

Passenger rail service complaints October to December 2021

7 April 2022

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 Q3 (1 October 2021 to 31 December 2021).

Contents:

Complaint volumes – p2
Complaint volumes by train operator – p3
Complaint rates – p4
Complaints by category – p5
Complaints responded to within 20 working days – p7

Responsible Statistician:

I. Ritchie

Public Enquiries:

rail.stats@orr.gov.uk

Media Enquiries:

Tel: 020 7282 2094

Next publication:

30 June 2022






Passenger rail service complaints closed in the latest quarter (1 October to 31 December 2021) were almost three times (179.2%) higher than the same quarter last year. This reflects the increase in passengers as coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic restrictions have eased.

Compared to the same quarter last year, [passenger journeys](#) more than doubled, 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 **90,144 complaints closed** by train operators in October to December 2021. This represents a rate of **31.6 complaints per 100,000 journeys**.

Figure 1 Punctuality/reliability was the most complained about category

Top complaint categories by percentage, Great Britain, October to December 2021 and change on the same quarters in 2020 and 2019

Type of complaint	% of all complaints	Percentage point change on Oct to Dec 2020	Percentage point change on Oct to Dec 2019
 Punctuality/reliability	19.9%	5.4	-5.2
 Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand	9.8%	7.8	1.7
 Facilities on board	7.8%	3.6	-2.5
 Ticketing and refunds policy	6.8%	-9.3	0.5
 Your personal security on board	4.5%	-0.6	3.1

Overall, **96.7% of complaints were closed within 20 working days** in October to December 2021. 20 out of 24 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

Since the start of the pandemic, we have published complaint volumes closed as an alternative measure to complaint rates (complaints per 100,000 journeys) due to the impact on rail passenger journeys. We resumed publication of complaint rates from April 2021 but are continuing to publish complaint volumes closed to provide greater context.

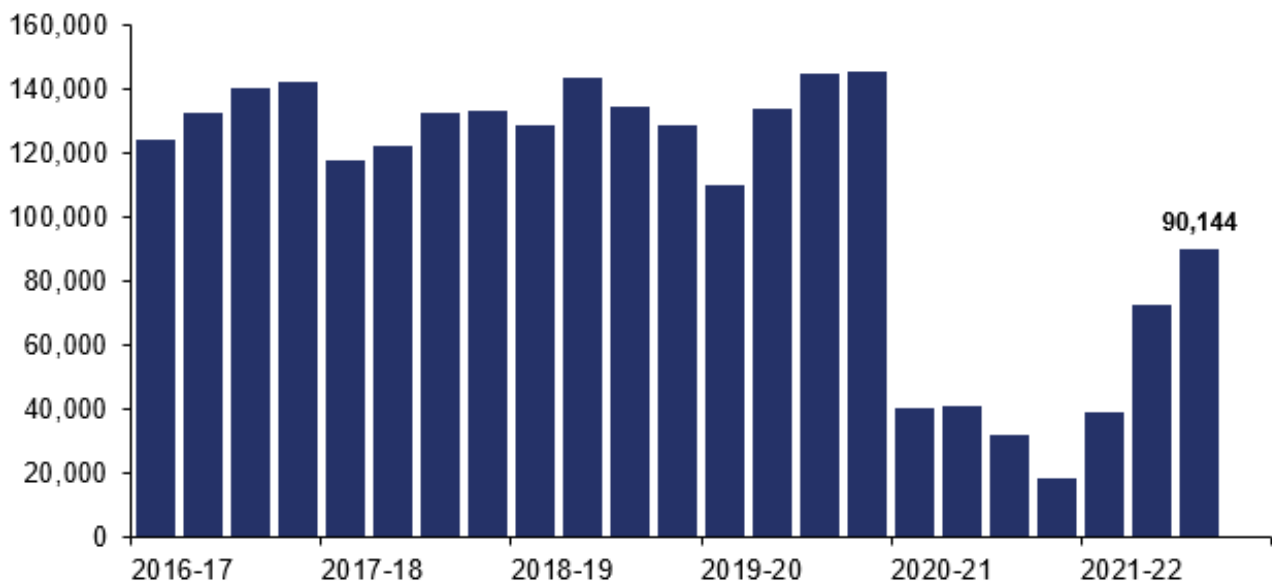
Comparisons of complaint volumes between train operators should be treated with caution because the number of passenger journeys by each operator varies. This is why complaint rates are more suitable for comparing operators.

Overall, there were 90,144 complaints closed by train operators during October to December 2021. This is almost three times (179.2%) higher than in the same quarter last year. However, when compared with the same quarter in 2019 this is down by 37.9%.

