

What Does On-Time Delivery Actually Measure?

An on-time percentage is only useful when you know what counts as on time.

A delivery score can look reassuring while leaving important questions unanswered. Was the shipment measured against the original appointment or a revised one? Did the clock stop at arrival, check-in or completed unloading? Which shipments were left out? Before comparing percentages, understand the rules behind them.

START WITH THE DEFINITION

At its simplest, on-time delivery is the number of eligible shipments meeting a defined timing requirement, divided by all eligible shipments, multiplied by 100. The calculation is straightforward. The meaning depends on the timing requirement, the shipment population and the evidence used.

For example, APQC's supplier-order measure explicitly uses the originally requested timeframe.[1] That is one defined measure, not a universal rule for freight scorecards. Your comparison needs an equally explicit definition suited to the customer's requirement.

FOUR CHOICES THAT SHAPE THE SCORE

The commitment. Identify the original requested date, accepted delivery commitment and any revised appointment. These may differ. Specify which one the score uses and preserve the history when an appointment changes.

The event and window. Define whether success means gate arrival, receiver check-in, unloading or delivery acceptance. State the time zone, allowed window and treatment of early arrivals. A same-day delivery measure cannot establish compliance with a narrow appointment window.

The population. State whether the unit is a shipment, order or delivery stop. Define which records enter the reporting period. A cohort based on original due dates helps keep overdue shipments visible; a completed-deliveries report answers a different question.

The evidence. Identify the source of the actual timestamp and distinguish event time from the time an update was entered. State how missing, conflicting or corrected records are handled. Report unresolved records separately rather than silently treating them as successes or dropping them.

SAME SHIPMENTS. THREE DIFFERENT PERCENTAGES.

Hypothetical example only. These invented counts illustrate measurement choices. They are not JTR or carrier performance, an industry benchmark or evidence of improvement.

Take 100 shipments originally due during one month. At the review cutoff, all are completed and all timestamps are available. Using receiver check-in as the event, 88 met their original appointment windows. Eight missed those windows but met later, approved appointments. Four missed both their original and applicable revised windows.

MEASUREMENT RULE	CALCULATION	RESULT
Original windows; all 100 shipments	88 / 100	88%
Latest approved windows; all 100 shipments	(88 + 8) / 100	96%
Latest approved windows; two late shipments excluded	96 / 98	98.0%

The third result is rounded to one decimal place. Removing two late shipments changes the denominator, not the successful-shipment count. None of these reporting changes makes a shipment arrive sooner.

Each result describes a different scope. The revised-appointment view can show whether a recovery plan was met. An exclusion-based view can help assess performance within agreed responsibility boundaries. Neither should replace visibility into the original commitment and the customer's experience.

EXPLAIN THE CHANGE, NOT JUST THE NUMBER

When an appointment changes, retain the original commitment, revised window, reason, time of change and authorizing party. Distinguish a customer-requested change from a recovery appointment created after a missed commitment. An updated estimated arrival time should not automatically become a new approved appointment.

For exclusions, show the rule, count and reasons alongside the score. Separately review responsibility using evidence: a missed appointment and a carrier-caused miss are different findings. A receiver closure may justify an exclusion from a provider-accountability metric while still creating disruption for the customer.

FIVE QUESTIONS BEFORE ACCEPTING A COMPARISON

- 01 Are we measuring the same promise?** Match the commitment basis, event, window and time zone before comparing providers or periods.
- 02 What is included?** Ask for the shipment count, reporting period, overdue or open shipments, exclusions and records awaiting evidence.
- 03 What changed?** Review rescheduled appointments, reason codes and any changes to measurement rules. A better percentage can reflect a different method or shipment mix.
- 04 Where are the misses concentrated?** Look at relevant lanes, facilities and service types. Show counts as well as percentages; a small sample can move sharply with one shipment.
- 05 What happened beyond the timestamp?** Review lateness duration, damage, shortages, recovery work and business consequences separately. A timing score alone does not establish a complete, damage-free delivery or a satisfactory customer outcome.

HOW THIS APPLIES TO JTR DIRECT

For appointment-sensitive freight, define the delivery requirement before evaluating transportation options. Ask what evidence supports the proposed plan, how changes will be communicated and who can authorize a revised commitment.

When reviewing performance, use the same definitions for JTR Direct and the alternatives under consideration. A breakbulk-free or shared-capacity option should be evaluated against the actual shipment requirements; its service label does not establish an on-time result.

START WITH THE RULE BEHIND THE SCORE

Bring a recent delivery report, the measurement definition and a few shipment records showing appointments, actual events and changes. These provide a practical starting point for discussing delivery requirements and where a transportation plan needs closer review.

Discuss Your Shipment - jtrlogistics.com/jtr-direct

[1] APQC, measure 102648: supplier orders received by original request date. Definition reference only; no benchmark data reproduced.