

Passenger rail service complaints January to March 2022

30 June 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: 1 January 2022 to 31 March 2022.

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Next publication:






27 October 2022

Passenger rail service **complaints closed** in the latest quarter (1 January to 31 March 2022) were more than four times (326.8%) higher than in the same quarter the previous year (**80,561** compared with 18,874).

There were **282,537 complaints closed** by train operators in the latest year (1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022), which is a rate of **28.5 complaints per 100,000 journeys**. The number of complaints closed was more than double the previous year's total (133,003). This reflects the increase in [passenger journeys](#) as coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic restrictions have eased. However, overall volumes remain significantly lower than before the pandemic.

Figure 1 Punctuality/reliability was the most complained about category

Top complaint categories by percentage, Great Britain, April 2021 to March 2022 and change on the previous two years

Type of complaint	Percentage of all complaints	Percentage point change from April 2020 to March 2021	Percentage point change from April 2019 to March 2020
 Punctuality/reliability	18.5%	4.4	-5.8
 Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand	8.7%	6.5	1.0
 Ticketing and refunds policy	7.3%	-10.1	0.9
 Facilities on board	7.2%	3.4	-3.0
 Your personal security on board	4.7%	0.6	3.3

In the latest year, **96.9% of complaints were closed within 20 working days**. 20 out of 23 train operators met industry requirements to make a full response to 95% of complaints within 20 working days.

Overall, **81.9%** of complaints were made **by email or webform**.

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.

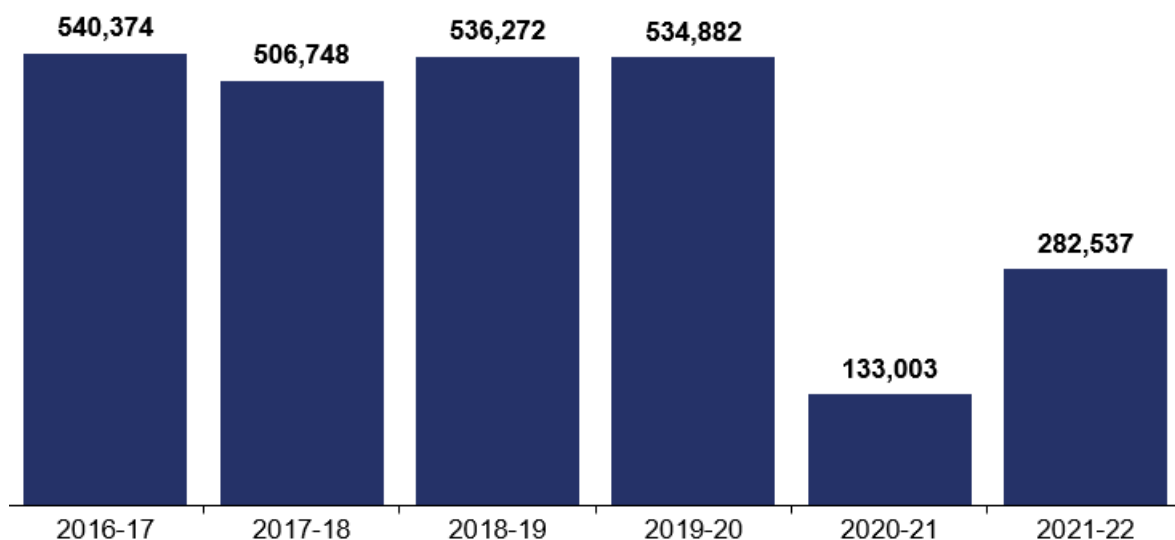
Comparisons of complaint volumes between train operators should be treated with caution because the number of passenger journeys by each operator varies. This is why complaint rates are more suitable for comparing operators.

April 2021 to March 2022 annual

Overall, there were 282,537 complaints closed by train operators in the latest year (1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022). This is more than double (112.4%) the previous year's total. However, when compared with two years ago, this is down by 47.2%.

Figure 1.1 Complaint volumes increased in the latest year but remain lower than before the pandemic

Complaint volumes closed, Great Britain, annual data, April 2016 to March 2022 (Table 4100)



January to March 2022 quarter

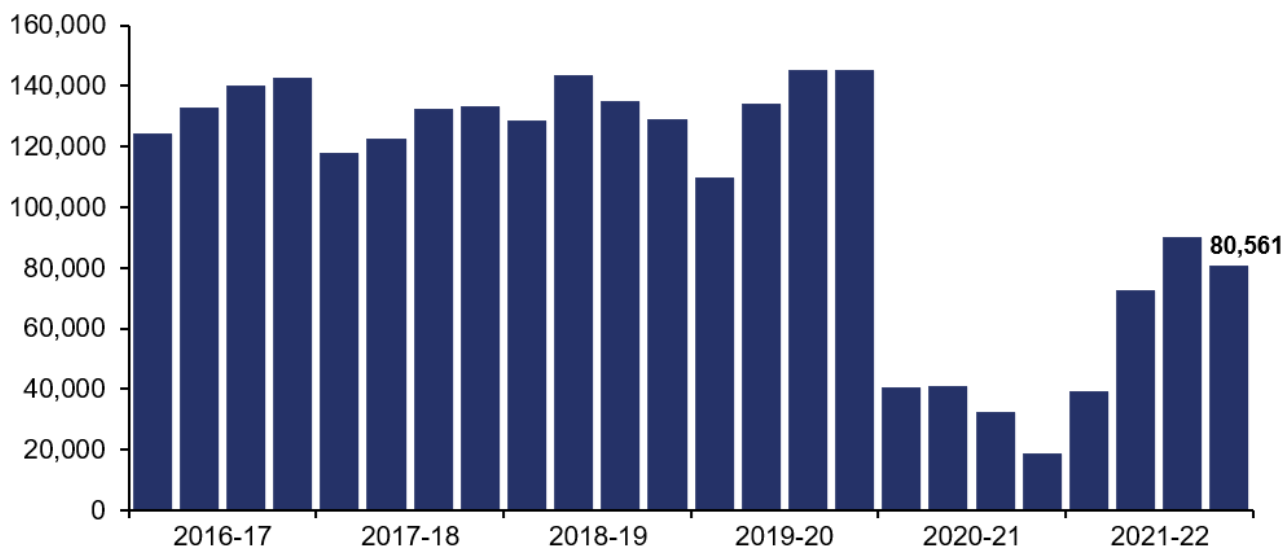
Overall, there were 80,561 complaints closed by train operators in the latest quarter (1 January to 31 March 2022). This is more than four times (326.8%) higher than in the same quarter in the previous year. However, when compared with the same quarter two years ago, this is down by 44.6%.

Following increases in quarterly complaint volumes during the year, the most recent data show a 10.5% decrease between the third and fourth (latest) quarters.

