

Board meeting

15 September 2020



Casework report quarter 1 2020/21

Agenda item: 9
LTW629
Drafted 01.09.20

Casework report written by Susan James, Head of Casework for Transport Focus and London TravelWatch

Overview

Quarter one of this year was always going to be an exciting but challenging period as during the first week of April 2020, we were expecting both organisations to 'go live' on an updated CRM system and also, for the London TravelWatch casework team to begin managing the Transport Focus appeals.

We were not expecting to deliver this change programme both remotely from the office and from each other. Fortunately, the plan put in place by both myself and Kate O'Reilly, the Transport Focus Stakeholder and Liaison Manager was able to flex to accommodate the necessity to work from home. The plan was further supported by Transport Focus quickly locating and sending out laptops that allowed the London TravelWatch casework team to connect more easily into the new CRM system. This had the added benefit of giving us improved connectivity options with colleagues at Transport Focus.

The team

The London TravelWatch casework team have managed the change well and have continued to provide the best possible appeal service when helping Transport Focus passengers. Case management at Transport Focus is slightly different to how they have managed their work previously. However, we have included all the new ways of working into our case handling and this will improve our output.

Reporting

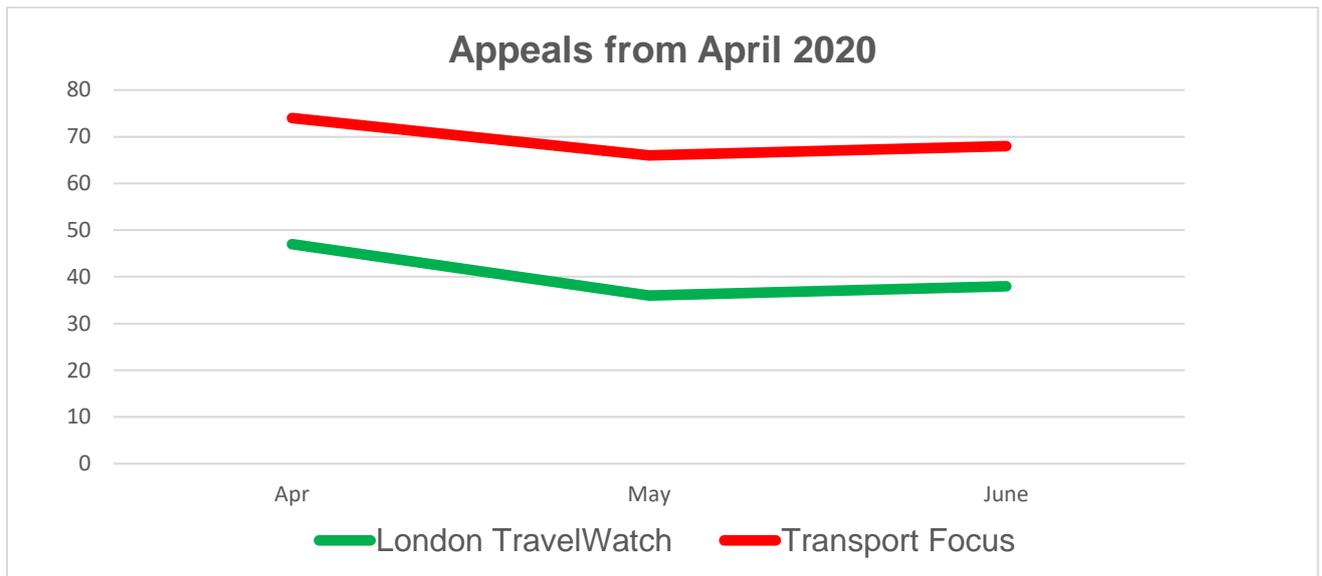
Going forward, it is envisaged that the joining of the casework functions would enable both organisations to understand the challenges experienced by all passengers in the UK. For both organisations to enjoy complete transparency for all appeals regardless of which organisation it was made to, this report is written to allow both Transport Focus and London TravelWatch staff and Members to view a single report but one that encompasses all cases which is still split by watchdog where appropriate. Also included is statistical information from the Rail Ombudsman global data portal. It gives an indication and some information of cases received by the Rail Ombudsman during quarter one.

This report is the first draft as we take the opportunity to move to single reporting. It is by no means set in stone and both boards' feedback is imperative for it to change and include other statistics as requested. By the end of this financial year it is hoped to have a single document agreed that will include all information required. However, additional information can also be provided whenever required.

