

# Passenger Rail Service Complaints 2021-22 Quarter 1

28 October 2021

## Background:

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

These statistics cover: **complaint rates, complaint volumes, complaint categories and complaint response time** within 20 working days.

**Sources:** Train Operators, Transport Focus, London TravelWatch, and RDG.

**Latest quarter:** 2021-22 Q1 (April 2021 to June 2021).

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13 January 2022

During 2021-22 Q1, passenger rail service complaints continue to be affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. [Train numbers increased](#) by 31% compared with the first quarter of last year, which led to a deterioration in punctuality and reliability. [Passenger journeys](#) were more than five times higher than in the same quarter last year. The volume of complaints has subsequently increased but remains significantly below pre-coronavirus years.

Overall, there were **39,159 complaints closed** by train operators in 2021-22 Q1. This represents a rate of **21.5 complaints per 100,000 journeys**.

## Figure 1 Punctuality/reliability was the most complained about category, accounting for 14.5% of all complaints closed

Top five complaint categories by percentage, Great Britain, 2021-22 Q1 and change from 2020-21 Q1 and 2019-20 Q1

Type of complaint	% of all complaints	pp change from 2020-21 Q1	pp change from 2019-20 Q1
 <b>Punctuality/reliability</b>	14.5%	-0.9	-3.3
 <b>Ticketing and refunds policy</b>	8.1%	-16.4	1.4
 <b>Your personal security on board</b>	7.2%	6.3	5.7
 <b>Ticket buying facilities</b>	6.7%	4.5	2.8
 <b>Facilities on board</b>	6.1%	3.5	-6.1

Overall, **99.6% of complaints were closed within 20 working days** in 2021-22 Q1. All 23 train operators met the industry requirement to make a full response to 95% of their complaints within 20 working days.

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

# 1. Complaint volumes closed

Throughout 2020-21 we published complaint volumes closed as an alternative measure to complaint rates (complaints per 100,000 journeys) because of the impact of the pandemic on rail passenger journey. We have resumed publication of complaint rates for 2021-22, but are continuing to publish complaint volumes closed to provide greater context.

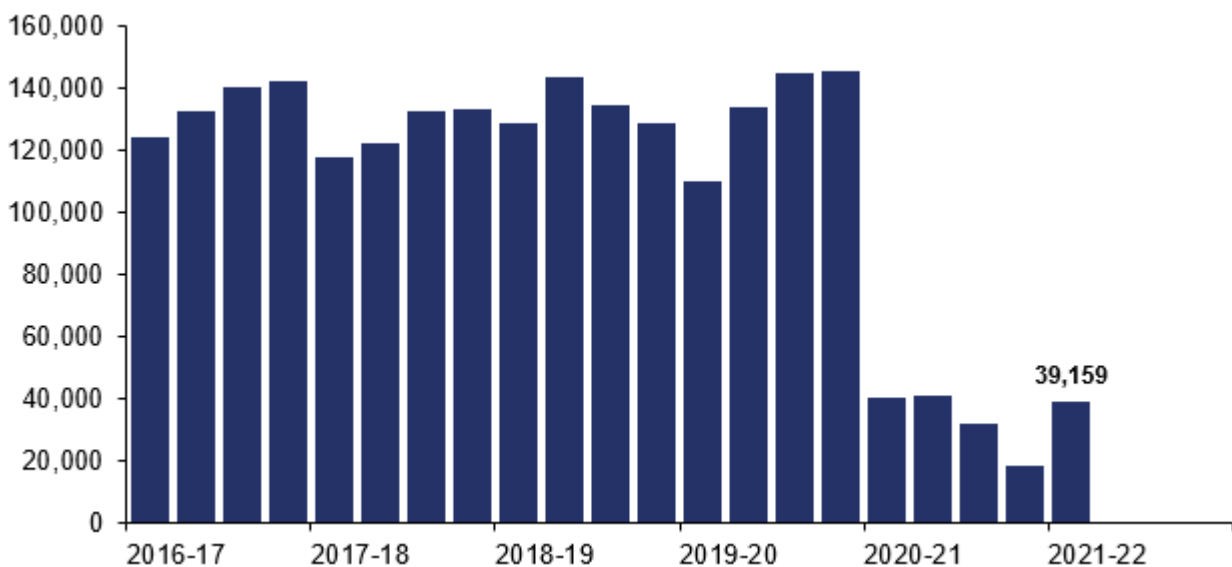
Comparisons of complaint volumes between train operators should continue to be treated with caution because the number of passenger journeys by each operator varies, which is why a complaints rate is a more suitable measure to compare operators.

