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More people returning to rail with cost of living pressures, new projects to drive demand

New research has confirmed 25 per cent of people are likely to increase their rail usage as we move into the new year as cost of living pressures bite and people get out more for events and activities.

A survey of 2500 metropolitan residents across Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth and Brisbane commissioned by the Australasian Railway Association (ARA) found that while our use of rail was changing, public transport users recognised the affordability and sustainability benefits rail delivers and would welcome the increased frequency of services and convenience that will result from new rail projects underway.

ARA Chief Executive Officer Caroline Wilkie said the survey found the main reason people would be more likely to use rail more in the next six months was a desire to get out more, while increasing petrol prices, traffic congestion and parking fees were key factors that would support greater use of rail.

“With the cost of living continuing to rise, rail offers a great alternative to ease household budget pressures and escape growing congestion on our roads,” Ms Wilkie said.

“As we make the most of the warmer weather, we look forward to seeing more people taking advantage of public transport to get to work, school and social events.”

Ms Wilkie said the survey confirmed reliability, safety and security, and convenience were key drivers in supporting greater use of rail.

“People want frequent, convenient and reliable services to make their journey as seamless as possible,” Ms Wilkie said.

“The industry has invested significantly in providing a great customer experience throughout the pandemic, with a focus on these issues. We expect as more people return to rail, they will enjoy the benefits of this ongoing focus.”

Ms Wilkie said new rail projects underway would be crucial to supporting increased patronage, with 43 per cent of respondents saying more frequent services would encourage them to use rail more.

“Projects such as the Sydney Metro, Metro Tunnel Project, Suburban Rail Loop, Cross River Rail, and the METRONET program will increase the capacity of the rail network to meet growing demand,” Ms Wilkie said.

“This new wave of rail projects will increase access to rail and provide more services, more often.

“As these projects are completed, we can expect faster, more convenient travel options for many of us, making rail an even more attractive option for people living in our cities.”

The research also confirmed the sustainable benefits of public transport, with two thirds (66 per cent) of respondents viewing rail as the most environmentally sustainable transport mode.

“It is great to see two thirds of survey participants are considering greater use of public transport to reduce their carbon footprint,” Ms Wilkie said.

“Increasing our public transport use will be key to meeting Australia’s our net-zero targets and is an easy way we can make a meaningful difference within our daily lives.”

The survey found 24 per cent of people were using rail less than before the pandemic. One third (31 per cent) of respondents said they were completing a higher proportion of their work from home compared to before the pandemic, with two thirds not expecting their work location to change in the near future.

Two thirds (65 per cent) of respondents with children said their kids were using rail the same amount or more often.

Crowding (30 per cent) and COVID risks (29 per cent) were the primary concerns that may impact use of rail. But increased cleaning and hygiene measures introduced during the pandemic were endorsed by the research, with 30 per cent of respondents advising this would encourage them to use rail more often.

The findings are consistent with [NZ research conducted](#) in June 2022, which found travelling less was the primary reason for lower levels of public transport use.

The survey was completed by Zing Insights in November 2022. View the key findings [here](#).

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Further information

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