Benchmarking operators' performance in rail passenger assistance: 2026 report

Executive summary

1. In 2025, ORR published its first benchmarking assessment of rail operators' delivery of passenger assistance. The report identified a consistent picture across the industry: while passenger satisfaction with assistance was generally high when delivered as requested, the reliability of assistance delivery varied between operators, with a minority of passengers continuing not to receive some or all of the assistance they had booked. The report set out targeted regulatory engagement with operators where performance concerns were most acute.

2. This 2026 report builds on that work. It presents the latest benchmarking assessment of passenger assistance delivery, reports on the outcomes of ORR's engagement with operators during the last year and identifies the common themes in the improvement actions being taken by operators.

3. We continue to use ORR's Experience of Passenger Assist survey as our key source of data. This year, for the first time, our assessment also incorporates ratings submitted by passengers through the Passenger Assist mobile app, providing a broader view of passenger satisfaction and enabling us to assess operators using a wider basket of measures.

4. Demand for passenger assistance continues to increase year-on-year. Record numbers of assistance requests are now being made across the network, up 18% this year. This growth places greater importance on operators being able to deliver assistance consistently and effectively. Our 2026 assessment continues to show high levels of passenger satisfaction with assistance received at stations and with the knowledge and proficiency of staff delivering that assistance. However, the central finding from our 2025 report remains unchanged: reliability continues to be the area of

greatest variation between operators and the most significant challenge facing the industry as usage increases. Improving reliability remains essential if passengers who require assistance are to travel with confidence and receive the level of service they are entitled to expect.

5. Our assessment uses a rolling three-year dataset weighted towards more recent performance and, as a result, changes in underlying performance may take time to be reflected fully in overall rankings. The strongest-performing operators over 2023-2026 remain broadly consistent with last year's assessment for 2022-2025. London North Eastern Railway (LNER) and Southeastern continue to perform strongly, with Network Rail, Chiltern Railways and Greater Thameslink Railway (GTR) also achieving strong results across the assessment metrics. West Midlands Trains (WMT), Northern Trains, Transport for Wales (TfW) and South Western Railway (SWR) remain the lowest-performing operators.

6. A key focus of this year's report is the impact of regulatory engagement following the 2025 benchmarking exercise. During the year, ORR continued to monitor and engage with Northern, SWR and WMT – focusing on ensuring improvement plans are in place, that those plans are being delivered and that they are providing the anticipated benefits. In the case of Northern, we are seeing the fruits of those efforts in this year's data.

7. We also undertook targeted engagement with TfW and Avanti West Coast where we identified emerging performance concerns.

8. The report identifies a number of common themes in the actions that operators are taking to drive improved performance, including:

- Using a wider range of data, insight and passenger feedback to understand performance;
- Targeting improvement activity at priority locations and known areas of risk;
- Strengthening governance, leadership and accountability for passenger assistance delivery;
- Working collaboratively across organisations to improve coordination and reliability; and
- Embedding continuous improvement through regular monitoring, review and action.

9. Our engagement suggests that these factors are important enablers of improved passenger assistance outcomes.

10. The Railways Bill, which is currently passing through Parliament, creates a new passenger watchdog that will take on some of ORR's consumer functions including monitoring of services

provided to disabled passengers. The new watchdog will grow out of Transport Focus and we are working collaboratively with them to plan and prepare for the transition, and to ensure that passenger protections are maintained and enhanced.

11. Ahead of the establishment of the Passenger Watchdog, ORR will continue to monitor passenger assistance delivery, share learning from effective improvement activity and target its regulatory engagement where it can have the greatest impact for passengers: in the case of SWR and WMT we will continue to hold the operators to account for the delivery of their improvement plans.

12. We will also continue to develop the benchmarking framework to strengthen our understanding of passenger outcomes and to support greater transparency, accountability and continuous improvement across the rail industry as it continues to evolve. Our objective remains to improve the reliability and quality of passenger assistance and to support better outcomes for passengers who rely on the service.

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1. Introduction

Background

1. Passenger assistance remains a key enabler of independent rail travel for disabled and older passengers. Through their Accessible Travel Policies (ATPs), train and station operators commit to providing assistance to disabled and older passengers. This assistance can be booked in advance through Passenger Assist or requested at the station through turn-up-and-go arrangements. Reliable delivery of passenger assistance is fundamental to ensuring disabled passengers can travel with confidence and enjoy equal access to the rail network.

2. Demand for passenger assistance continues to increase year-on-year. Record numbers of assistance requests are now being made across the network. This growth places greater importance on operators being able to deliver assistance consistently, understand the experiences of passengers who require that assistance, and respond effectively when things go wrong.