Overall, there were 39,159 complaints closed by train operators in 2021-22 Q1. This represents a decrease of 3.7% compared with 2020-21 Q1. However, when compared with two years ago (2019-20 Q1) this is down 64.4%.

The total volume of complaints peaked in 2019-20 Q4 at 145,442.

**Figure 1.1 Complaint volumes increased in 2021-22 Q1 but remain well below pre-coronavirus years**

Complaint volumes closed, Great Britain, 2016-17 Q1 to 2021-22 Q1 (Table 4100)



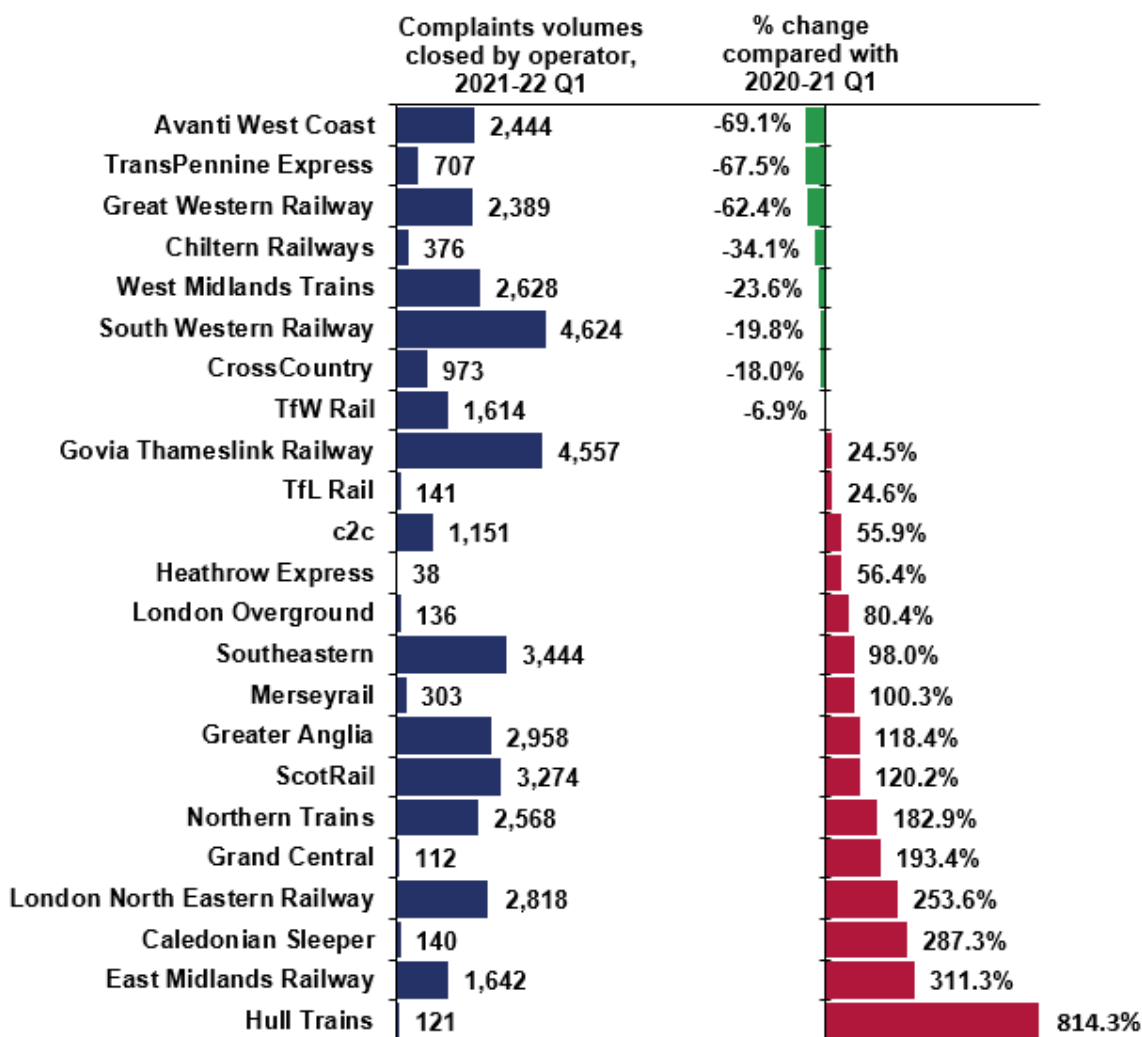
## 2. Complaint volumes closed by train operator

