

# Research reveals rail workers' time off for poor health increases 42% in 2022 from 2019

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Rail and bus workers took over 52.3 million days off work for illness between January 1 2019 and June 30 2022, at an estimated cost of £7.7 billion, according to wellbeing and performance experts [GoodShape](#). Its *Transport Industry Health Alert* reveals an increase of 42% in time taken off work between the first half of 2019, pre-pandemic, and the first half of 2022.

The figures include an 18% increase in costs due to mental health-related absences, comparing the first half of 2022 with the same period in 2019. Since the beginning of 2019, the sector's costs for mental health-related absences have topped £1.3 billion, and that's without admin or replacement worker fees.

This significant increase in mental health-related absences highlights the psychological pressure on workers across the rail and bus industry. In the rail industry, the rate of suicide is 1.6 times higher than in any other sector and more than half of all workers have experienced poor mental health.<sup>1</sup>

"The transport sector is in a state of flux, and its workers are weary", says Alun Baker, CEO GoodShape. "Poor mental health is a historic problem for the industry. The service's frontline experience during the pandemic coupled with the cost of living crisis are pushing workers to their limit. It's important that employers hear and understand these issues, so they can drive measurable, positive change for their

people, over and above the issue of pay.”

### **Key findings in the *Transport Industry Health Alert***

#### **Absence in Rail and Bus sector increases dramatically since 2019:**

- The first half of 2022 (January 1 – June 30) saw 42% more lost working time due to absence than in the first half of 2019.
- 8.4 million days were lost in H1 2022 compared to 5.9 million days in 2019.
- The estimated direct cost of this absence increased from £828 million in H1 2019 to £1.3 billion in H1 2022.
- In 2021, 15.6 million working days were lost at an estimated cost of £2.3 billion.
- In 2020, 16.6 million working days were lost at an estimated cost of £2.4 billion.
- In 2019, 11.8 million working days were lost at an estimated cost of £1.6 billion.

#### **Bus and rail workers impacted by poor mental health:**

- The first half of 2022(January 1 – June 30) saw 38% more individual instances (spells) of mental health-related absence than in the first half of 2019.
- 1.25 million working days were lost in H1 2022 compared to 1.16 million days in H1 2019.
- The estimated direct cost of this absence increased 18% from £163 million in H1 2019 to £192 million in H1 2022.

#### **Musculoskeletal issues the most common cause of absence since 2019:**

- Since 2019, the most common cause of absence for employees in the rail and bus industry is musculoskeletal issues.
- Between January 1 2019 and June 30 2022, 6.5 million working days were lost for musculoskeletal reasons at a cost of £946 million.
- In the first half of 2022, 784k million working days were lost for musculoskeletal reasons at a cost of £121million.

### **Methodology**

All data is taken from GoodShape’s proprietary database of workplace absences which covers more than 750,000 employee records. GoodShape’s travel industry statistics are drawn from rail and bus companies, covering more than 7.3k workers. To calculate the UK estimated figures, average values were taken for employee salary earnings and working days available. The table below outlines the values taken:

|                                     | 2019           | 2020           | 2021              | 2022              |
|-------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Transport industry headcount</b> | <b>340,000</b> | <b>337,000</b> | <b>335,000</b>    | <b>335,000</b>    |
| <b>Median salary</b>                | £34,486.00     | £35,969.50     | <b>£34,658.00</b> | <b>£34,658.00</b> |

|                        |       |       |       |       |
|------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Working days available | 239.5 | 239.5 | 239.5 | 239.5 |
|------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|

The bus and rail headcounts were derived from the following sources:

Rail:

- 2019
- 2020
- 2021

Bus

- 2019
- 2020
- 2021

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