3. ORR's latest survey of users of passenger assistance (Experiences of Passenger Assist survey) shows that satisfaction remains high: 87% of survey respondents are satisfied with the end-to-

end experience from booking through to receiving assistance. However, reliability remains a significant challenge: a proportion of passengers continue to report receiving only part, or none, of the assistance they booked, with potentially serious consequences for their ability to travel independently and with confidence. The survey also demonstrates the importance of reliable assistance in supporting passengers' confidence to make future journeys.

4. In response to these challenges, ORR introduced a benchmarking framework in 2025 to provide greater transparency about operators' performance and organisational capability. Benchmarking helps us identify where performance is strongest, where regulatory attention may be required, and where good practice can be shared more widely across the industry. It also supports operators by highlighting opportunities for improvement and providing insight into approaches being adopted elsewhere in the sector. This year's report builds on that framework.

Benchmarking methodology

Evidence base and metrics

5. ORR uses passengers' experience of assistance to make an assessment of each operator's delivery. In our 2026 assessment, we use four metrics derived from two sources: three from ORR's ongoing Experiences of Passenger Assist survey; and an additional metric new for 2026, ratings given by passengers through the Passenger Assist mobile app. For both sources, data is for the period April 2023 and March 2026.

6. Metrics based on data collected through ORR's Passenger Assist survey are

- **Reliability**, measuring the percentage of passengers who reported receiving none of the assistance they had booked;
- **Satisfaction with assistance received at station**, capturing the proportion of passengers who were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the assistance they received, when met; and
- **Satisfaction with staff knowledge and proficiency at station**, reflecting passengers' views on the competence of staff delivering that assistance, when met.

7. For each of these metrics, up to a total of 26,389 survey responses have been analysed across all operators (depending on the specific metric). See Annex A for individual operator sample sizes.

8. It should be noted that a different approach to asking passengers about the reliability of their assistance was undertaken in periods one to six of 2025 to 2026. Following a review in period

seven, the question reverted to the original question text used in previous years for the rest of the year. For 2025 to 2026, only data from period seven onwards has been included in analysis of this metric. Data from periods one to six has not been included.

9. The new metric based on ratings submitted by passengers through the Passenger Assist mobile app is:

- **Satisfaction with assistance experience at stations**, as submitted through the Passenger Assist mobile app. This measures the percentage of respondents who rated their assistance experience at a station as four or five stars out of five.

10. This Passenger Assist data offers value to the benchmarking process by providing us with a more rounded view of passenger experience. The dataset's sample size is also substantial: across the three-year period, 123,234 ratings through the Passenger Assist mobile app have been analysed.

Passenger Assist rating via mobile app – source of data

11. Assisted journeys are recorded in the Passenger Assist system, whether they are booked by phone, online, through the Passenger Assist mobile app or at a station. Passengers who have set up an account on the Passenger Assist mobile app can view their journeys either where they have booked in advance, or where they are making a turn-up-and-go (TUAG) journey and staff have both entered the journey details into Passenger Assist and connected the journey to the individual's Passenger Assist account.

12. After completing their journey, passengers whose journeys are linked to their account on the Passenger Assist mobile app are invited to submit a satisfaction rating, with a range of one to five stars. Ratings are provided for the experience of assistance at a station – for a single-leg journey, a passenger therefore can rate assistance at the boarding and alighting stations separately.

13. Passenger ratings are stored by Transreport, the company who operates the Passenger Assist system under contract with the Rail Delivery Group (RDG). RDG download anonymised ratings data from Transreport and pass it to ORR. ORR carries out all data analysis.

14. Over the last three years TUAG assists account for 9% of ratings analysed. This figure also includes short notice bookings accepted within the 2-hour notice period normally required by operators for 'booked assistance'.

Confidence to travel

15. Since April 2025 we have included a new question in ORR's Passenger Assist survey to understand how passengers' experience of assistance has impacted their confidence to travel in the future.

16. As we only have data for a single year, we have not used responses to this new question in our overall assessment of operator performance. Once we have sufficient trend data, we intend to include a new metric in our assessment, capturing the proportion of passengers who were 'less confident' or 'much less confident' about making a similar journey in the future.

Benchmarking

17. Performance has been attributed to the operator with overall responsibility for assistance at a station. In most cases this is the station operator. However, at some Network Rail stations one or more train operators are responsible for delivering assistance instead and our analysis reflects this.

18. To ensure a robust and representative analysis, as in 2025 we applied a weighted scoring system across all three-year metrics: weighted 1:2:3 towards the most recent year.