As passenger volumes increased in 2021-22 Q1, complaint volumes also increased for the majority of train operators. However, the rates at which [train services](#) and [rail usage](#) increased has varied across operators. This has resulted in large variations in complaint volumes when compared with the same quarter last year.

The increase in complaints closed for Hull Trains was particularly large – nine times (814.3%) higher than last year. This is due to Hull Trains suspending services during the first quarter of last year, when it closed just 13 complaints, compared with 121 in 2021-22 Q1.

**Figure 2.1 Complaint volumes were higher for 15 operators and lower for eight operators compared with one year ago**

Complaints volumes closed by train operator, 2021-22 Q1 and change on 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 2020.

# 3. Complaint rates

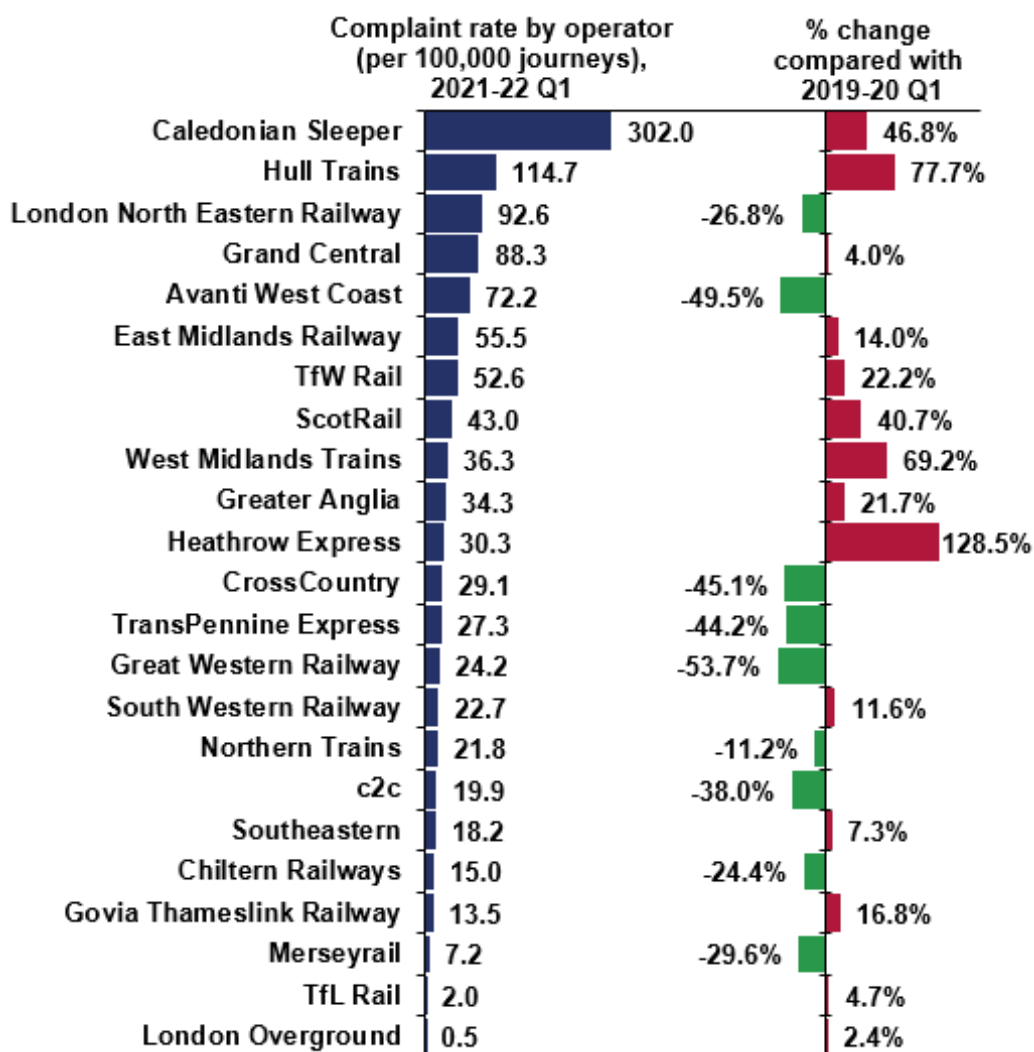
Complaint rates (complaints per 100,000 journeys) were not published for 2020-21. This was due to the impact of the pandemic on [passenger rail usage](#) which meant that passenger journeys were not a suitable normaliser to calculate a reliable complaint rate for each operator. We used an alternative measure of complaint volumes instead which we continue to publish. We have now resumed publication of complaint rates for 2021-22. However, comparisons between train operators, and with previous years, should be treated with caution as relative rail usage compared with pre-coronavirus years varies by operator.