The most complaints closed in a single quarter was 145,442, in January to March 2020.

Figure 1.1 Complaint volumes increased for the third consecutive quarter but remain lower than before the pandemic

Complaint volumes closed, Great Britain, quarterly data, April 2016 to December 2021 (Table 4100)



2. Complaint volumes closed by train operator

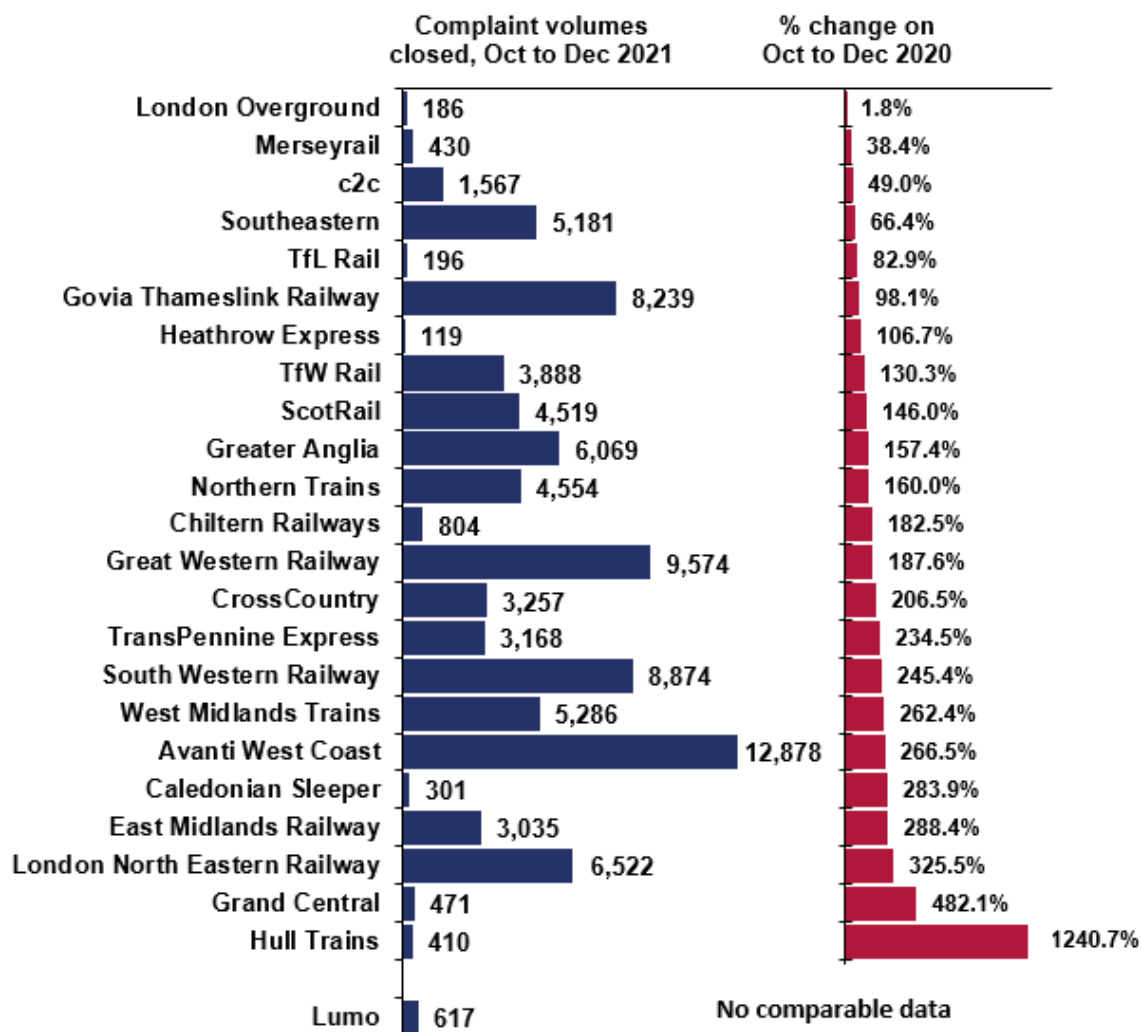
Complaint volumes increased for all train operators in October to December 2021 compared with the same quarter last year. This reflects an increase in passenger journeys over this period as pandemic restrictions have been eased. However, the rates at which [train services](#) and [rail usage](#) increased has varied across operators. This has resulted in large differences in complaint volumes when compared with the same quarter last year.

The increase in complaints closed for Hull Trains is particularly large – 13 times (1,240.7%) higher than last year. This is due to Hull Trains running a reduced train service during October to December 2020.

