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Public transport use increases in December quarter 2020 but still well down on a year earlier

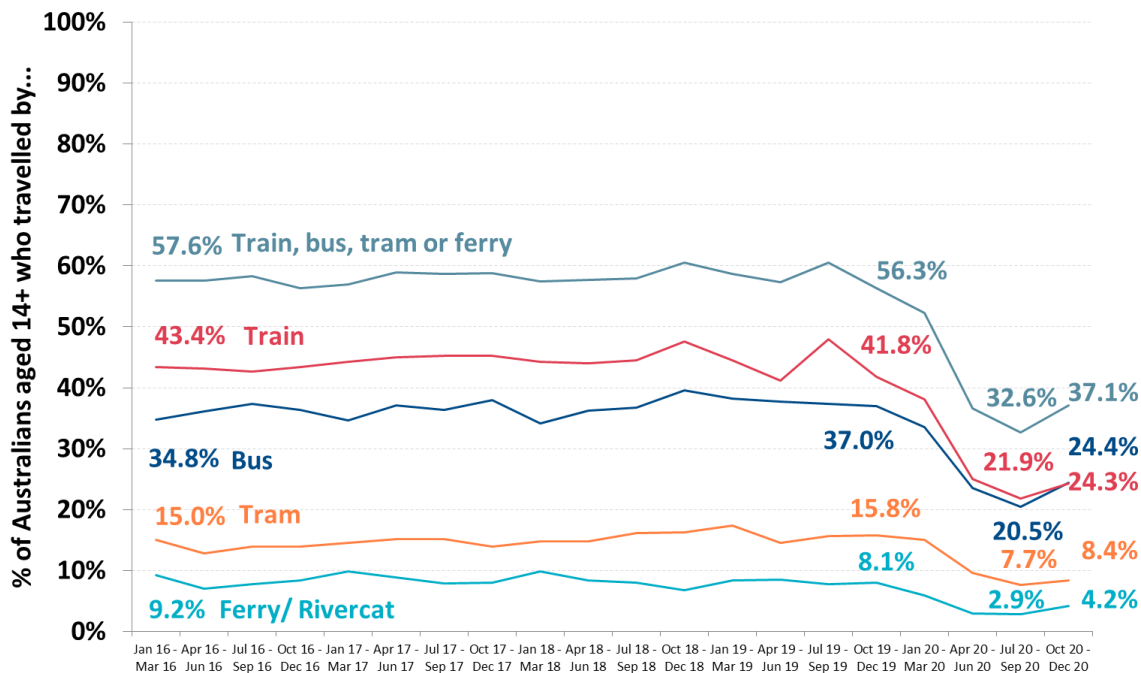
New research shows over 7.8 million Australians aged 14+ (37%) used public transport during the December quarter 2020. This is up over 950,000 from the September quarter 2020 when just under 6.9 million (33%) were using public transport – a low reached during Melbourne’s long second lockdown and significant restrictions on people’s movement in Sydney.

Despite the quarterly increase, public transport usage in the December quarter 2020 was down by almost 4 million people (a decline of 33.5%) on its pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels when 11.8 million people used public transport in the December quarter 2019.

For the first time buses were the most popular form of public transport used by 5.15 million (24%) just ahead of trains used by 5.13 million (24%). Nearly 1.8 million (8%) travelled on trams and just over 880,000 (4%) 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 – 2020



Source: Roy Morgan Single Source, January 2016 – December 2020, quarterly average sample n = 13,143.
Base: Australians aged 14+.

Buses leading form of transport in Perth, Adelaide, Brisbane and Hobart

Analysing the results for Australia’s Capital Cities shows that buses were the most popular form of transport in Perth (35% travelled by bus in December quarter 2020) just ahead of Adelaide (33%), Brisbane (32%) and Hobart (24%).

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Although over a third of Sydneysiders (36%) travelled by bus this was significantly behind the 44% that travelled by train. Train travel was also the leading form of public transport in Melbourne used by 21% of Melburnians ahead of bus travel (16%).

Another consequence of Melbourne's long second lockdown was that the city lost its 'crown' as the city with the highest level of tram usage to Adelaide. In the December quarter 2020 17% of people in Adelaide travelled by tram compared to only 14% in Melbourne. A year ago, before the COVID-19 pandemic, more than three times as many Melburnians (43%) travelled by tram.

It's worth noting that for almost the entire month of October Melburnians were heavily restricted due to the city's long second lockdown and there were considerable restrictions that persisted throughout the remainder of the quarter in the southern capital.

Travelling by ferry/ rivercat is far more popular in Brisbane (9%) and Sydney (7%) than other cities although usage in both was well down on a year earlier when 14% travelled by ferry/ rivercat in Sydney and 12% did so in Brisbane.

Roy Morgan CEO Michele Levine says the December quarter of 2020 marked the first upturn in public transport usage across Australia since the beginning of the pandemic:

"Public transport usage in Australia was much lower in the December quarter 2020 than it was a year ago although the quarter did mark the first increase in public transport usage across the country since the pandemic began in March 2020.

"In the December quarter of 2019 11.8 million Australians (56%) travelled by public transport including trains, buses, trams or ferries/ rivercats. This dropped to a low of only 6.9 million in the September quarter 2020, when Melbourne was plunged into a long second lockdown, but subsequently recovered to over 7.8 million in the December quarter 2020.

"Despite this increase public transport usage was still down a sizeable 33.5% on a year earlier as millions of Australians continued to work from home. Since the end of Melbourne's long lockdown there have been short and sharp lockdowns enforced in South Australia, Brisbane, Sydney's Northern Beaches, Perth and Victoria to deal with COVID-19 outbreaks that have meant going back to work in the office has been something of a stop-start process for many.

"As the COVID-19 vaccines are rolled out around Australia during the next few months the expectation is that restrictions will be fully lifted at some point later this year and 100% of workers will be allowed to return to the office if they wish to do so.

"However, despite the return to the office of many workers already the experience of 2020 shows many people are able to work well from home which suggests not all workers will in fact return to the office. This consequence of the pandemic, as well as ongoing worries about new strains of COVID-19 emerging, are likely to keep public transport usage below the high levels of 2019 for some time to come even once most Australians have been vaccinated later this year."

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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