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

Figure 1.2 Complaint volumes decreased in the latest quarter after three consecutive quarters of growth

Complaint volumes closed, Great Britain, quarterly data, April 2016 to March 2022 (Table 4100)



2. Complaint volumes closed by train operator

April 2021 to March 2022 annual

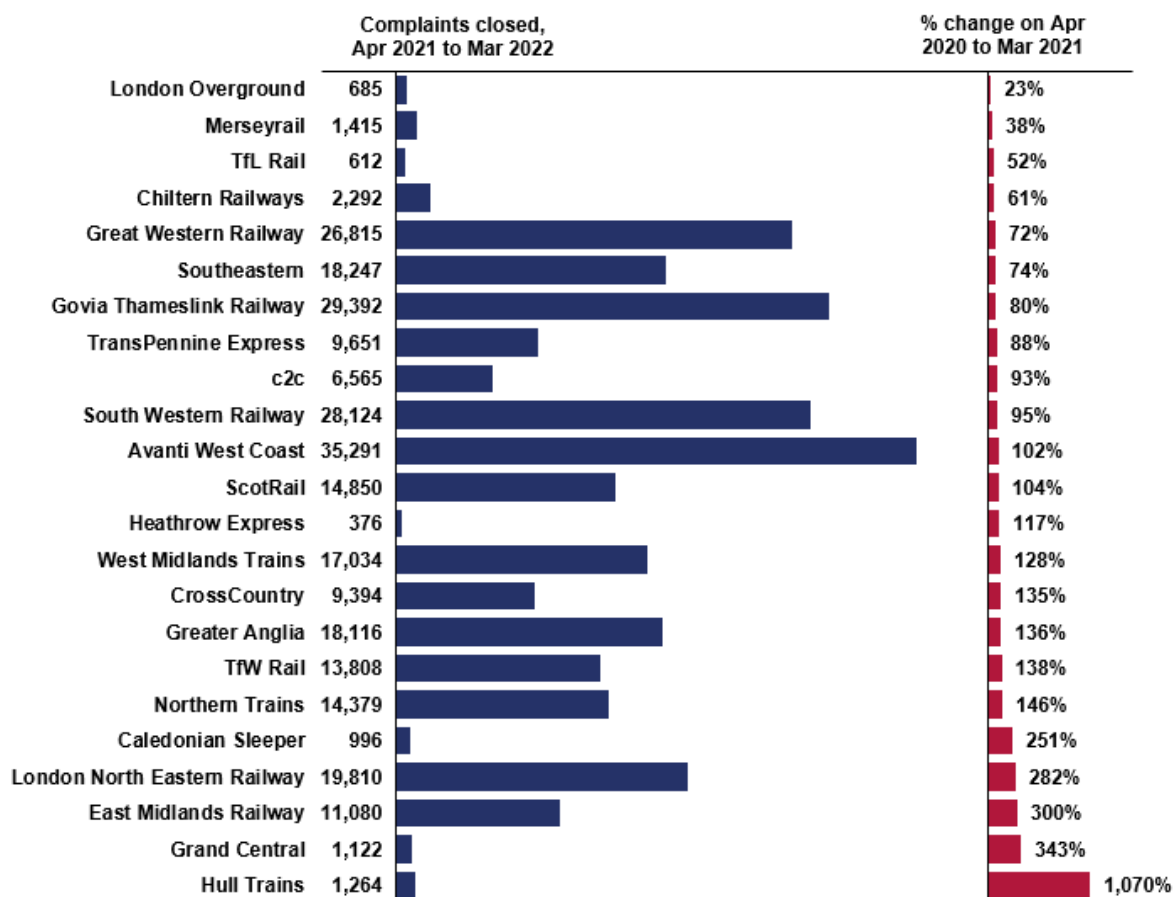
Complaint volumes increased for all train operators in the latest year (April 2021 to March 2022) compared with the previous year. This reflects an increase in passenger journeys over this period as pandemic restrictions have been eased. However, the rates at which [train services](#) and [rail usage](#) increased has varied across operators. This has resulted in large differences in complaint volumes when compared with the previous year.

Hull Trains recorded the greatest increase, with over 11 times (1,070%) more complaints than the previous year. This is due to Hull Trains running significantly more services in the latest year compared with the previous year. London Overground recorded the lowest increase (up 23%) from the previous year.

Lumo began running services on 25 October 2021, which is why annual data is not presented and no comparison is possible with previous years for that operator.

Figure 2.1 Complaint volumes increased for all operators in the latest year

Complaint volumes closed by train operator, April 2021 to March 2022 and change compared with previous year (Table 4100)