The chart below compares complaint rates in 2021-22 Q1 with rates two years ago (2019-20 Q1).

Overall, there were 21.5 complaints per 100,000 journeys in 2021-22 Q1, a decrease of 14.4% compared with 2019-20 Q1.

**Figure 3.1 Complaint rates were higher for 14 operators and lower for nine operators compared with two years ago**

Complaint rate by train operator, 2021-22 Q1 and change on 2019-20 Q1 (Table 4113)



# 4. Complaints by category

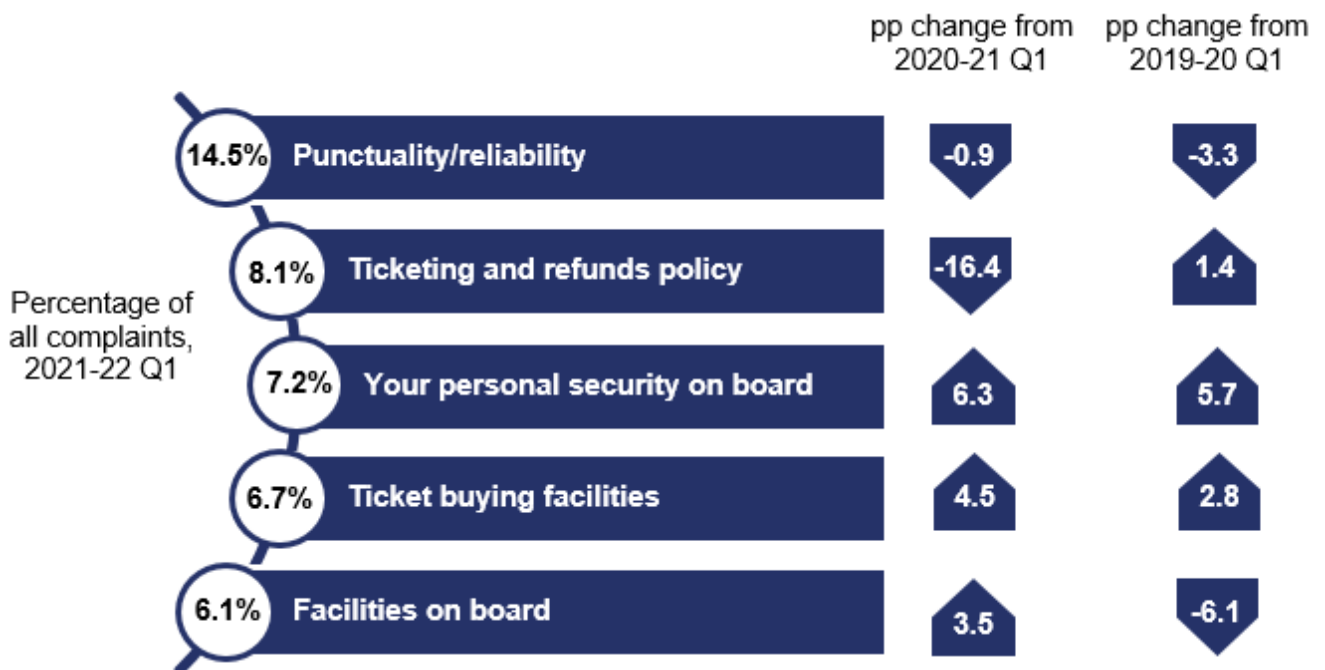
Punctuality and reliability was the most common cause to complain to train operators in 2021-22 Q1, accounting for 14.5% of all complaints (down 0.9pp compared with 2020-21 Q1). This is the second consecutive quarter that punctuality and reliability was the most common cause to complain to train operators. It had been overtaken by complaints regarding ticketing and refunds policy for most of 2020-21, due to passengers applying for ticket refunds as a result of the reduction in travel caused by the pandemic.

Complaints about ticketing and refunds policy was the second most common cause of complaint, with 8.1% of all complaints (down 16.4pp compared with 2020-21 Q1).

