Passenger rail service complaints 2021-22 Quarter 2

13 January 2022

In the second quarter of financial year 2021-22, the number of passenger rail service complaints closed was 76.0% higher than the same quarter last year. This reflects an increase in passenger usage as coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions were eased.

Compared with the second quarter of last year, trains planned increased by 4% and passenger journeys by 85.8%, which contributed to a deterioration in punctuality and reliability and subsequently an increase in complaints. However, overall volumes remain significantly lower than before the pandemic.

Overall, there were **72,470 complaints closed** by train operators in 2021-22 Q2. This represents a rate of **29.2 complaints per 100,000 journeys.**

Figure 1   Punctuality/reliability was the most complained about category

Top five complaint categories by percentage, Great Britain, 2021-22 Q2 and change from 2020-21 Q2 and 2019-20 Q2

Type of complaint	% of all complaints	pp change from 2020-21 Q2	pp change from 2019-20 Q2
Punctuality/reliability	16.3%	4.6	-8.6
Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand	9.4%	7.4	1.9
Facilities on board	8.2%	3.4	-2.9
Ticketing and refunds policy	6.6%	-7.1	1.1
Your personal security on board	5.8%	-0.9	4.4

Overall, **98.7% of complaints were closed within 20 working days** in 2021-22 Q2. All 23 train operators met the industry requirement to make a full response to 95% of 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) due to the impact of the pandemic on rail passenger journeys. 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 be treated with caution because the number of passenger journeys by each operator varies. This is why complaint rates are more suitable for comparing operators.

Overall, there were 72,470 complaints closed by train operators in 2021-22 Q2. This represents an increase of 76.0% compared with 2020-21 Q2. However, when compared with two years ago (2019-20 Q2) this is down 46.0%.

The most complaints closed in a single quarter was 145,442, in 2019-20 Q4.

Figure 1.1 Complaint volumes increased in 2021-22 Q2 but remain lower than before the pandemic

Complaint volumes closed, Great Britain, 2016-17 Q1 to 2021-22 Q2 (Table 4100)
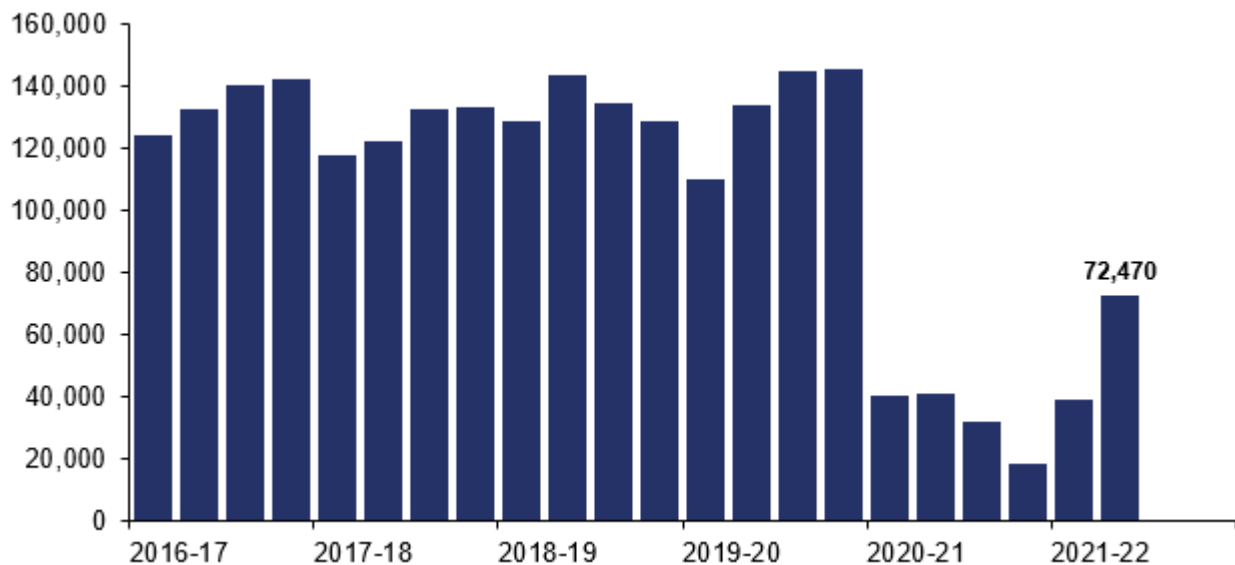
2. Complaint volumes closed by train operator

