Department for Transport

Rail Factsheet 2021

About this factsheet

This factsheet provides an overview of key statistics on rail in Great Britain and the context of how rail fits in the wider transport system. The national rail statistics are for surface rail only, and do not include underground, light rail and tram systems. These statistics cover up until March 2021 so include effects of the coronavirus pandemic.

Contents

Rail statistics overview

In Great Britain in 2020-21

Latest year compared to the previous year of available data

Rail Usage

↓ 78%

in rail passenger journeys to just 388 million, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Journey Purpose

↓ 10pp

in journeys made by rail for commuting from 47% to 37%.

Performance

↑ 9pp

in punctuality (time-to-3) compared with the previous year.

Rail Freight

↓ 8.6%

in freight moved by rail commodity to 15.16 billion net tonne kilometres.

Complaints

↓ 75.1%

in the number of passenger rail services complaints closed.

Finance

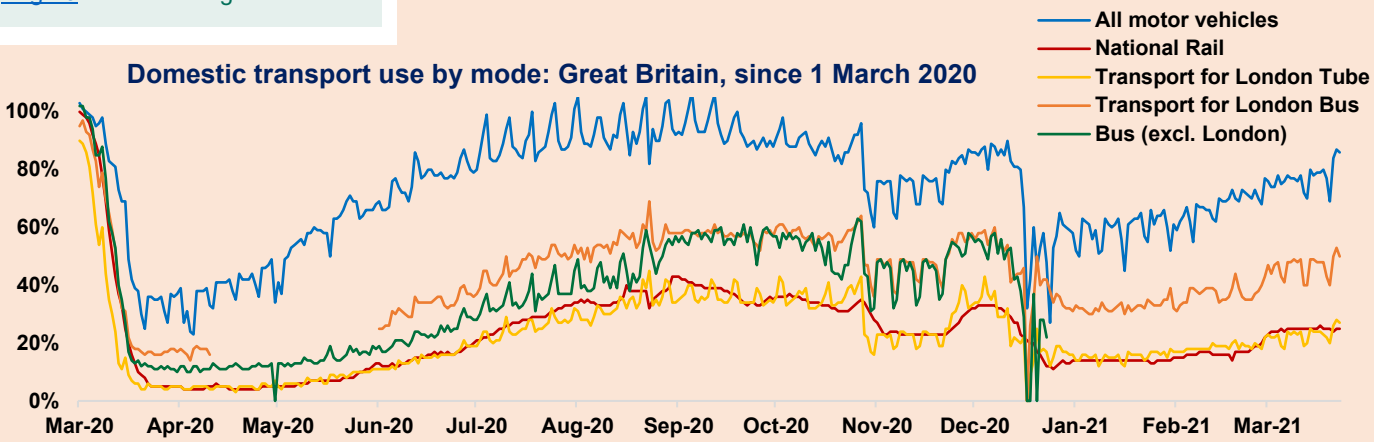
↑ 97%

in total government support to the railways to £22.0bn.

Impact of Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

In 2020-21, public transport was heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. At the lowest point in April and May 2020, passenger rail journeys were 96% less than an equivalent day in the previous year. Further information on the time-series of transport: DfT transport use during the COVID-19 pandemic statistics.

In previous years, the Rail Factsheet has presented estimates of overcrowding on trains during peak times using the PiXC (Passengers in Excess of Capacity) metric. However, owing to the fact that for nearly all journeys observed, seating capacity exceeded passenger numbers, there is no reporting of overcrowding and passenger standing measures within this statistical release



TfL Bus journey data is based on tap-ins on the bus – there is a gap in the data series during the period where tap-in was not being done. Data was not collected for buses outside of London beyond December 31st 2021, hence the break in that data series.

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FURTHER INFORMATION: Public: 020 7944 2419; Media: 020 7944 3021

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Railway in Great Britain

The mainline railway is comprised of:

2,569 stations

9,902 miles (15,935 km) of route

17.1 years Average age of rolling stock

23 Train Operating Companies (TOCs)

3,756 miles (6,045 km), 38% of route electrified

~63,000 Full-time equivalent employees across TOCs

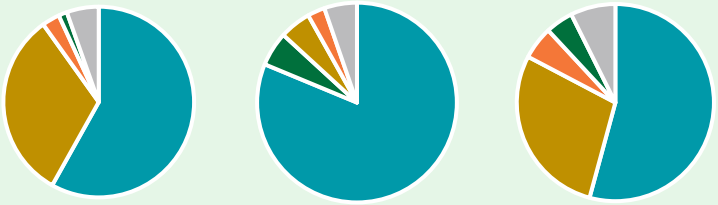
For further information, please see:
Office of Rail and Road: TOC Key Statistics (Table 2200) and Rail Infrastructure and Assets (Tables 6313 and 6320)

