

Northern Trains Limited *Complaints Review and continuous improvement report*

Rail Year 23-24



NORTHERN

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Introduction

This report provides an overview of the number and types of complaints Northern closed between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024. The improvements made because of the complaints we received through our continuous improvement program along with improvements made to the complaint handling process.

Overview of complaints closed in Rail Year 1 April 2023 - 31 March 2024

Complaints Received	16166
Complaints Closed	15724
Average Resolution Time	8.3 Days
% Resolved within 10 working days	73.46%
% Resolved within 20 working days	96.34%
Complaints Signposted to Rail Ombudsman	127
Average time to deadlock	12 Days



Top Complaint driver by reason

Level 2 Category	Level 3 Category	Total
Train Service Performance	Punctuality/reliability (i.e. the train arriving/departing on time)	4148
Company policy	Ticketing and refunds policy	1468
Staff Conduct and Availability	The helpfulness and attitude of staff on train	1189
Staff Conduct and Availability	The attitudes and helpfulness of the staff at station	1000
Delay compensation schemes	Claim rejected	781
Delay compensation schemes	Compensation claims process	579
Safety and Security	Your personal security on board	549
Quality on Train	Sufficient room for all passengers to sit/stand	548
Fares and retailing	Ticket buying facilities - ticket vending machine	412
Other – miscellaneous	Other – miscellaneous	341
Staff Conduct and Availability	The helpfulness and attitude of other staff (not on train/not at station)	335
Fares and retailing	The value for money for the price of your ticket	306
Delay compensation schemes	Speed of response	283
Delay compensation schemes	Level of compensation	269
Provision of information	Provision of information about train times/platforms	259
Safety and Security	Your personal security whilst using station	224
Fares and retailing	Ticket buying facilities – online	201

Complaints handling improvements

In Rail Year 2023 – 2024 Northern had 4715 internal customer satisfaction survey's completed by customers who accessed our complaints handling process a 29% response rate. The customer effort score for Rail Year 2023 – 2024 increased by 8% to 53% finding it easy to interact with Northern's complaint handling process, compared to Rail Year 2022 – 2023.

This is a direct result of enhancing our customer-facing webforms, the launch of our refund and compensation triage tool and the re-launch of our revamped online chat service. Although complaints received across Complaint handling categories increased by 90 overall in Rail Year 2023 -2024 when factoring in the increased passenger journeys and the performance achieved based Rail Year 2022 -2023 this would equate to a 14% reduction.

In January 2023 we introduce a new operating model into our customer experience center and this changed the way we responded to customer objections and handle complex complaints, this resulted in Northern being able to achieve resolution without the need for the Rail Ombudsman involvement reducing the number of deadlock letters issued in Rail Year 2023 – 2024 by 60% compared to Rail Year 2022 – 2023.

Overall complaints across all categories reduced in Rail Year 2023 – 2024 by 10% even though passenger footfall increased by 5% compared to Rail Year 2022 – 2023.

Train Service Performance

We continue to actively manage our train performance to support our customer's.

Cancellations of services occur for many reasons including, but not limited to, weather impact, infrastructure failure, train faults, theft and trespass, and traincrew unavailability. Working collaboratively through our close partnership with Network Rail, we develop mitigation for these occurrences on a continuous basis.