Terminology

Cases received by Transport Focus and London TravelWatch are still called 'appeals' as London TravelWatch still receive these from transport providers not part of the Rail Ombudsman scheme. The question has been raised as to whether or not these contacts should still be referred to as appeals and ideas on this subject would be welcomed.

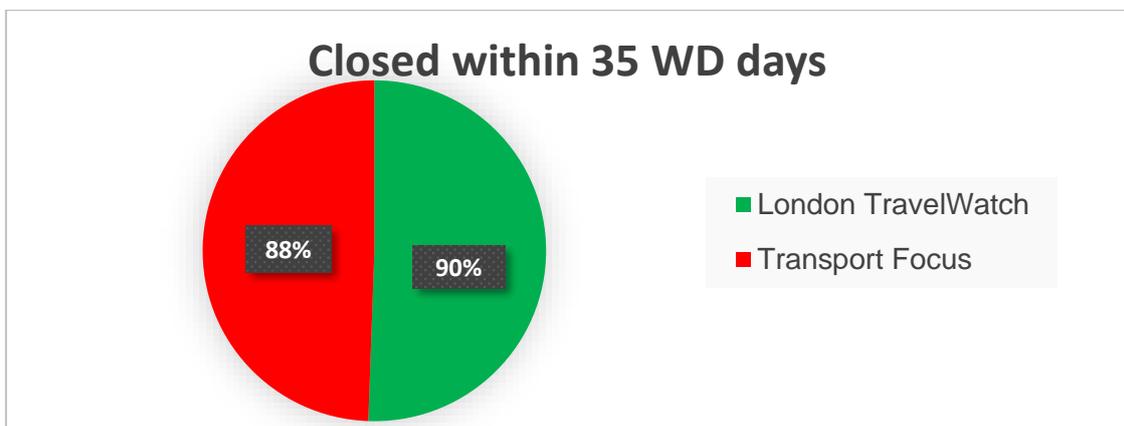
Appeals received by Transport Focus and London TravelWatch from April 2020



Casework performance

The target for closure for appeal cases is 35 working days (WD). It is acceptable for cases to be open beyond this time if the caseworker is negotiating with the operator or if the case is of a complex nature and the caseworker requires assistance from other staff members. However, the passenger must be kept informed of the situation no less than every 15 working days until the case is closed.

Some of the cases closed in May 2020 appeared to have remained open for some time. Examination of these cases indicates that they have been completed and should have been closed in quarter four of last year. This may have been an error when cases were transferred to the new system or could have been a simple admin error.



