

Passenger rail service complaints

July to September 2023






11 January 2024

There were **87,195 complaints closed** by train operators in the latest quarter (1 July to 30 September 2023), an increase of 1% from the same quarter in the previous year and represents a rate of **22 complaints per 100,000 journeys**.

The increase in complaint volumes reflects [increased passenger journeys](#), which were up 14% compared with the same quarter in the previous year. Overall complaint volumes remain lower than before the pandemic.

Figure 1 Punctuality and reliability was the most common cause of complaint

Top five complaint categories by percentage, Great Britain, July to September 2023 (Table 4130)

Type of complaint	% of all complaints
 Punctuality/reliability	16%
 Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand	14%
 Ticketing and refunds policy	8%
 Facilities on board	7%
 Ticket buying facilities - online	5%

Overall, **91.6% 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. Note that from 1 April 2023, operators are no longer permitted to “stop the clock” when calculating response times. Further details on this change can be found in Annex 2.

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.

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 July to 30 September 2023

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Next publication:

4 April 2024

1. Complaint volumes closed

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.

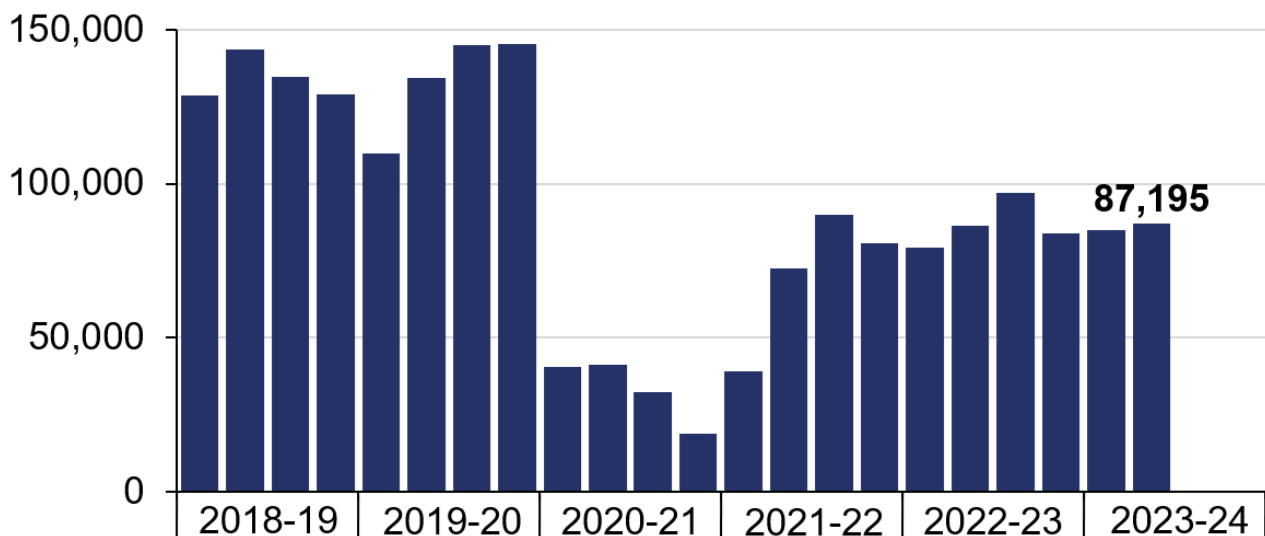
There were 87,195 complaints closed by train operators in the latest quarter (1 July to 30 September 2023). This is an increase of 1% compared with the same quarter in the previous year.

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 in the latest quarter

Complaint volumes closed, Great Britain, quarterly data, April 2018 to September 2023 (Table 4100)

