

Passenger rail service complaints October to December 2022

6 April 2023

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** within 20 working days.

Sources: Train operators, Transport Focus, London TravelWatch, and RDG.

Latest quarter: 1 October to 31 December 2022

Contents:

Complaint volumes – p2
Complaint rates – p3
Complaints by category – p5
Complaints responded to within 20 working days – p7
Annexes – p8

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There were **97,254 complaints closed** by train operators in the latest quarter (1 October to 31 December 2022), an increase of 8% from the same quarter in the previous year and represents a rate of **26.4 complaints per 100,000 journeys**.

The increase in complaint volumes reflects [increased passenger journeys](#), which were up by 29% compared with the same quarter in the previous year. There was a [deterioration in train punctuality and reliability](#) and subsequently an increase in complaints. However, overall volumes remain lower than before the pandemic.

Figure 1 Punctuality and reliability was the most complained about category

Top complaint categories by percentage, Great Britain, October to December 2022 and change compared with October to December 2021 (Table 4130)

Type of complaint	% of all complaints	pp change on Oct to Dec 2021
 Punctuality/reliability	18.6%	-2.1
 Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand	12.1%	2.2
 Ticketing and refunds policy	9.2%	2.4
 Facilities on board	8.1%	0.2
 Delay compensation claim rejected	5.0%	1.6

Overall, **92.9% of complaints were closed within 20 working days** in the latest quarter. Twenty 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

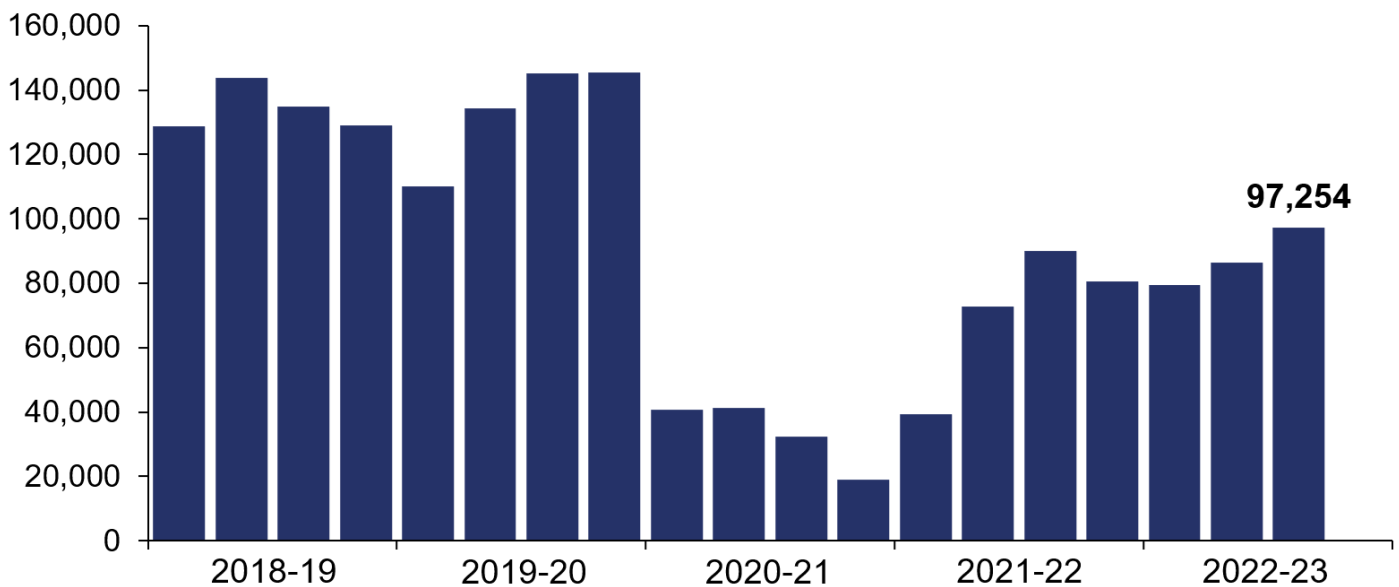
There were 97,254 complaints closed by train operators between 1 October and 31 December 2022. This is an increase of 8% from the same quarter in the previous year, but 33% lower compared with the same quarter in 2019, before the pandemic.

The most complaints closed in a single quarter was 145,442, between 1 January and 31 March 2020.