19. As outlined above, only data from period seven onwards has been included for 2025 to 2026 when deriving the reliability metric. Other years and metrics are unaffected. This variation in data coverage is reflected in our weighting calculation, as set out below – as the most recent year, 2025 to 2026 is subject to triple weighting but this is halved to one-and-a-half times weighting because just half the year's data has been included in the analysis.

Illustration of how an operator's weighted score for each metric is calculated

Reliability metric: (Y1 + (Y2x2) + (Y3x1.5)) ÷ 4.5 = Result

All other metrics: (Y1 + (Y2x2) + (Y3x3)) ÷ 6 = Result

Table 1: How an operator's weighted score for each metric is calculated

Metric	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	Three-year weighted score for each metric
Reliability (no assistance received)	12%	11%	8%	(12+20+12)/4.5 =10%
Satisfaction with assistance	92%	93%	94%	(92+186+282)/6 =93%
Satisfaction with staff	94%	94%	96%	(94+188+288)/6 =95%
Satisfaction via app	82%	84%	86%	(82+168+256)/6 =84%

20. The overall Delivery score was calculated using the three-year weighted score for each metric and following weightings: 50% for reliability and 50% across the three satisfaction metrics (split evenly).

Illustration of how an operator's overall score is calculated

Overall: (((100 – Reliability) x3) + Satisfaction with assistance + Satisfaction with staff + Satisfaction via app) ÷ 6 = Result

e.g. ((91 x 3) + 93 + 95 + 84) ÷ 6 = 91

21. Note that in this calculation the Reliability score is subtracted from 100 to provide a metric that can be weighted versus the Satisfaction metric scores. So, for example, a 9% 'no assistance received' reliability score becomes a 91% 'some or all assistance received' score for this purpose.

22. This year we ranked operators based on an overall Delivery score; last year operators were ranked on reliability alone. We are now able to rank on overall delivery because of the addition of the satisfaction data via the app, which is both reliable and provides greater performance variability between operators.

Operators in scope

23. To ensure statistically robust and meaningful comparison between operators, operators must have had at least 50 survey responses per year for all metrics to be included in the overall Delivery assessment. The following operators were therefore included in the full Delivery assessment (full sample sizes for each metric are provided in Annex A):

- Avanti West Coast
- Chiltern Railways
- East Midlands Railway (EMR)
- Greater Thameslink Railway (GTR)
- Great Western Railway (GWR)
- Greater Anglia
- London North Eastern Railway (LNER)
- Network Rail
- Northern Trains
- ScotRail
- South Western Railway (SWR)
- Southeastern
- TransPennine Express (TPE)
- Transport for Wales (TfW)

- West Midlands Trains (WMT)

24. Operators excluded from the full Delivery assessment due to low response rates or because they do not manage stations include First Rail London (London Overground), c2c, CrossCountry, Grand Central, GTS Rail (Elizabeth line), Hull Trains, London Underground and Lumo. We continue to consider opportunities to expand future coverage by increasing survey sample sizes and exploring alternative data sources.

25. The addition of ratings data submitted by passengers via the Passenger Assist mobile app has given us improved visibility of these operators' performance in delivering assistance, due to the larger data sample – therefore, while not included in the full Delivery assessment, we are able to engage individual operators where we have had cause for concern.

26. Note that ownership of both GTR and First Rail London changed in May 2026, resulting in name changes. For the duration of the three-year benchmarking period, these operators were known as Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) and Arriva Rail London (ARL – referred to here as the more familiar London Overground).

Capability to Improve assessment

27. In implementing the benchmarking framework last year, our stated intention was to undertake detailed Capability to Improve assessments of the weakest performers. In 2025, we undertook such assessments of SWR and WMT, alongside our ongoing work with Northern to improve its performance; these were the weakest performers in terms of reliability of assistance. For more information, see the 2025 Benchmarking Report.

28. In 2026, these three operators remain amongst the weakest performers. We have therefore not carried out further detailed Capability to Improve assessments but have continued our engagement with them as they developed and delivered their improvement plans. We are also undertaking targeted engagement with TfW and Avanti, where the latest benchmarking results or passenger feedback have identified new and emerging concerns.

29. The result of this work is set out in more detail in Chapter 3.

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2. Benchmarking assistance delivery

30. Table 1 ranks operators' performance in delivering assistance over the last three years (weighted in favour of the most recent years), using the methodology described in Chapter 1. Operators are ranked based on a weighted overall delivery score.

