



OFFICE *of the*
RAIL REGULATOR



RAIL COMPLAINTS

Rail Complaints Bulletin
Report Number: 2

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‘...passengers have a right to expect excellent service’

I am pleased to be able to publish this second report providing information on the numbers of complaints received by the passenger train operators and their performance in dealing with those complaints. As my predecessor, John Swift QC, emphasised in the first Complaints Bulletin, passengers have a right to expect excellent service. Where this service fails to meet their expectations, they have a right to complain and seek an explanation, an apology and, where appropriate, redress.

This report is a mid-year report, covering the period from April to mid-October 1998. In this time, I am pleased to be able to note some significant actions to improve the way in which train operators deal with complaints from their customers. A number of operators have invested in improved complaint handling systems that allow them to record complaints better, answer them more quickly, and make better management use of the information provided by passengers' letters and telephone calls. Some operators have also installed better telephone handling systems that make it easier for passengers to register complaints by telephone, although for the industry generally this is an area that still requires significant improvement.

As the first Complaints Bulletin explained, a low number of complaints is not necessarily a measure of success. Making it easy for passengers to register their complaints, by providing pre-printed comment forms and easily accessible telephone numbers, may well encourage passengers to register their comments on operators' services. This is not something to be afraid of, and those operators who have taken actions to improve their accessibility are to be applauded.

However, operators must ensure that they are able to deal with the complaints they receive in a timely and effective way, providing a high quality service to their customers. In this respect complaint handling performance has been patchy this period. Some operators have provided a high level of service throughout this period, answering a very high level of complaints within their response targets, but a small number are falling well below acceptable standards. I have sought explanations from them of their poor performance and an assurance that matters will be put right. I will be monitoring the situation closely. All operators must ensure that the commitments made to this office, and more importantly, the commitments made to passengers in terms of speed and quality of responses to complaints, are met over the next six months. Passengers will expect to see improved performance when the next report is published in the summer.

CHRIS BOLT
Rail Regulator

February 1999

Introduction

This is the second Complaints Bulletin published by ORR, covering the period 1 April to 17 October 1998. As in the last report, published in July 1998, this report contains information about the volume of complaints that passenger train operators have received from their passengers and the effectiveness of their complaint handling procedures. For each train operator we have shown:

- ◆ the total number of written complaints received in the period;
- ◆ the total number of telephone complaints received in the period, including as a percentage of total complaints received;
- ◆ the percentage of written complaints received on pre-printed complaint forms; and
- ◆ the percentage of complaints closed within 20 working days and the percentage closed within each operator's target closure time.

We have also produced a league table ranking each train operator on the number of written complaints received per 100,000 journeys to allow comparison between operators, and have also shown for the passenger train operators as a whole a breakdown of complaints by subject.

It is important to note that this report only includes data on first time complaints made directly to the passenger train operators themselves. It does not include data on second time complaints made to other organisations, such as the Rail Users Consultative Committees (RUCCs) about the train operators. The data in this report is provided by the train operators themselves, to an agreed format and following guidelines produced by ORR. However, it is unaudited data and it is therefore possible that there are some discrepancies in the data. ORR is currently developing an independent auditing regime which will validate future complaint data provided by train operators.

For the purposes of this report, we have used the Office of Fair Trading's definition of a complaint (ie. that a complaint is a single contact from a customer). A complaint may cover more than one issue (eg. train punctuality and quality of information). While operators report the number of issues contained in the complaints they receive (see Fig 1.) all other tables in this report relate to the number of individual contacts received by train operators from their passengers.

Total Complaint Volumes

At an industry level, the passenger train operators reported 540,000 written and telephone complaints in the period covered by this report. This equates to 117 complaints per 100,000 journeys made in the period, or one complaint every 855 passenger journeys.

Table 1: *Total complaints reported by passenger train operators for 1 April 1998 - 17 October 1998*

Total written complaints	Total telephone complaints	Total complaints	Ratio to passenger journeys
356,476	183,530	540,006	117:100,000

For all train operators as a group, there has been a 20% increase in the

volume of total complaints received in the first half of 1998-99 compared to the same period last year. It should be noted, however, that there has been a greater increase in the volume of telephone contacts (up by 56%) than in written contacts (up by 7%). This is, at least in part, attributable to the developments made by a number of train operators in providing more accessible telephone services and better recording systems. As we have explained previously, an increase in complaints may be as much a result of improved access as an increase in the level of customer dissatisfaction.