Complaint volumes by individual train operator are published in Table 4100 on the [data portal](#).

Figure 1.1 Complaint volumes have increased for two quarters in a row

Complaint volumes closed, Great Britain, quarterly data, April 2018 to December 2022 (Table 4100)



2. Complaint rates

Overall, there were 26.4 complaints per 100,000 journeys between 1 October and 31 December 2022, which is lower than the same quarter in the previous year (31.6 complaints per 100,000 journeys).

Comparisons with the previous year for individual train operators should be treated with caution. This is because complaint volumes and passenger usage substantially increased from a low level as pandemic restrictions were eased in 2021. The rates of increase have varied by operator and resulted in some large fluctuations.

For example, the largest increase in complaint rate is for Heathrow Express (up 55% compared with the previous year). This operator reported a 160% increase in complaint volumes and a 68% increase in passenger journeys over this time period.

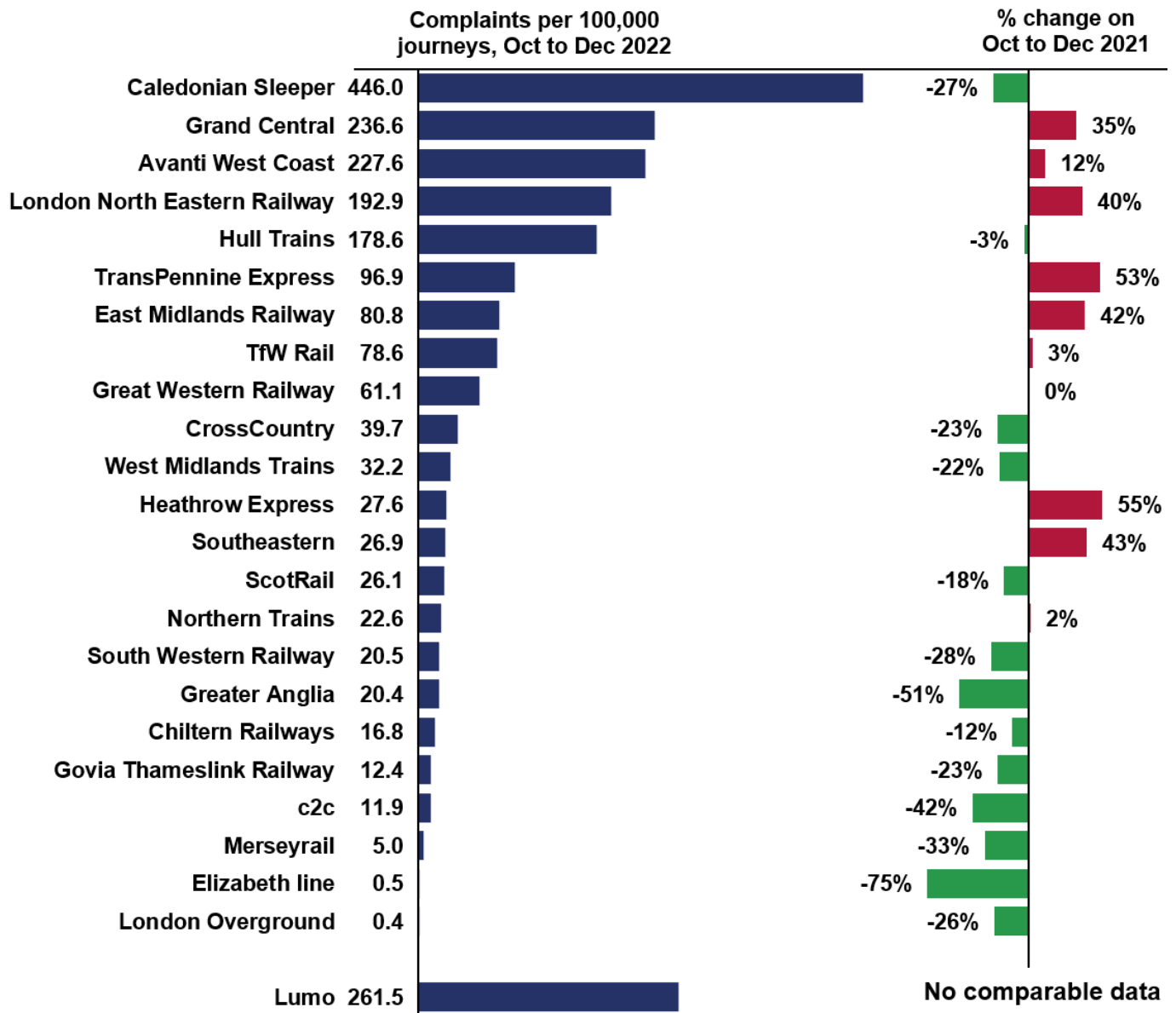
The largest decrease in complaint rate is for the Elizabeth line (down 75% compared with the previous year). This operator reported a 44% increase in complaint volumes. However, the increase in passenger journeys (480%) over this time period was much larger with trains now running on the central section of the line. This led to the large decrease in complaint rate.

