

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 Northern's 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 year¹



More than 22,000

passengers told us about their experience of making complaints to train operators²



97%

of complaints were responded to by train operators within 20 working days, and 73% within ten working days¹



99%

of delay compensation claims were processed by train operators within 20 working days, which was the same as last year³



46

rail organisations including train and station operators and a third party retailer are members of the Rail Ombudsman scheme⁴



1.8 billion

journeys made. Up 6% compared with last year⁵



295,852

Disabled Persons Railcards were issued, up 19% on last year, saving passengers a third on fares⁶



18%

increase in passenger assists booked in advance⁷



At least 44%

of passenger assists were turn up and go⁷



More than 10,000

passengers told us about their experiences of using booked assistance⁸



77%

of booked assistance users received all assistance types booked, 10% received none, similar to last year⁸



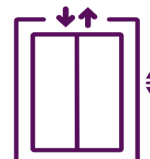
94%

of passengers who received assistance at a station were satisfied with the assistance provided by staff, the same as last year⁸



1,403

passenger lifts across the rail network. This is up 52 from last year⁹



7.0

faults per lift. This is down 0.1pp on last year⁹



233

faults that put a lift out of service for more than a week, down from 396 last year⁹



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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