Table 2: Weighted assessment of assistance delivery, 2023 to 2026

Operator	Overall delivery score	Reliability (proportion receiving none of the assistance booked)[1]	Satisfaction with assistance received at station[1]	Satisfaction with staff knowledge and proficiency at station[1]	Satisfaction with assistance experience at station[2]
London North Eastern Railway	93	8%	95%	96%	88%
Southeastern	92	8%	93%	94%	86%
Network Rail	91	8%	92%	93%	84%
Chiltern Railways	91	9%	91%	94%	85%
Greater Thameslink Railway	91	10%	93%	95%	85%
Great Western Railway	90	11%	93%	94%	84%
Avanti West Coast	89	10%	92%	94%	81%
Greater Anglia	89	12%	92%	94%	86%
TransPennine Express	89	13%	92%	95%	85%
ScotRail	89	12%	91%	93%	84%
East Midlands Railway	88	12%	90%	91%	82%
South Western Railway	87	14%	90%	92%	82%
Transport for Wales	87	14%	90%	93%	82%
Northern Trains	86	16%	90%	94%	80%
West Midlands Trains	85	16%	89%	92%	79%

Figures are rounded to the nearest whole number. [1]Source: ORR Experiences of Passenger Assist survey. [2]Source: Passenger Assist app data.

Table 2: Weighted assessment of assistance delivery, 2023 to 2026 (accessible version)

Operator	Overall delivery score	Reliability (proportion receiving none of the assistan
London North Eastern Railway	93	8%
Southeastern	92	8%
Network Rail	91	8%
Chiltern Railways	91	9%
Greater Thameslink Railway	91	10%
Great Western Railway	90	11%

Operator	Overall delivery score	Reliability (proportion receiving none of the assistan
Avanti West Coast	89	10%
Greater Anglia	89	12%
TransPennine Express	89	13%
ScotRail	89	12%
East Midlands Railway	88	12%
South Western Railway	87	14%

Operator	Overall delivery score	Reliability (proportion receiving none of the assistan
Transport for Wales	87	14%
Northern Trains	86	16%
West Midlands Trains	85	16%

Figures are rounded to the nearest whole number. [1]Source: ORR Experiences of Passenger Assist survey. [2]Source: Passenger Assist app data.

Key findings

31. Overall, our assessment continues to show a picture of relatively high satisfaction with assistance received at the station, and with staff knowledge and proficiency, across all operators. Individual operators' relative performance on each satisfaction metric is generally consistent with how they are ranked on the other satisfaction metrics

32. Reliability of assistance delivery shows greater variation across operators, with persistent delivery gaps continuing to affect the minority of passengers. This has a clear impact on their

confidence to travel.

33. The data presented in Table 1 represents a rolling picture over three years, weighted towards more recent performance. This helps explain why last year's weakest performers remain amongst the weaker performers this year, despite some recent signs of improvement, which are discussed below. Annex B provides annual data for the years 2023-2026.

Strongest performers

34. The strongest performer overall is London North Eastern Railway (LNER), followed by Southeastern. These were also the two strongest performers in 2025. Network Rail, Chiltern Railways and Greater Thameslink Railway (GTR) are this year's next strongest performers.

35. These operators are best performing across all metrics but are joined by Great Western Railway (GWR) for satisfaction with assistance received (via survey), TransPennine Express (TPE) for satisfaction with staff knowledge and proficiency, and Greater Anglia for satisfaction with the assistance experience (via app ratings).

36. Year-on-year, South Western Railway (SWR) (17% in 2024-2025 to 9% in 2025-2026), Northern Trains (18% to 13%) and Chiltern Railways (10% to 5%) achieved the largest improvements in reliability. Chiltern passengers' satisfaction with the assistance experience (via app ratings) also rose from 81% to 87%.

Weakest performers

37. The operator with the lowest overall score was West Midlands Trains (WMT), followed by Northern, Transport for Wales (TfW) and SWR. These operators were consistently poorer across all metrics. Avanti West Coast and East Midlands Railway (EMR) recorded some of the lowest satisfaction with assistance experience at stations (via app ratings).

38. Year-on-year, Avanti also had the largest drop in reliability from 9% in 2024-2025 to 12% in 2025-2026.

39. The app satisfaction data has also given us enhanced visibility of operators with smaller samples in our survey, who are therefore not able to be included in our full Delivery assessment.

Engagement with operators

40. Following our in-depth Capability to Improve assessments last year, this year we have continued to engage with 2025's weakest performers Northern, SWR and WMT, in order to achieve sustained improvements.

41. We have also engaged with operators where we have specific new concerns regarding performance during the latest year. This included TfW for reliability and Avanti for impact on confidence to travel and app ratings.

42. Chapter 3 covers this in more detail.

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3. Regulatory engagement and monitoring outcomes

43. ORR has continued to engage with operators where benchmarking results, passenger feedback or previous regulatory interventions identified concerns. While each operator's circumstances differ, engagement has focused on understanding root causes, supporting improvement activity and monitoring outcomes. Several operators have now developed and implemented improvement plans, with early evidence of positive change.

