

Annual rail consumer report 2025 to 2026

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
-  Previous Complaints and compensation