Complaint volumes increased for most train operators in 2021-22 Q2 compared with the same quarter last year. This reflects an increase in passenger journeys over this period as coronavirus restrictions have been eased. 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 is particularly large – seven times (592.5%) higher than last year. This is due to Hull Trains suspending services for part of 2020-21 Q2, when it closed just 51 complaints, compared with 355 in 2021-22 Q2.

Figure 2.1   Complaint volumes were higher for 21 of 23 operators compared with one year ago

Complaint volumes closed by train operator, 2021-22 Q2 and change on 2020-21 Q2 (Table 4100)
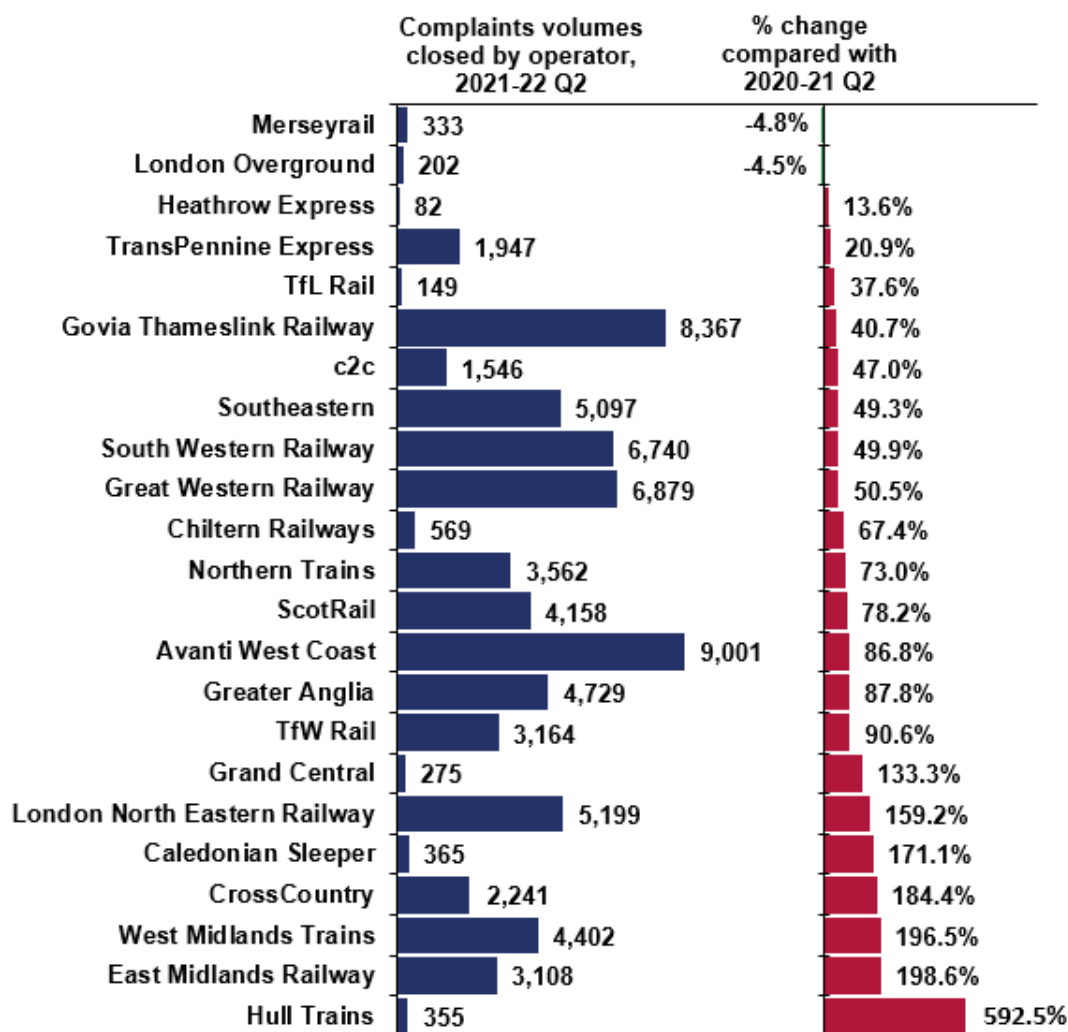
3. Complaint rates