The third most common cause of complaint during 2021-22 Q1 was regarding the passenger’s personal security on board the train, accounting for 7.2% of all complaints (up 6.3pp compared with 2020-21 Q1). This is likely due to concerns related to coronavirus health and safety issues (e.g. passengers wearing face coverings) as rail usage increases.













**Figure 4.1 Punctuality and reliability was the top complaint category, accounting for 14.5% of all complaints closed**

Top five complaint categories by percentage, Great Britain, 2021-22 Q1 and change from 2020-21 Q1 and 2019-20 Q1 (Table 4130)



## Largest changes in complaint categories

**Table 4.1 Top three increases and decreases in complaints category in 2021-22 Q1 compared with 2020-21 Q1 (Table 4130)**

	2021-22 Q1 percentage of all complaints	pp change from 2020-21 Q1
 <b>Your personal security on board</b>	7.2%	 6.3
 <b>Ticket buying facilities</b>	6.7%	 4.5
 <b>Facilities on board</b>	6.1%	 3.5
	2021-22 Q1 percentage of all complaints	pp change from 2020-21 Q1
 <b>Ticketing and refunds policy</b>	8.1%	 -16.4
 <b>Other ticket buying facilities (online ticket sales)</b>	5.3%	 -5.3
 <b>Delay compensation claim rejected</b>	1.8%	 -3.8