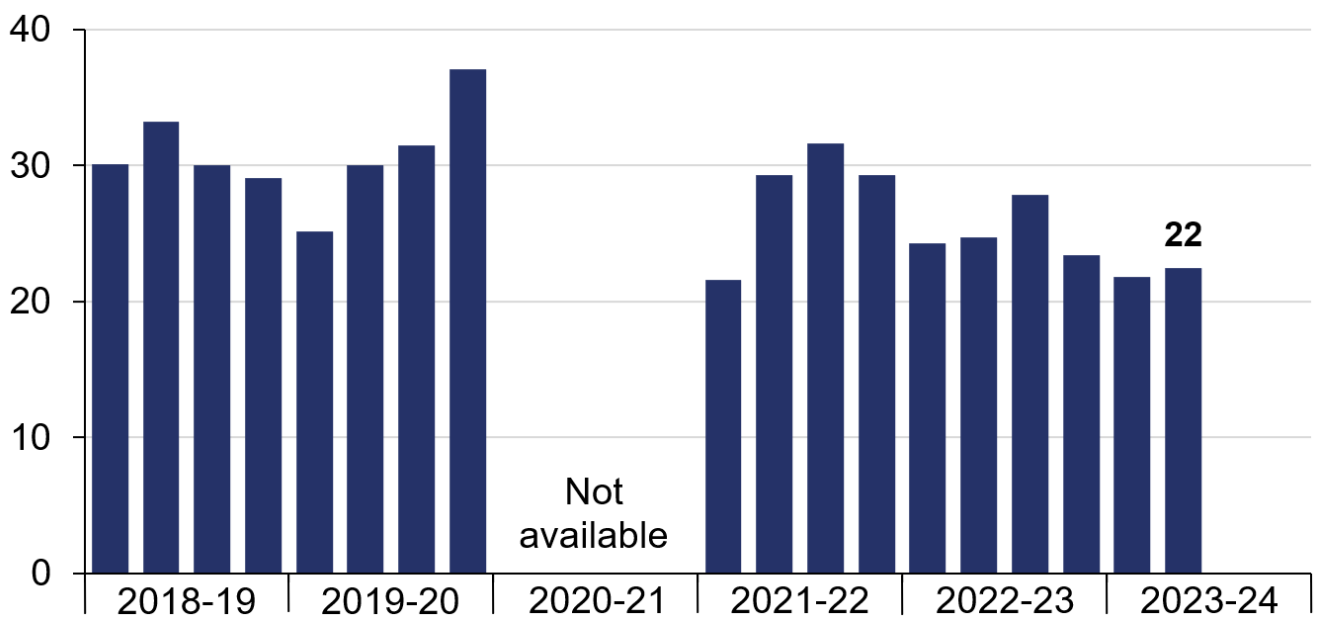


2. Complaint rates

Overall, there were 22 complaints per 100,000 journeys between 1 July and 30 September 2023, which is 9% lower than the same quarter in the previous year (25 complaints per 100,000 journeys).

Figure 2.1 The complaint rate increased in the latest quarter

Complaint rates, Great Britain, quarterly data, April 2018 to September 2023 (Table 4110)



Eight operators recorded an increase in their complaints rate compared with the same quarter in the previous year, with CrossCountry (49 complaints per 100,000 journeys, up 102%) seeing their complaints rate more than double. Grand Central (148 complaints per 100,000 journeys, up 30%) also saw a large increase in their complaints rate.

