

Question on Notice

No. 828

Asked on 18 August 2022

MR M CRANDON ASKED MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT AND MAIN ROADS (HON M BAILEY)—

QUESTION:

Will the Minister advise the reasons for the variation between budgeted and actual South East Queensland patronage in the 2021–22 financial year?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for Coomera for the question.

Over the 2021–22 financial year, Queensland's public transport workers have faced a series of challenges and have overwhelmingly responded to them by continuing to keep the state moving with minimal service disruptions.

There are several reasons for the variation between budgeted and actual South East Queensland (SEQ) patronage in the 2021–22 financial year, with the COVID-19 pandemic being the largest factor for why the budget was not achieved.

The 2021–22 Budget assumed that the roll-out of COVID-19 vaccines in 2021–22 would see patronage recover and grow in the 2020–21 actuals, as travel patterns returned to pre-COVID-19 levels. However, the impacts of COVID-19 and the new Delta and Omicron variants, are reflected in lower SEQ public transport usage. Restrictions were also implemented to combat the spread of the virus which led to a decrease in public transport. These restrictions include:

- lockdowns in July and August 2021
- interstate border closures
- increased restrictions, such as proof of vaccination status to enter venues and mask mandates for indoor public spaces
- encouragement of working from home
- delayed start of the 2022 school year by two weeks.

While COVID-19 and associated responses has been the main cause for the variance between actuals and budget, the SEQ floods which occurred in late February/early March 2022 caused major disruptions to the SEQ public transport network.

March 2022 saw the full suspension of the SEQ rail network over two days due to flood damage and then a further week of partially restored services as services were progressively restored. Translink supported bus services were also reduced at this time. Demand for public transport services was also lower than usual over this period, as many in the community were personally responding to flood impacts.

The Palaszczuk Government supported Queenslanders to recover by providing a weekend of free public transport (including free road tolls). Brisbane City Council subsequently offered a fare free weekend of bus services. Patronage during fare free periods is not recorded. The Brisbane ferry network was suspended over many weeks and remains in recovery from the damage caused to infrastructure and vessels.

The return of influenza season in May and June 2022—combined with COVID-19—saw many in the community responsibly isolating to prevent further community transmission, further reducing demand for public transport services. These events were not budgeted and have each contributed to the variance between budgeted and actual SEQ patronage for the 2021–22 financial year. Due to recent emergent trends, such as working from home and a shift towards online learning, it has been difficult to model patronage at the time of setting budgets and may remain so for some time.