

Friday, 9 July 2021

Public transport use increases in March quarter 2021 – up by 2 million from the lows of late 2020

New research shows 8.88 million Australians aged 14+ (42%) used public transport during the March quarter 2021. This is up over 1 million from the December quarter 2020 and an increase of 2 million from the September quarter 2020 when only 6.88 million (32.6%) were using public transport.

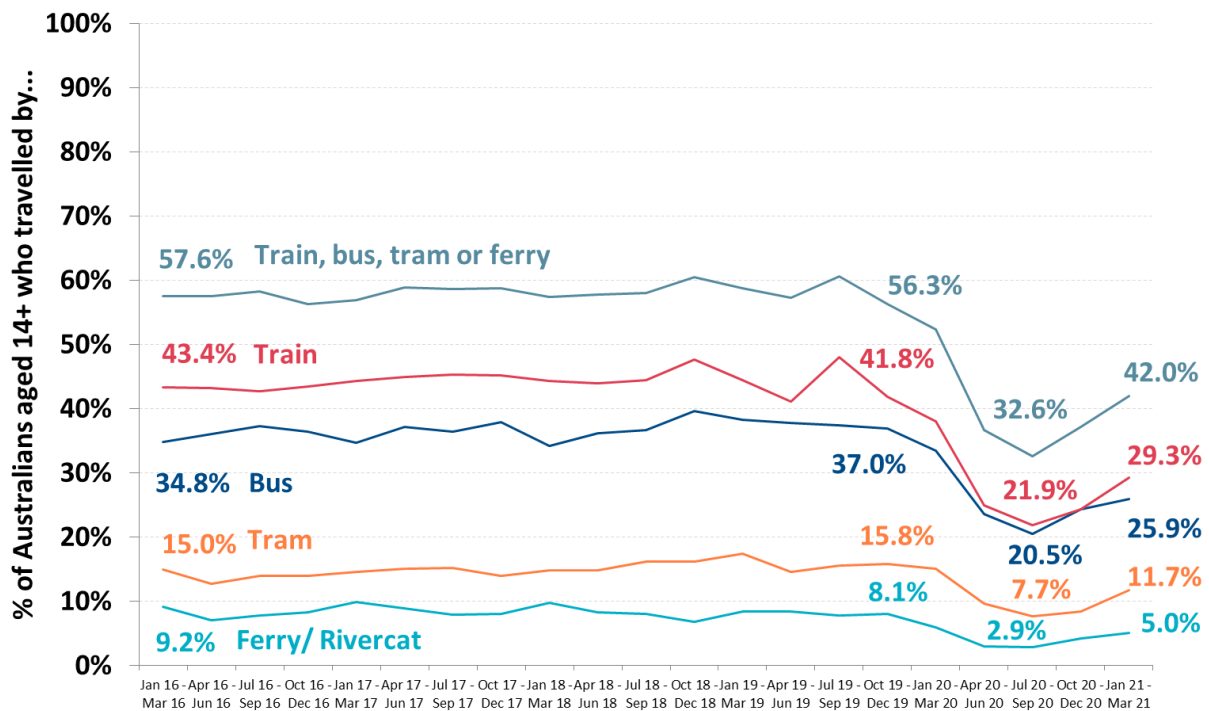
The low in usage of public transport was reached during Melbourne’s long second lockdown and when there were significant restrictions on people’s movement in Sydney due to the outbreak of COVID-19 centred on the Crossroads Hotel.

Despite the back-to-back quarterly increases, public transport usage in the March quarter 2021 was still down by almost 3 million people (a decline of 24.7%) on its pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels when 11.8 million people used public transport in the December quarter 2019.

In the March quarter 2021 trains regained their usual spot as the most popular form of public transport used by 6.2 million (29.3%) of Australians ahead of buses used by 5.48 million (25.9%). Over 2.47 million (11.7%) travelled on trams and just over 1.06 million (5%) travelled on ferries or rivercats.

This new data comes from Roy Morgan Single Source, Australia’s most comprehensive consumer survey, derived from in-depth interviews with over 50,000 Australians each year.

Public transport use in Australia from 2016 – 2021



Source: Roy Morgan Single Source, January 2016 – March 2021, quarterly average sample n = 13,260.
 Base: Australians aged 14+.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Trains are the leading form of transport in Sydney, Melbourne & Perth, but buses are the most highly used in Brisbane, Adelaide, Hobart & Canberra – patronage up strongly in 2021

Analysing the results for Australia's Capital Cities shows trains are the leading form of transport in Sydney (49.9% travelled by train in the March quarter 2021), Melbourne (36.6%) and Perth (37.6%).