Lumo began running services on 25 October 2021, which is why no comparison is possible for that operator with previous years.

Figure 2.1 Complaint volumes increased for all operators compared with last year

Complaint volumes closed by train operator, October to December 2021 and change compared with October to December 2020 (Table 4100)



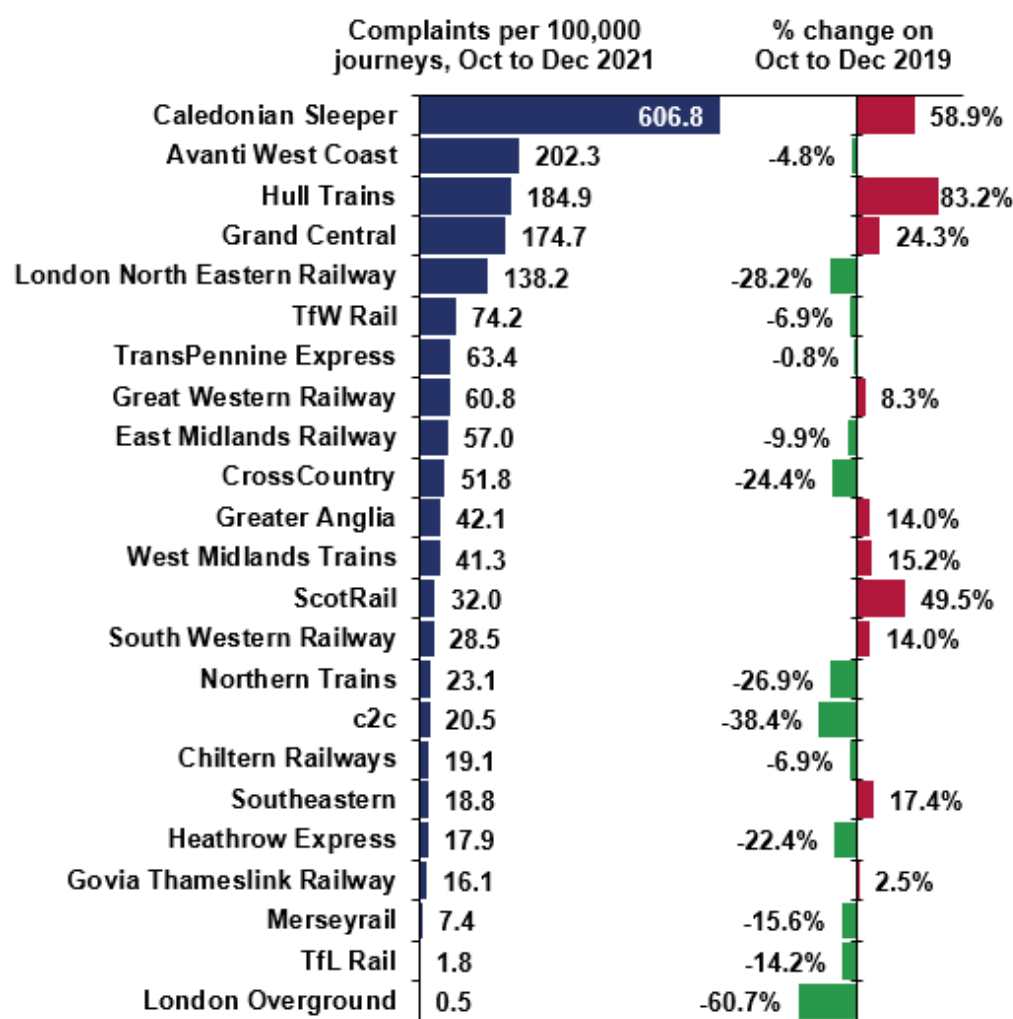
3. Complaint rates

We did not publish complaint rates (complaints per 100,000 journeys) for the year 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021. 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. From April 2021 we resumed publication of complaint rates, therefore comparisons below are with the same quarter **two** years ago. 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 31.6 complaints per 100,000 journeys in October to December 2021, which is almost unchanged on the same quarter two years ago.

Figure 3.1 Complaint rates were higher for 10 operators and lower for 13 operators compared with two years ago

Complaint rates by train operator, October to December 2021 and change compared with October to December 2019 (Table 4113)



Note: Lumo is not shown in Figure 3.1. As it began operating part way through the latest quarter (on 25 October), its complaints rate is not comparable with other operators.