Strike action affected large parts of the network during the quarter. This included strike action by the RMT union on 1 and 8 October, 13, 14, 16, 17, 24 and 27 December. Strike action by the RMT union for 5 and 7 November was postponed too late to fully change the planned reduced timetable. There was strike action at some operators by the ASLEF union on 1 and 5 October and also on 26 November. In response a reduced timetable was put in place on the strike days and for some of the days after.

Lumo began running services on 25 October 2021, which is why no comparison to the previous year is possible for that operator. In the latest quarter, Lumo recorded the second highest complaint rate per 100,000 journeys (261.5), after Caledonian Sleeper (446.0).

Figure 2.1 Complaint rates were higher for 10 operators and lower for 13 operators compared with the previous year

Complaint rates by train operator, October to December 2022 and change compared with October to December 2021 (Table 4113)



3. Complaints by category

Punctuality and reliability was the most common cause to complain to train operators between 1 October and 31 December 2022, accounting for 18.6% of all complaints. This was 2.1 percentage points (pp) lower than the same quarter in the previous year.

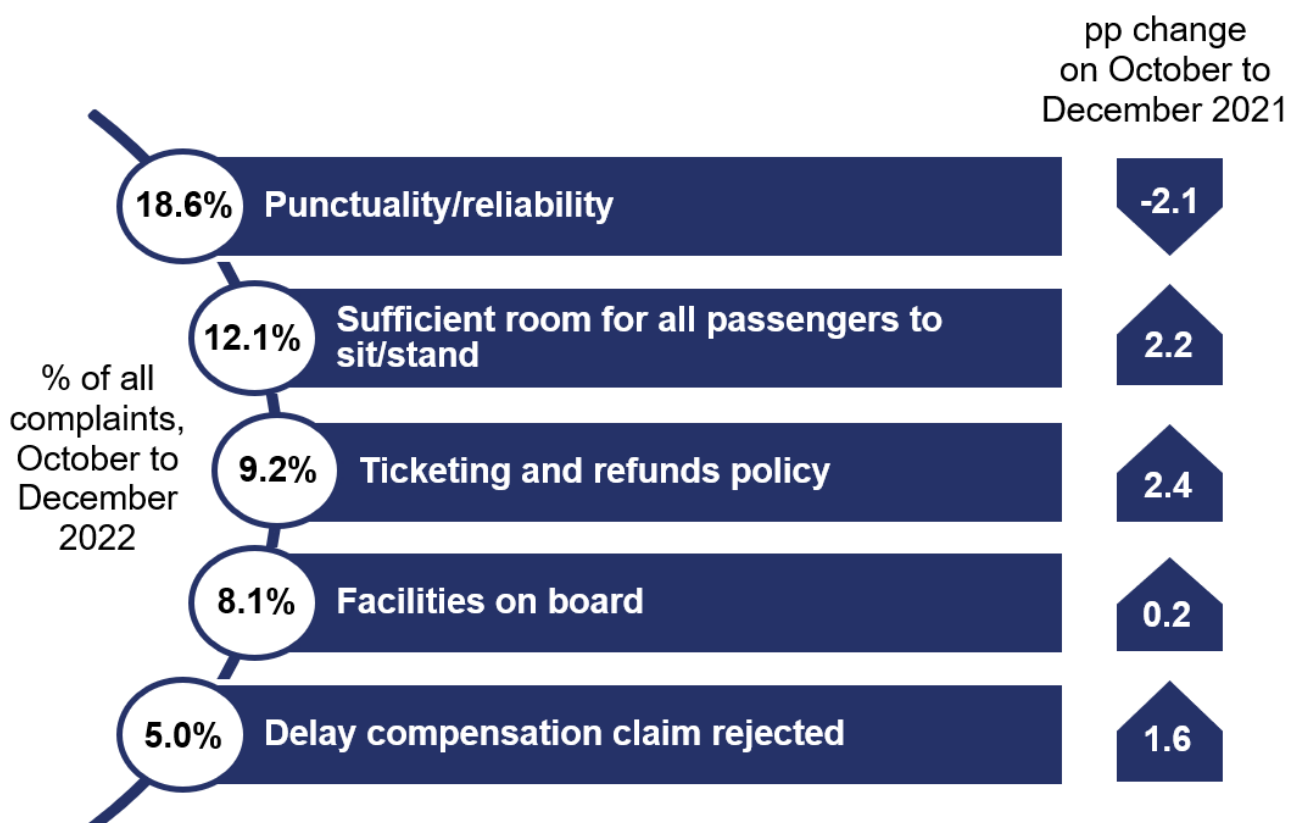
Complaints about sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand was the second most common cause of complaint, with 12.1% of all complaints (up 2.2pp compared with the same quarter in the previous year).