Northern Trains

44. Our concerns about Northern's delivery of passenger assistance were prompted by ongoing poor results in our Experiences of Passenger Assist survey. In September 2024, we asked Northern to set out a plan that would deliver sustainable improvements for passengers who require assistance to travel, informed by an assessment of current performance, known weaknesses and risks to the delivery of passenger assistance.

45. We held Northern to account for delivery of its passenger assistance improvement plan, and all actions were completed by November 2025. Our focus then moved to monitoring passenger assistance outcomes using a range of insights to assess the effectiveness of its actions. While outcomes did not improve right away, recent data suggest a more promising picture is emerging

(see Annex B for annual data):

- A decrease in the proportion of respondents to ORR's Experiences of Passenger Assist survey reporting they received none of the assistance booked with Northern. For example, in 2024/25 the proportion was 18% which fell to 13% in 2025-2026. At Leeds, the proportion of passengers reporting that they received none of their booked assistance fell from 15% in 2023/24 to 5% in 2025-2026;
- Increasingly positive ratings submitted via the Passenger Assist mobile app at key stations like Leeds and Manchester Victoria. For example, Passenger Assist mobile app satisfaction scores increased from 67% to 80% at Manchester Oxford Road and from 68% to 84% at Manchester Victoria over the same period;
- Fewer participants in Northern's mystery shopping exercises report they receive none of their assistance.

46. We are therefore confident that the delivery of the actions in the improvement plan have laid the foundation for more Northern passengers who require assistance to have a more positive experience. While there are still instances where things go wrong, Northern now has the capacity to identify them, investigate the causes, learn lessons and take appropriate action. Importantly, insight-led continuous improvement, which was lacking prior to implementation of the improvement plan, is now embedded in Northern's passenger assistance processes and driving better outcomes. A critical aspect to this improvement has been the significant buy in and support from senior staff at Northern; accessibility is now a priority that is regularly discussed at senior levels within the organisation.

47. Overall, we are satisfied that Northern's improvement plan has begun to deliver for passengers that require assistance. We have therefore returned to business-as-usual monitoring of Northern's passenger assistance performance and will be focused on whether the recent improvements are sustained.

Disability awareness training investigation

48. In August 2025 new reporting requirements for all operators revealed that around 800 Northern passenger facing staff had not received required disability awareness training. The training gap had not been identified or addressed in the passenger assistance improvement plan.

49. Northern submitted a plan to deliver training to station staff and, on 4 November 2025, reported that it had fulfilled the plan.

50. Notwithstanding the delivery of training in October 2025, given the range of issues raised previously, we continued to have concerns about Northern's historic and ongoing compliance.

51. In December 2025, we opened a formal licence investigation into Northern's provision of disability awareness training for its staff. The licence investigation focused on commitments that Northern made in its Accessible Travel Policy 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:
    i. The recent training has been effective and is enabling staff to meet the required training outcomes, and
    ii. A similar situation will not arise in future.

52. Northern's own internal audit, conducted in December 2025, identified a number of systemic issues relating to governance processes, monitoring and controls that led to the failure to deliver training to staff.

53. In March 2026 ORR published our decision that Northern had failed, and was failing, to comply with commitments made in its published Accessible Travel Policy (ATP) to provide disability awareness training for staff and to provide the management and oversight arrangements that would support and assure delivery of that training.

54. During the investigation, Northern submitted a training improvement plan aimed at bringing it back into compliance. ORR accepted the plan as comprehensive and well-targeted at tackling systemic issues relating to governance, oversight and delivery of disability awareness training.

55. In addition, Northern submitted a package of reparations with an estimated value of £550,000, intended to represent a commitment to repair and build a foundation for improved standards of customer service delivery.

56. We monitored Northern's delivery of its improvement plan and reparations package, and on 8 September 2026 we wrote to it to confirm all actions in the plan had been completed and satisfactory progress with the reparation package had been made. Having received this confirmation, we have returned to our regular monitoring of Northern's obligations related to

disability awareness training.

South Western Railway (SWR) and West Midlands Trains (WMT)

57. Our 2025 Benchmarking Report highlighted ORR's concerns regarding the passenger assistance performance of SWR and WMT. We asked both operators to develop improvement plans designed to address the reliability of their assistance provision and are now monitoring implementation.

58. Both operators have made good progress implementing their plans and have reported that delivery remains broadly on track. Improvement activity is being embedded within day-to-day operations and continues to receive attention from senior management at both operators. Both operators are focused on improving the reliability of assistance delivery through a range of measures. For example, SWR is strengthening operational accountability, governance and investigation processes, while WMT has enhanced performance monitoring and reporting arrangements and targeted improvement activity at priority stations to better identify and address passenger assistance issues.