Comparisons between operators

To allow comparison between operators, we relate the numbers of written complaints received by operators to the numbers of passenger journeys made in the same period. Table 2 shows the number of written complaints received per 100,000 passenger journeys. The operator with the highest number of written complaints per 100,000 journeys is at the top of the table and the operator with the lowest is at the bottom. The table also shows the percentage change in the number of complaints received from the equivalent period last year.

In our last report we commented on some of the factors that can affect the volume of complaints received. Service performance obviously has some correlation to passengers' propensity to complain, but the ease with which passengers can make complaints can also increase overall complaint numbers. In this respect it should be noted that LTS Rail, which has seen the second largest percentage increase in complaints received in this reporting period on the same period last year, has also seen the largest increase in the percentage of complaints received by pre-printed comment forms. As we also noted in our last report, those train operators whose business is predominantly in the long distance market receive substantially more complaints per journey than regional or commuter-based operators.

Telephone complaints

All passenger train operators are required to provide public telephone numbers for passengers to contact

Rank	Train company	Written complaints per 100,000 journeys	Percentage change in written complaints received
1	Virgin CrossCountry	659	+33%
2	Virgin West Coast	656	-3%
3	Great North Eastern Railway	489	-26%
4	First Great Western Trains	409	+38%
5	Anglia Railways	271	-26%
6	Midland Main Line	250	+19%
7	Wales & West Passenger Trains	201	+67%
8	First North Western Trains	108	+158%
9	Chiltern Railways	80	+95%
10	Central Trains	80	+21%
11	Silverlink Train Services	46	+73%
12	Great Eastern Railway ¹	44	-12%
13	Northern Spirit	41	-27%
14	LTS Rail	34	+137%
15	ScotRail Railways	32	-4%
16	West Anglia Great Northern	30	-8%
17	Thames Trains	29	-30%
18	South West Trains	29	+23%
19	Thameslink Rail	28	+22%
20	Cardiff Railways	25	+128%
21	Gatwick Express	21	+30%
22	Connex South Eastern	20	-2%
23	Merseyrail Electrics	19	+12%
24	Connex South Central	18	-3%
25	Island Line	10	+7%

¹Great Eastern's complaints include figures for Delay Repay¹ compensation forms, not included last year.

Table 2: Number of written complaints received per 100,000 passenger journeys by train operator and the percentage change in volume measured over the same half-year period in 1997-98

them to register complaints. The ability to register complaints by telephone is central to providing an accessible complaint handling service. Registering and resolving complaints over the telephone wherever possible benefits both passengers and train operators alike. Providing a contact telephone number with too few lines, so that passengers have difficulty in getting through, or requiring all passengers who telephone to put their complaint in writing, places significant barriers in front of passengers and makes it less likely that they will make their complaint, whilst at the same time more likely that they will form and retain a poor impression

Train company	Telephone complaints as a % of total complaints
Merseyrail Electrics	81
West Anglia Great Northern	79 ¹
Thames Trains	72 ¹
Chiltern Railways	52
First Great Western Trains	52
Virgin Rail ²	49 ¹
First North Western Trains	39 ¹
Island Line	25
Silverlink Train Services	25 ¹
Thameslink Rail	22
Connex South Central	19 ¹
Wales & West Passenger Trains	19
Connex South Eastern	18 ¹
Cardiff Railways	16
South West Trains	11
Great North Eastern Railway	7
Midland Main Line	4 ¹
ScotRail Railways	4
Great Eastern Railway	3
Anglia Railways	3
Gatwick Express	2
Central Trains	1
LTS Rail	1
Northern Spirit	Not provided

¹ Includes complaints and enquiries
² Figures are for both West Coast and CrossCountry

Table 3: Telephone complaints received as a percentage of total complaints

of the operator.