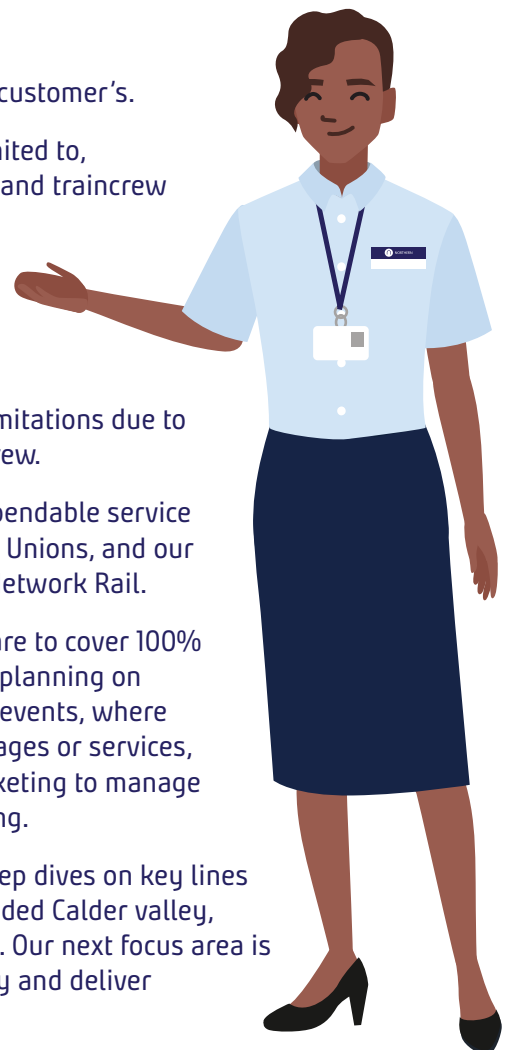
The main reasons for exceeding our cancellation target have been the high rate of traincrew unavailability through sickness, a high level of outstanding training creating a skills gap in our driver resource and limitations due to existing terms and conditions to work Sundays for many of our traincrew.

Looking forward, we continue to focus on providing a resilient and dependable service for our customers, working in collaboration with our colleagues, Trade Unions, and our industry partners to implement our Joint Performance Strategy with Network Rail.

We are finalizing the deployment of automated customer count software to cover 100% of fleet, enabling us to use the onboard data to improve fleet capacity planning on specific routes. Where we anticipate increased foot fall due to special events, where possible we can strengthen the planned services with additional carriages or services, increasing capacity. We're already actively use Advanced purchase ticketing to manage customer demand, maximizing pricing differential on advanced ticketing.

NTL are working in partnership with NWR to complete performance deep dives on key lines of route to identify potential challenges to performance. This has included Calder valley, where over 60 improvements have been identified for implementation. Our next focus area is the Harrogate line, where again we will focus in partnership to identify and deliver improvements to performance.

We received 4148 complaints in rail year 2023 – 2024 a 12 % reduction on Rail Year 2022 – 2023 in relation to train service performance. Had the improvements not been delivered and a similar performance achieved as per rail year 2022 – 2023 we would have received 4657 complaints in this area.



Ticket and Refunds Policy

Key Insight – Penalty Fares

As part of the penalty fare increase in January 2023, all signage was updated and replaced, improving the size and readability of information. We continue to review placement of signage to ensure good visibility and continue to work with other train operators to improve potential hotspots, including in Manchester Airport where NTL works in partnership with TPT to support a comprehensive and cohesive approach.

NTL complete proactive visits prior to large events to ensure we are compliant with the station's risk assessment.

Additional Revenue Protection officers have been recruited to support customers and to ensure compliant customers are not footing the bill for non-compliant customers.

Revenue protection officers have received additional training, focusing on both seen and unseen disabilities, L3 investigative practice, including conflict de-escalation, as well as going through a 2 year rolling programme of customer service training.

Where we see specific challenges with school pupils fare evading, our scholastic travel team proactively reach out and work with schools to educate pupils and parents.

Where matters proceed to court, the public interest test is continually applied and out of court settlements are usually offered (not for assault or abuse cases).

In Rail Year 2023 – 2024 we received 1468 complaints in relation to ticketing and refunds policy with the main complaint driver being Penalty Fares this is 22% reduction compared to Rail Year 2022 – 2023. Had no improvement been made based on Rail Year 2022 – 2023 results this would have equated 1674 complaints.

Helpfulness and attitude of staff on train and at the station

We continue to support our customers across our network. We ask our customers post travelling for their feedback, combined with our complaint data, and use this information to understand where we do well and where we need to improve.