These figures represent increases from the lows of the September quarter 2020 when only 40.1% of Sydneysiders and 20.8% of Melburnians travelled by train. The lowest patronage of trains for residents of Perth was in the June quarter 2020 when less than a third, 29.2%, did so.

There was also high patronage of buses in these cities with 39.4% of Sydney residents, 33.8% of Perth residents and 22.6% of Melburnians travelling by bus in the March quarter 2021.

Buses remained the leading form of public transport in other Australian capitals including Brisbane (29.9% travelled by bus in the March quarter 2021), Adelaide (28.2%), Canberra (25.7%) and Hobart (17.9%).

Patronage of Melbourne's trams also increased strongly during early 2021 with 27% of Melburnians travelling by tram in the March quarter 2021 up from a low of 15.6% in the September quarter 2020. However, these figures are still well down on tram usage pre-pandemic during 2019 when over 40% of Melburnians travelled by tram in an average three months.

Travelling by ferry/ rivercat is far more popular in Sydney (9.2%) and Brisbane (8.7%) than other cities although usage in both was well down on the pre-pandemic usage during 2019 when 16.1% travelled by ferry/ rivercat in Sydney and 12.2% did so in Brisbane.

Roy Morgan CEO Michele Levine says Australians were returning to public transport early in 2021 as restrictions were lifted but the latest outbreaks of COVID-19 and lockdowns of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth and Darwin will slow the return to the office:

"Public transport usage in Australia continued to recover in the early months of 2021 with restrictions easing around the country and authorities eager to encourage people to return to the office – particularly in the CBDs of the major cities. (Roy Morgan has closely tracked the movement of people during the COVID-19 pandemic via a partnership with UberMedia – more details on how Australians are moving around their cities is [available here](#).)

"In the March quarter 2021 nearly 8.9 million Australians (42%) travelled by public transport including trains, buses, trams and ferries/ rivercats. This was up 2 million from a low of only 6.9 million (32.6%) in the September quarter 2020.

"Despite the increase since late 2020, public transport usage was still down by around a quarter (down 24.7%) from the pre-pandemic period when 11.8 million Australians (56.3%) travelled by trains, buses, trams and ferries/ rivercats in the December quarter of 2019.

"The recovery in public transport usage will be tested by the recent lockdowns around Australia. Since late May there have been five Australian cities placed into lockdown and the current Sydney-wide lockdown (of at least three weeks) is now the longest since Melbourne's nearly four month long second-lockdown ended in late October 2020.

"The path to an end to lockdowns and a return to a 'COVID-normal' was laid out last week after a meeting of national cabinet and requires vaccination rates to reach an unspecified level providing so-called 'herd immunity' – estimated to be around 80% of the adult population.

"Australia's vaccine rollout has been widely criticised for dropping behind comparable countries overseas and at the current pace the threshold of 'herd immunity' is expected to be reached only in early 2022 which suggests public transport usage will not approach the pre-pandemic levels until well into 2022."

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Related research findings

For more information about [Roy Morgan's Single Source](#) and our latest data on [public transport](#) and usage of [trains](#), [buses](#) and [trams](#) please contact:

Compiled with data from Roy Morgan's Single Source survey (the largest of its kind in the world, with 50,000 respondents each year), these ready-made profiles provide a broad understanding of the target audience, in terms of demographics, attitudes, activities and media usage in Australia.

About Roy Morgan

Roy Morgan is Australia's largest independent Australian research company, with offices in each state, as well as in the U.S. and U.K. A full-service research organisation, Roy Morgan has over 75 years' experience collecting objective, independent information on consumers.

Margin of Error

The margin of error to be allowed for in any estimate depends mainly on the number of interviews on which it is based. Margin of error gives indications of the likely range within which estimates would be 95% likely to fall, expressed as the number of percentage points above or below the actual estimate. Allowance for design effects (such as stratification and weighting) should be made as appropriate.

Sample Size	Percentage Estimate			
	40%-60%	25% or 75%	10% or 90%	5% or 95%
1,000	±3.0	±2.7	±1.9	±1.3
5,000	±1.4	±1.2	±0.8	±0.6
10,000	±1.0	±0.9	±0.6	±0.4
50,000	±0.4	±0.4	±0.3	±0.2