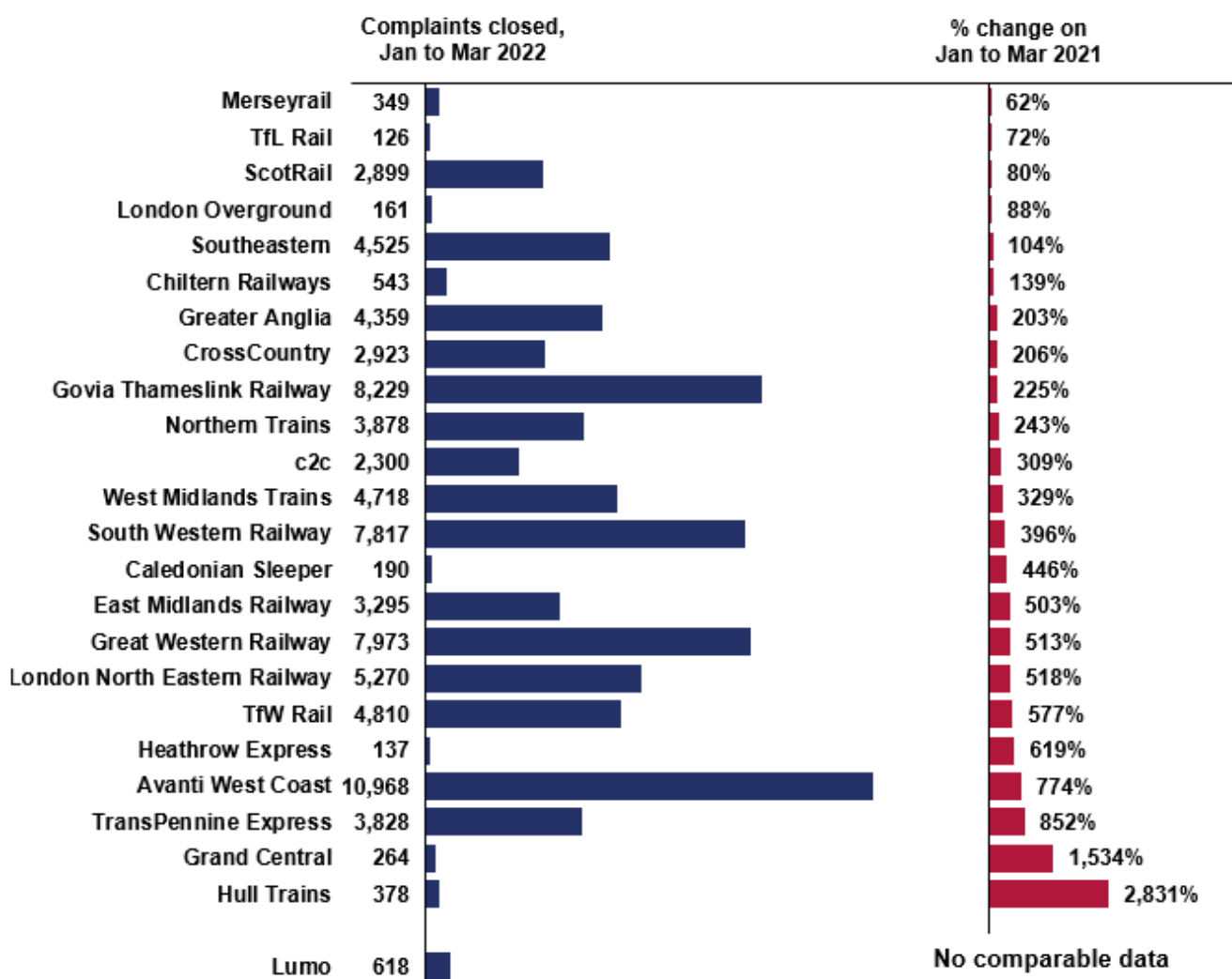
January to March 2022 quarter

Complaint volumes increased for all train operators in the latest quarter (1 January to 31 March 2022) compared with the same quarter in the previous year.

The increase in complaints closed for Hull Trains is particularly large – 29 times (2,831%) higher than the previous year. This is due to Hull Trains running a reduced service of 40 trains during January to March 2021 compared with 1,020 trains in the latest quarter. Merseyrail recorded the smallest increase (up 62%) compared with the same quarter in the previous year.

Figure 2.2 Complaint volumes increased for all operators this quarter

Complaint volumes closed by train operator, January to March 2022 and change compared with the same quarter in the previous year (Table 4100)



3. Complaint rates

We did not publish complaint rates (complaints per 100,000 journeys) for the year April 2020 to 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 time period **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.

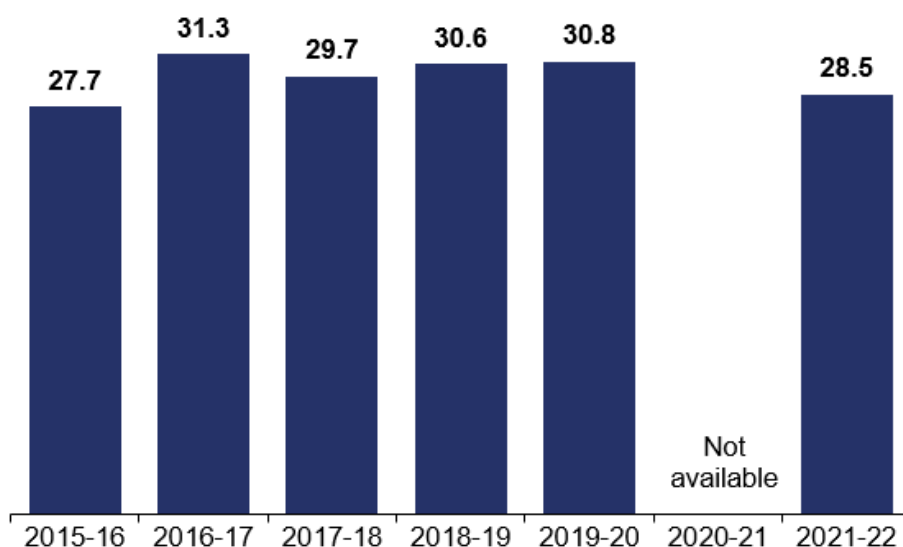
Lumo began running services on 25 October 2021, which is why annual data is not presented and no comparison is possible with previous years for that operator.

April 2021 to March 2022 annual

Overall, there were 28.5 complaints per 100,000 journeys in the latest year (April 2021 to March 2022), a decrease of 7.2% on the rate from two years ago and the lowest level since the year April 2015 to March 2016.

Figure 3.1 Complaint rates are at their lowest level for six years

Complaint rate per 100,000 journeys, Great Britain, annual data, April 2015 to March 2022 (Table 4110)