We have improved our analytics in complaint trends to drill down into lines of route / stations where we see hot spots in complaints.

We share the information with our operational teams on a periodic basis and agree improvement actions on key trends through our insight to action programme.

We also share this information with our training department to support with prioritisation of resource / scheduling to ensure staff in these areas are prioritized for customer service training.

We continue to deliver our customer service training programme and are currently recruiting an additional 2 trainers to support in rolling out our programme.

In Rail Year 2023 -2024 we received 2189 complaints in relation to the attitudes and helpfulness of staff at station and onboard our services, a 13% reduction compared to Rail Year 2022 -2023.

Had no improvements been made then we would have received 2459 complaints based on Rail Year 2022 – 2023 performance.



Delay Repay Compensation process

Overall compensation claims received via our delay repay process increased by 48% in Rail Year 2023 – 2024 to 355,778. We received 1954 complaints across all our delay repay complaint categories .0055 per claim VS Rail Year 2022 – 2023 .0081 per claim. The same performance in Rail Year 23-24 to Rail Year 22-23 would have resulted in 2882 complaints being received in Rail Year 2023 – 2024 an increase of 47% of the actual complaints we received. Further details on our delay repay improvements can be found here:

<https://www.northernrailway.co.uk/sites/default/files/2024-05/Delay%20Repay.pdf>

Safety and Security on board / Sufficient room for all passengers to sit and stand

Key insight – Crowding

NTL are supporting customers to make informed choices on travelling through a number of initiatives.

Our use of automated customer count data enables us to share through our website and our new CIS screens which services are likely to be busier as well as a real time indicator of capacity on our train carriages, which we display for c75% of our services through our CIS on the platform.

Our automated customer count data is also used in our fleet planning, to maximise the capacity we have, specifically during peak demand as well as supporting special events in the region.

NTL also actively use Advanced purchase ticketing to manage customer demand, maximizing pricing differential on advanced ticketing, encouraging customers to travel at quieter times to reduce crowding.

As part of our new rolling stock programme, we have specifically highlighted requirements that support customers on busier services.

In Rail Year 2023 – 2024 we received 1089 complaints in relation to safety and security onboard and sufficient room for all passengers to sit and stand, A 33% reduction in complaints compared to Rail Year 2022 – 2023. Had no improvements been delivered then we would have expected to receive 1237 complaints based on Rail Year 2022 – 2023 performance.



Accessibility Improvements

Key Insight - Failed booked assistance, Mobility scooter policy

Our customer data allows us to view the information from customers who have identified themselves as disabled separately and subsequently produce a Disabled Customer CSAT score which we monitor continuously.

We know from our complaints data that there are three key areas of complaint that relate primarily to the disabled customers experience;

- Failure to provide assistance as requested
- Lack of or condition of accessible facilities at stations
- Complaints related to our mobility scooter policy

These insights have allowed us to prioritise key initiatives to improve the customer experience. They include;

- Supporting regional station teams with business cases to increase resources related to assistance, including seasonal support staff
- Supporting our Property team with a targeted Accessibility for All suite of works aimed at installing or enhancing accessible facilities at 160 stations across our network
- Rebriefing of Conductor teams on the mobility scooter policy to achieve a greater consistency and reviewing complaints to adapt the policy to be more customer friendly

We have undertaken comprehensive Mystery shopping work in 2023 to support our customer insights and have expanded our Accessibility team in early 2024 to allow us to put a greater emphasis on acting on insights.

In Rail Year 2023 – 2024 we received 442 complaints across all accessibility categories 134 of these were reported booked assistance failures across 57529 booked assisted travel journeys provided, A .0023 failure compared to .0026 failure rate in Rail Year 2022 – 2023 across 50617 booked assisted travel journeys provided. Had no improvements been delivered we would have expected to see 500 complaints across these categories based on Rail Year 2022 – 2023 performance.