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 t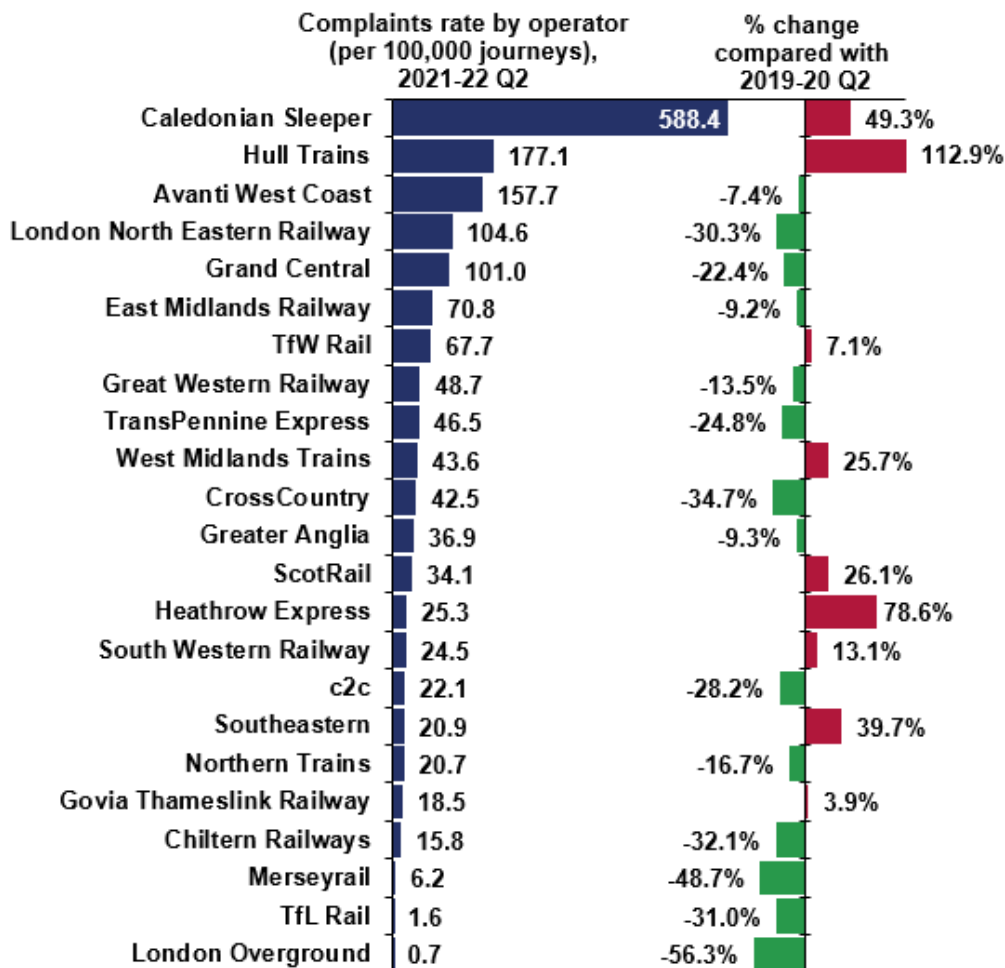o calculate a reliable complaint rate for each operator. We used an alternative measure of complaint volumes instead, which we continue to publish. We have now resumed publication of complaint rates for 2021-22. However, comparisons between train operators, and with previous years, should be treated with caution as relative rail usage compared to before the pandemic varies by operator.