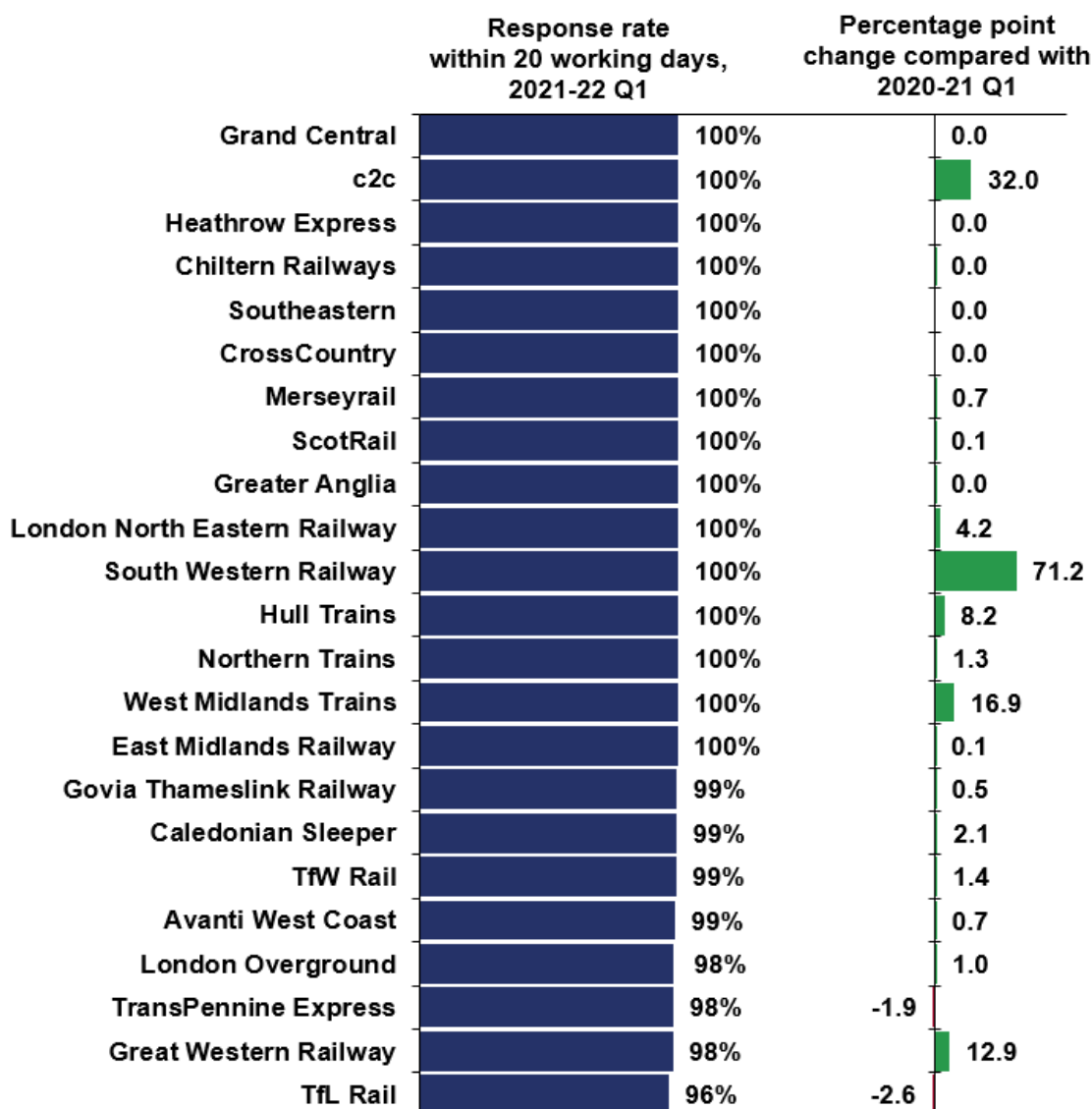
# 5. Complaints answered within 20 working days

Overall, 99.6% of complaints closed were answered within 20 working days in 2021-22 Q1. This represents an increase of 14.8pp compared with 2020-21 Q1. This is the highest Q1 response rate since the time series break in 2016-17.

South Western Railway had the biggest increase in response rate (up 71.2pp) compared with 2020-21 Q1. In the first quarter of 2020-21 South Western Railway received a large volume of refund requests which impacted upon its ability to meet the requirement to make a full response to 95% of all complaints within 20 working days.