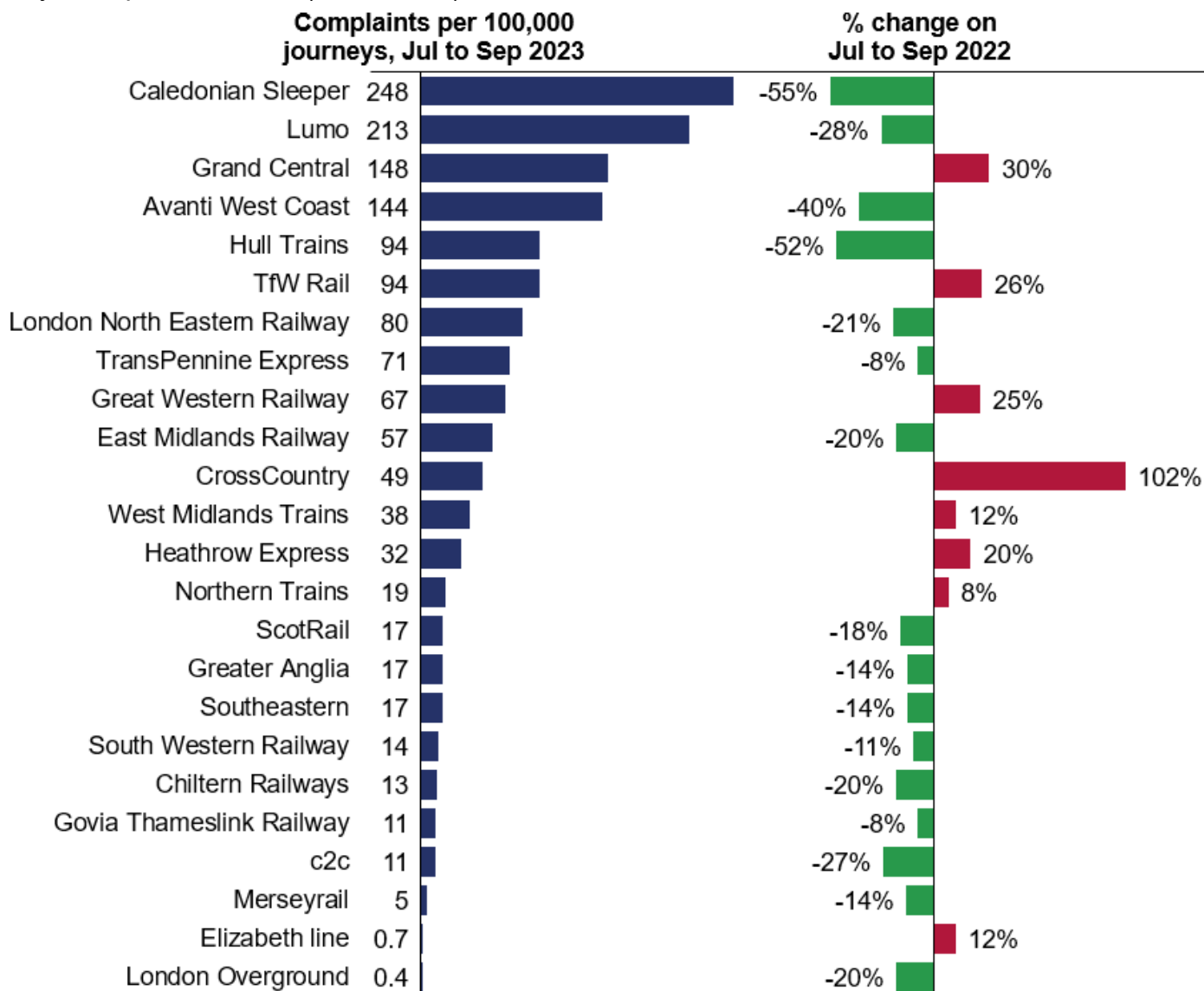
Sixteen operators recorded a decrease in their complaints rate compared with the same quarter in the previous year. Although Caledonian Sleeper (248 complaints per 100,000 journeys, down 55%) recorded the highest complaints rate, they also recorded the greatest percentage decrease. Hull Trains (94 complaints per 100,000 journeys, down 52%) also saw their complaints rate decrease by more than half.

In the latest quarter, seven strike action days took place (20, 22, and 29 July, 26 August, and 1, 2 and 30 September). Five of these (20, 22 and 29 July, 26 August, and 2 September) were linked to action by the RMT union, with the remaining two (1 and 30 September) linked to action by the ASLEF union. The strike action dates and estimates of the reduction in trains planned on each of the strikes days are shown in the [Passenger rail performance](#) statistical release.

Caution should be taken when comparing Elizabeth line complaints to previous years due to the substantial increase in usage when the central section of the line opened in May 2022. For example, there was a 58% increase in passenger journeys in the latest quarter (July to September 2023) compared with the same quarter the previous year.

Figure 2.2 Complaint rates were lower for 16 operators compared with the previous year

Complaint rates by train operator, July to September 2023 and change compared with July to September 2022 (Table 4113)



3. Complaints by category

Punctuality and reliability was the most common cause to complain to train operators in the latest quarter (1 July to 30 September 2023), accounting for 15.7% of all complaints. This was 1.9 percentage points (pp) lower than the same quarter in the previous year.

