

Rail regulator statistics show start of return of rail passengers

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Figures from the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) show that rail travel started to rebound between April and June 2021, following the gradual easing of government covid restrictions.

Overall, there were 182 million rail passenger journeys made between April and June this year. This is more than five times the 35 million journeys made in the same quarter last year (April to June 2020).

However, this is still a long way down on the 437 million journeys made in the same quarter two years ago (2019-20 Q1). Looked at in conjunction with Department for Transport statistics, numbers indicate that passenger rail usage in Great Britain began the quarter at around 30% of pre-coronavirus levels, before increasing to as high as 55% in early June.

In terms of passenger revenue, this was £999 million, equating to 35.9% of the £2.8 billion in 2019-20 Q1, based on 2021-22 Q1 prices. Franchised passenger revenue per journey fell from £6.26 in 2019-20 Q1 to £5.45 in 2021-22 Q1. This was due to a combination of a decrease in average journey length and an increase in the proportion of journeys made using off-peak tickets.

The London and South East sector recorded 127 million journeys in 2021-22 Q1. This equates to 42.2% of the 301 million journeys in the same quarter two years ago (2019-20 Q1). London Overground (55.9%) recorded the highest relative usage this quarter with TfL Rail (53.0%) and c2c (48.2%) also recording around half of the journeys made in 2019-20 Q1. By contrast, Chiltern Railways had a relative usage of 34.5% this quarter.

The regional sector recorded 40 million journeys in 2021-22 Q1, giving a relative usage of 41.2%. Relative usage in this sector ranged from 54.5% for Merseyrail to 32.2% for ScotRail. The Long Distance sector recorded 14 million journeys this quarter, equating to 39.3% of the 36 million journeys in 2019-20 Q1.

Commenting on the ORR's Passenger Rail Usage statistics, Andy Bagnall, Director General at the Rail Delivery Group, said: "Rail companies are working together to welcome people back to train travel, whether to visit friends or family or head in to the workplace.

"This growth in journeys is supporting the nation's economic recovery because when people take the train it's more than a journey. Train travel boosts communities and local businesses as rail passengers spend £133 billion a year in places like shops, restaurants and hotels before the pandemic."

Photo credit: Office of Rail and Road