59. ORR will continue to monitor delivery of the remaining commitments and assess the longer-term impact of both plans on passenger assistance outcomes.

Transport for Wales (TfW)

60. In 2024 ORR raised concerns with TfW about reliability of passenger assistance and the operator established a range of improvement actions in response. Since then, TfW has achieved some improvement in passenger assistance performance but remains among the weakest performers.

61. ORR therefore revisited its engagement with TfW during the 2026 benchmarking exercise to assess the impact of the actions previously introduced and ensure TfW fully understood the factors contributing to poor passenger assistance performance.

62. TfW has continued to refine its approach, including introducing new customer insight measures and more targeted analysis of assistance delivery at locations where operational

challenges are greatest.

63. ORR continues to monitor performance trends and engage with TfW as this work progresses. While there are some encouraging signs of improvement, further sustained progress will be required to demonstrate that recent initiatives are delivering meaningful improvements for passengers who require assistance.

Avanti West Coast

64. Following analysis of the 2026 benchmarking results, we engaged with Avanti after identifying a recent decline in the reliability of passenger assistance, passenger satisfaction and passenger confidence to make a similar journey in the future. While Avanti has historically performed around the industry average, ORR sought assurance that the emerging negative trajectory was understood and being addressed.

65. Avanti's review identified challenges at Crewe and Preston, where increasing assistance demand and operational complexity were placing pressure on service delivery. In response, the operator began developing a targeted programme of improvement activity focused on staffing, operational processes and ways of working with stakeholders.

66. Early actions included securing additional staffing at Crewe and Preston, strengthening engagement with Network Rail and developing dedicated passenger assistance coordinator roles. A wider passenger assistance improvement plan remains in development.

67. ORR will continue to monitor performance trends and engage with Avanti as this work progresses to ensure the negative trajectory is reversed.

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4. Common themes from operator improvement activity

Introduction

68. Although the operators we engaged with faced different challenges when delivering passenger assistance, several common themes emerged in the actions they identified to resolve those challenges and improve performance and reliability. These themes were:

- improving performance insight through better data and monitoring;
- targeting improvement activity where risks and demand are greatest;
- strengthening governance and accountability;
- improving collaboration across the industry; and
- embedding more structured approaches to continuous improvement.

69. This chapter explores how operators have applied these approaches to better understand performance, strengthen oversight and deliver more reliable assistance for passengers.

Understanding performance through better data and insight

70. The operators we engaged with have consistently identified lack of robust insight on passenger assistance performance as a root cause of poor reliability. As a result, all have moved beyond tracking a small number of headline performance metrics and made greater use of passenger feedback, operational data and assurance activity to understand performance, identify issues and implement solutions.

71. Several operators identified limitations in the information they used to monitor performance and responded by introducing new sources of insight or making better use of existing data.

72. SWR and WMT developed enhanced dashboard reporting and monitoring arrangements, enabling managers to access more detailed information on assistance delivery, app usage, training compliance and operational performance.

73. Northern similarly expanded the range of data and insight used to monitor accessibility performance, drawing on customer and staff feedback, complaints, mystery shopping and operational information to support improvement activity.

74. Some operators also introduced new sources of insight:

- TfW introduced a dedicated customer-focused passenger assistance survey following engagement with ORR;
- Northern expanded its use of mystery shopping exercises to help better understand passenger experiences; and
- SWR commissioned research focused specifically on passenger expectations and experiences of assistance.

75. Many operators also highlighted the value of direct engagement with disabled passengers and accessibility forums. Stakeholder groups were increasingly used to test proposed solutions, identify emerging concerns and provide challenge from a lived experience perspective.

76. This increased use of customer insight demonstrates the value operators place on understanding passenger experiences and identifying opportunities for improvement. A common lesson emerging from our engagement is the value of combining multiple data sources rather than relying on a single performance metric. Passenger feedback, operational data, complaints, mystery shopping and staff insight can each provide a different perspective and, when considered together, offer a more complete understanding of passenger assistance outcomes. Operators are then better equipped to identify processes that are not working for passengers and can focus resources on resolving them.

Using data to identify priority stations

77. Operators are increasingly targeting resources and improvement activity at locations where demand, operational complexity or performance concerns are greatest. Many operators we spoke to found that passenger assistance demand and performance challenges were concentrated at a relatively small number of locations. Rather than adopting broad network-wide interventions, they used data to identify priority stations and focused resources where data suggested the greatest improvements could be achieved.