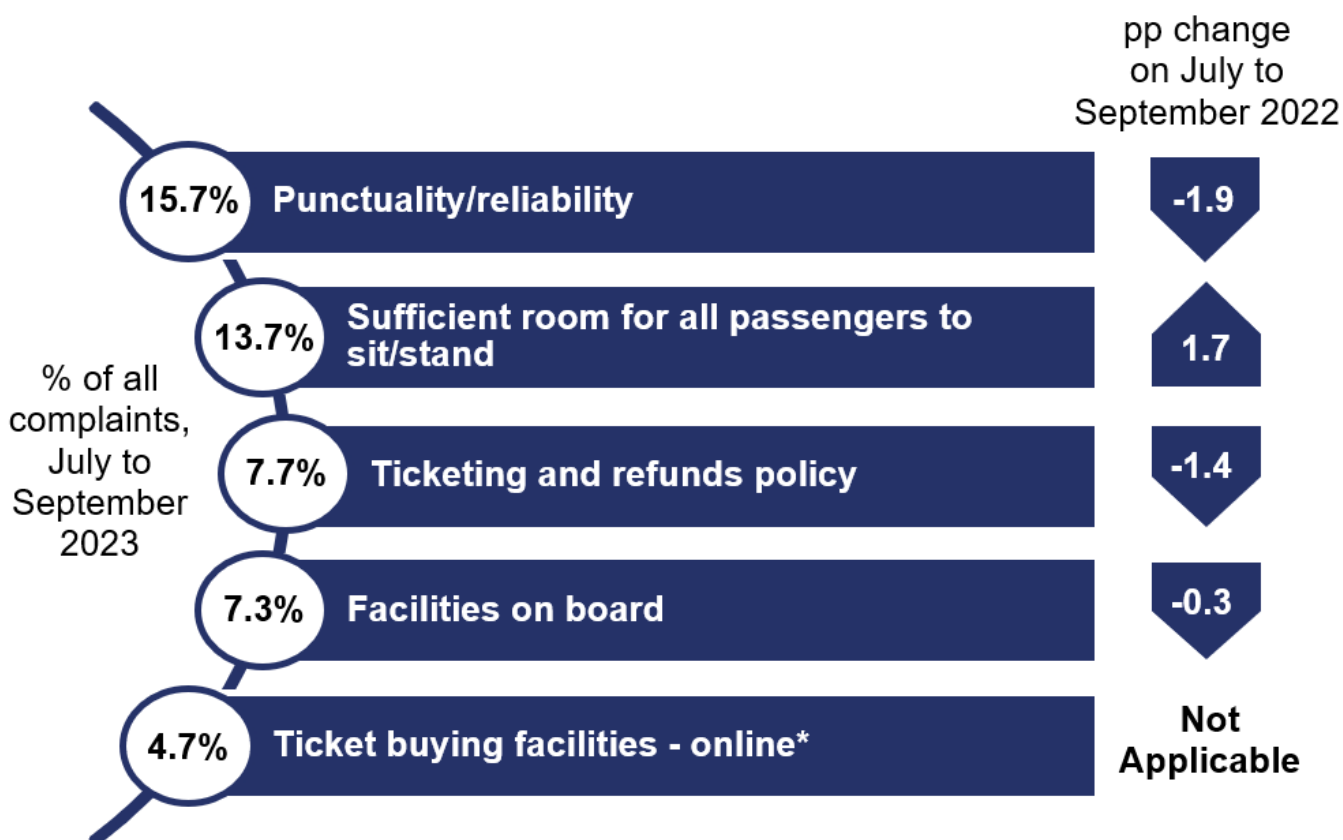
Complaints about sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand was the second most common cause of complaint, with 13.7% of all complaints (up 1.7pp compared with the same quarter in the previous year).

The third most common cause of complaint in the latest quarter was regarding the ticketing and refund policies of train operators, accounting for 7.7% of all complaints (down 1.4pp 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, July to September 2023 and change compared with July to September 2022 (Table 4130)



* Category was introduced on 1 April 2023.

Largest changes in complaint categories

Table 3.2 Top three increases and decreases in complaint categories in July to September 2023 compared with July to September 2022 (Table 4130)

Top 3 Increases		Percentage of all complaints, July to September 2023	pp change on July to September 2022
	Your personal security on board	3.7%	 2.0
	Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand	13.7%	 1.7
	Smartcards	2.4%	 0.7
Top 3 Decreases		Percentage of all complaints, July to September 2023	pp change on July to September 2022
	Punctuality/reliability	15.7%	 -1.9
	Ticketing and refunds policy	7.7%	 -1.4
	Other – miscellaneous	0.7%	 -1.2

Note: The ticket buying facilities categories have not been included in Table 3.2 due to improvements in classifying these complaints which were introduced from 1 April 2023 and therefore the data are not comparable.

4. Complaints responded to within 20 working days

From 1 April 2023, operators are no longer permitted to “stop the clock” when calculating response times. However, some operators were unable to implement this change ahead of the deadline (see Annex 2 for details).