The third most common cause of complaint in the latest quarter was regarding the ticketing and refund policies of train operators, accounting for 9.2% of all complaints (up 2.4pp compared with the same quarter in the previous year).

Complaint categories by individual train operator are published in Table 4133 on the [data portal](#).













Figure 3.1 Punctuality and reliability was the most common cause of complaint

Top five complaint categories by percentage, Great Britain, October to December 2022 and change compared with October to December 2021 (Table 4130)



Largest changes in complaint categories

Table 3.2 Top three increases and decreases in complaint categories in October to December 2022 compared with October to December 2021 (Table 4130)

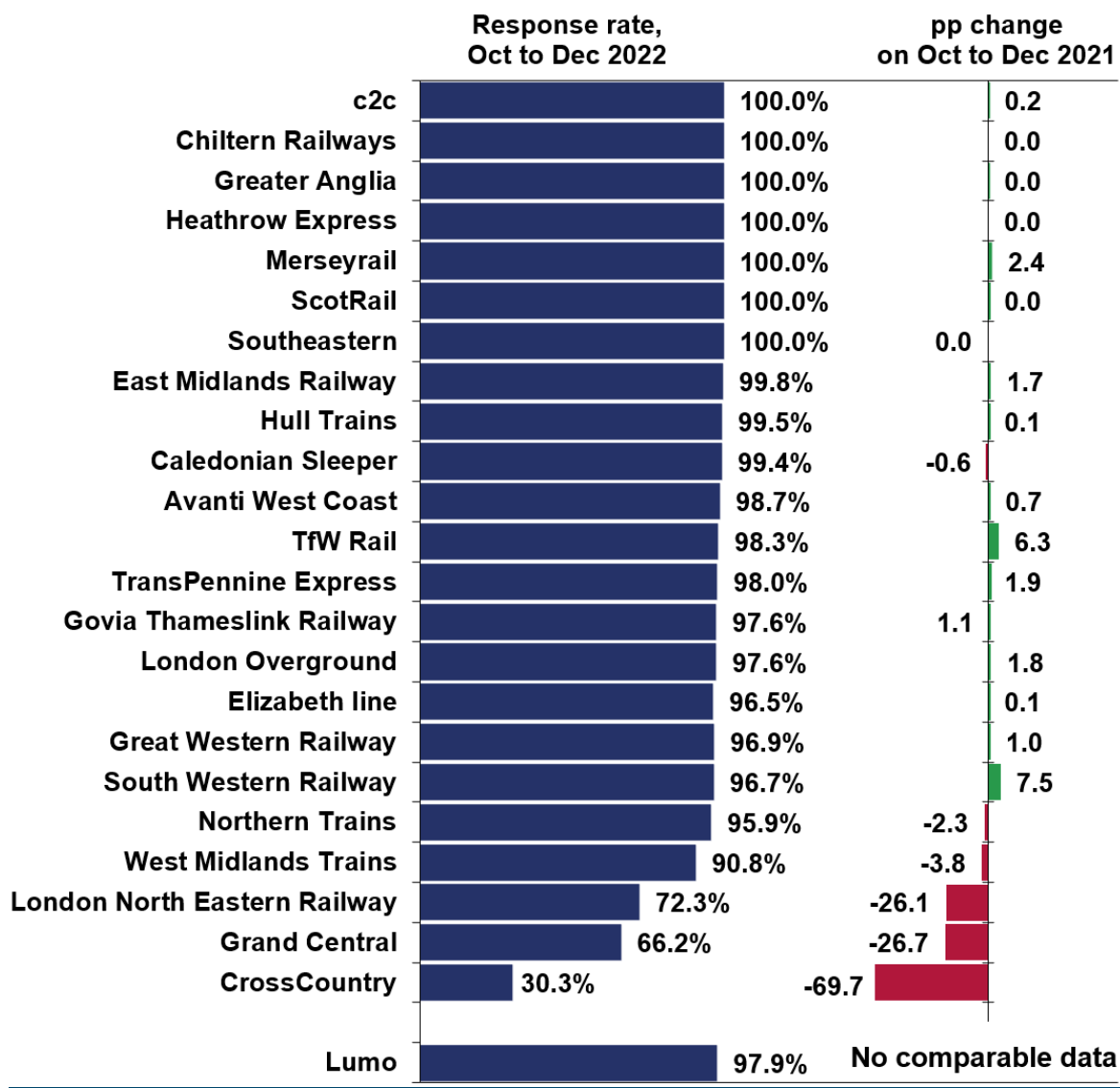
Top 3 Increases		% of all complaints October to December 2022	pp change on October to December 2021
	Ticketing and refunds policy	9.2%	 2.4
	Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand	12.1%	 2.2
	Delay compensation claim rejected	4.5%	 1.7
Top 3 Decreases		% of all complaints October to December 2022	pp change on October to December 2021
	Punctuality/reliability	18.6%	 -2.1
	Your personal security on board	2.2%	 -2.1
	Other ticket buying facilities (online ticket sales)	2.9%	 -1.1