4. Complaints by category

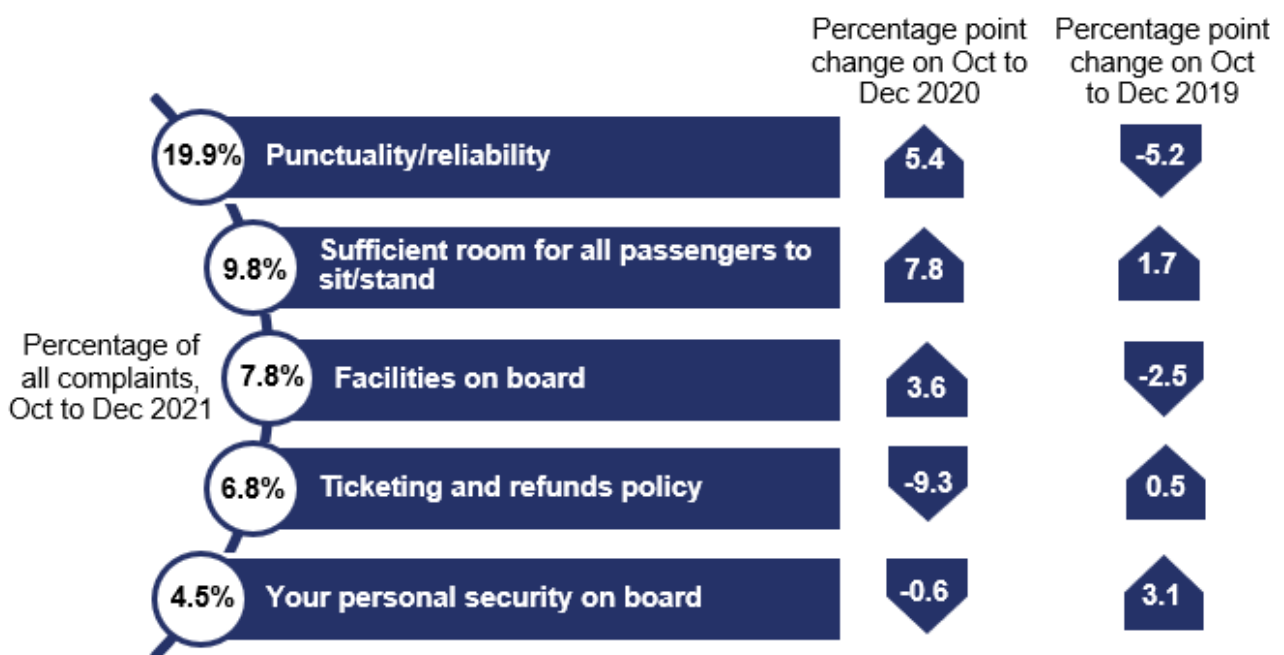
Punctuality/reliability was the most common cause to complain to train operators in October to December 2021, accounting for 19.9% of all complaints. This was 5.4 percentage points (pp) higher than the same quarter last year, but 5.2pp lower than two years ago. Punctuality/reliability has been the most common cause to complain to train operators since the start of 2021. During 2020, it had been overtaken by complaints regarding ticketing and refunds policy due to passengers applying for ticket refunds following 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 9.8% of all complaints (up 7.8pp compared with the same quarter last year).

The third most common cause of complaint in October to December 2021 was regarding the facilities on board the train, accounting for 7.8% of all complaints (up 3.6pp compared with the same quarter last year).













Figure 4.1 Punctuality/reliability was the top complaint category

Top five complaint categories by percentage, Great Britain, October to December 2021 and change on the same quarters in 2020 and 2019 (Table 4130)



Largest changes in complaint categories

Table 4.1 Top three increases and decreases in complaint categories in October to December 2021 compared with October to December 2020 (Table 4130)

	Percentage of all complaints Oct to Dec 2021	Percentage point change on Oct to Dec 2020
 Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand	9.8%	 7.8
 Punctuality/reliability (i.e. the train arriving/departing on time)	19.9%	 5.4
 Facilities on board	7.8%	 3.6
	Percentage of all complaints Oct to Dec 2021	Percentage point change on Oct to Dec 2020
 Ticketing and refunds policy	6.8%	 -9.3
 Other ticket buying facilities (online ticket sales)	3.6%	 -3.1
 Your personal security whilst using the station	3.4%	 -1.6