Table 3 shows, for all passenger train operators, the proportion of total complaints registered in the period that were received by telephone. It should be noted that a number of operators are currently unable to differentiate between telephone complaints and telephone enquiries and so their figures represent total telephone contacts received in the customer relations department. For this reason, caution should be exercised in drawing comparisons between operators in this area.

Accessibility

As with telephone systems, train operators need to make it easy for passengers to make complaints about their service in writing. One way of achieving this is to

provide pre-printed complaint forms that are readily available to passengers at stations. The table below shows the percentage of written complaints received on pre-printed complaint forms during the period covered by this report. The total for all passenger train operators is 51%, and most operators show relatively high levels of complaints received by this method, with only Island Line (who only received 47 written complaints in the period) and Thameslink receiving less than one-third of their written complaints via pre-printed forms. Anglia again receives the highest proportion of written complaints by this method, and special mention should go to LTS, who received the second highest proportion of complaints by this method, despite only receiving 26% for the last four months they reported on in 1997-98.

Table 4: Percentage of written complaints received on pre-printed comment forms

Train company	% of written complaints received on pre-printed comment forms
Anglia Railways	77
LTS Rail	72
Silverlink Train Services	71
Virgin West Coast	63
Central Trains	62
Virgin CrossCountry	58
Midland Main Line	57
South West Trains	56
Northern Spirit	53
West Anglia Great Northern	52
Chiltern Railways	52
Thames Trains	51
Gatwick Express	51
First North Western Trains	48
ScotRail Railways	46
First Great Western Trains	45
Great Eastern Railway	44
Cardiff Railways	43
Connex South Central	39
Wales & West Passenger Trains	35
Great North Eastern Railway	35
Merseyrail Electrics	33
Connex South Eastern	33
Thameslink Rail	29
Island Line	5

Speed of response

As important as the volume of complaints received is the way in which train operators deal with their complaints. Each operator has a commitment within its Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP) to provide a full response to complaints within set timescales. We receive from the operators details of the percentage of cases answered within these targets and, because they differ from operator to operator, the percentage of cases answered within twenty working days - the recommended minimum standard of Service First (formerly The Citizen's Charter Unit). The table below shows train operator performance at meeting these targets, so that we can compare performance by the percentage answered within twenty working days.

The performance of the train operators in this area has improved since 1997-98. Sixteen operators have answered more than 90% of complaints within twenty working days in the period, an improvement from eleven last year. However, most operators need to do more to ensure that they meet their own targets more consistently; only nine answered more than 90% of complaints within their own target response time in the period, and in the case of a small number of operators, performance has, at times, been unacceptable. Where this has been the case, we have taken these matters up with the operators concerned. We have gained assurances from those operators that actions are being taken to improve performance. These include the provision of extra staff within customer relations departments, shift working to extend opening hours of departments and improved monitoring of operational