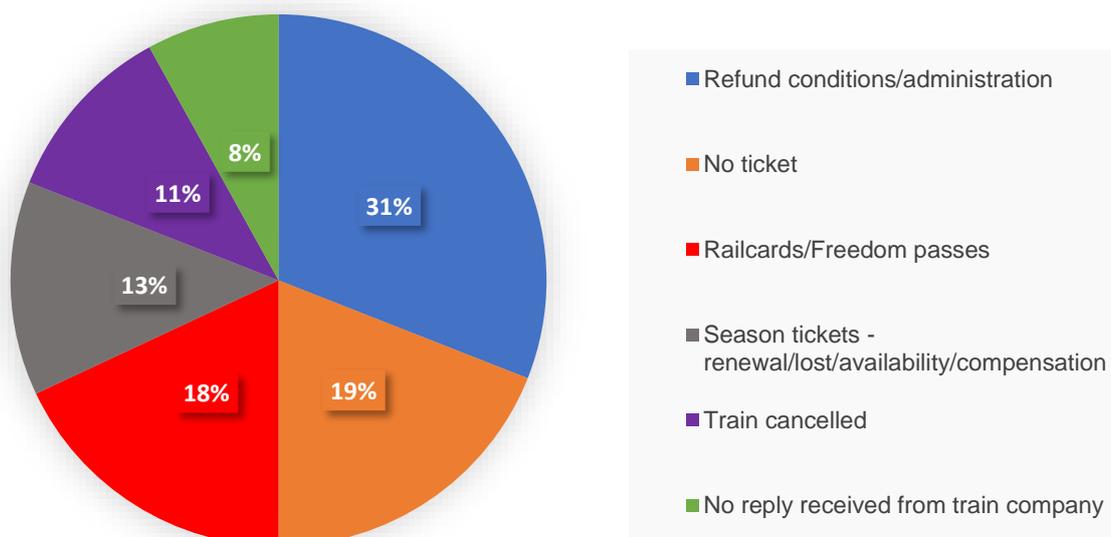
Complaint information

Operators receiving the most complaints	No of complaints	Subject of complaint	Outcome
thetrainline.com	35	Refund conditions	21 successful
Northern (Arriva)	35	Penalty fares	9 successful, 9 neutral*
Eurostar International Ltd	34	Refunds	16 successful, 15 neutral*
Railcards	34	Getting them/incorrect	14 successful, 10 neutral*

*An example of a neutral outcome would be one where the passenger does not believe that their refund calculation is correct. The casework team would check the calculation themselves and with the TOC. A neutral outcome would be where the calculation is correct and the caseworker would reassure the passenger of this.

TfL by mode	No of complaints	Subject of complaint
Transport for London	3	Refunds and lack of response
TfL Buses	9	
TfL Oyster/contactless payment	10	
TfL DLR (Docklands Light Railway)	5	
TfL Overground	6	
TfL Underground	8	
TfL CrossRail only (MTR Crossrail)	1	
TfL Oyster 60+	3	
Total	45	

The six most common complaint subjects overall



Case types received

The Rail Ombudsman receive most of the general appeals from passengers which means that the types of casework received by Transport Focus and London TravelWatch are frequently linked to policy and therefore much more challenging and time consuming. In this period the casework team have been trying to negotiate refunds/compensation for passengers where the TOC's policy, the National Rail Conditions of Travel and the DfT guidance already clearly state the passenger entitlement. Nevertheless, the team enter often long drawn out negotiations where they use all their skills and experience to persuade the TOC to change their mind. Many passengers have asked for backdated refund claims and the DfT guidance is very clear on the subject. Regardless, the casework team have had some success in achieving really positive outcomes for passengers who may already be experiencing financial hardships due to the Covid crisis.

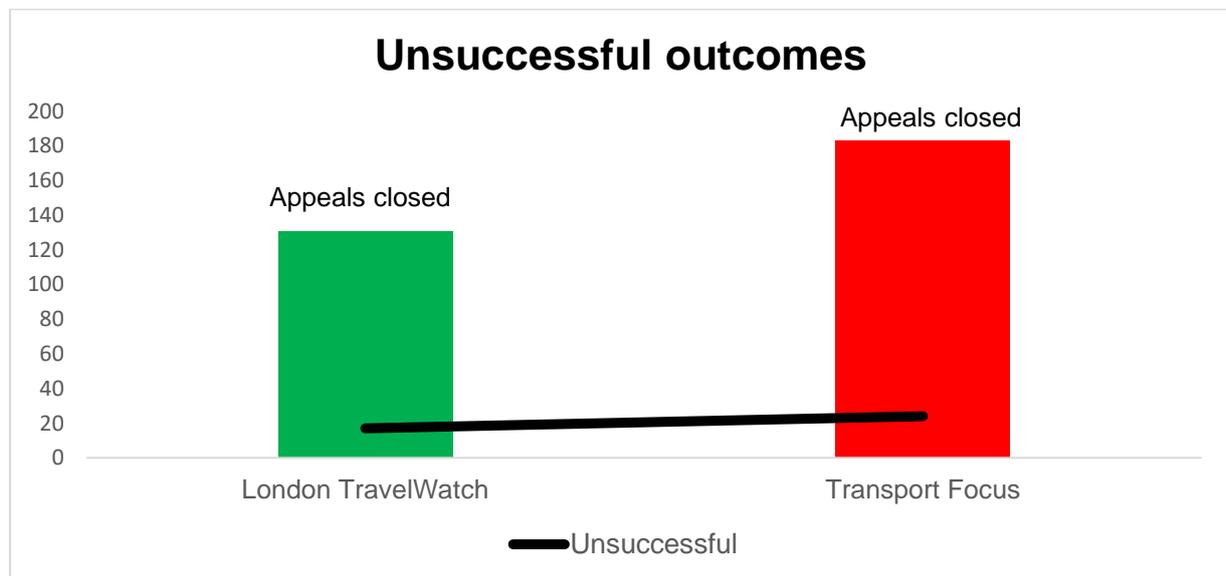
In addition, the casework team have had success where the TOC has refused to refund a passenger and the Rail Ombudsman has upheld the TOC's decision. Some passengers have then turned to Transport Focus and London TravelWatch for help and we have successfully argued for a different outcome on their behalf.