Rail Travel in the Context of Other Transport Modes

Car is the most common mode of transport and travel by rail has fallen

Of all travel in England in 2020, rail accounted for:

1% of trips **6% of distance** **5% of travel time**



Key: Rail Bus Other Walk Cars

Rail trips accounted for 1% of all trips in 2020. The distance travelled and the time spent travelling significantly decreased in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has seen an increase in the distance and time people spend walking.

This data covers England only and calendar year 2020.
For more information please see:
Department for Transport: National Travel Survey 2020 (NTS0303)

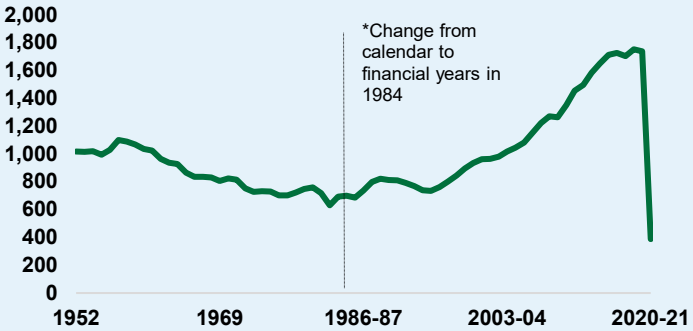
	Rail	Bus	Car	Walk
Trips per person per year, 2020	11	22	429	236
Compared to 2019:	↓50%	↓56%	↓26%	↓5%
Miles per person per year, 2020	241	107	3,522	220
Compared to 2019:	↓61%	↓54%	↓30%	↑7%
Hours per person per year, 2020	12	14	146	77
Compared to 2019:	↓58%	↓54%	↓31%	↑10%

Note: due to changes in the methodology of data collection, changes in travel behaviours and a reduction of data collected during 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, care should be taken when interpreting 2020 data and comparing to other years due to the small sample sizes

Rail Usage and Users

Prior to the pandemic, long-term rail demand was increasing

Rail passenger journeys in Great Britain, millions



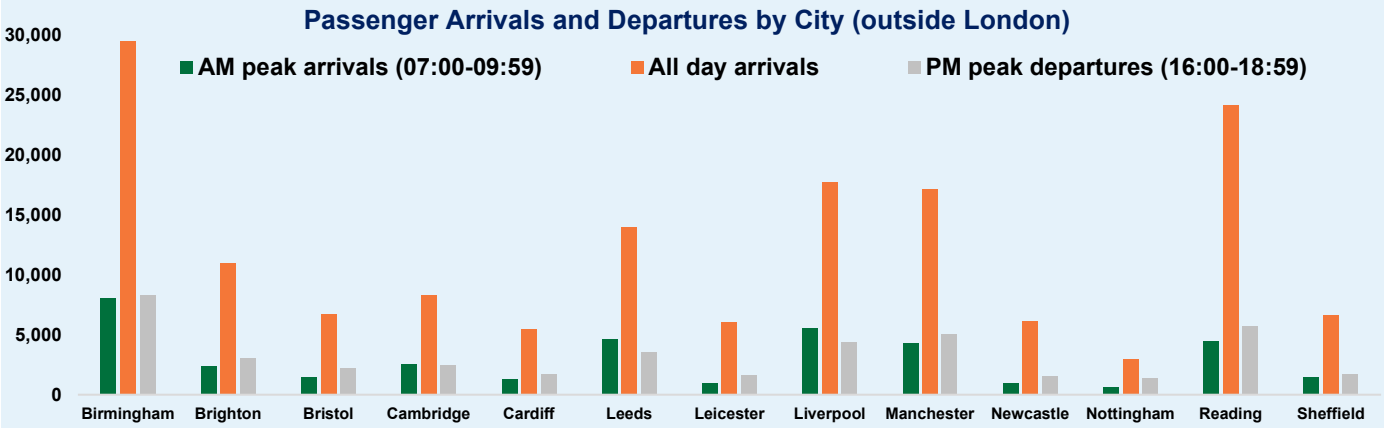
In the 20 years prior to the pandemic, rail journeys increased by 89% to reach a record 1.8 billion journeys in 2018-19. It has since sharply declined by 78% to just 388 million rail passenger journeys