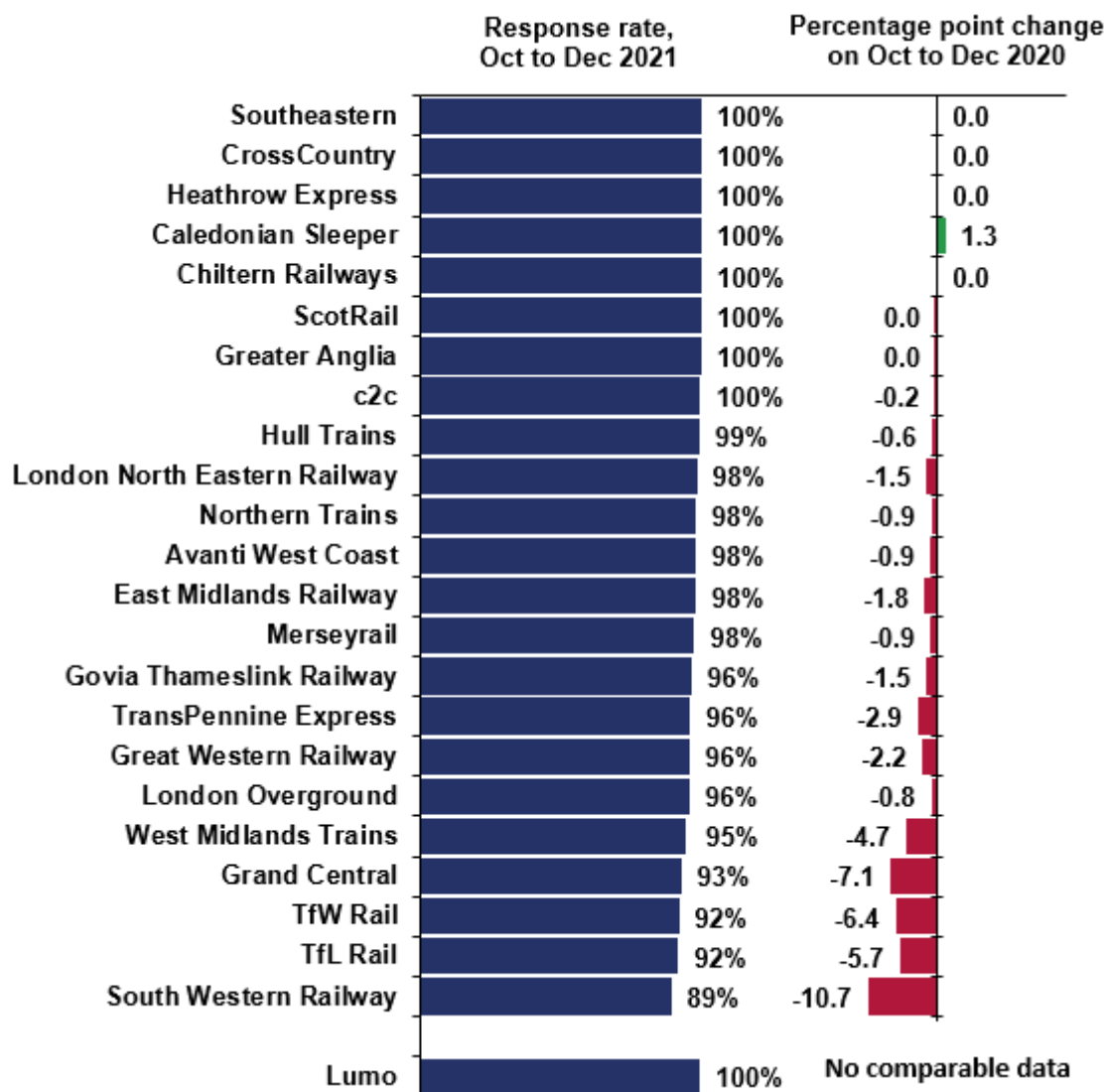
5. Complaints answered within 20 working days

Overall, 96.7% of complaints closed were answered within 20 working days in October to December 2021. This represents a decrease of 2.4pp compared with the same quarter last year. Response rates declined for most train operators, which reflects the high response rates in 2020 when pandemic restrictions meant lower passenger numbers and complaint volumes.

South Western Railway had the biggest decrease in response rate in the latest quarter, down 10.7pp compared with October to December 2020.

Figure 5.1 20 out of 24 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, October to December 2021 and change compared with October to December 2020 (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 included in the final quarter of the financial year (January to March) releases only.

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 April 2015, 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 for the year 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021. 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 final quarter of the financial year (January to March) releases only, although the data is presented by quarter.

Revisions

There have been no revisions to historic data in this release. Details of previous 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 to these statistics from April 2021

Following on from the proposals set out in the January to March 2021 quarterly statistical release 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 on [delay compensation claims](#) were collected from April 2018, and are published in a factsheet alongside this statistical release each quarter.

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 annually 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.



© Crown copyright 2022

This publication is licensed under the terms of the [Open Government Licence v3.0](#) except where otherwise stated.

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

This publication is available on the [ORR data portal](#)

Any media enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at orr.gov.uk/contact-us.