Overall, there were 29.2 complaints per 100,000 journeys in 2021-22 Q2, a decrease of 2.6% compared with two years ago (2019-20 Q2).

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

Complaint rate by train operator, 2021-22 Q2 and change on 2019-20 Q2 (Table 4113)

| Operator	Complaints rate by operator (per 100,000 journeys), 2021-22 Q2	% change compared with 2019-20 Q2
Caledonian Sleeper	588.4	49.3%
Hull Trains	177.1	112.9%
Avanti West Coast	157.7	-7.4%
London North Eastern Railway	104.6	-30.3%
Grand Central	101.0	-22.4%
East Midlands Railway	70.8	-9.2%
TfW Rail	67.7	7.1%
Great Western Railway	48.7	-13.5%
TransPennine Express	46.5	-24.8%
West Midlands Trains	43.6	25.7%
CrossCountry	42.5	-34.7%
Greater Anglia	36.9	-9.3%
ScotRail	34.1	26.1%
Heathrow Express	25.3	78.6%
South Western Railway	24.5	13.1%
c2c	22.1	-28.2%
Southeastern	20.9	39.7%
Northern Trains	20.7	-16.7%
Govia Thameslink Railway	18.5	3.9%
Chiltern Railways	15.8	-32.1%
Merseyrail	6.2	-48.7%
TfL Rail	1.6	-31.0%
London Overground	0.7	-56.3%

4. Complaints by category

Punctuality/reliability was the most common cause to complain to train operators in 2021-22 Q2, accounting for 16.3% of all complaints (up 4.6pp compared with 2020-21 Q2). This is the third consecutive quarter that punctuality/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 sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand was the second most common cause of complaint, with 9.4% of all complaints (up 7.4pp compared with 2020-21 Q2).

The third most common cause of complaint during 2021-22 Q2 was regarding the facilities on board the train, accounting for 8.2% of all complaints (up 3.4pp compared with 2020-21 Q2).