Top 10 most used stations in Great Britain, 2020-21

Rank	Station	Entries and Exits	Rank (2019-20)
1	Stratford (London)	13,985,162	8
2	London Victoria	13,791,322	2
3	London Bridge	13,763,890	4
4	London Waterloo	12,214,626	1
5	London Liverpool St	11,212,008	3
6	Highbury & Islington	8,660,736	14
7	Clapham Junction	8,370,706	16
8	Birmingham New St	7,350,942	5
9	Barking	6,742,918	32
10	East Croydon	6,695,420	17

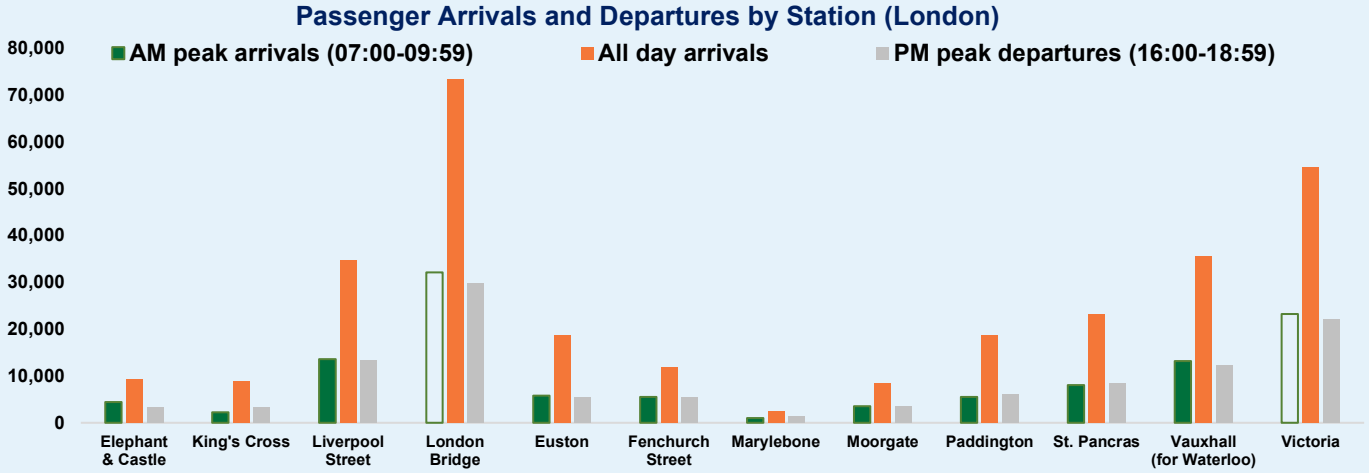
For more information please see: Office of Rail and Road:
Passenger Rail Usage (Table 1220) and
Estimates of station usage (Table 1410)

Passenger demand fell in all major cities because of COVID-19



The average number of rail journeys into major cities in England and Wales decreased by 75% (79% outside London) in autumn 2020 compared to the same period in the previous year. This fall was even greater during the AM peak, where the average number of rail journeys into major cities fell by 81%.

London remained the city with the highest rail passenger numbers. Passenger arrivals throughout the day were just over 10 times that of Birmingham (the city with the second highest).

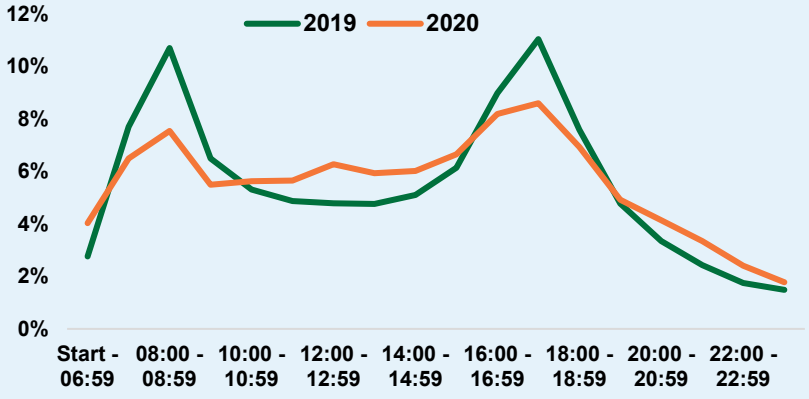


In autumn 2020 there were large reductions in all-day arrivals into London stations, on average a fall of 73% compared to the same period in the previous year. The impact on AM peak arrivals was even greater, a fall of 81% compared to autumn 2019, owing to fewer commuting journeys taking place.

