

## Train operators cause more than a third of rail delays

Driver sickness, broken-down trains and passengers being taken ill during journeys were responsible for thousands of delays last year, official figures have shown.



Train operators responsible for more than a third of rail delays Photo: Alamy

By David Millward, Transport Editor

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Statistics produced by the industry regulator have shown that 39 per cent of delays were caused by train operators themselves.

In all train companies were responsible for 28 per cent of delays to their own services with a further 11 per cent being the fault of other operators.

Nearly 188,000 trains – 2.6 per cent of the total – were more than half an hour late or cancelled completely.

According to the Labour Force Survey, produced by the Government statistical service, ONS, there were 238,292 days of train and driver sickness last year.

One company, C2C, operating services from London to Essex was responsible for 40 per cent of the delays – measured in delay minutes – it faced.

A spokesman for the company, which otherwise has the best punctuality record in the industry said: “More than 80% of our delays are caused by issues with the train or third-party factors, such as passengers being taken ill.”

Chiltern, another company with an above average punctuality record, was nevertheless responsible for 40 per cent of the its own delays. According to a company spokesman the difficulties were due to two separate incidents with a locomotive.

First Capital Connect, which runs commuter services through into London from the north and south and held responsible for 23 per cent of its delays, said many of the problems were due to drivers, using other operators, arriving late to work because of problems.

Southern, which links London with the Sussex coast and was responsible for 35 per cent of its own delays, blamed a train failure and two incidents of passengers falling ill for the disruption it faced.

Commuter services are deemed as running late if they fail to arrive within five minutes of schedule, longer distance services are given 10 minutes leeway.

But even these figures fail to tell the true picture with many services being deemed to have arrived when they pass the last signal before entering the station.

Train operators have been swift to complain about delays they face because of Network Rail, but the figures show that their performance also has room for improvement.

Maria Eagle, Shadow Transport Secretary, seized on the figures. "The train operators are very good at telling Network Rail to raise its game and are right to do so, but they must also recognise their own failings.

“These companies made £305 million from running rail services last year, at a time of inflation-busting fare rises. It's clear they should be increasing their investment in the services they run and cracking down harder on poor performance.”

But a spokesman for the Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC) defended the industry.

“Latest figures show nine out of 10 trains arrived as planned. Delays caused by train companies have almost halved in the last decade.”