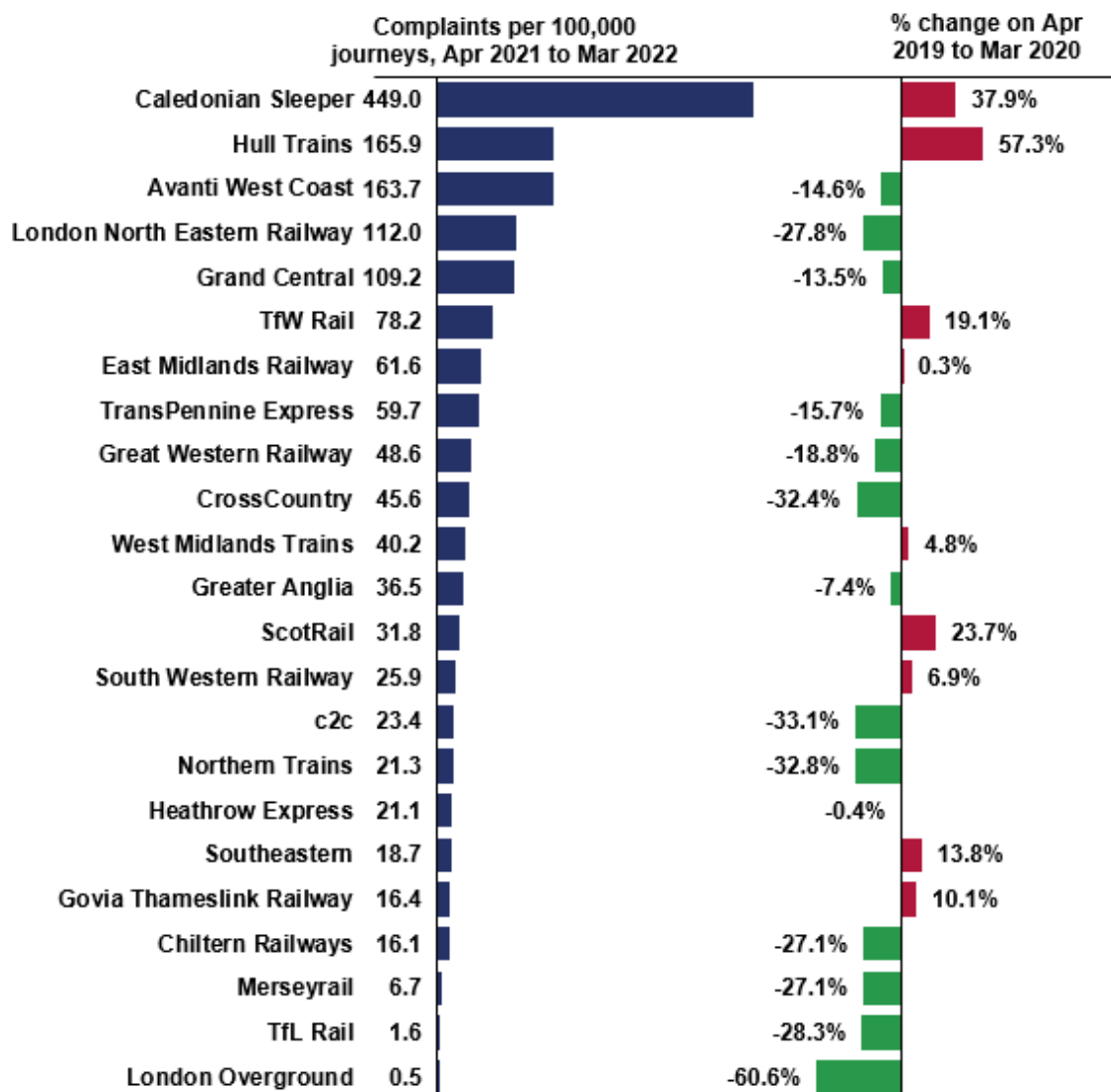


Data for individual train operators show that Caledonian Sleeper had the highest complaint rate (449.0 per 100,000 journeys).

Compared with two years ago, London Overground had the largest decrease (down 60.6%) and Hull Trains had the largest increase (up 57.3%).

Figure 3.2 Complaint rates were lower for 14 operators and higher for nine operators compared with two years ago

Complaint rates by train operator, April 2021 to March 2022 and change compared with two years ago (Table 4113)



January to March 2022 quarter

Overall, there were 29.3 complaints per 100,000 journeys in the latest quarter (1 January to 31 March 2022), a decrease of 21.0% on the rate from the same quarter two years ago.

Figure 3.3 Complaint rates decreased in the latest quarter

Complaint rates, Great Britain, quarterly data, April 2015 to March 2022 (Table 4110)

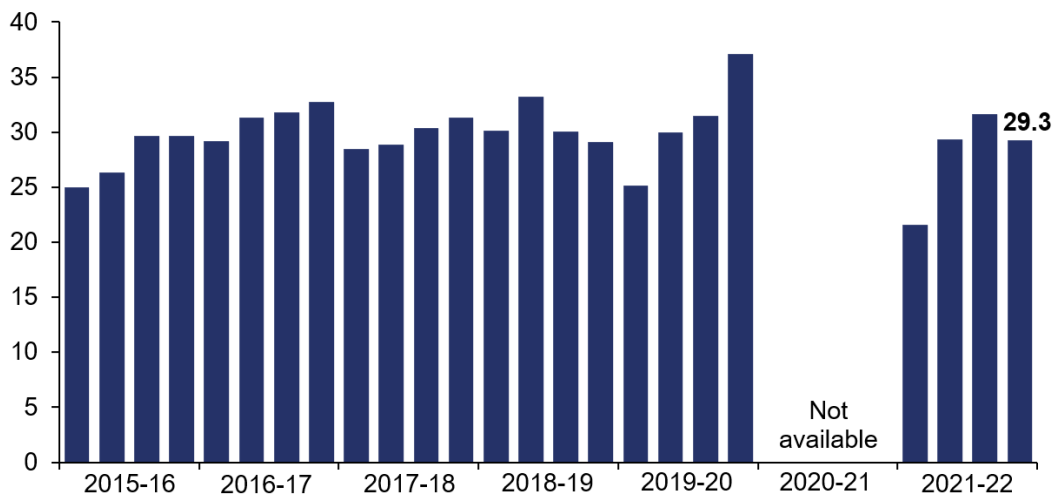
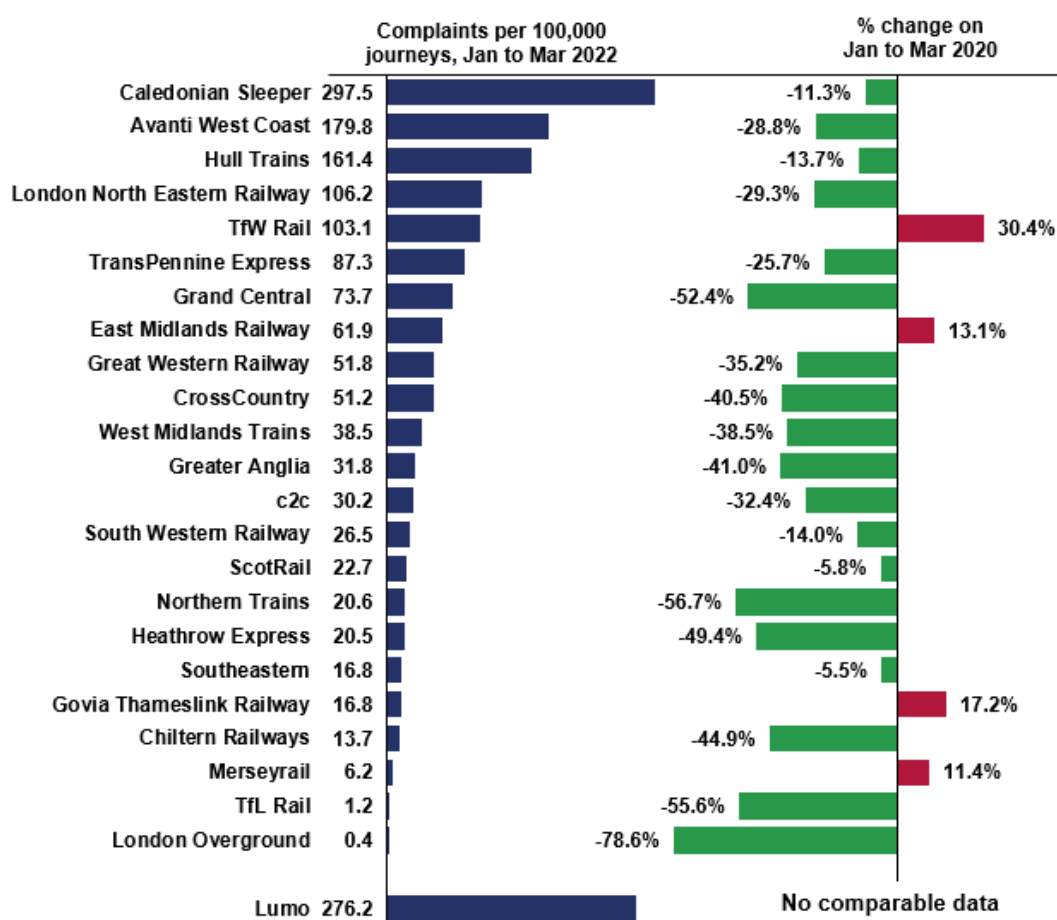