For more information please see:
Department for Transport: Rail passenger numbers and crowding on weekdays in major cities in England and Wales: 2020

Rail journeys were more evenly spread throughout the day in 2020

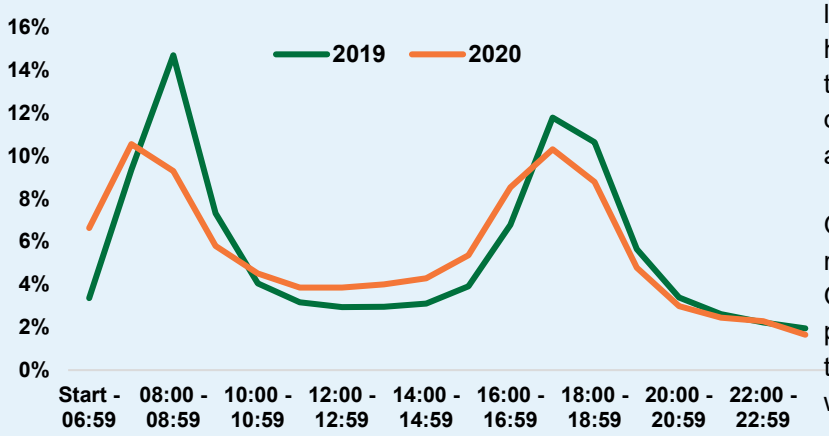
Proportion of Passenger Arrivals and Departures by Hour, Regional Major Cities: Autumn 2019 and 2020



For regional major cities, the pre COVID-19 two-peak distribution was replaced by a more even spread of rail travel across the day. In 2020, 25% of arrivals occurred in the 3-hour morning peak, compared to 31% in the same period the previous year.

A larger proportion of passengers travelled in the evening peak (28%) in cities outside London than the morning peak (25%), possibly due to a greater proportion of leisure journeys.

Proportion of Passenger Arrivals and Departures by Hour, London stations: Autumn 2019 and 2020



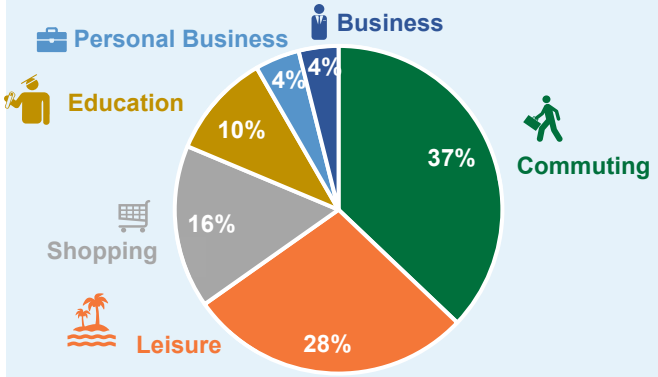
In 2019 the distribution of journeys into and out of London was defined by two peaks: a larger more pronounced one during AM peak hours and a slightly shorter and wider one in the evening. This pattern has been affected during 2020 as fewer commuters travel into and out of London.

On a typical autumn day in 2020, 297,785 rail journeys were made into central London. Of these, 39% were made in the morning peak. On an average autumn day in 2019 there were 1.1 million arrivals, of which, 55% were during the 3-hour morning peak

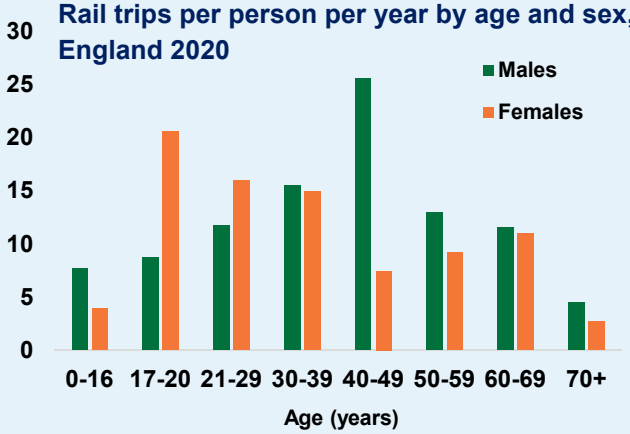
For more information please see:
Department for Transport: Rail passenger numbers and crowding on weekdays in major cities in England and Wales: 2020