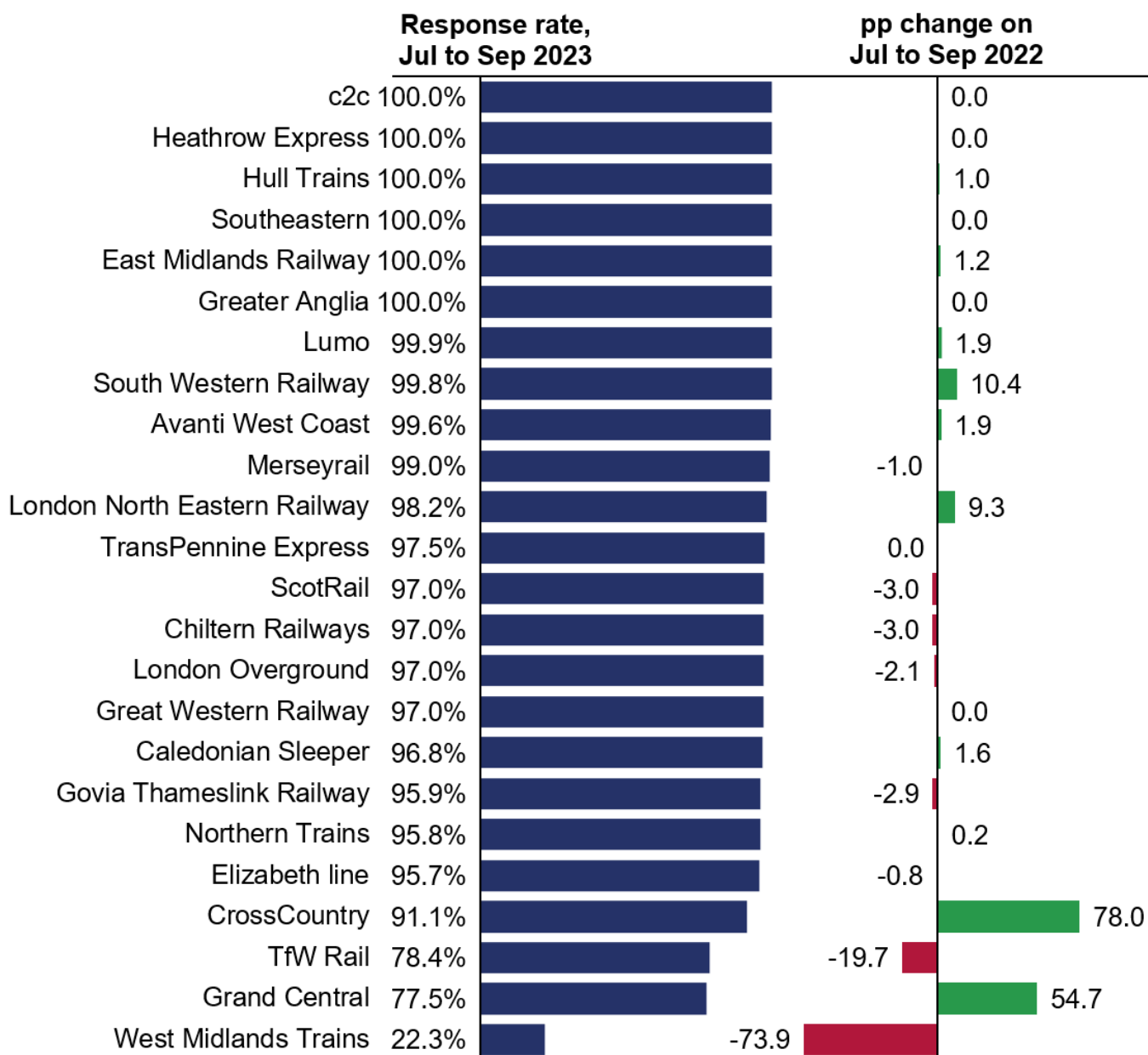
Overall, 91.6% of complaints closed were responded to within 20 working days in the latest quarter (1 July to 30 September 2023). This represents a decrease of 3.3pp compared with the same quarter in the previous year.

Twelve operators saw an increase in their response rates, with CrossCountry (91.1%, up 78.0pp) and Grand Central (77.5%, up 54.7pp) seeing the greatest increases in their response rates.

Nine operators recorded a decrease in their response rates, with West Midlands Trains (22.3%, down 73.9pp) seeing the largest decrease in response rate.

