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Control Period 7 passenger train performance reset: Consultation on train performance measures for 2026-29

As trailed in Transport Focus's 7 October 2024 response to the above consultation, this supplementary note follows completion of the research undertaken in partnership with the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) and Network Rail to explore passengers' views. That research is now complete, and we will publish findings in December to coincide with publication of your conclusions.

The new research shows that 97 per cent of passengers considered arriving within one minute of the scheduled time as punctual, while 89 per cent considered arriving within three minutes as punctual. Seven in ten (69 per cent) felt measuring to one minute was fair and three-quarters (75 per cent) felt measuring to three minutes was fair. 16 per cent felt one minute was too strict, while one in five (20 per cent) felt three minutes was too lenient.

In our original response we concluded that passengers' interests would be best served by ORR sticking with 'on time' (that is, within one minute of scheduled time measured at each station) as the primary metric to hold Network Rail to account for delivery of a punctual railway.

That remains our position for three principal reasons:

- We know that passenger satisfaction declines steeply from the very first minute of delay, rather than only after three minutes¹. Passengers want trains to run on time, rather than nearly on time.
- For some there are real world impacts of being even three minutes late. A connecting train or bus, or appointments where the railway running bang on time really matters (for instance collecting children from nursery).
- For some it is a matter of principle: if the railway truly cares about paying customers it would not count a late running train as a punctual train. They do not want the railway patting itself on the back for having, in their view, failed to achieve success.

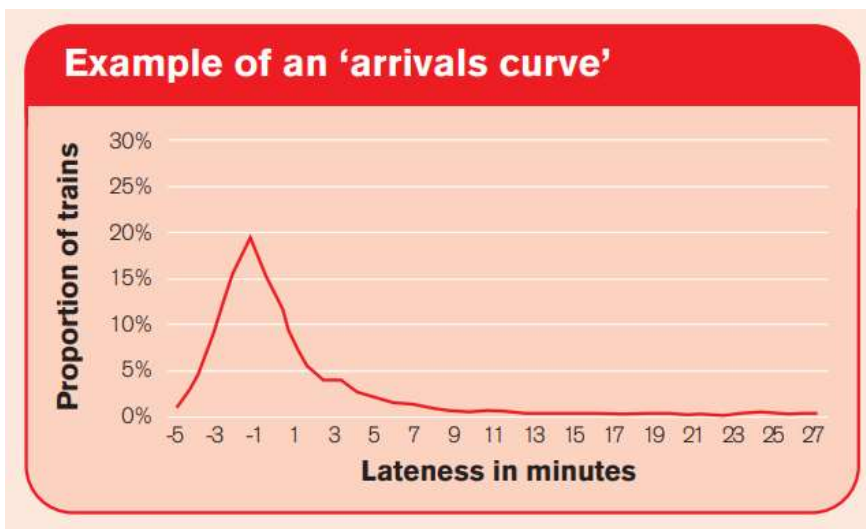
It is true that many passengers could 'live with' a metric defining punctual as within three minutes of scheduled time, but some argue that is only because people are conditioned to accept mediocrity. Taking everything into account, our conclusion is that counting trains that are up to three minutes late as punctual will not incentivise the railway to strive for what passengers *actually* want – and is therefore not in passengers' best interests.

¹ <https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/publication/train-punctuality-the-passenger-perspective/>

In closing, we reiterate a point made in our 7 October response: “Transport Focus would expect ORR to be considering train performance against a number of different delay thresholds.” It is important to passengers that ORR is focusing the industry to striving to improve the whole of the ‘arrivals curve’.

This echoes a question we posed previously about the limitations of a single pass/fail metric, irrespective of the threshold it uses:

“Might the answer be targets to encourage movement of the whole ‘arrivals curve’ (example below) to the left on the graph, incentivising better ‘right time’ performance, but also giving incentives to achieve a three-minute delay rather than a four-minute delay, or a nine-minute delay rather than an 11-minute delay and so on?”



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