Commuting is the most common journey purpose of rail passengers

Rail journey purpose, England 2020



Rail trips per person per year by age and sex, England 2020

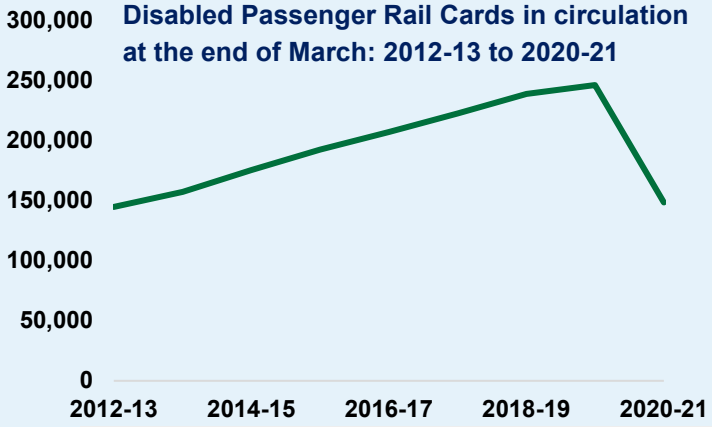


In England in 2020, 37% of all rail journeys were for commuting and over a quarter for leisure. Though commuting is still the most common journey purpose, its share fell by 10pp from 47% in 2019. Males undertook 34% more rail trips on average (12 trips per person per year) than females (9 trips per person per year).

This data covers England only and calendar year 2020. For more information please see:
Department for Transport: National Travel Survey 2020 (NTS0409 & NTS0601)

On average, users with mobility difficulties made 0.5 rail trips per person per year compared with 13 rail trips per person per year for those without mobility difficulties in 2020. Those with mobility difficulties made 37% fewer car trips and 12% fewer bus trips in 2020 than those without mobility difficulties.

Disabled Passenger Rail Cards in circulation at the end of March: 2012-13 to 2020-21



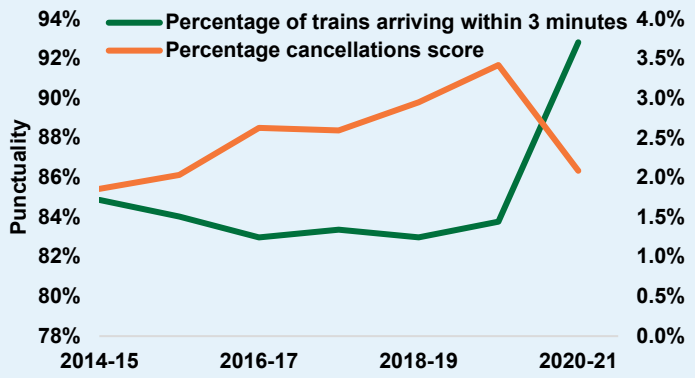
During 2020-21 there was a reduction in the volume of Disabled Persons Railcards (DPRC) in circulation and issued when compared with 2019-20, due to reduced travel brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

There were 148,608 Disabled Persons Railcards in circulation at the end of 2020-21, representing a decrease of 39.7% compared with the previous year.

For more information please see: Department for Transport: National Travel Survey 2020 (NTS0709) and Office of Rail and Road: Disabled Persons Railcards (Table 4310)

Punctuality increased and cancellations decreased due to the pandemic

Percentage of trains 'on time' and percentage cancellation score, 2014-15 to 2020-21 (Moving annual averages)



In 2020-21, there was a 22% decrease in planned train services and a 9.0% percentage point improvement in punctuality compared with the previous year. Since the decline in punctuality in 2018/19 due to timetabling difficulties, punctuality has increased and remained at a higher level.

In 2020-21, 2.1% of trains were classified as cancellations in Great Britain. This represents a 1.3pp fall when compared with the previous year.

For more information please see: Office of Rail and Road: Passenger rail performance (Tables 3133 and 3123)

'on time' services are those that arrive at the station early or less than three minutes after the scheduled time. This is different from the Public Performance Measure (PPM) used previously.

Passenger Complaints

The number of passenger service complaints closed has decreased

In 2020-21, 133,003 complaints were closed by train operators, a decrease of 75.1% compared to 2019-20.