Figure 3.4 Complaint rates were lower for most operators

Complaint rates by train operator, January to March 2022 and change compared with the same quarter two years ago (Table 4113)



4. Complaints by category

April 2021 to March 2022 annual

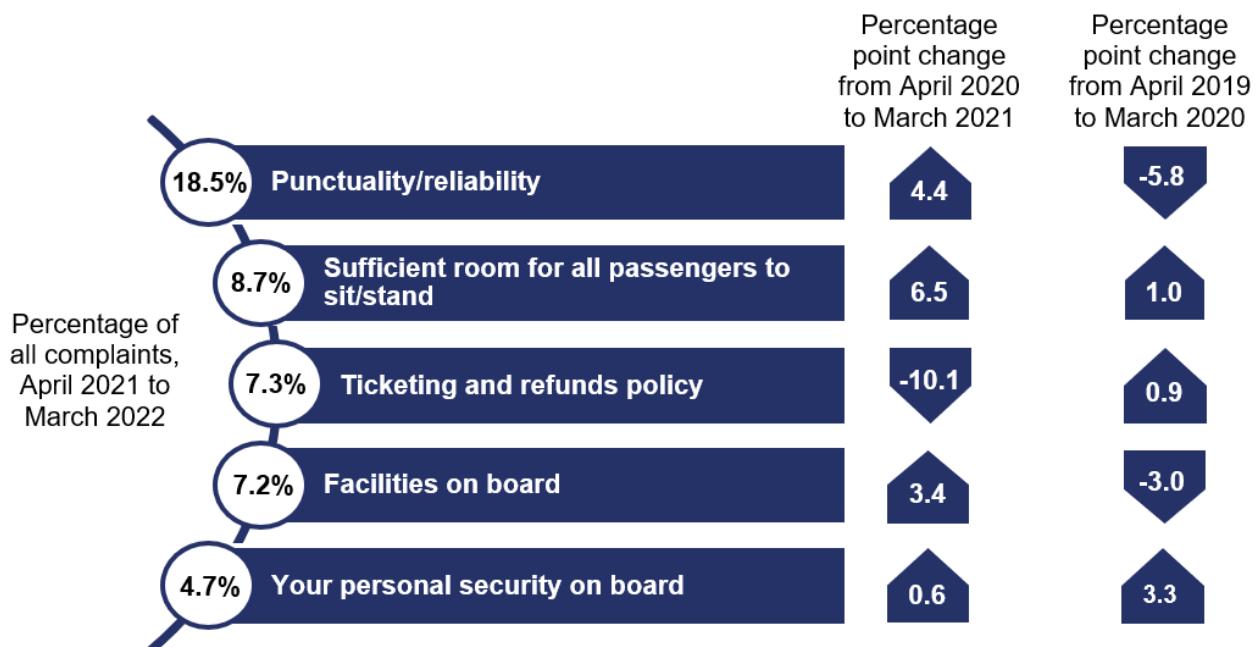
Punctuality/reliability was the most common cause to complain to train operators in the latest year (1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022), accounting for 18.5% of all complaints closed (up 4.4 percentage points (pp) compared with the previous year). Punctuality/reliability has historically been the most common cause to complain to train operators, although in the previous year it had been overtaken by complaints regarding ticketing and refunds policy due to passengers applying for refunds following the reduction in travel caused by the pandemic.

Complaints about sufficient room for all passengers to sit and stand was the second most common cause of complaint, with 8.7% of all complaints (up 6.5pp compared with the previous year).

The third most common cause of complaint in the latest year was regarding ticketing and refunds policy, accounting for 7.3% of all complaints made (down 10.1pp compared with the previous year).













Figure 4.1 Punctuality/reliability was the top complaint category in the latest year

Top five complaint categories by percentage, Great Britain, April 2021 to March 2022 and change compared with the two previous years (Table 4130)



Largest changes in complaint categories

Table 4.2 Top three increases and decreases in complaint categories in the latest year (April 2021 to March 2022) compared with the previous year (Table 4130)

Top 3 Increases		Percentage of all complaints, April 2021 to March 2022	Percentage point change from April 2020 to March 2021
	Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand	8.7%	 6.5
	Punctuality/reliability	18.5%	 4.4
	Facilities on board	7.2%	 3.4
Top 3 Decreases		Percentage of all complaints, April 2021 to March 2022	Percentage point change from April 2020 to March 2021
	Ticketing and refunds policy	7.3%	 -10.1
	Other ticket buying facilities (online ticket sales)	4.3%	 -3.7
	Complaints not fully addressed/fulfilled by train operator	0.6%	 -1.1

January to March 2022 quarter

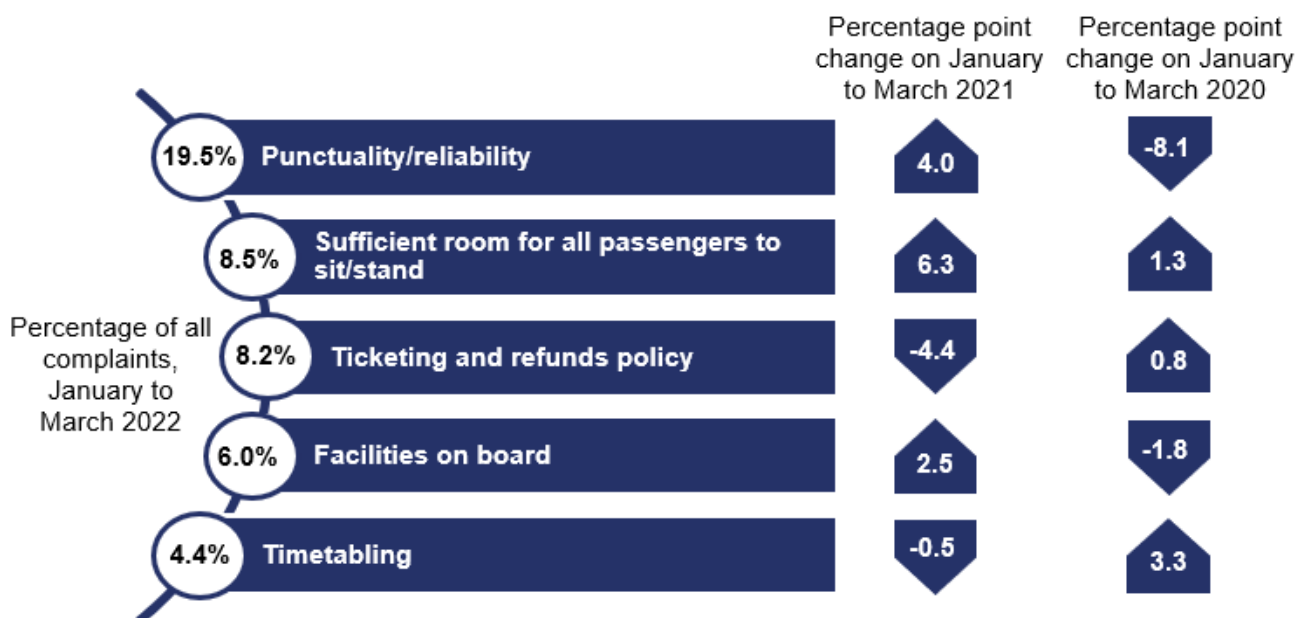
Punctuality/reliability was the most common cause to complain to train operators in the latest quarter (1 January to 31 March 2022), accounting for 19.5% of all complaints. This was 4.0pp higher than the same quarter in the previous year, but 8.1pp lower than two years ago.