However, this additional effort takes more time than the cases managed prior to the Rail Ombudsman as the team put qualitative results for the passenger before anything else.

Closed appeals

131 appeals closed for London TravelWatch in this period

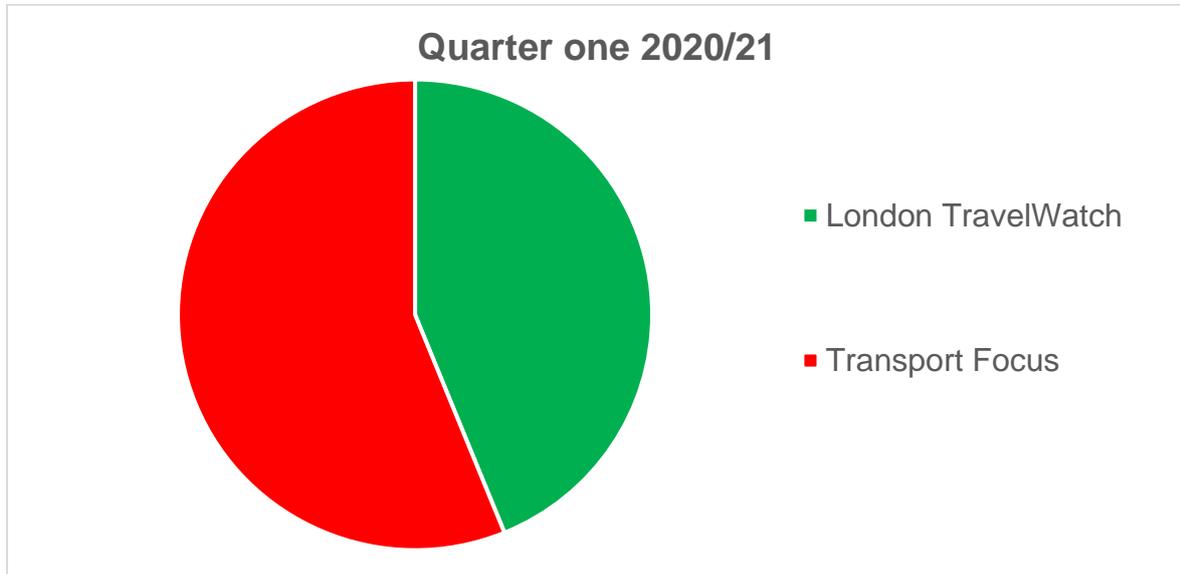
183 appeals closed for Transport Focus in this period



The graph above demonstrates the low numbers of unsuccessful appeal outcomes in this this period.