78. Northern prioritised improvement activity at its ten stations with the highest passenger assistance demands, including Leeds, before considering how successful interventions could be rolled out elsewhere. WMT focused specific improvement activity at Wolverhampton and Milton Keynes, while Avanti identified Crewe and Preston as priorities due to the volume of assistance requests, frequency of interchanges and operational complexity associated with those stations.

SWR identified Southampton as being prone to significant peaks in demand so carried out a resource review to inform its staffing model. It has also developed station-level approaches to monitoring and understanding performance.

79. Engagement with Avanti highlighted the value of using detailed operational analysis to understand demand patterns. The operator identified that passenger assistance demand was concentrated around specific timetable flows and peak periods, helping it better understand where additional staffing and coordination arrangements may have the greatest impact.

80. This targeted approach allows operators to focus improvement activity where it is likely to benefit the largest number of passengers while also providing opportunities to trial and refine new initiatives before wider rollout.

Strengthening governance and accountability

81. Clear ownership and leadership are critical enablers of improvement. A recurring theme across several operators was the importance of ensuring passenger assistance performance receives appropriate management attention and accountability. This reflects findings from our previous Capability to Improve assessments in 2025, which identified governance, oversight and accountability arrangements as important factors in supporting improvement.

82. Several operators strengthened governance arrangements following engagement with ORR. Northern introduced director-level oversight of passenger assistance improvement activity and established formal governance arrangements to monitor delivery.

83. SWR and WMT both strengthened reporting and oversight processes to support implementation of their improvement programmes. Both operators developed comprehensive passenger assistance risk registers to identify, record, monitor and mitigate risks to delivery before they caused issues.

84. As part of their passenger assistance improvement plans, both SWR and WMT have developed station-specific assistance plans, providing a more structured framework for identifying accessibility improvements, monitoring delivery and strengthening accountability for assisted travel outcomes at individual stations. The plans are intended to support greater local ownership of accessibility issues and more consistent delivery of Passenger Assist across their networks

85. Northern, SWR and WMT have all introduced internal passenger assistance discussion forums,

where data and insight are discussed regularly with senior staff, which helps retain focus on improvement activities.

86. Operators also reported increasing management accountability through objectives, governance forums and programme oversight arrangements. These mechanisms help ensure that accessibility considerations are included in wider operational decision-making and that improvement activity remains visible across the organisation.

Working collaboratively across the industry

87. Delivering reliable assistance often requires effective collaboration between operators, infrastructure managers and industry bodies. Passenger assistance frequently involves multiple organisations and several operators identified collaboration as a key enabler of improvement.

88. Avanti reported increased collaboration with Network Rail on communication, handover arrangements and operational issues affecting assistance delivery. Avanti and Network Rail are trialling the use of the electronic handover when transferring information about assistance between boarding and alighting stations. They are the first to trial the technology between operators.

89. TfW increased engagement with Rail Delivery Group and other operators to identify good practice and strengthen its own approach. Northern, SWR and WMT also highlighted involvement in industry working groups and collaborative initiatives aimed at improving reporting, training and operational processes. In addition, a number of operators identified handover arrangements between organisations as an area of continued focus. More effective communication, consistent processes and clearer allocation of responsibilities were all seen as important contributors to reliable assistance delivery.

90. The ability to share lessons learned and good practice across organisational boundaries is likely to become increasingly important as passenger assistance demand continues to grow.

Conclusion

91. Our engagement with operators has highlighted several factors associated with improvement, including stronger use of data and customer insight, targeted interventions at locations of greatest risk, clearer governance and accountability, effective collaboration across the industry,

and continuous monitoring of passenger outcomes. We expect operators to continue to build on these approaches as demand for passenger assistance continues to grow.

- ← Previous 3. Regulatory engagement and monitoring outcomes
- → Next 5. Next steps

5. Next steps

92. ORR's objective remains to improve outcomes for passengers who require assistance by promoting the reliable delivery of high-quality passenger assistance across the rail network. While many passengers continue to report positive experiences, the findings in this report demonstrate that reliability challenges remain and that sustained focus is required from operators to address them.

Continued regulatory oversight

93. We will continue to monitor passenger assistance delivery using a range of data sources, including passenger research, Passenger Assist mobile app feedback, industry reporting and intelligence gathered through regulatory engagement. We will focus our efforts on those areas where intervention is likely to have the greatest benefit for passengers who require assistance, including operators demonstrating persistently poor performance, deteriorating outcomes or emerging risks affecting disabled passengers. Where necessary, we will continue to engage directly with operators and take further action to secure improvements.

Monitoring delivery of improvement activity

94. During the coming year we will continue to monitor the implementation and effectiveness of improvement programmes developed by operators, including South Western Railway, West Midlands Trains, Transport for Wales and Avanti West Coast. Our engagement will focus on evidence of delivery, the impact of actions on passenger outcomes, the sustainability of improvements over time and the effectiveness of governance and assurance arrangements. We expect operators to continue embedding continuous improvement approaches and to identify and address emerging issues before they adversely affect passengers.

