the [Revisions log](#).

Further information on data sources, quality, and the methodology used to calculate the data within this release can be found in the [quality and methodology report](#).

# Annex 3 – List of data tables associated with this release and other related statistics

## Data tables

All data tables can be accessed on the [ORR data portal](#) free of charge in OpenDocument Spreadsheet (.ods) format. We can also provide data in csv format on request.

All tables associated with this release can be found under the Data tables heading at the bottom of the [passenger rail service complaints page](#).

## Complaint volumes

- Complaints closed by operator – Table 4100 (NEW TABLE)

## Complaints per 100,000 journeys

- Complaints per 100,000 journeys – Table 4110
- Complaints per 100,000 journeys by operator – Table 4110

## Complaint categories

- Complaints categories – Table 4130
- Complaints categories by operator – Table 4133

## Complaint response rate

- Complaints responded to within 10 and 20 working days by operator – Table 4153

## Complaints by contact method

- Complaints by contact method and train operator – Table 4143 (updated annually)

## National Rail Enquiries

- National Rail Enquiry telephone service – Table 4180 (updated annually)

## Praise

- Praise per 100,000 journeys by operator – Table 4123 (updated annually)

## Appeals

- Appeals closed by Transport Focus and London TravelWatch by operator – Table 4163
- Appeals categories closed by Transport Focus and London TravelWatch – Table 4160

## Other related data

### Delay compensation claims

One of the complaint categories in this release relates to delay compensation schemes. Statistics published on [delay compensation claims](#) were collected from 2018-19 onwards, and have been published in a factsheet alongside this statistical release since 2018-19 Q2.

The statistics include the volume of delay compensation claims received, closed and approved, as well as the percentage of claims which were responded to within 20 working days. All these measures are provided at national (Great Britain) level as well as by each individual train operator.

### Passenger satisfaction with complaints handling

ORR also publish statistics about [passenger satisfaction with complaints handling](#).

### Rail Ombudsman

The [Rail Ombudsman](#) provide a service to help sort out unresolved customer complaints about service providers within the rail industry.

### Transport Focus - National Rail Passenger Survey (NRPS)

The [NRPS](#) provides a network-wide picture of passengers' satisfaction with rail travel. Passenger opinions of train services are collected twice a year from a representative sample of journeys.

# Annex 4 – ORR’s statistical publications

## Statistical Releases

This publication is part of ORR’s [National Statistics](#) accredited releases, which consist of six annual publications: **Rail Finance; Rail Fares Index; Rail Safety Statistics; Rail Infrastructure and Assets; Rail Emissions; Regional Rail Usage**; and four quarterly publications: **Passenger Rail Performance; Freight Rail Usage and Performance; Passenger Rail Usage; Passenger Rail Service Complaints**.

In addition, ORR also publishes a number of Official Statistics, which consist of four annual publications: **Estimates of Station Usage; Train Operating Company Key Statistics; Rail Statistics Compendium; Occupational Health**; and four quarterly publications: **Signals passed at danger (SPADS); Delay Compensation Claims; Disabled Person’s Railcard (DPRC); Passenger assistance**.

All the above publications are available on the [ORR data portal](#) along with a list of [publication dates](#) for the next 12 months.

## 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**.

Our [statistical releases were assessed in 2012](#) and hold National Statistics status. Since our assessment we have improved the content, presentation and quality of our statistical releases. In addition, in July 2019 we launched our new data portal. Therefore, in late 2019 we worked with the OSR to conduct a compliance check to ensure we are still meeting the standards of the Code. On 4 November 2019, [OSR published a letter](#) confirming that ORR’s statistics should continue to be designated as National Statistics. OSR found many positive aspects in the way that we produce and present our statistics and welcomed the range of improvements made since the statistics were last assessed.

For more information on how we adhere to the Code please see our [compliance statements](#). For more details or to provide feedback, please contact the Statistics Head of Profession (Lyndsey Melbourne) at [rail.stats@orr.gov.uk](mailto:rail.stats@orr.gov.uk).



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