**Figure 5.1 All 23 train operators met the industry requirement to respond to 95% of complaints within 20 working days**

Percentage of complaints responded to within 20 working days by train operator, 2021-22 Q1 and change on 2020-21 Q1 (Table 4153)





# 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. Complaint volumes are based on complaints which have had a first full substantive response only.
- **First full substantive response:** The rail company's first substantive response which in its view, reasonably provides a full response to the consumer's complaint. This does not include an acknowledgement or holding response.
- **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 (Transport Focus or London TravelWatch). For information on the [Rail Ombudsman](#), please see the [quality and methodology report](#).



## 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) and National Rail Enquiries data is sourced from the Rail Delivery Group (RDG), these are only included in the Q4 release.

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 we issue technical guidance and a standard data collection template which can both be found on the [core complaints data page](#).

### 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 [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 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, we 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 are based on the first full substantive response only.

### Complaints per 100,000 journeys

Complaint rates were not published during 2020-21. This was due to the impact of the pandemic on [passenger rail usage](#) which meant that passenger journeys were not a suitable normaliser for complaint volumes. An alternative measure of complaint volumes was provided and continues to be published.

## 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 appeal categories and the percentage attributed to each is available on the [Data Portal](#) in Table 4160. This table is updated annually with the Q4 release, although the data is presented by quarter.

## Revisions

The Merseyrail journey estimates for 2015-16 Quarter 1 to 2019-20 Quarter 4 have been revised down. This was due to the overstating of Merseyrail journeys included as part of the non-LENNON component of the data. Consequently, Merseyrail, Franchised and Great Britain complaints rates have been revised for the affected quarters. This affects tables 4110 (complaints per 100,000 journeys) and 4113 (complaints per 100,000 journeys by operator).

Further details on historic revisions can be found in the [Revisions log](#).

## How these statistics can and cannot be used



- Comparing complaint volumes over time
- Comparing complaint rates by train operators and over time
- Comparing the proportion of complaints responded to within 20 and 10 working days by train operator and over time
- Comparing complaint contact methods by train operators and over time
- Comparing what rail passengers complain about over time



- Comparing complaint volumes by train operators (due to differences in passenger usage)
- Comparing appeal volumes by train operators (due to differences in passenger usage)
- Using complaints rate for 2020-21 (due to the pandemic's effect on [rail usage](#))

## Changes in 2021-22 statistics

Following on from the proposals set out in the 2020-21 Q4 publication we have made the following changes:

Publication of the following tables has reduced from quarterly to annually:

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

We no longer produce the following table:

- Praise per 100,000 journeys by operator – Table 4123

We made these changes because we had identified low level of demand for these tables from our web analytics.

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 [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

## Complaints per 100,000 journeys

- Complaints per 100,000 journeys – Table 4110
- Complaints per 100,000 journeys by operator – Table 4113

## 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)

## Appeals

- Appeals closed by Transport Focus and London TravelWatch by operator – Table 4163 (updated annually)
- Appeals categories closed by Transport Focus and London TravelWatch – Table 4160 (updated annually)

## Other related statistics

### 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. Before the Coronavirus pandemic, passenger opinions of train services were collected twice a year from a representative sample of journeys. The [latest wave of the survey](#) was published on 2 July 2020. Due to the pandemic and a significant drop in the numbers of people using public transport, NRPS has been paused.

# Annex 4 – ORR’s statistical publications

## Statistical Releases

This publication is part of ORR’s [National Statistics](#) accredited releases, which consist of seven annual publications: **Estimates of Station Usage; Rail Industry Finance (UK); 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 three annual publications: **Train Operating Company Key Statistics; Rail Statistics Compendium; Occupational Health**; and four quarterly publications: **Signals passed at danger (SPADS); Delay Compensation Claims; Disabled Persons Railcards (DPRC); Passenger assistance**.

All the above publications are available on the [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**.

The majority of these [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 Office of Rail and Road’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. Estimates of Station Usage statistics [were assessed in 2020](#).

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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