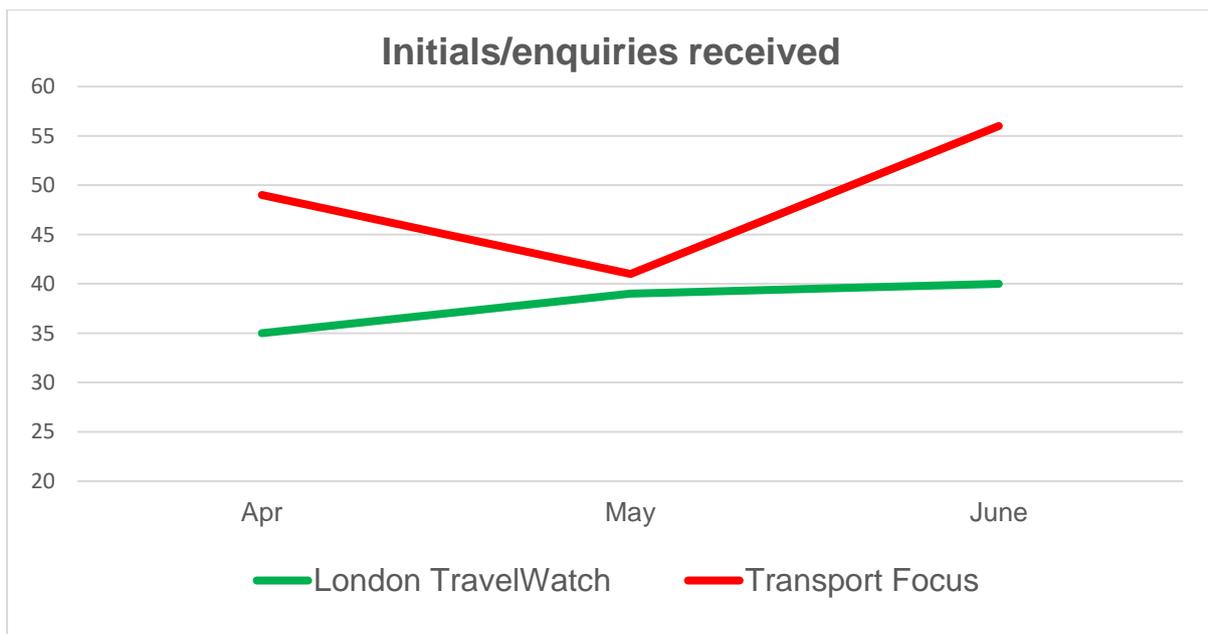
Initial and Enquiry contacts

On behalf of Transport Focus and London TravelWatch, Ventrica received 133 initial and enquiry contacts in quarter one. The table below shows how many were received for each organisation.



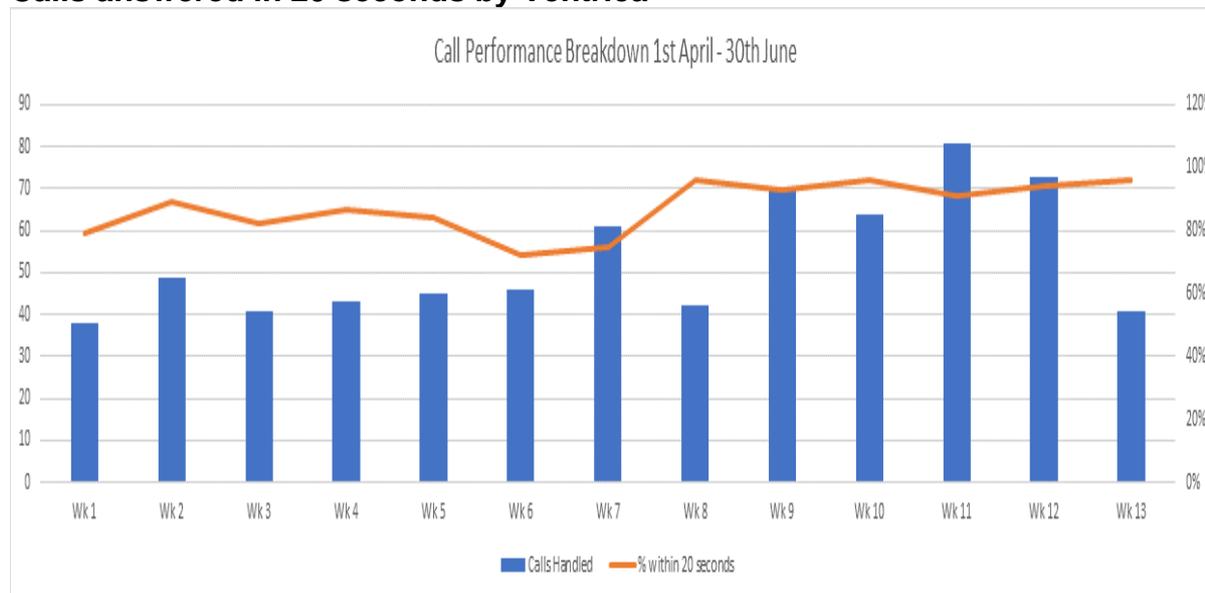
The majority of passenger contacts were for those trying to reach Eurostar – London TravelWatch and Railcards – Transport Focus.

Initial/enquiries received in Quarter one 2020/21



Ventrica – call answering and initial enquiries

Calls answered in 20 seconds by Ventrica



It did not take too long for Ventrica to have their staff up and running at home although they have experienced the same staffing issues as other organisations.

The dip in responding within the 20 second time frame was largely due to a number of calls being received at the same time. Ventrica recognised these peaks and took steps to manage the situation which increase the number of calls being answered within the 20 second target.