Figure 4.1   Punctuality/reliability was the top complaint category

Top five complaint categories by percentage, Great Britain, 2021-22 Q2 and change from 2020-21 Q2 and 2019-20 Q2 (Table 4130)
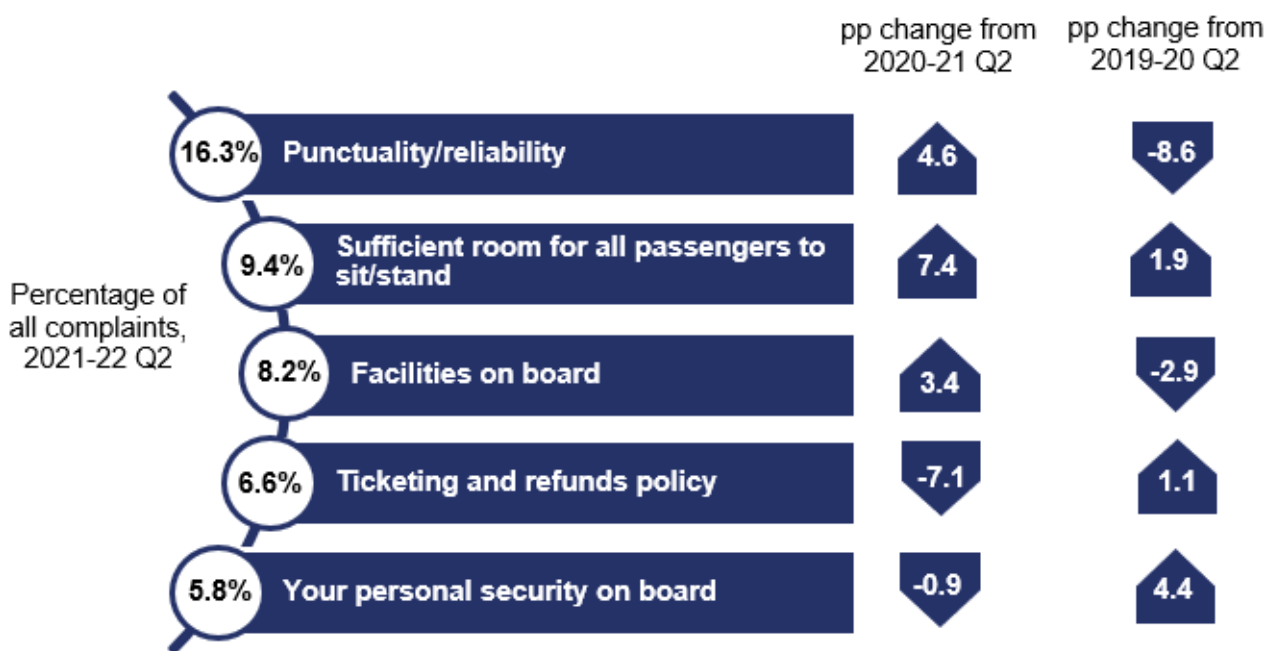
Largest changes in complaint categories

Table 4.1   Top three increases and decreases in complaint categories in 2021-22 Q2 compared with 2020-21 Q2 (Table 4130)

	2021-22 Q2 percentage of all complaints	pp change from 2020-21 Q2
Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand	9.4%	↑ 7.4
Punctuality/reliability (i.e. the train arriving/departing on time)	16.3%	↑ 4.6
Facilities on board	8.2%	↑ 3.4

	2021-22 Q2 percentage of all complaints	pp change from 2020-21 Q2
Ticketing and refunds policy	6.6%	↓ -7.1
Other ticket buying facilities (online ticket sales)	4.5%	↓ -5.0
Your personal security whilst using the station	0.8%	↓ -1.2

5. Complaints answered within 20 working days

Overall, 98.3% of complaints closed were answered within 20 working days in 2021-22 Q2. This represents an increase of 1.0pp compared with 2020-21 Q2.

South Western Railway had the biggest increase in response rate (up 18.8pp) compared with 2020-21 Q2. This may be related to the large volume of refund requests South Western Railway received in the first quarter of 2020-21 that 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 Q2 and change on 2020-21 Q2 (Table 4153)

	Response rate within 20 working days, 2021-22 Q2	Percentage point change compared with 2020-21 Q2
CrossCountry	100%	0.0
c2c	100%	4.6
Grand Central	100%	0.0
Caledonian Sleeper	100%	0.0
Southeastern	100%	0.0
Chiltern Railways	100%	0.0
Heathrow Express	100%	0.0
Greater Anglia	100%	0.1
ScotRail	100%	0.0
South Western Railway	100%	18.8
Northern Trains	99%	-0.2
East Midlands Railway	99%	-1.1
TfW Rail	99%	0.5
Avanti West Coast	98%	-1.6
Hull Trains	98%	-0.3
Merseyrail	98%	-1.7
London Overground	97%	-1.4
Govia Thameslink Railway	97%	-1.8
Great Western Railway	97%	-1.5
London North Eastern Railway	97%	-3.0
TransPennine Express	97%	-3.3
TfL Rail	96%	-0.7
West Midlands Trains	95%	-4.3

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

No revisions were made this quarter. 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](#). The format of these tables was changed in January 2022 to improve accessibility.

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 – Table 4150 **(new table)**

● 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 our statistical releases were assessed in 2012 and hold National Statistics status. Since this 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 Office for Statistics Regulation (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. 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.