Complaints about sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand was the second most common cause of complaint, with 8.5% of all complaints (up 6.3pp compared with the same quarter last year).

The third most common cause of complaint in the latest quarter was regarding ticketing and refunds policy, accounting for 8.2% of all complaints (down 4.4pp compared with the same quarter in the previous year).

Figure 4.3 Punctuality/reliability was the top complaint category in the latest quarter

Top five complaint categories by percentage, Great Britain, January to March 2022 and change compared with the two previous years (Table 4130)



5. Complaints responded to within 20 working days

April 2021 to March 2022 annual

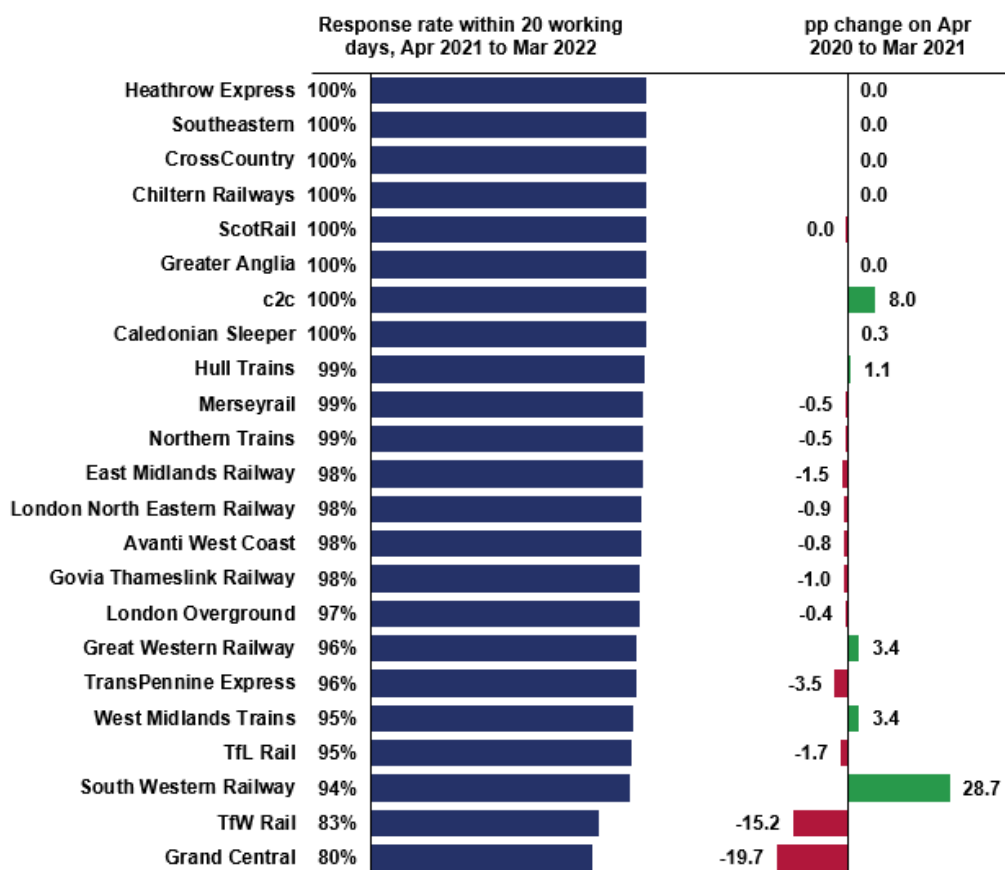
Overall, 96.9% of complaints met the industry requirement to make a full response within 20 working days in the latest year (1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022). This is an increase of 2.7pp compared with the previous year and the highest annual level since the time series began in the year April 2015 to March 2016.

Grand Central had the biggest decrease in response rate in the latest year, down 19.7pp compared with the previous year, to 80%. South Western Railway saw the greatest increase (up 28.7pp), to reach 94%. This reflects South Western Railway's low response rate in the previous year when the company received a large volume of refund requests that affected its ability to make a full response to complaints within 20 working days.

Lumo began running services on 25 October 2021, which is why annual data is not presented and no comparison is possible with previous years for that operator.

Figure 5.1 20 out of 23 train operators responded to 95% of complaints within 20 working days

Percentage of complaints responded to within 20 working days by train operator, April 2021 to March 2022 and change compared with the previous year (Table 4153)