4. Complaints responded to within 20 working days

Overall, 92.9% of complaints closed were responded to within 20 working days between 1 October to 31 December 2022. This represents a decrease of 3.8pp compared with the same quarter in the previous year. Response rates were either steady or declined for most train operators, which reflects the high response rates during the pandemic, when restrictions meant lower passenger numbers and complaint volumes. CrossCountry (down 69.7pp), Grand Central (down 26.7pp) and London North Eastern Railway (down 26.1pp) saw large decreases in response rates compared with the previous year.

Figure 4.1 Four operators did not meet the response time requirement

Percentage of complaints responded to within 20 working days by train operator, October to December 2022 and change compared with October to December 2021 (Table 4153)



Passenger rail service complaints October to December 2022

5. 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 operator's response, they can appeal against the operator's decisions to the Rail Ombudsman. For information on the [Rail Ombudsman](#), please see the [quality and methodology report](#). If the complaint is out of scope for the Rail Ombudsman, the customer may be signposted on to another body such as the passenger watchdogs (Transport Focus or London TravelWatch). ORR publishes the volume of appeals closed by Transport Focus and London TravelWatch by category (Table 4160) and by operator (Table 4163).

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 73 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 continues to be provided in Table 4100.

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.

Recent changes to train operators

Lumo is a new open access operator which began running services on 25 October 2021 between end stations London King's Cross and Edinburgh Waverley on the East Coast Main Line.

On 1 April 2022 the ScotRail franchise transferred to the publicly owned ScotRail Trains Limited company.

On 24 May 2022 the Elizabeth line opened to passengers. Also, on this date the service running under TfL Rail were rebranded as the Elizabeth line.

Revisions

- The quarterly data for July to September 2022 have been revised due to East Midlands Railway correcting a small error in the data previously supplied to ORR.
- All figures from April 2007 to March 2016 have been revised, due to the removal of the praise data from the tables. The percentage figures shown in this period have

been adjusted to take account of the new totals excluding praise.

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

The National Rail Passenger Survey ([NRPS](#)) provides a network-wide picture of passengers' satisfaction with rail travel. Before the 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 October 2020. Due to the pandemic and a significant drop in the numbers of people using public transport, NRPS has been paused.

Transport Focus run a [Rail User Survey](#) asking passenger about their experiences of travelling by rail and how satisfied they were with their most recent train journey.

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 five annual publications: **Common Safety Indicators; Passenger satisfaction with complaints handling; Train operating company key statistics; Occupational health; Rail statistics compendium;** 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 October 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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