Figure 4.1 Four operators did not meet the response time requirement

Percentage of complaints responded to within 20 working days by train operator, July to September 2023 and change compared with July to September 2022 (Table 4153)



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 75 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 July 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. From July 2023, we have also collected data on the percentage of complaints responded to within 30 working days. The response times reported are based on the first full substantive response only.

Stop the clock

Prior to 1 April 2023, operators were able to “stop the clock” (STC) in the calculation of complaints handling response times. Where further information was required from the complainant, operators could pause the timer with it resuming when the information was received. As of 1 April 2023, operators are no longer permitted to use STC. For further information on the process in place, please see the [core data guidance](#) available on the [core complaints data page](#).

The removal of STC from train operator complaint systems has required technical changes to be applied. For some operators, it was not possible to make all the necessary changes by 1 April 2023. The table below provides details of the use of STC prior to 1 April 2023 and the date on which operators ceased using STC.

Operator	Did they use STC before 1 July 2023?	When did they stop using STC?
Avanti West Coast	Yes	1 April 2023
c2c	Yes	Still in use as of 30 September 2023
Caledonian Sleeper	Yes	1 April 2023
Chiltern Railways	Yes	1 April 2023
CrossCountry	Yes	1 April 2023
East Midlands Railway	No	Not applicable
Govia Thameslink Railway	Yes	28 May 2023
Grand Central	Yes	28 May 2023
Great Western Railway	Yes	1 April 2023
Greater Anglia	Yes	25 June 2023
Heathrow Express	Yes	1 April 2023
Hull Trains	Yes	1 April 2023
London North Eastern Railway	Yes	1 April 2023
London Overground	Yes	1 April 2023
Lumo	Yes	1 April 2023
Merseyrail	Yes	1 April 2023
Northern	Yes	30 April 2023
ScotRail	Yes	25 June 2023
South Western Railway	Yes	Still in use as of 30 September 2023
Southeastern	Yes	1 April 2023
Elizabeth line	Yes	1 April 2023
TfW Rail	Yes	Still in use as of 30 September 2023
TransPennine Express	Yes	1 April 2023
West Midlands Trains	Yes	28 May 2023

Southeastern

Before 1 April 2023, data for Southeastern included some responses to complaints that had already been closed. It is estimated that such responses account for less than 10% of the total number closed by Southeastern and less than 1% of the number closed nationally. From 1 April 2023 onwards, data for Southeastern are correctly limited to complaints closed.

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 or 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

On 28 May 2023, the government brought TransPennine Express under public control with the Operator of Last Resort.

On 25 June 2023, Caledonian Sleeper was moved to public ownership under the Scottish Government.

Further information on individual operators, including route maps, can be found via the [Rail Delivery Group](#) website.

Revisions

There have been no revisions to previously published data. Details of previous revisions can be found in the [revisions log](#).

How these statistics can be used



- Comparing complaint volumes over time
- Comparing complaint rates by train operators and over time
- Comparing the proportion of complaints responded to within 10, 20 and 30 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

How these statistics cannot be used



- 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 2023 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, 20 and 30 working days – Table 4150
- Complaints responded to within 10, 20 and 30 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

Our statistical practice is regulated by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR). OSR sets the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) that all producers of official statistics should adhere to. You are welcome to contact us directly with any comments about how we meet these standards by emailing rail.stats@orr.gov.uk. Alternatively, you can contact OSR by emailing regulation@statistics.gov.uk or via the OSR website.

Statistical Releases

This publication is part of ORR’s [‘accredited official statistics’](#), 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**.

ORR also publishes a number of other 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.

Accredited official statistics

Accredited official statistics are called National Statistics in the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007. They are official statistics that have been independently reviewed by the Office for Statistics Regulation and found to comply with the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the Code of Practice for Statistics.

The majority of our [statistical releases were independently reviewed by the OSR in September 2012](#). They comply with the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) and are labelled accredited official statistics.

Since our review we have improved the content, presentation and quality of our statistical releases. In addition, in April 2019 we launched our new data portal. Therefore, in late 2019 we worked with the OSR to conduct a compliance check to ensure we are still meeting the standards of the Code. On 4 November 2019, [OSR published a letter](#) confirming that ORR’s statistics should continue to be accredited official 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 [independently reviewed by OSR](#) in November 2020 and a [their accreditation was confirmed](#) on 1 December 2020.

For more information on how we adhere to the Code please see our [compliance statements](#).

If you have any feedback or questions please email rail.stats@orr.gov.uk.



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