Top five complaint categories, Great Britain, 2020-21

Type	% of all complaints	pp change 2019-20
Ticketing and refunds policy	17.4%	↑10.9
Punctuality/reliability	14.1%	↓10.2
Other ticket buying facilities – online ticket sales	8.0%	↑1.8
The attitudes and helpfulness of the staff at station	5.0%	↑1.4
Ticket buying facilities	4.5%	↑1.1

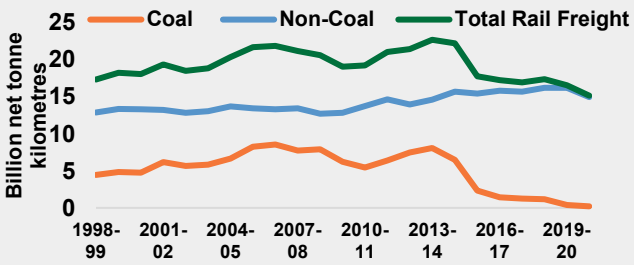
For more information please see: Office of Rail and Road: Passenger rail service complaints (Table 4130)

Rail Freight

The proportion of freight moved by rail has decreased

In 2020-21, the total amount of rail freight transported decreased to 15.16 billion net tonne kilometres, an 8.6% decrease on 2019-20.

Rail freight moved by commodity, 1998-99 to 2020-21



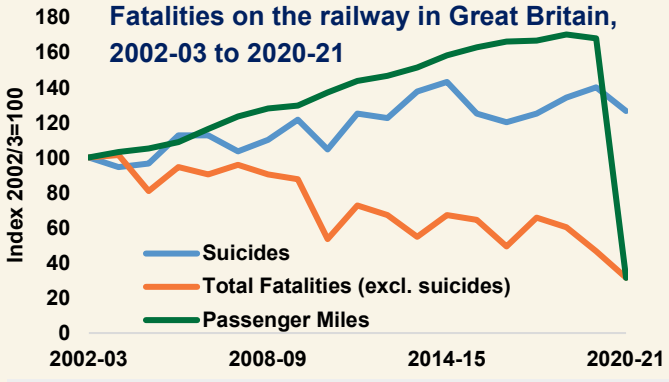
For more information please see: Office of Rail and Road: Freight rail usage and performance (Table 1310)

Rail Safety

Rail remains one of the safest modes of transport

Rail was one of the safest modes of transport with just under 3 fatalities per billion passenger miles in 2020-21.

Fatalities on the railway in Great Britain, 2002-03 to 2020-21



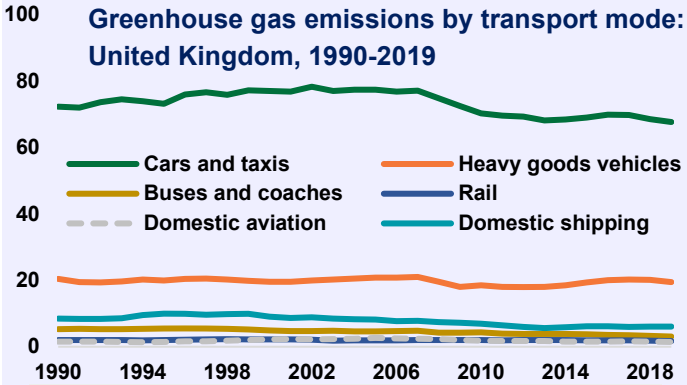
For more information please see: Office of Rail and Road: Rail safety (Table 5200)

Rail Emissions

Rail emits a small percentage of all transport greenhouse gas emissions

Rail contributed 1.7% of total domestic transport greenhouse gas emissions in 2019.

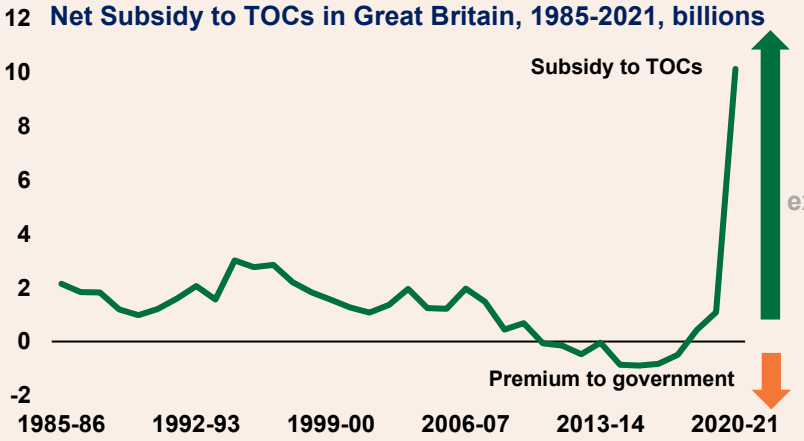
Greenhouse gas emissions by transport mode: United Kingdom, 1990-2019