Most contacts are still regarding Railcards and Eurostar. There is still no decision on whether or not Railcards will be refunded or extended to cover the period when they could not be used. Contacts regarding Eurostar unsurprisingly rose again when the decision was made for passengers arriving from France to self-isolate.

For phone calls, Ventrica do not record the issue being raised, only the transport provider, although they do flag up any trends or themes they notice. However, it would be helpful to have an idea of why passengers are calling and the option to record this information is currently being discussed.

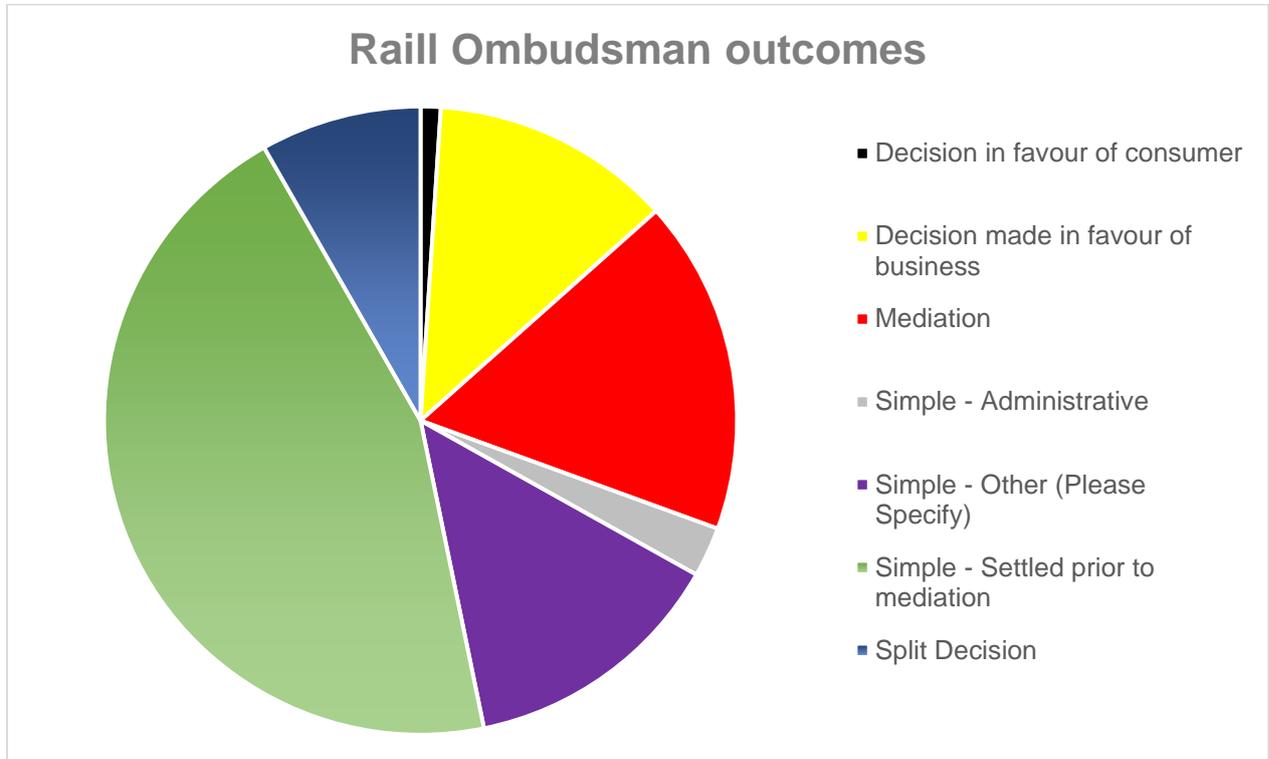
Rail Ombudsman

During quarter one, the Rail Ombudsman received more appeals from TransPennine and Avanti West Coast passengers.

