

16 February 2022

Q4 2021 rail patronage grows after key states emerge from lockdowns

Rail passenger numbers rose in the fourth quarter of 2021, signalling a return of people to the office as COVID-19 restrictions were relaxed and lockdowns removed.

National passenger numbers increased by 42.15 million or 62 per cent during the three months to 31 December 2021, and 8.3 per cent, or 8.44 million passengers above the same time the previous year.

The sharp rise followed a fall in passenger numbers during Q3 as a result of lockdowns across several jurisdictions.

Patronage remained 49.8 per cent – or 109.25 million passengers – down on pre-COVID levels.

Australasian Railway Association (ARA) Chief Executive Officer Caroline Wilkie said the increase in passenger numbers during the quarter was welcome news.

“The return to rail represents a return to a more normal way of life so it has been fantastic to see people coming back to the network after lockdown,” Ms Wilkie said.

“As many of us seek to reconnect with friends, family and the social occasions we have missed during 2021, we look forward to welcoming more people back to rail.”

The regional rail network saw the largest proportional increase in passengers, with a 112.6 per cent rise or a 3.07 million increase in passengers, during the quarter.

All Australian states recorded an increase in passenger numbers during the quarter, except for Western Australia, which saw a 0.1 per cent or 6,218 fall for the period.

NSW recorded the biggest rise, with patronage up 171 per cent for the quarter. However, the state’s passenger numbers remained 59.7 per cent down on pre-COVID levels.

Patronage in New Zealand fell by 21.5 per cent or 887,239. The quarter was 40.6 per cent down from the same time last year and 63.3 per cent below pre-COVID levels.

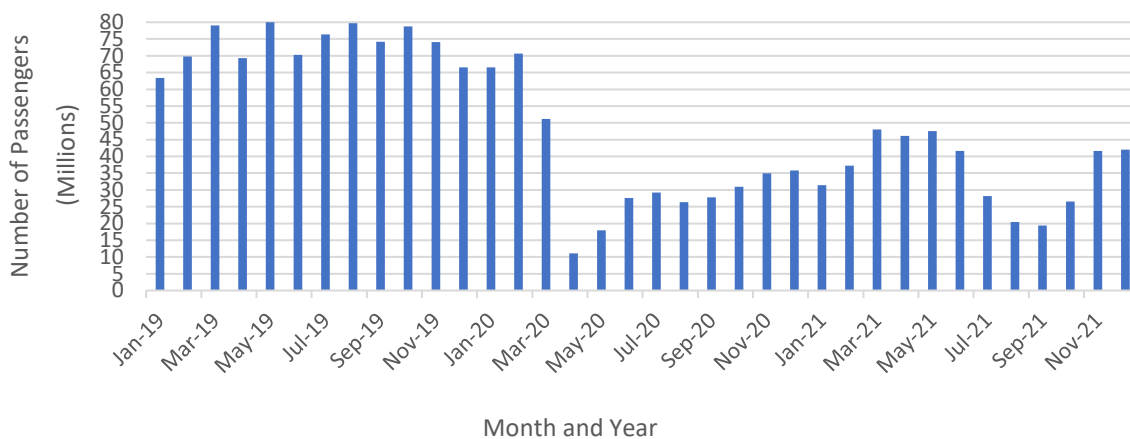
Ms Wilkie said while the increase in patronage was encouraging, the emergence of the Omicron variant was expected to impact patronage over the usually quieter month of January.

However, February had seen a return of many students as the school term got underway.

“As schools throw open their doors for another busy year, the rail industry is ready to welcome students back to the network,” Ms Wilkie said.

“The extensive COVIDsafe measures that have been in place throughout the pandemic will continue to be implemented to support safe travel in 2022.”

Rail Passenger Numbers - Australia - All Types



Increasing patronage was recorded against all rail modes, with regional rail having the greatest rise in numbers.

Light rail passengers increased by 4.67 million or 58.7 per cent for the quarter, while urban rail increased by 33.52 million or 54.5 per cent.

ENDS

Note to editors: Please see the following table for statistics by country and state.

Australian snapshot – rail passenger numbers

Quarterly passenger numbers			
	Q3 2021	Q4 2021	Variance
Passengers	68,019,029	110,164,751	42,145,722 62%

Year on year quarterly passenger numbers						
	Q4 2019 (pre-COVID)	Q4 2021	Variance	Q4 2020	Q4 2021	Variance
Passengers	219,413,037	110,164,751	-109,248,286 -49.8%	101,722,339	110,164,751	8,442,412 8.3%

State and territory rail passenger trends

Location	Change this quarter	Change year on year	Location	Change this quarter	Change year on year
NSW & ACT	27,849,288 171.0%	-14,346,779 -24.5%	VIC	13,794,380 51.6%	20,880,513 106.3%
QLD	420,699 4.4%	525,122 5.6%	WA	-6,218 -0.1%	810,261 7.3%
SA	87,573 2.5%	273,713 8.2%			

New Zealand snapshot – rail passenger numbers

Quarterly passenger numbers			
	Q3 2021	Q4 2021	Variance
Passengers	4,130,996	3,243,757	-887,239 -21.5%

Year on year quarterly passenger numbers						
	Q4 2019 (pre-COVID)	Q4 2021	Variance	Q4 2020	Q4 2021	Variance
Passengers	8,838,964	3,243,757	-5,595,207 -63.3%	5,429,072	3,243,757	-2,215,034 -40.6%

Further information

Joeley Pettit

Director Corporate Services and Corporate Affairs

0407 061 421, jpettit@ara.net.au