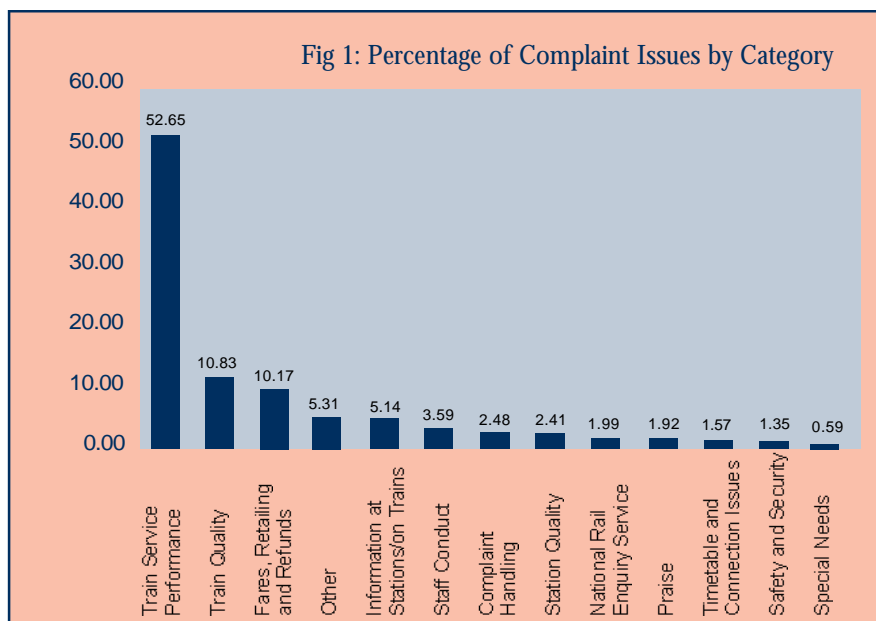
Train company	% of written complaints closed within 20 working days	% of written complaints closed within operator's own target response time	Train operators' target response times
Central Trains	100	100	3 weeks
Chiltern Railways	100	100	10 working days
Merseyrail Electrics	100	100	20 working days
West Anglia Great Northern	100	99	15 calendar days
South West Trains	100	97	10 working days
Anglia Railways	100	95	10 working days
Island Line	100	92	10 working days
First Great Western Trains	100	27	5 working days
Northern Spirit	99	100	1 month
Gatwick Express	99	84	10 working days
Connex South Eastern	99	77	10 working days
Great Eastern Railway	98	94	10 working days
Wales & West Passenger Trains	97	79	10 working days
Connex South Central	97	73	10 working days
Thameslink Rail	96	89	10 working days
First North Western Trains	94	80	5 working days
Thames Trains	87	74	10 working days
ScotRail Railways	86	86	20 working days
Midland Main Line	84	84	20 working days
Virgin CrossCountry	73	40	10 working days
Virgin West Coast	71	41	10 working days
Silverlink Train Services	68	57	10 working days
Great North Eastern Railway	67	67	20 working days
Cardiff Railways	62	56	15 calendar days
LTS Rail	49	41	5 working days

Table 5: Target response time and percentage of written complaints closed within target by train operator

difficulties to allow extra resources to be provided in advance of expected complaint peaks. We look to all operators to meet their response targets consistently with a high level of success, ie. to take seriously the need to meet the commitments they have made to their passengers.

Complaint categories

The passenger train operators provide us with a breakdown of the subjects that have caused their passengers to register complaints. This information is contained within the bar chart below. While operators are improving their complaint recording systems, not all are yet able to break down an individual letter or telephone call of complaint into multiple categories. Until that time, we are unable to provide a breakdown by operator. For all operators, the subjects of complaint for the period of this report is very similar to the breakdown for the full year 1997-98, with train service performance accounting for over half of all complaints and train quality and fares/retailing each accounting for one complaint in ten.



Next steps

End of year report

This report covers the period April to mid-October 1998. The Regulator will also publish an annual report for 1998-99 which will include full-year data. The annual report will provide comparisons by individual operator with the data for the previous year on:

- ◆ complaint volumes for the industry and for individual train operators;
- ◆ the percentage of complaints received on pre-printed forms;
- ◆ the speed of response performance of individual operators.

The annual report will also provide greater analysis of the reasons behind train operator performance, look at developments being made by the industry to improve their complaint handling procedures and performance and explore the actions being taken by the Regulator to promote improvements by the industry.

Auditing

The Regulator is developing an independent audit process of complaint statistics provided by the industry and the complaint handling systems used. It is expected

that the data published in the annual report will have been independently audited.

Annex A

Complaints received per 1,000,000 passenger

Train Company	Complaints received per 1,000,000 passenger miles
Virgin CrossCountry	65
First North Western Trains	58
Wales & West Passenger Trains	56
Virgin West Coast	49
First Great Western Trains	47
Anglia Railways	46
Central Trains	35
Great North Eastern Railway	34
Midland Main Line	32
Merseyrail Electrics	32
Chiltern Railways	30
Silverlink Train Services	29
Cardiff Railways	27
Great Eastern Railway	25
Island Line	21
Northern Spirit	21
LTS Rail	18
Thames Trains	16
ScotRail Railways	16
West Anglia Great Northern	15
South West Trains	15
Connex South Eastern	13
Thameslink Rail	13
Connex South Central	12
Gatwick Express	8