January to March 2022 quarter

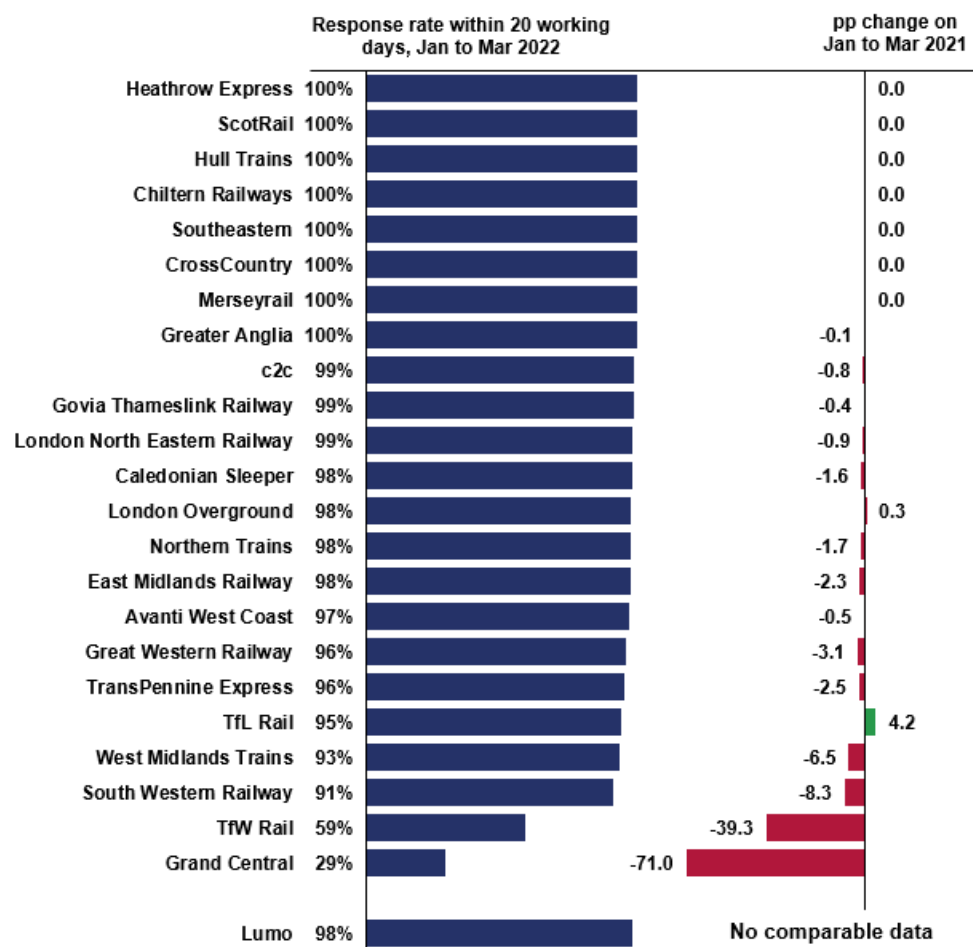
Overall, 94.6% of complaints were responded to within 20 working days in the latest quarter (1 January to 31 March 2022). This represents a decrease of 4.8pp compared with the same quarter in the previous year. Response rates declined for the majority of operators, which reflects the high response rates during the same quarter a year ago (January to March 2021) when pandemic restrictions meant lower passenger numbers and lower complaint volumes.

20 out of 24 train operators met the industry requirement to respond to 95% of complaints within 20 working days in the latest quarter. Eight operators recorded a response rate of 100%.

TfL Rail saw the greatest increase in response rate (up 4.2pp) from the previous year, with London Overground (up 0.3pp) also recording an increase. The largest decreases and lowest response rates were for Grand Central (29%, down 71.0pp) and TfW Rail (59%, down 39.3pp).

Figure 5.2 20 out of 24 train operators responded to 95% of complaints within 20 working days in the latest quarter

Percentage of complaints responded to within 20 working days by train operator, January to March 2022 and change compared with the same quarter in the previous year (Table 4153)



6. Complaints by contact method

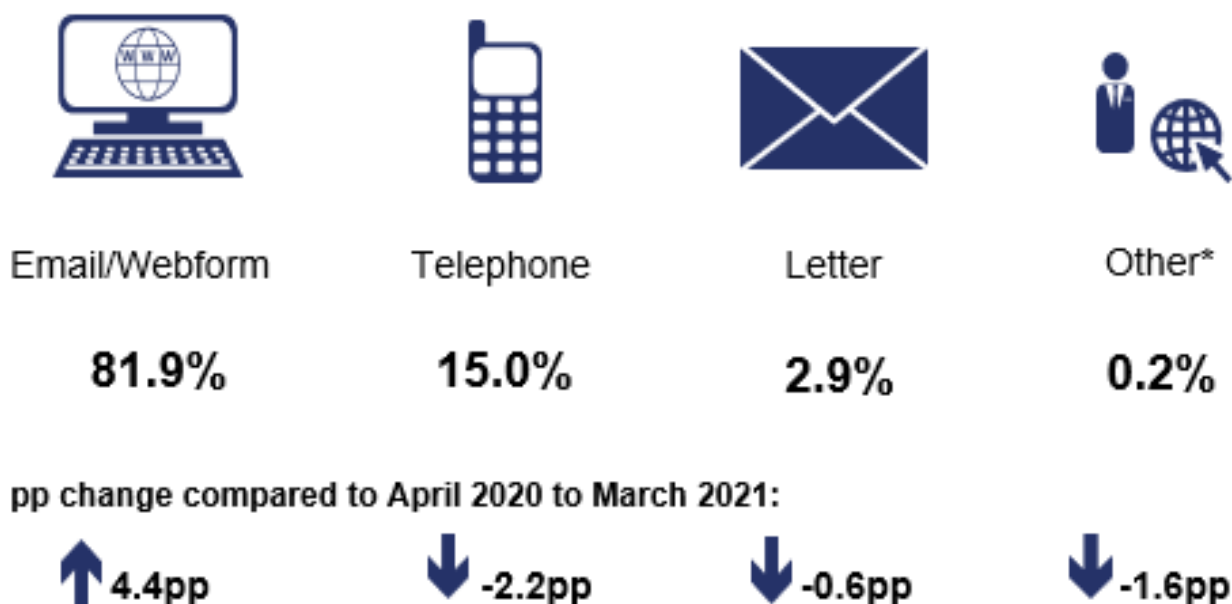
April 2021 to March 2022 annual

Overall, 81.9% of complaints were made by email or by using a webform in the latest year (1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022), an increase of 4.4pp compared with the previous year. In the five years since April 2016 to March 2017, correspondence using e-mail/webform has increased by 13.5pp, from 68.4%.

Correspondence using letters fell from 13.3% in the year April 2016 to March 2017 to 2.9% in the latest year. Over the same period, correspondence using telephones decreased from 17.5% to 15.0%.

Figure 6.1 The percentage of complaints made by email/webform increased

Percentage of complaints by contact method, Great Britain, April 2021 to March 2022 and change compared with previous year (Table 4143)



Note: Other includes 'meet the manager' sessions and online forums

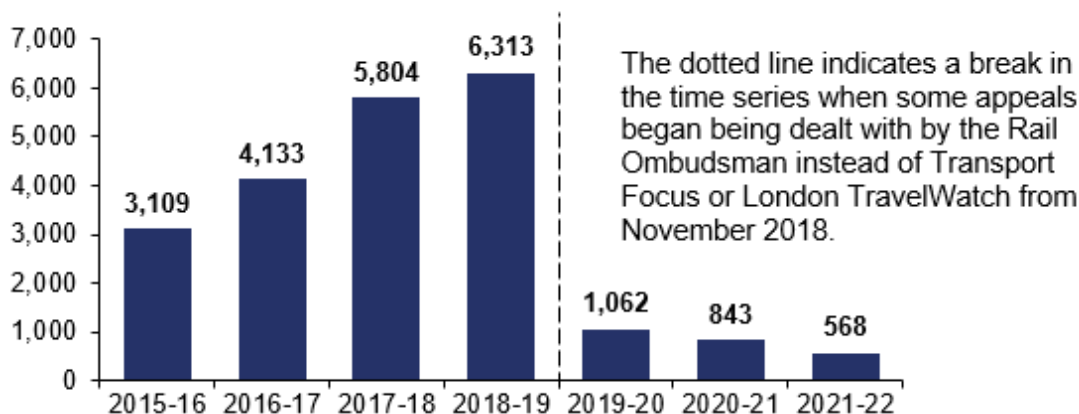
7. Appeals

April 2021 to March 2022 annual

Passenger watchdogs (Transport Focus and London TravelWatch) closed 568 appeals in the latest year (1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022). This represents a decrease of 32.6% compared with the previous year.

