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Overcrowding 'intolerable' complain nation's train travellers

Nearly half of the nation's train travellers complain that the level of crowding on local train services at peak times is intolerable, according to the University's latest national transport survey, released today.

40 percent of train users say that they are forced to stand between 60 percent and 100 percent of their journey time during peak hours.

"Crowding on metropolitan rail networks has become a greater concern for many rail and non-rail users than other factors such as travel time and fares" says Professor David Hensher, Director of the University of Sydney's Institute of Transport and Logistics Studies (ITLS), which produces the quarterly ITLS-Transport Opinion Survey (TOPS).

Victorians experience the worst crowding on local train services with 53 percent of users describing the crush as intolerable. This compared with 32 percent for Queensland and 38 percent for New South Wales.

"There are clearly big differences between the capital cities," said Professor Hensher. "This sends a strong signal about the need to include level of crowding when considering new investment, something that is often missing in formal transport project appraisal."

The latest TOPS survey also indicates that Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), a relatively new system of public transport introduced in the early 1970s, is misunderstood by the majority of the public. Only 8 percent of survey participants correctly described BRT as buses operating on dedicated corridors.

"This lack of awareness of BRT is very concerning, with the consequence that Australians tend to see only railways as being capable of providing dedicated corridor services. We know that railways are much more expensive to provide than BRT for the equivalent levels of service." Professor Hensher said.

Both for the short-term and longer-term, confidence in transport improvements in Australia is now at its lowest point since the TOPS project commenced in March 2010.

The September 2012 TOPS survey revealed that more than 50 percent of Australians regard improvement in public transport as the highest priority for transport. This finding is in line with the previous TOPS surveys.

The first national survey to measure opinions on transport on a regular basis, TOPS is a representative indicator of Australians' ongoing confidence in transport both locally and nationally.

The ITLS in the University of Sydney Business School provides education and conducts research in transport, logistics and supply chain management. The September 2012 quarterly report is available at: <http://sydney.edu.au/business/itls/tops>.

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