

Annual rail consumer report 2025 to 2026

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 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. 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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