miles by train operator

Annex B

Total complaint volumes and journey data

Train Company	Total number of written complaints P1-P7 1998-1999	Total passenger journeys P1-P7 1998-1999	Total passenger miles P1-P7 1998-1999	Total number of telephone complaints P1-P7 1998-1999
Anglia Railways	9917	3,654,000	213,855,000	348
Cardiff Railways	818	3,228,000	30,173,000	159
Central Trains	14580	18,206,000	413,996,000	154
Chiltern Railways	4031	5,025,000	135,500,000	4425
Connex South Central	11258	63,891,000	977,449,000	2640
Connex South Eastern	10222	51,353,000	766,571,000	2262
First Great Western Trains	37511	9,167,322	806,275,255	40602
First North Western Trains	16510	15,312,000	284,821,000	10768
Gatwick Express	525	2,507,000	67,958,000	8
Great Eastern Railway	12484	28,067,000	508,964,000	450
Great North Eastern Railway	37751	7,724,358	1,115,556,897	2736
Island Line	47	450,000	2,218,000	16
LTS Rail	4314	12,682,000	233,854,000	22
Merseyrail Electrics	2457	12,751,578	77,784,626	10497
Midland Main Line	8859	3,544,000	277,968,000	412
Northern Spirit	9733	23,609,000	471,265,000	not supplied
ScotRail Railways	9808	30,792,000	619,300,000	1413
Silverlink Train Services	8,342	18,146,000	284,000,000	2822
South West Trains	18775	64,778,000	1,230,796,000	2377
Thames Trains	4839	16,437,000	295,715,000	12741
Thameslink Rail	4972	17,888,000	377,478,000	1408
Virgin CrossCountry	48884	7,423,000	752,698,000	51538
Virgin West Coast	55698	8,488,000	1,143,822,000	51538
Wales & West Passenger Trains	15487	7,711,000	275,239,000	3516
West Anglia Great Northern	8654	29,112,000	562,781,000	32216
Total	356476	461,946,258	11,926,037,778	235068

IF YOU HAVE A COMPLAINT

If you have a complaint about any aspect of the service provided on the national rail network, either on trains or at stations you should firstly contact the train operator providing the service about which you wish to complain. If you are unsure about which train operator you should complain to, you can register your complaint with any operator and they will ensure that your complaint is passed to the correct place. Details of train operators' names, addresses and telephone numbers are shown on posters at stations and on trains and are also listed in the telephone directory. Telephone numbers for the train operators are shown below.

Train Operator	Customer Relations Department Tel. No.
Anglia	01473 693333
Cardiff Railways	01222 430430 (to 5/3/99) 01222 449844 (from 5/3/99)
Central Trains	0121 654 3833
Chiltern Lines	01296 332114
Connex South Central/ Connex South Eastern	0870 603 0405
Gatwick Express	0171 922 9696
Great Eastern	0645 505000
Great North Eastern Railway	0845 722 5333
Great Western	01793 499458
Island Line	01983 408585
LTS	01702 357889
Merseyrail	0151 702 2071
Midland Main Line	0345 221 125
Northern Spirit	0870 602 3322
North Western Trains	0161 228 4696
ScotRail	0141 335 4612
Silverlink	01923 207258
South West Trains	0171 620 5620
Thameslink	0171 620 6333
Thames Trains	0118 908 3678
Virgin Trains	0121 654 7400
Wales & West	01222 430090
West Anglia Great Northern	0345 818919

If you are unhappy with the response that you receive from a train operator, you should contact your local Rail Users Consultative Committee which may be able to help you. These Committees are independent of the train operators and were set up under the Railways Act 1993 to protect the interests of the users of Britain's railway network. Telephone numbers for the Committees are listed below.

Name of Rail Users Consultative Committee (RUCC)	Tel. No.
RUCC for Scotland	0141 221 7760
RUCC for Wales	01222 227247
RUCC for North Western England	0161 228 6247
RUCC for North Eastern England	01904 625615
RUCC for the Midlands	0121 212 2133
RUCC for Eastern England	01733 312188
RUCC for Western England	0117 926 5703
RUCC for Southern England	0171 222 0391
London Regional Passengers Committee	0171 505 9000

Contact points for further information

All press enquiries to the ORR
0171 282 2002/2082

All requests for further copies of the report to
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All other enquiries about this bulletin to Stuart
White on 0171 282 2000