Embedding and sharing good practice

95. The findings in this report highlight a number of common themes associated with successful improvement. We will continue to identify, promote and share examples of good practice across the industry, encouraging operators to learn from one another and adapt successful approaches to their own circumstances. In particular, we will continue to promote effective use of customer insight, strong governance arrangements, targeted operational interventions and meaningful engagement with disabled passengers and stakeholders.

Developing the benchmarking framework

96. We will continue to refine the benchmarking methodology to ensure it remains robust, proportionate and focused on the outcomes that matter most to passengers. This will include continued use of Passenger Assist mobile app feedback, further monitoring of confidence-to-travel measures and consideration of how additional operational performance information can be incorporated into future assessments. We will continue working with industry partners to improve understanding of passenger assistance performance across all operators, including those not currently covered by survey-based benchmarking.

Looking ahead

97. Passenger assistance demand is expected to continue growing and operators will need to ensure that accessibility considerations remain embedded within operational planning, decision-making and service delivery. We expect operators to move beyond a narrow focus on compliance and adopt approaches centred on understanding passenger experiences, identifying risks and driving continuous improvement.

98. The Railways Bill, which is currently passing through Parliament, creates a new passenger watchdog that will take on some of ORR's consumer functions including monitoring of services provided to passengers who require assistance. The new watchdog will grow out of Transport Focus and we are working collaboratively with them to plan and prepare for the transition, and to ensure that passenger protections are maintained and enhanced.

- ← Previous 4. Common themes from operator improvement activity
- → Next Annex A: Operators included in benchmarking assessment

Annex A: Operators included in benchmarking assessment

Table A.1: Operators included in benchmarking assessment and total sample sizes by metric (all 2023-2026)

Operator	Reliability (proportion receiving none of the assistance booked)	Satisfaction with assistance received at station	Satisfaction with staff knowledge and proficiency at station	Satisfaction with assistance experience at station (via Passenger Assist mobile app)
Avanti West Coast	1,676	1,753	1,729	8,971
Chiltern Railways	293	342	339	1,241
East Midlands Railway	687	717	708	7,710
Greater Thameslink Railway	796	885	875	5,922

Operator	Reliability (proportion receiving none of the assistance booked)	Satisfaction with assistance received at station	Satisfaction with staff knowledge and proficiency at station	Satisfaction with assistance experience at station (via Passenger Assist mobile app)
Great Western Railway	3,193	3,406	3,362	15,868
Greater Anglia	767	850	835	5,045
London North Eastern Railway	4,324	4,531	4,506	14,015
Network Rail	3,658	3,853	3,822	25,020
Northern Trains	1,433	1,459	1,421	8,449
ScotRail	1,298	1,470	1,446	5,705

Operator	Reliability (proportion receiving none of the assistance booked)	Satisfaction with assistance received at station	Satisfaction with staff knowledge and proficiency at station	Satisfaction with assistance experience at station (via Passenger Assist mobile app)
South Western Railway	997	1,017	1,004	8,792
Southeastern	769	882	871	4,112
TransPennine Express	907	1,045	1,022	1,954
Transport for Wales	1,238	1,352	1,313	5,349
West Midlands Trains	784	885	867	5,081
Total	22,820	24,447	24,120	123,234

Source: ORR Experiences of Passenger Assist research report, except satisfaction with assistance experience at station (via Passenger Assist mobile app data from the Rail Delivery Group).

- ← Previous 5. Next steps
- → Next Annex B: Reliability performance by year

Annex B: Reliability performance by year

Table B.1: Reliability (proportion receiving none of the assistance booked) performance by year

Operator	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026
Avanti West Coast	10%	9%	12%
Chiltern Railways	12%	10%	5%
East Midlands Railway	15%	11%	11%
Greater Thameslink Railway	11%	10%	9%
Great Western Railway	11%	10%	11%
Greater Anglia	14%	11%	11%
London North Eastern Railway	9%	8%	6%

Operator	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026
Network Rail	9%	9%	7%
Northern Trains	16%	18%	13%
ScotRail	12%	11%	13%
South Western Railway	14%	17%	9%
Southeastern	10%	7%	9%
TransPennine Express	15%	12%	12%
Transport for Wales	17%	13%	13%
West Midlands Trains	13%	16%	17%

- ← Previous Annex A: Operators included in benchmarking assessment
- ← Previous 4. Common themes from operator improvement activity
- → Next Annex A: Operators included in benchmarking assessment