

Rail journeys fall to lowest annual levels since 1872

June 3, 2021



Rail passenger journeys in Great Britain fell to the lowest levels of annual passenger usage since at least before 1872, when records started, according to official statistics from the Office of Rail and Road.

Nationally, 388 million journeys were made in 2020-21 (April to March), which equates to only 22% of the 1,739 million made in 2019-20.

Total passenger revenue in Great Britain was £1.9 billion in 2020-21, compared to £10.4 billion in 2019-20.

There were 80 million journeys made during the final quarter (Q4 January to March) of 2020-21, down from the 139 million made in the previous quarter (Q3 October to December) and the 133 million in Q2 (July to September). This was still more than double the 35 million journeys made in 2020-21 Q1 (April to June).

This unprecedented fall in usage can be attributed entirely to the impact of the pandemic.

Three operators of services in and around London recorded the highest levels of usage relative to 2019-20. TfL Rail (32.5%), London Overground (31.8%) and c2c (31.7%) were the only operators to record at least

30% of the journeys made in 2019-20.

Merseyrail (29.5%) and Caledonian Sleeper (24.9%) recorded the fourth and fifth-highest journey numbers as a percentage of 2019-20.

Four more London and South East operators – South Western Railway, Southeastern, Greater Anglia (all 22.4%), and Govia Thameslink railway (21.8%) – recorded just over a fifth of journeys made in 2019-20.

Of the other franchised operators, Northern (20.3%) recorded the highest level of usage as a percentage of journeys made in 2019-20. ScotRail (14.9%) and TfW Rail (15.8%) recorded the lowest levels of relative usage.

Heathrow Express, which operated throughout the year, recorded the lowest level of usage as a percentage (4.7%) of journeys made in 2019-20.

'Other' tickets (35.8%) such as rover tickets, group tickets, and package products (e.g. which included accommodation and/or onward travel with other forms of transport) recorded the highest usage relative to 2019-20, albeit with only 2.9 million journeys. This was followed by off-peak tickets (26.8%), anytime/peak tickets (25.0%), advance tickets (20.9%) and season tickets (15.9%).

Graham Richards, Director of Planning and Performance at the Office of Rail and Road, said: "This unprecedented fall in passenger numbers, the lowest annual fall since the time series began, has clearly had an impact on both rail usage and ticketing revenue.

"Despite this, recent estimates published by the Department for Transport show that rail usage has recovered to around 45% of pre-COVID levels by the end of May 2021.

"ORR continues to work closely to support industry and help passengers back on to the railway safely."

Commenting on ORR's passenger rail usage statistics, Robert Nisbet, Director of Nations and Regions at the Rail Delivery Group, said: "Despite plummeting passenger numbers during the last year, Britain's trains have helped to keep key workers and people who cannot work from home on the move throughout the pandemic.

"As restrictions are lifted, the rail industry, through our safer travel pledge, will welcome more people back to train travel and help to support the country's economic recovery."

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