

29 March 2022

Rail industry forum to highlight importance of return to rail

The Australasian Railway Association (ARA) will host its Return to Rail Forum today, bringing together industry leaders to discuss the importance of attracting more people back to public transport following pandemic restrictions.

ARA Chief Executive Officer Caroline Wilkie said rail patronage had been hit hard by COVID-19 restrictions and lockdowns, and bringing people back to the rail network would be an essential part of Australia's post pandemic recovery.

"The rail industry kept essential rail services operating throughout the pandemic, even when passenger numbers fell by as much as 90 per cent on pre-pandemic levels in some states," Ms Wilkie said

"As we return to a more normal way of life, it is vital more of us get back on the rail network to avoid traffic gridlock and reinvigorate our cities and communities.

"Today's forum will bring together the people who led the industry's response to the pandemic to discuss how to welcome people back to rail to support Australia's economic recovery and sustainable development."

Rail patronage was increasing by about two per cent per year before the pandemic, with 962 million passenger trips recorded in 2018.

While national passenger numbers increased after lockdowns ended in 2021, there were still 109 million fewer passenger trips nationally in the three months to December 2021 compared to pre-pandemic levels.

Ms Wilkie said rail has traditionally been the most popular public transport mode for commuters and the industry continued to play a key role in supporting our daily lives as pandemic restrictions eased.

She said greater use of rail offered a wide range of economic, social and sustainability benefits to the community.

"One commuter train takes 578 cars off the road, helping reduce emissions and making it easier to move around our cities," Ms Wilkie said.

"Today's forum provides an opportunity to showcase the wide range of initiatives the industry has implemented to support greater use of rail and make sure we can maximise the many benefits rail provides to the community."

The Return to Rail Forum will discuss the passenger, operational and workforce impacts of the last two years, new innovations introduced across the network, and how customer needs and expectations have changed as a result of the pandemic.

Participants will also outline strategies in place to attract people back to the rail network, including new customer service initiatives, operational responses and communications and engagement campaigns.

The Return to Rail Forum is an online event and is sponsored by Arup.

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Further information

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