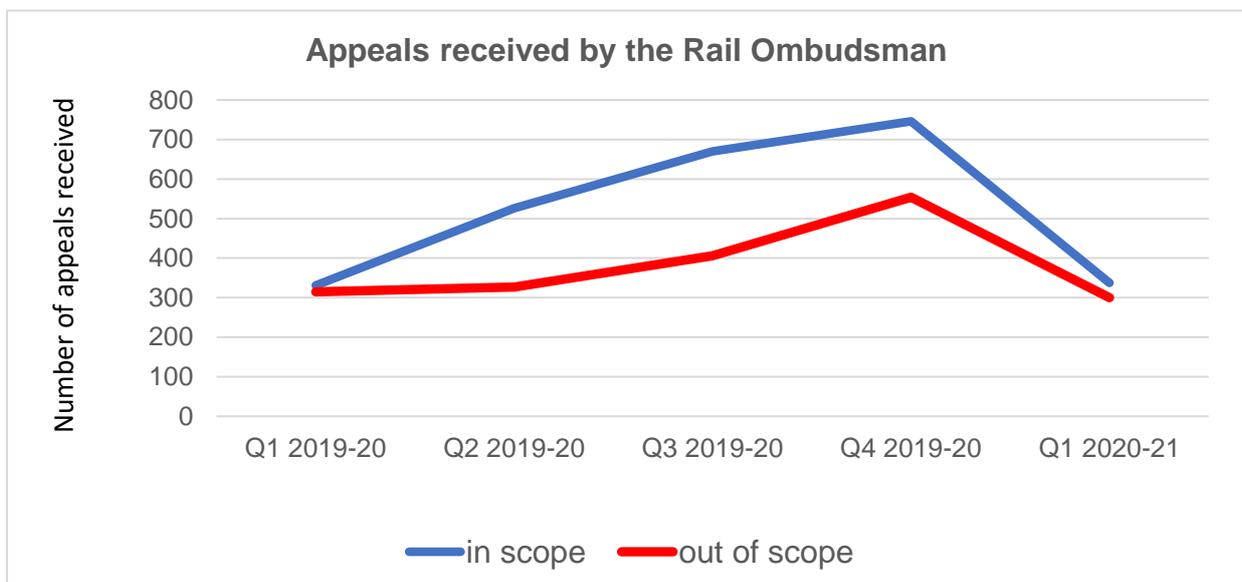
Rail Operator	No of complaints	Subject of appeals	Outcome
TransPennine Express	51	Complaints handling	Almost all simple outcome*
Avanti West Coast	45	Delay compensation schemes	19 simple outcome* 18 in favour of TOC

*an example of a simple outcome would be the Rail Ombudsman advising the TOC that a cheque/refund had not been received by the passenger

Rail Ombudsman appeal outcomes



The Rail Ombudsman originally forecast an increase in the numbers of appeals they would receive in 2020-21 and based on last year's figures this was a fairly realistic estimate. However, following the Covid crisis, the number of appeals they forecast to receive in this financial year has been reduced. The table below shows the number of appeals made to the Rail Ombudsman since quarter one of last year.



Appendix one

Passenger feedback

Below are some of the comments we have received from passengers after their case has been closed.

Thanks for attempting to get a reasonable response from TfL. I'm glad that you acknowledge that their inability to answer regarding the Equality Impact Assessment is ridiculous. Thanks for passing this over to your policy team - hopefully they'll have more luck.

Thanks for providing the further response from TfL. Hopefully they will actually provide disabled parking when the project is completed - though this is something that should have been considered at the planning stage!

Thanks again for your help. Obviously, I would've preferred a more positive outcome but recognise that this is due to TfL and not the work you've done!

Thank you for your email.

I do feel this is wrong, at the time of the announcements and on your website there was no mention of a time limited refund it was just stated as a maximum of 56 days – if there was a 'hardstop' of 17th March this should have been clearly stated. It was not either by Abellio who managed my ticket, by government who made the announcement or by you on your website.

I must say I do feel that I have been short-changed and am disappointed by your response – your website page was clear 'you have 56 days to claim a refund'. I do not think your comment referring to a subordinate page really helps as the main page on refunds does not mention 17th March. These would have worked through the system now and only some people would have been caught like me but this is a nice earner for train companies where they should be refunding money to the travelling public.

Thanks so much for getting back to me. It was really nice to read your email, as it feels like the first time anyone has actually took the time to listen to me and take what happened seriously.

Regardless of the outcome, your thoughtful response has been very welcome.

Thank you for this good news and for your part in bringing it about. It's been a long and tortuous campaign!

I am grateful for the time you have taken with this. Thankyou enormously- you have moved things on.

I would love the remainder of the taxi fare- yes please- I was hoping they might relent and reimburse me £49.30.

Many thanks for the assistance from your organization, and, yes, we have the funds back into our account.

It has been a very trying time for all and your help is greatly appreciated.

I only found your company from a blog "P****d off travelers", which I thought was very appropriate