

# Poor rail punctuality blamed on floods and staff shortages

Morning rush-hour and engineering faults also cited as factors, with Network Rail looking set to miss five-year target

---

- Press Association
  - [guardian.co.uk](http://guardian.co.uk), Friday 11 January 2013 13.25 GMT
- 



Latest figures show the two main London-to-Scotland companies – East Coast (pictured) and Virgin West Coast – ran fewer than four in five trains on time. Photograph: Alamy

Floods, staff shortages and constant morning rush-hour problems combined to drag down rail punctuality last month.

The two main London-to-Scotland companies – East Coast and Virgin West Coast – ran fewer than four in five trains on time during the period from 9 December 2012 to 5 January 2013, Network Rail said.

London Midland, where passengers have experienced repeated staff shortages, only reached a 77.7% trains-on-time figure for the period.

But some companies ran almost all of their services on time, with London to Tilbury and Southend company c2c achieving a 98% figure.

Overall, a total of 88.2% of trains ran on time in the four-week period compared with 88.8% in the same period over the new year in 2011/12.

Virgin's figure was 75.8% and East Coast only reached 77.2%.

But nine of the 19 companies achieved at least 90%, with London Overground reaching 96.9% and Merseyrail recording 94.5%.

A spokesperson for Network Rail (NR) said: "Severe weather with multiple flooding, landslide and embankment slip events caused severe disruption over a number of days to many train operators and particularly impacted our long-distance customers."

Some of the worst of the flooding last month was in the West Country. Yet First Great Western still managed to run 84.0% of trains on time – albeit down on the 89.5% figure it achieved in the same period a year before.

Although the flooding did cause much disruption and London Midland's staff problems contributed to the difficulties, passengers on many lines were also hit by a series of signal faults and broken-down trains at peak times.

The latest figures, which come only a few days after passengers saw the price of their season tickets rise by an average 4.2%, do not include cancellations and delays caused by planned engineering work.

They do include any disruption caused when engineering work finished late.

In the year from 6 January 2012 to 5 January 2013, train companies ran 91.4% of trains on time.

This is below the 92.5% target for the period 2009-14 – a five-year target average that NR is set to miss.

Announcing to-be-approved £37.5bn plans for the railways earlier this week, NR said its target for 2014-19 would be unchanged.

An Office of Rail Regulation spokesman said: "Some rail passengers have suffered poor performance in recent weeks – far below the high standards they have come to expect in recent years.

"The regulator has asked NR to explain the cause of these failings and to provide an update on its progress to improve performance on the key long-distance and London and south-east routes. It is imperative the rail industry learns lessons and improves train punctuality for passengers in the future."

The leader of the RMT transport union, Bob Crow, said: "These figures make a nonsense of the government's McNulty rail review plans, which would axe yet more staff from the railways even though it is clear that punctuality is already being compromised by a shortage of staff.

"No matter how the government and the train companies try to dress this up, the fact is that rail travel was more efficient, punctual and cheaper under British Rail and we will continue to press the case for full renationalisation."