

Public transport ridership hits 93.5% of pre-pandemic peak

Average of 7.19 million bus and train rides a day in 2023, up from 6.39 million in 2022

Esther Loi

Bus and train ridership continued its recovery in 2023, rebounding to 93.5 per cent of the pre-pandemic peak. It was at 83.1 per cent in 2022.

On average, there were 7.19 million bus and train rides each day in 2023.

This is 12.6 per cent higher than the 6.39 million daily rides in 2022, but 6.5 per cent below the peak of 7.69 million rides a day in 2019.

According to figures released by the Land Transport Authority on Jan 31, there were 3.45 million daily MRT and LRT rides in 2023, a 17.6 per cent increase from 2.93 million rides in 2022.

Buses registered a more moderate rise of 8.3 per cent to 3.75 million daily rides in 2023, compared with 3.46 million in 2022.

Separately, ridership on taxis and private-hire cars also increased, albeit at a slower pace than before.

On average, there were 606,000 such point-to-point rides daily in

2023, a 4.1 per cent increase from the 582,000 rides in 2022. In 2021, there were 553,000 such rides a day.

In 2023, there were 397,000 private-hire car rides a day, up 14.4 per cent from 347,000 in 2022. Taxi ridership receded 11.1 per cent from 235,000 to 209,000 rides a day over the same period.

Associate Professor Walter The-

seira, head of the urban transportation programme at the Singapore University of Social Sciences, said how public transport ridership levels will stabilise in 2024 is "anyone's guess".

"The trajectory for public transport has been rebounding to pre-Covid-19 levels," he said.

"But the structure of work and the economy has shifted somewhat due to the normalisation of some levels of flexible work and also the much greater take-up of deliveries as a replacement for in-person retail and dining."

He added that it would be necessary to look into peak loads – passenger numbers during rush hours – and the distribution of travel to provide a more accurate projection, as these factors determine the costs needed for the public transport system to provide the capacity for high peak loads.

Transport analyst Terence Fan from the Singapore Management University said public transport ridership is still "somewhat below" what is expected, based on commuting patterns in 2019.

Assistant Professor Fan noted that there were more MRT lines operating in 2023 than in 2019, with the addition of the Thomson-East Coast Line.

The third stage of the MRT line, which started operating in 2020 and is being rolled out in five stages, opened in November 2022.

But he said the decline in the number of bus rides from 4.1 million in 2019 to 3.75 million in 2023 did not correspond to an increase in MRT rides, which also fell over the same period, from 3.38 million in 2019 to 3.24 million in 2023.

"This is evidence that commuters in general are not all back at their workplace to the same extent as in 2019.

"We are close but not quite there (in terms of recovery)," he added.

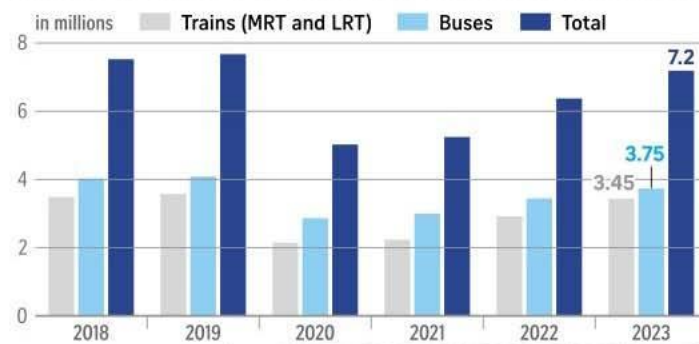
The experts attributed the continued increase in private-hire car rides to lower demand for street-hail services, which are offered only by taxis, and shrinking taxi fleets.

Prof Theseira said taxis are less favoured from an investment standpoint, as they cannot be converted to private cars or rented out to private drivers, unlike private-hire vehicles.

Therefore, taxi fleets are shrinking, contributing to the fall in ridership, he added.

Prof Fan said that based on his calculations, point-to-point transport ridership has exceeded pre-Covid-19 levels slightly, after taking population increase into account.

Average number of rides per day



Source: LAND TRANSPORT AUTHORITY STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

estloi@sph.com.sg



There were 3.75 million daily bus rides in 2023, up 8.3 per cent from 3.46 million rides in 2022. Train journeys saw a bigger rise, with 3.45 million daily MRT and LRT rides in 2023, a 17.6 per cent increase from 2.93 million rides in 2022. ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI