# Annual rail consumer report 2025 to 2026




## Executive summary

Rail services enable people to get to work, enjoy their leisure time, and access health, education and other services. For every journey, we want all travellers to feel confident about the experience they can expect. This report highlights our key interventions to protect passengers during 2025 to 2026 and our forward plan.

### Purchasing train tickets and revenue protection practices

Passengers must have access to the information they need when buying train tickets. To assist rail retailers in meeting their consumer law obligations, we have published updated guidance on rail retailing. The guidance sets out key principles and provides case studies to show how they apply in a rail retailing context.

In June 2025 we completed an in-depth review commissioned by the Secretary of State for Transport which focused on: how train operators and ticket retailers communicate ticket conditions to consumers, and how operators enforce revenue protection, including the use of prosecutions.

The Secretary of State accepted our recommendations in full and published a comprehensive response in March 2026. The response sets out concrete steps being taken, including measures to simplify the ticket-buying process and support clearer, more transparent ticket information for passengers.

## Travelling when there is disruption

While the industry should be aiming to minimise disruption, there will always be a need for engineering works to maintain the network and incidents will occur that impact services.

When rail replacement services are in use, planning and making a journey should be as easy for passengers as when travelling by train. We have been working to drive improvements in the information available to passengers when they are planning and making a journey involving rail replacement since 2023. In July 2025, we wrote to operators to note where we had seen improvements but also to highlight that we continue to observe mixed practice, and that has remained the case throughout the year. We have been providing ongoing bilateral feedback to operators.

Delays will always be unwelcome for passengers but a clear and timely explanation of the reasons for delay can help to mitigate frustration. We have observed material improvements in the proportion of delayed services for which operators are providing explanations, and have been engaging with those operators who needed to improve most.

We want to see passenger safety and welfare placed at the heart of the industry's response to stranded train incidents. To ensure that momentum is maintained against the challenges that we set industry in April 2025, we held a second industry event in October 2025, co-hosted by ORR and the Rail Delivery Group. The industry has made significant progress but there is still more to do, and we welcome the governance that the Rail Delivery Group (RDG) has put in place to provide an ongoing focus.

Throughout the year, we have continued to engage with the industry's Smarter Information Smarter Journeys (SISJ) programme that enables cross-industry improvements in passenger

information.

## Enabling disabled people to travel by rail

Some disabled and older people need assistance from staff to travel by rail, and they should be able to feel confident that the assistance they need will be there for them.

This year operators have reported an 18% increase in assists booked in advance. We are also now publishing data that is reported to us on volumes of turn up and go assists.

We published our first annual benchmarking report on operators' delivery of passenger assistance in December 2025. Northern Trains, South Western Railway (SWR) and West Midlands Trains (WMT) recorded the lowest reliability. We have been engaging with Northern since 2024 on our concerns with the poor reliability of its assistance provision. As a result of our benchmarking work, we also asked SWR and WMT to establish action plans, which are now in place, and we are holding the operators to account for delivery. We will provide an update on Northern, SWR and WMT's progress in our second annual benchmarking report, later in the year.

Staff training should enable staff to assist disabled passengers with confidence, and result in a more reliable service and more positive experiences. We introduced new reporting requirements on operators in April 2025. We have been using the data to inform bilateral engagement on compliance with our training requirements and escalation. In most cases, the scale of non-compliance has been relatively minor. Northern trains was a significant outlier, and we opened a formal enforcement investigation.

We published the outcome of our investigation into Northern in March 2026, and found Northern in breach of its licence obligations. Our investigation had established that there were significant historic gaps in training for Northerns' passenger-facing station staff, linked to systemic issues relating to governance processes, monitoring and controls.

During the investigation, Northern set out actions that it was taking aimed at resolving the systemic issues and also proposed a suite of reparations. ORR's Board determined that a penalty was not appropriate in this case. In reaching that decision, we required Northern to continue to implement and deliver its improvement plan and reparations package. We are closely monitoring progress and will publish a report on Northern's progress after the end of July 2026, when almost all actions are expected to be complete.

Our wider work on accessible travel has included:

- A focus on better communication between staff at boarding and destination stations as a key enabler for improvement in assistance outcomes, with over 100 stations now participating in trials of an electronic handover process.
- A reminder for operators of the key regulatory standards relating to provision of wheelchair spaces, which has supported engagement with a number of operators that have secured a range of improvements for passengers.
- An update on the reliability of help points at stations where we found that, since the publication of our 2024 report and follow-up engagement with industry, help point performance in England has improved. Performance of help points at ScotRail-managed stations in Scotland remains substantially better than for help points in England.
- Ongoing monitoring of lift performance, with data published twice a year, and engagement with Network Rail focussed on delivery of its improvement plan for lift performance.
- Consultation on a draft framework to support operators in making decisions on redress for failed assists.

## Resolving complaints when things go wrong

Operators should always be looking to improve their handling of complaints and delay repay claims, and they report to us annually on how they are doing that. To share good practice, in October 2025 we published a short summary of the steps that operators are taking to improve their complaints handling and delay repay claims processes.

The Rail Ombudsman provides an independent service for resolving complaints where passengers are not satisfied with an operator's response. We sponsor the Rail Ombudsman and have continued to hold it to account for effective delivery of its contractual requirements. Our sponsorship has overseen a range of improvements to the service including system upgrades, accessibility improvements, and service enhancements. Our annual audit found strengthened compliance with contractual requirements this year compared to last.

## Looking ahead

We will maintain our focus on securing the right outcomes for passengers across the areas that we regulate over the year ahead. That will include continuing to contribute to the delivery of the Government's Roadmap for an Accessible Railway.

The Railways Bill, which is currently passing through Parliament, creates a new passenger watchdog that will take on some of ORR's consumer functions. The new watchdog will grow out of Transport Focus and we are working collaboratively with them to plan and prepare for the transition, including developing a Memorandum of Understanding that will set out how the passenger watchdog and ORR will work together to secure improved outcomes for passengers.

**336,332**
passenger complaints were responded to by operators, up 4% on last year[1]



**More than 22,000**
passengers told us about their experience of making complaints to train operators[2]



**97%**
of complaints were responded to by train operators within 20 working days, and 73% within ten working days[1]



**99%**
of delay compensation claims were processed by train operators within 20 working days, which was the same as last year[3]



**46**
rail organisations including train and station operators and a third party retailer are members of the Rail Ombudsman scheme[4]



**1.8 billion**
journeys made. Up 6% compared with last year[5]



**295,852**
Disabled Persons Railcards were issued, up 19% on last year, saving passengers a third on fares[6]



**18%**
increase in passenger assists booked in advance[7]



**At least 44%**
of passenger assists were turn up and go[7]



**More than 10,000**
passengers told us about their experiences of using booked assistance[8]



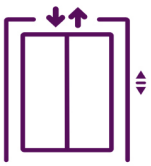
**77%**
of booked assistance users received all assistance types booked, 10% received none, similar to last year[8]



**94%**
of passengers who received assistance at a station were satisfied with the assistance provided by staff, the same as last year[8]



**1,403**
passenger lifts across the rail network. This is up 52 from last year[9]



**7.0**
faults per lift. This is down 0.1pp on last year[9]



**233**
faults that put a lift out of service for more than a week, down from 396 last year[9]



Infographic sources:

1. ORR Passenger rail service complaints statistical release
2. ORR Passenger satisfaction with complaint handling survey
3. ORR Delay compensation claims
4. Rail Ombudsman: Participating Service Providers
5. ORR Passenger rail usage statistical release
6. ORR Disabled Persons Railcards factsheet
7. ORR Passenger assistance factsheet
8. ORR Passenger Assist User Experience Survey
9. ORR Passenger lifts at stations factsheet

Note: pp = percentage points

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# Our Consumer Role

ORR protects the interests of rail and road users, improving the safety, value and performance of railways and roads, today and in the future.

Our regulation of the rail sector makes a difference for passengers at every stage of their journey, from planning a journey and booking a ticket, through to travelling and redress where things go wrong.

We want passengers to feel confident about the experience they can expect when travelling by rail. Our passenger-facing work focuses on five key areas:

- ticket retailing and passenger rights;
- passenger information;
- accessible travel;
- complaints and compensation; and
- sponsorship of the Rail Ombudsman.

We define the minimum acceptable standards for the passenger experience, hold operators and retailers to account against those standards, and drive continuous improvement across the

industry. Our work is underpinned by requirements set out in consumer law, conditions in the licences that we issue to passenger train and station operators, and health and safety legislation.

We oversee all mainline train and station operators and retailers against common standards, including:

- those operated by and for the Department for Transport, the Scottish and Welsh Governments, and Transport for London;
- open access and heritage operators; and
- third-party rail ticket retailers.

We use a range of information sources to help us prioritise our work and identify where there is an opportunity to drive improvements or where we need to intervene to protect passengers from harm. This includes commissioning ongoing and ad-hoc passenger research and collecting information from industry. Our core expectation is that if something has gone wrong, it is fixed quickly by the operator or retailer. To help secure this outcome, we may:

- monitor activity more closely and require more frequent reporting;
- request improvement plans; and/or
- escalate issues in line with our economic enforcement policy.

Our Consumer Expert Panel provides independent advice and challenge, and plays a key role in bringing a consumer perspective to our decisions.

We are not responsible for setting fares, awarding or monitoring management agreements with operators, or for setting the level of public subsidy in the railways – these roles sit with Department for Transport and Transport Scotland. We are also not responsible for enforcement of the Equality Act 2010, which sits with the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC).


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# Ticket retailing and passenger rights

We want operators and retailers to be fair and transparent in all their interactions with passengers, providing information that is accurate and timely which enables passengers to make

well-informed decisions and access their statutory rights as customers.

## Guidance on rail retailing

Passengers must be able to quickly and easily access relevant, accurate, complete and timely information during the ticket buying process. This is a legal requirement and a fundamental component of informed passenger decision-making.

We published updated guidance on rail retailing in January 2026, following consultation. The guidance aims to assist rail retailers in meeting their consumer law obligations regarding the provision of information to passengers and promote best practice in connection with the sale and use of rail tickets, products, and services.

The guidance sets out key principles, such as what information should be made available to consumers, as well as case studies providing examples of how the principles could apply in a rail retailing context. We have designed it in such a way that consumers can understand what information they can expect to be provided with when buying rail tickets.

The guidance replaces the Code of Practice on retail information for rail tickets and services that was published in 2015.

## Independent review of train operators' revenue protection practices

In June 2025 we completed an in-depth review commissioned by the Secretary of State for Transport which focused on two main areas: how train operators and ticket retailers communicate ticket conditions to consumers, and how operators enforce revenue protection, including the use of prosecutions. From this, five key areas for improvement were identified. These included making it simpler and easier for passengers to buy the right ticket by providing clearer information on restrictions; ensuring passengers are treated fairly and consistently when ticket issues arise, with a focus on genuine mistakes rather than intentional fare evasion; and introducing greater consistency and fairness in decisions to prosecute, through a common test applied across operators.

Further recommendations sought to improve transparency and understanding of revenue

protection by making information on penalties, prosecutions, settlements and appeals easier to access, and to strengthen coordination and oversight by establishing a forum or body to promote best practice across the industry. Together, these measures aim to reduce confusion, improve fairness, and build greater trust between passengers and the rail industry.

The Secretary of State accepted our recommendations in full and published a comprehensive response in March 2026. The response sets out concrete steps being taken, including measures to simplify the ticket-buying process and support clearer, more transparent pricing for passengers.

## Regulatory framework for ticket retailing and passenger rights

Our work is underpinned by:

- our consumer law investigation and enforcement powers, which we hold concurrently with the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA);
- obligations set out in train and station operating licences; and
- commitments set out in industry-owned documents such as the National Rail Conditions of Travel.

In April 2025, the enforcement and unfair commercial practices provisions of the Digital Markets, Competition & Consumer Act 2024 came into effect. The Act consolidates and enhances enforcement powers and consumer rights, including strengthening of the provisions relating to the drip-pricing of mandatory fees. The CMA published guidance on the price transparency provisions of the Act in November 2025.

## Our priorities for April 2026 to March 2027

We will:

- continue to monitor risks to passengers across the ticket retailing landscape and identify where we need to intervene.
- work collaboratively with DfT and the industry to inform the future landscape for rail retailing under rail reform

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# Passenger information

We want passengers to have accurate and timely information about their travel options, so that they can plan and make journeys with confidence, including during disruption.

# Rail replacement buses

Planning and making a journey when rail replacement services are in use should be as easy for passengers as when travelling by train. In 2023, we set out what operators need to do to improve passenger information for journeys that involve planned rail replacement services. In 2024, we reviewed progress and published our findings. We wrote to operators again in July 2025 recognising progress and have been providing ad hoc bilateral feedback to operators to support ongoing improvements for passengers.

We have continued to observe a mix of good and poorer practice. We have, for example, seen some rail replacement buses providing passengers with information about intermediate stops and destinations with automated announcements and digital screens. This is best practice and consistent with the requirements of the Public Service Vehicle (Accessible Information) Regulations 2023. DfT are working with the rail and coach industries to help deliver full compliance with these regulations for planned rail replacement vehicles. The regulations are enforced by the Driver and Vehicles Standards Agency (DVSA) with whom we have regular engagement.

Building on the findings in our first report, the industry's Smarter Information Smarter Journeys Programme (SISJ) is continuing to support operators in trialling provision of real time information to passengers on planned rail replacement services, via journey planners and customer information screens. SISJ has also made welcome progress towards establishing an enduring approach that would support wider adoption of real-time journey information for rail replacement services, which we hope to see progressed.

# Protecting passengers when trains are stranded

We want to see passenger safety and welfare placed at the heart of the industry's response to

stranded train incidents.

Following a series of high-profile incidents, we published a report jointly with Transport Focus in August 2024, calling for a greater focus on the experience of passengers who are stranded on trains.

We hosted an industry event to explore how industry can embed best practice and, in April 2025, set the industry a series of challenges and next steps. To ensure that momentum was being maintained we followed up with a second industry event, co-hosted by ORR and the Rail Delivery Group, in October 2025.

The industry has made significant progress in ensuring organisational readiness to plan for and respond to stranding incidents, keeping passengers at the heart of the decision-making process. There is still more to do and we welcome the establishment of a Stranded Passengers Industry Working Group by the Rail Delivery Group that will provide an ongoing focus on progress against the challenges we set out.

## Explaining to passengers the reasons for delay

Delays will always be unwelcome for passengers but a clear and timely explanation of the reasons for delay can help to mitigate frustration. The National Rail Communications Centre (NRCC, part of National Rail Enquiries) monitors the accuracy and completeness of operators' passenger information, including provision of delay reasons, and reports findings weekly to operators so that they can identify where they need to improve, ORR and Transport Focus.

Delay reasons has been one of the areas of focus for the RDG's Customer Information Group (CIG) this year. We were pleased to observe that many operators responded positively and proactively, and we observed significant improvements with the industry now meeting its target of 80% of trains delayed more than 10 minutes having a reason. However, three operators continued to perform poorly in providing passengers with reasons for delays and so we initiated bilateral engagement.

## Encouraging cross-industry collaboration

We continue to support cross-industry collaboration that enables network-wide improvements to the provision of passenger information.

We previously challenged the industry to develop a single, transparent strategy to deliver improvements in passenger information. In response, the industry established the SISJ programme, which is jointly led by the RDG and Network Rail. The SISJ programme plays a central role in enabling change that requires cross-industry collaboration. Alongside, CIG focuses on supporting operators to deliver for passengers every day.

We engage actively with both SISJ and CIG in recognition of the value that they bring in enabling improvements in the passenger experience.

## Regulatory framework for passenger information

We hold operators to account against requirements set out in the Passenger Information licence condition, under which operators have adopted the Customer Information Pledges as their regulated Code of Practice.

The Pledges must be reviewed annually to drive continuous improvement. The licence requirements complement wider requirements in consumer law and the Railway Interoperability Regulations.

## Our priorities for April 2026 to March 2027

We will

- Follow-up our review of online information about station facilities, to drive improvements for passengers
- Continue to assess operator compliance with the Customer Information Pledges, particularly during disruption, providing bilateral feedback to operators.
- Continue to engage and influence across the breadth of the SISJ and CIG work programmes, in recognition of the value they have demonstrated in enabling improvements for passengers across the whole network


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## Accessible Travel

We want to empower confident travel by all, including disabled passengers, whether their journeys are made independently or with assistance.

## Understanding the passenger experience

We publish industry data on volumes of assistance every quarter. We define an assist as the help provided at one station, which means that two assists are recorded per journey leg. A single journey involving one train would be counted as two assists, for the help needed at the stations at each end of the journey. A journey with one change of trains would be counted as four assists.

This year, operators have reported that 1.9m assists were booked in advance, an 18% increase on last year. At least 1.5m turn up and go assists were requested at a station, which means that at least 44% of assists requested were turn up and go.

We have been surveying passengers on their experiences of booked assistance on an ongoing basis since 2017, and publish findings annually. We use the findings to help us understand where we need to act to improve the passenger experience. This year, more than 10,000 passengers participated. Satisfaction with the assistance provided at the station where passengers are successfully met by staff is relatively high, with 94% of passengers satisfied with the assistance they received at the station. However, the service is not reliable enough with 10% reporting that they received none of the assistance that they booked, similar to the 11% reported last year. The survey findings are a key input to our benchmarking of operators' performance in delivering assistance.

We require operators to report to us each quarter on assistance outcomes. We had low confidence in the quality and usefulness of this data and, following a review facilitated by RDG, we implemented changes to our reporting requirements in April 2025 to reflect new reporting categories developed by industry. Frontline staff are trained to report the outcome of every assist in the Passenger Assist system using these reporting categories, which they can do through either the Passenger Assist staff mobile app or web interface.

RDG has been working with operators to understand the extent to which this new approach is enabling a more accurate picture of when assistance failures are happening and why. As a result, some minor amendments are being made to reporting categories in summer 2026 to support more consistent reporting.

This industry data on assistance outcomes should become useful to use in holding operators to account for performance. It should also be essential insight for operators, enabling them to understand where they need to focus efforts on making improvements for passengers. We need to see all operators maintaining a focus on ensuring that their staff understand the value of reporting assist outcomes, and feel confident and comfortable in consistently reporting accurately, including where things go wrong.

## Approval of operators' Accessible Travel Policies

We hold operators to account against the commitments they make in their Accessible Travel Policies (ATPs) and require operators to review their ATPs annually.

Since April 2025, we have approved Accessible Travel Policies for five operators as they transitioned into public ownership under the Department for Transport Operator (c2c, Greater Anglia, Greater Thameslink Railway, South Western Railway and West Midlands Trains), and for two operators who have taken over operations from previous licence holders (GTS for the Elizabeth line, and First Rail London for London Overground). In all cases, the new licence holder has largely adopted the ATP from their predecessor.

We have also approved ATPs for two new licence holders, DB Cargo and First Rail Stirling (Lumo). The two licence holders who are now operating under the Lumo brand (East Coast Trains and First Rail Stirling) will be held to account against the same ATP.

All amendments to ATPs proposed through the annual review process were minor.

## Securing improvements in the delivery of assistance

We published our first annual report benchmarking train and station operators' delivery of passenger assistance in December 2025. It forms part of the Government's roadmap to an accessible railway. Our aim is to provide transparency on performance, identify areas for improvement and celebrate success where operators are delivering well.

The benchmarking framework focuses on two areas:

- Delivery performance – how reliably assistance is provided, alongside passenger satisfaction and staff knowledge.

- Capability to Improve – a qualitative assessment of organisational capacity to strengthen delivery, targeted at operators with sustained poor performance.

Northern Trains, South Western Railway (SWR) and West Midlands Trains (WMT) recorded the lowest reliability. We carried out Capability to Improve assessments with SWR and WMT and, as a result, asked both operators to establish action plans to drive improved performance. Those plans are now in place, and we are holding the operators to account for delivery.

We have been engaging with Northern since 2024 on our concerns with the poor reliability of its assistance provision. We accepted an improvement plan in December 2024 and all actions were delivered in 2025. We are monitoring Northern's progress towards delivering sustained improvements in the reliability of passenger assistance. Data from our passenger survey and Northern's mystery shopping programme suggest that passengers are now starting to experience a more reliable assistance service.

We will provide an update on Northern, SWR and WMT's progress in our second annual benchmarking report, later in the year.

## Disability awareness training for passenger-facing staff

We require all operators, through their ATPs, to commit to providing disability awareness training for passenger-facing staff. Where that training is delivered well, and staff can assist disabled passengers with confidence, it should result in a more reliable service and more positive experiences.

We introduced new reporting requirements in April 2025, with operators submitting data to us quarterly on delivery of staff training. We have been using the data to inform bilateral compliance engagement and escalation. We have engaged with several operators that have reported, or have reported that they are at risk of developing, backlogs in refresher training. In most cases, the scale of non-compliance has been relatively minor and operators have been able to explain the reasons and their plans for timely recovery. Northern trains was a significant outlier, and we opened an enforcement investigation.

## ORR investigation into Northern Trains

In August 2025, Northern reported that around 800 passenger facing staff had not received disability awareness training. This gap had not been identified or addressed in the passenger assistance improvement plan that they had put in place in 2024. While Northern took swift action to close the training gap, given the range of issues raised previously, we continued to have concerns about Northern's historic and ongoing compliance.

In December 2025, we opened a formal licence investigation into Northern to establish if it had contravened or was contravening Condition 5 (Accessible Travel Policy) of its GB Statement of National Regulatory Provisions (SNRP): Passenger and Station Licence. Northern engaged constructively and openly throughout our investigation.

The investigation focused on commitments that Northern makes in its ATP relating to disability awareness training and included:

- The timeframe over which staff who had not received required training were interacting with disabled passengers, and the scale and impact of the issue;
- The circumstances that led to staff not receiving training when required and how the issue remained unresolved and unreported during this timeframe;
- How Northern can assure itself, its passengers and ORR that: the recent training has been effective and is enabling staff to meet the required training outcomes, and a similar situation will not arise in future.

We published the outcome of our investigation in March 2026, and found Northern in breach of its licence obligations. Our investigation had established that there were significant historic gaps in training for Northerns' passenger-facing station staff, linked to systemic issues relating to governance processes, monitoring and controls.

During the investigation, Northern set out actions that it was taking aimed at resolving the systemic issues. Northern also proposed a suite of reparations in acknowledgement of its failings, predominantly targeted at further improving disability awareness training, and valued at an estimated £550,000.

ORR's Board determined that a penalty was not appropriate in this case, taking into account the steps that Northern was already taking to secure future compliance, the dependency on public funds, and the package of reparations offered.

In reaching that decision, we required Northern to continue to implement and deliver its improvement plan and reparations package. We are closely monitoring progress and will publish a report on Northern's progress after the end of July 2026, when almost all actions are expected to be complete.

## Communications between stations when delivering assistance

Better communication between staff at boarding and destination stations remains a key enabler for improvement in assistance outcomes, as it will help to ensure passengers who are assisted onto a train by staff will receive assistance to get off at their destination.

In May 2025, we published a review that focussed on learnings from five busy stations. Our findings included that use of the Passenger Assist staff mobile app and web interface is reducing the risk of information being lost or miscommunicated between stations. We asked train operators to review whether they could deliver equivalent or better outcomes for passengers by using the electronic handover capability in Passenger Assist instead of routinely making phone calls to handover between stations.

We have now approved electronic handover trials for five operators, Avanti West Coast, Great Western Railway, Network Rail, Northern Trains and Transport for Wales, with over 100 stations participating in those trials. Operators are reporting to us regularly on the impact of their trials. We have not identified any negative impacts on passengers to date and, reflecting this low risk profile, have significantly streamlined the approval process for operators. We encourage all operators to test how use of electronic handover protocol can improve their handover processes.

## Provision of wheelchair spaces on trains

For wheelchair users to access and travel safely on our rail network, stations and trains need to be accessible to them. Provision of wheelchair spaces on all passenger trains, to which wheelchair users always have priority, is one key enabler.

Several complementary regulatory standards require operators to provide wheelchair spaces and ensure they are available to wheelchair users when required. To support operators' understanding of this framework, in late 2025 we wrote to operators summarising requirements.

We have engaged with a number of operators on aspects of compliance and secured a range of improvements, and plans for further improvements, for passengers.

## Help points at stations

For passengers, help points are often the only way to speak to a human for assistance when station staff are unavailable, and it is the responsibility of station operators to ensure they are working and that calls are answered.

In March 2026, we published an update on station operators' responses to our 2024 report on the Reliability of help points at stations. This work forms part of the Government's Roadmap to an accessible railway.

Since the publication of our 2024 report, operators have reviewed their approach to monitoring the availability of their help points, and have risk assessed stations that rely on mobile coverage for help point or freephone communication connectivity.

Help point performance in England has improved. Performance of help points at ScotRail-managed stations in Scotland remains substantially better than for help points in England.

## Passenger lifts at stations

Lifts enable access to the railway for disabled passengers and others. In 2024, we published a report that identified concerns about the number of faults that are occurring and an apparent decline in performance over time. In 2025, we started publishing biannual statistics on lift performance.

Network Rail is responsible for the maintenance of nearly all lifts across the rail network and we hold them to account for this activity under their network licence. Our engagement with Network Rail is focussed on delivery of its improvement plan for lift performance, which we are monitoring closely and which forms part of the Government's Roadmap to an accessible railway.

## Redress for failed assists

Operators must provide redress to passengers where assistance has been booked but has not

been provided.

For all redress claims submitted by a passenger, operators must provide an explanation of what went wrong, what steps they have taken to prevent the failure from happening again and an appropriate remedy. This could take a variety of forms, such as an apology, a gesture of goodwill, and/or financial compensation.

In October 2025, we introduced a requirement for operators to determine redress on a case-by-case basis, following consultation. All operators' ATPs have now been reviewed and updated to reflect this new requirement.

As part of our consultation response, we committed to undertake further work to explore wider issues raised in the consultation responses. These included whether a framework may be needed to support the determination of appropriate redress and we are now consulting on a draft framework.

# Accessible rail replacement vehicles

We work with the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) to monitor provision of accessible rail replacement vehicles, supporting them in their role enforcing the Public Service Vehicle Accessibility Regulations (PVSAR).

According to the data that we receive from operators, nearly all rail replacement vehicles either met PVSAR accessibility standards or have an exemption from the Secretary of State.

For passengers, this means that 97% of rail replacement vehicles are reported as meeting accessibility standards. This is a small rise from 96% in 2024 to 2025 primarily reflecting improved provision of accessible rail replacement for planned disruption.

The Department for Transport has decided not to renew PVSAR exemptions for rail replacement vehicles beyond July 2026, noting that almost all services are being provided by compliant vehicles.

## Regulatory framework for accessible travel

All train and station operators must establish and comply with an ATP as a condition of their licence, setting out their provision for disabled passengers.

Our published guidance defines the minimum requirements for operators' ATPs, covering areas such as:

- provision of assistance;
- staff training; and
- passenger information.

ORR also holds operators to account against accessibility standards for rolling stock and stations, which are set out in the Code of Practice on Design Standards for Accessible Railway Stations and the National Technical Specification Notices that are issued by Government under the Railway Interoperability Regulations.

## Our priorities for April 2026 to March 2027

We will:

- Continue to monitor operators' delivery of assistance and hold them to account for delivering improved services for disabled passengers.
- Report on Northern Train's progress in delivering the actions and reparations that it committed to as a result of our enforcement case on disability awareness training.
- Publish our second report benchmarking operators' performance in delivering assistance.
- Review the arrangements that operators have in place to deliver turn up and go assistance.
- Publish a response to our consultation on a proposed framework to support the determination of appropriate redress.
- Review the emerging findings from the trials of the electronic handover protocol.


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## Complaints and compensation

Where things go wrong, we want passengers to feel confident that they will be compensated for delays, can easily complain and that their complaints will be addressed. We want operators to use learnings from all complaints to drive continuous improvement in passengers' experiences of rail.

# Meeting minimum expectations

Operators report data on their performance in handling complaints and delay repay claims to us every month. We monitor this data to identify where we need to intervene to protect passengers.

This year, performance has been generally good. The industry average over the year has seen 97% of complaints responded to within 20 working days, which is our minimum requirement, and 73% responded to within 10 working days. Similarly, 99% of delay repay claims were processed within 20 working days. No individual operator has performed substantially worse than the average during the year.

We want to see operators self-reporting compliance risks and issues to us, as it provides assurance both that they understand their own performance and that they are proactively taking steps to come back into compliance. Several operators have alerted us to short term compliance issues during the year, together with their plans and timescales for recovery. This is welcome and means that we can make an early judgement about whether or when there is a need for further regulatory engagement, proportionate to the risks to passengers.

# Continuous improvement

Operators should always be looking to improve their handling of complaints and delay repay claims, and they report to us annually on how they are doing that.

To share good practice, in October 2025 we published a short summary of the steps that operators are taking to improve their complaints handling and delay repay claims processes.

The complaints continuous improvement reports demonstrated some good practice but there are areas that operators need to focus on to underpin a continuous improvement culture, including how they assess the experiences of the complaints process and the impact of improvements.

For the first time this year, all operators were required to specifically consider disabled passengers' experiences in their complaints continuous improvement reports. Some good practice examples that ORR encourage to be rolled out more widely include:

- Examining the top complaint categories associated with accessibility, including passenger assistance, to establish any recurring issues.

- Setting up specialised teams to handle complaints about passenger assistance.
- Collecting information on passengers' requirements/preferences in handling their complaint.
- Improving access and ways to communicate complaints, for example accessible webforms and use of accessibility services like SignLive and Aira. In addition, providing an Easy Read version of guidance on making a complaint.

On delay repay, we asked operators to focus on raising awareness of the scheme in innovative ways to maximise the number of passengers who know they can claim for delays, and to identify and address recurring issues that are driving passenger complaints about delay repay.

## Regulatory framework for complaints and redress

We hold operators to account against requirements set out in:

- the Delay Compensation licence condition and supporting Code of Practice that defines minimum requirements; and
- the Complaints Handling licence condition, which is also supported by a Code of Practice that defines minimum requirements.

## Our priorities for April 2026 to March 2027

We will:

- Assess the continuous improvements reports that operators are required to produce each year on their delay repay and complaints handling processes.
- Monitor operator performance using the data they report to us each month and our ongoing survey of passenger satisfaction with complaints handling, intervening where necessary.
- Continue to challenge industry to fully utilise the insight and learning that is generated through complaints handling.


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# The Rail Ombudsman

The Rail Ombudsman is a free, impartial and independent service that passengers can use to escalate unresolved complaints about train and station operators.

It also plays an important role in driving continuous improvement in the rail sector by generating learning and insight from its casework that helps operators make improvements to their services.

# Sponsorship of the Rail Ombudsman

We continue to hold the Rail Ombudsman to account for effective delivery of its contractual requirements, ensuring that performance and quality standards are met.

We undertake an annual audit of the Rail Ombudsman each October. The first of these was in October 2024, and 12 actions were raised and addressed. In the October 2025 audit, we identified eight actions, of which 50% were low priority. This improvement reflects a positive shift towards higher-quality outputs, supported by strengthened ORR oversight and enhanced focus on ensuring compliance with ORR's contractual requirements.

Our sponsorship of the Rail Ombudsman has overseen a range of improvements to the service including system upgrades, accessibility improvements, and service enhancements.

One major milestone was the launch of a redesigned Rail Ombudsman website in July 2025, with improved accessibility features informed by ORR commissioned user testing and research.

Further improvements include the transition to Relay UK, the introduction of a WhatsApp channel, targeted engagement with underrepresented groups, and strengthened quality assurance and plain English standards across consumer communications.

Alongside, the Rail Ombudsman also introduced a new case management system to improve service delivery, which enhances functionality and accessibility for users and stakeholders and improves the efficiency and handling of complaints processes.

## Regulatory framework for the Rail Ombudsman

Under the Complaints Handling licence condition, operators are required to be members of the Rail Ombudsman. The Ombudsman is funded through charges to operators for the service it

provides.

## Our priorities for April 2026 to March 2027

We will:

- continue to hold the Rail Ombudsman to account for its service delivery, with a focus on the independence, accessibility and quality of its service, ensuring the Rail Ombudsman continues to meet all of its accreditation standards
- work collaboratively with Transport Focus to support a smooth and fully assured transition of the Rail Ombudsman to the new Passenger Watchdog


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