

95L shunned suburban services in five months, many chose metro rail

Better Services Lure Passengers Away, Beach-Tambaram Route Takes Biggest Hit

Imaging: G Joy Theophilus

CHANGING TRACK

Railway data shows that every day around 60,000 commuters left Chennai's suburban network

Passengers Chennai suburban lost between April and August this year **95 lakh**

Chennai Beach-Tambaram route lost **15 lakh** passengers in this period



PASSENGERS

130.53 million

2019

(April to July figures)

137.54 million

2018

PASSENGER CATEGORIES (drop)

First class season ticket holders | 6%

Second class season ticket holders | 6%

Second class regular | 6%

LOCALS CANCELLED

1,700

2019

(April to August)

1,200

2018



METRO RAIL PASSENGERS

2019 10 million

2018 4.8 million

(April to August)

Around 40,000 passengers moved to metro every day

Railway studies estimate 50% of this is from suburban sector

TIME TAKEN

Park to Airport on suburban local | 30 minutes (as per timetable)

Central to airport in metro | 27 minutes

METRO VS SUBURBAN

Air-conditioned coaches

Regular announcements

Less crowded

Reliability



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Suburban trains in Chennai may run full during peak hours, but the network has lost around 95 lakh commuters between April and August this year when compared to the same period the previous year, official data shows.

On an average, the suburban network lost 60,000 passengers every day. Multiple sources in Southern Railway said this was due to the gradual shift of commuters, especially on the Chennai Beach-Tambaram route, to metro rail whose stations are cleaner and trains air-conditioned and faster. The route is largely parallel from Park station to airport, although metro rail services don't touch commercial areas such as Mambalam, Nungambakkam and Kodambakkam. Also, the Chennai division of Southern Railway has cancelled around 40% more suburban trains compared to last year for maintenance of tracks and other safety reasons. TOI had reported in June how the suburban network lost 18 lakh commuters in April. "The monthly loss in ridership trains has remained consistent," a railway official said.

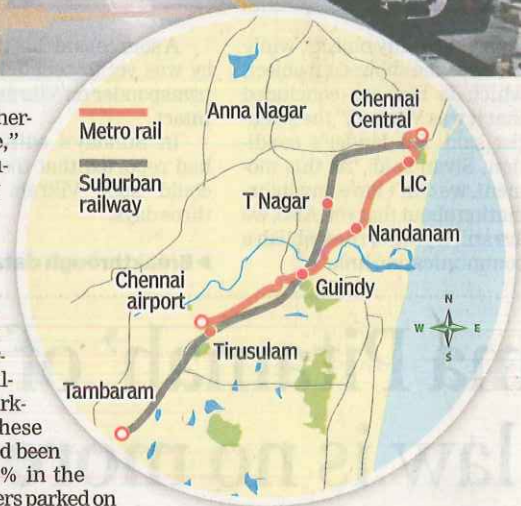
Though exact section-wise details were not available, sources estimated the drop on the Beach-Tambaram route to be around 15 lakh. "This runs paral-

lel to metro rail's Washermenpet-Airport line," an official said. A supervisor at a ticketing window on the section said the drop at some stations was as high as 15%.

The change in commuter choice has reflected in allied services provided at railway stations. A few parking contractors at these stations said there had been a drop of around 20% in the number of two-wheelers parked on their premises. "Metro rail has opened parking lots which are better paved and payment can be made through a card," a contractor said.

Railway sources said between April and July, metro rail ridership has more than doubled compared to the previous year. "It is estimated that around 20,000 to 25,000 people have been shifting from suburban trains to metro rail everyday," an official said. This is half of the commuters the suburban network has been losing daily.

But playing down this shift, retired railway official and now a metro rail consultant R Ramanathan told TOI that suburban trains were low-cost and had dedicated users. However, he said railways should upgrade its signalling systems and run trains at a frequency



of three minutes during peak hours. At present, peak-hour frequency on the Beach-Tambaram section is seven minutes.

South Asia programme head of Institute for Transportation and Development Policy Shreya Gadepalli said there had been very little improvement in suburban services which has made commuters shift to a better service. "Rather than seeing multiple public transport services as being competitive, they should be structured as part of a larger network that provides seamless connectivity to people," she said. The bigger concern was shift from public transport services to personal motor vehicles and app taxis that add to traffic congestion, pollution and road safety concerns, she said.