

Play fair on refunds, train operators told



The 19 train operators received £136 million from Network Rail for delays Stefan Rousseau/PA

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Train companies will be forced to reveal the amount they pay in compensation to passengers for disruption amid claims that there is an unfair gap between the amount operators receive and pay out for delays.

The 19 train operators received £136 million from Network Rail in the past financial year for delays to passenger services. Partial data from the rail industry show that train companies paid £20.97 million to passengers under a complex compensation system.

Only eight companies are required under the terms of their contracts to publish compensation figures. Seven of the remaining 11 train operators disclosed the scale of their compensation packages when contacted. Those which refused claimed that opening up their books to public scrutiny would put them at a commercial disadvantage.

Passenger Focus, the watchdog, argues that making all the data public will ensure that passengers get a fair deal when using the railway.

The white-collar transport union TSSA claimed that the compensation system was "rigged against the passenger". The rail industry denies the claims but under government reforms to the franchising system all operators will have to disclose the scale of compensation payments when lines are re-let.

All operators were contacted this week after publication of Network Rail's annual accounts. The financial statements show that Network Rail paid £136 million to operators for unplanned delays and cancellations to services in the year to April compared with £82 million in 2012. "The increase reflects worse performance on key routes as well as more demanding targets," the accounts said.

The eight companies obliged to disclose how much they paid in compensation to passengers paid out £12.59 million between them. Seven of the remaining 11 operators paid out a combined £8.38 million. Arriva Trains Wales, c2c, Chiltern and Northern Rail declined to provide compensation data.

Norman Baker, the Rail Minister, vowed to bring more transparency to the industry. "We are in an era of open Government and the rail industry, the recipient of vast sums of public money, should be part of that," he said.

The Association of Train Operating Companies said that it had neither figures for the total amount paid out in compensation nor the number of passengers who had tried successfully or unsuccessfully to make a claim.

Train companies said it was wrong to compare compensation payments paid to passengers with those made to operators because train companies had to be covered for business lost from people who were intending to travel but turned back before

they reached the station and people who were put off from travelling by train at a later date as a result of disruption.

Under government guidelines, passengers are entitled to a minimum of 20 per cent of the price of single ticket if their train arrives more than one hour late or 10 per cent of the return fare.

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