Figure 7.1 Appeals decreased in the latest year

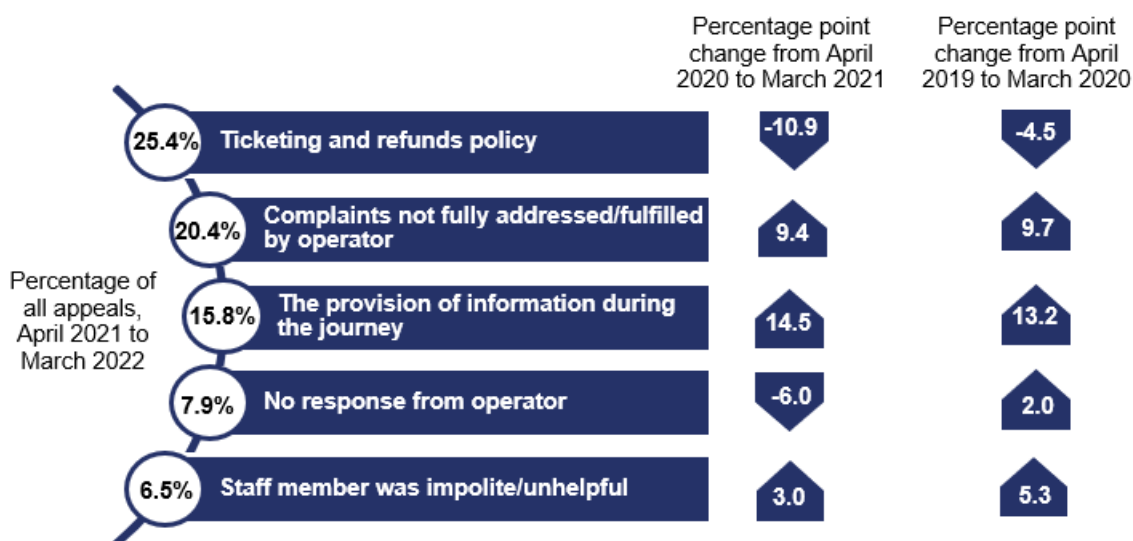
Appeals closed by passenger watchdogs, Great Britain, annual data, April 2015 to March 2022 (Table 4163)



Ticketing and refunds policy was the most appealed about complaint category, accounting for 25.4% of all appeals closed in the latest year (down 10.9pp compared with the previous year). Appeals about ticketing and refunds policy are out of scope for the Rail Ombudsman so are dealt with by Transport Focus or London TravelWatch.

Figure 7.2 Ticketing and refunds policy is the most common category for appeals

Top five appeal categories, Great Britain, April 2021 to March 2022 (Table 4160) and change compared with the two previous years



8. National Rail Enquiries telephone service

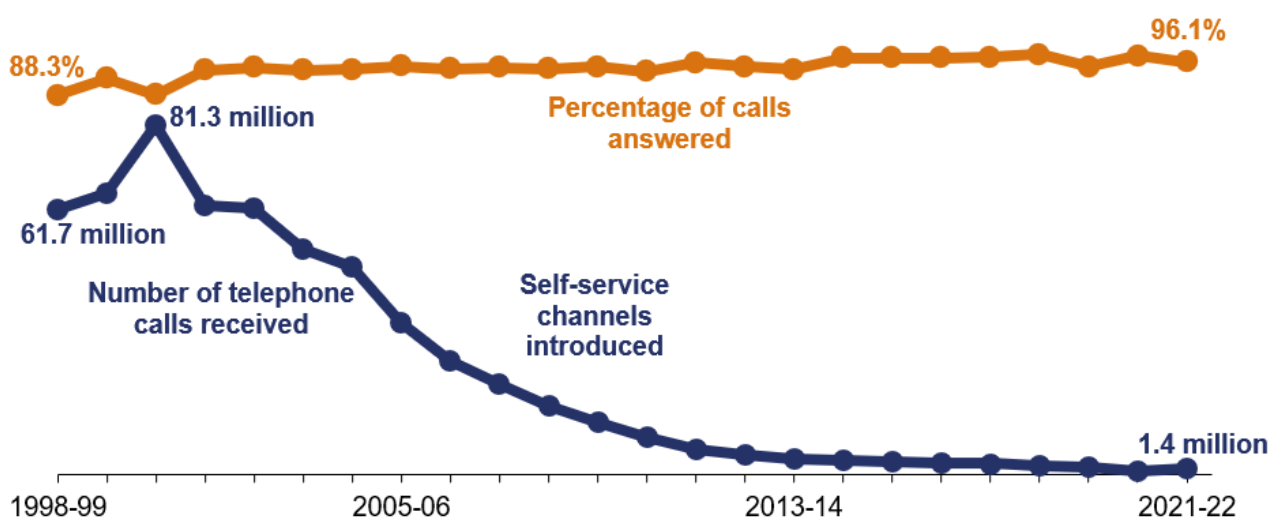
April 2021 to March 2022 annual

There were 1.4 million calls made to the National Rail Enquiries (NRE) telephone service in the latest year (1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022), an increase of 83.4% compared with the previous year. Of those calls made during the latest year, 96.1% were answered and 3.9% were abandoned. This is 1.3pp lower than the percentage of calls answered in the previous year (97.4%).

Since April 2000, there has been a long-term decline in the number of calls to the NRE telephone service. This decline has been due to the increased availability of other information sources such as on websites or by mobile app.

Figure 8.1 The number of calls to the NRE telephone service continues to decrease

Number of calls made to the National Rail Enquiries telephone service and percentage of calls answered, Great Britain, April 1998 to March 2022 (Table 4180)



9. 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 is available on the [Data Portal](#) in Table 4130. This data is 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.

Passenger rail service complaints January to March 2022

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

Data for Northern Trains data has been revised for Oct to Dec 2021 and data for TfW Rail has been revised from Apr to Dec 2021. This was due to changes in both company's reporting systems that resulted in incorrect data being reported earlier this year. Figures for franchised operators and Great Britain have been revised to reflect this. 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 April 2020 to March 2021 (due to the pandemic's effect on [rail usage](#))

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
- 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 and data table 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.



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