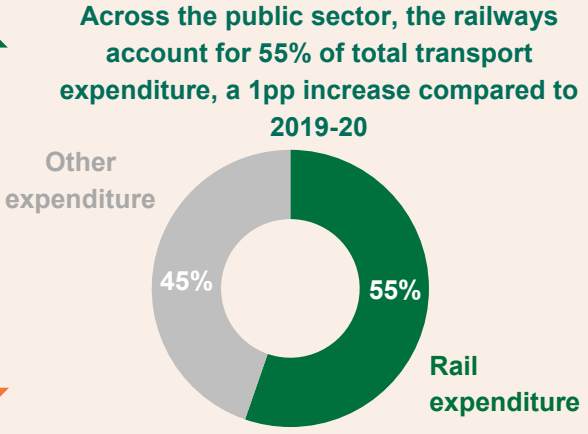


For more information please see: Department for Transport: Transport Statistics Great Britain (ENV0201)

Rail Finance and Government Support

Government funding of rail in Great Britain has increased





In 2020-21, TOCs received an overall subsidy of £10.1bn from Government, an 832% increase on 2019-20. Network Rail received a grant of £6.7bn, a 26.4% increase on 2019-20. This is the largest operational funding subsidy given to the TOC's since the time series began in 1985-86. Network Rail and HS2 also received a total of £5.0bn in enhancements funding, a 13.5% increase from 2019-20.

The increase in government funding for TOCs resulted from the introduction of emergency contractual agreements following a reduction in fares income impacting franchised train operators' financial sustainability.

Income by source, real terms

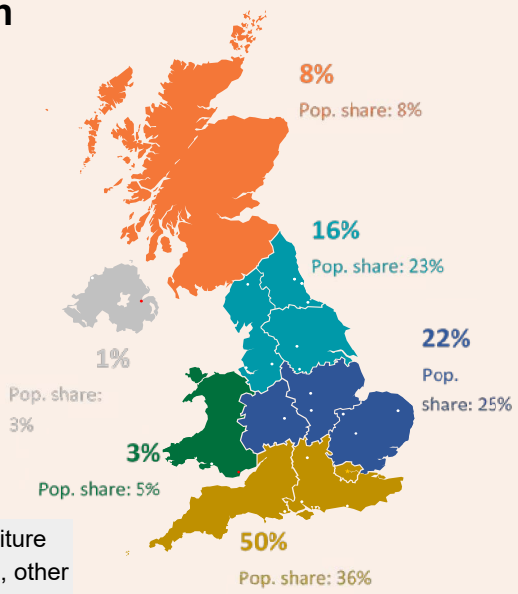
	Government support	Passenger revenue	Private investment
2019/20	£11.2bn	£11.7bn	£1.0bn
2020/21	£22.0bn	£2.5bn	£0.6bn
% change	↑97%	↓79%	↓34%

ⓘ For more information please see: Office of Rail and Road: Rail industry finance (Table 7270) and HM Treasury: Country and Regional Analysis 2021

Railway public expenditure by UK Super Region

50% of public spend on the railways benefited the South, including London which made up 30% of all railways spend. This is a fall of 9pp from 2016-17, largely offset by an increase of 8pp in the Midlands and a 1pp increase in the North.

	2019-20	2020-21	Change
North	16%	16%	0%
Midlands	20%	22%	↑2%
South	51%	50%	↓1%
Scotland	8%	8%	0%
Wales	4%	3%	0%
NI	1%	1%	0%



ⓘ HM Treasury Country & Regional Analysis (CRA) covers all public expenditure (capital and current) on rail, including: DfT, local authorities, public corporations, other government departments and devolved administrations.

For more information please see: HM Treasury: Country and Regional Analysis 2021

Acknowledgements

The rail statistics team at DfT would like to say thank you to the following:

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- Mursil Farhan for his conscientious work on his placement year