

Metro patrons want better frequency

Numbers Are Boosted By Office-Goers, Air Travellers

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Chennai: Ridership on metro trains has picked up and commuters want the frequency of services during weekdays to be increased to prevent crowding during daily commutes. Office-goers returning to work and the increase in operations of domestic flights have been steadily boosting metro rail patronage since it resumed services in September after the five-month nationwide lockdown.

Chennai Metro Rail Limited (CMRL), which had been operating trains at five-minute intervals before the lockdown triggered by Covid-19 began in late March, now runs trains in both the corridors and the direct service for every seven minutes during peak hours and every 10 minutes during non-peak hours.

Regular commuters say they find it inconvenient to travel particularly during peak hours as the trains are crowded and that it is difficult to follow any physical distancing. Women passengers say first class coaches,

FACT FILE



Daily average patronage is up from 14,798 in September to around **45,000 now**

Daily average patronage in pre-Covid time | **1.16 lakh**

Peak hour footfall | **18,000**

TYPE OF PASSENGERS USING METRO NOW

- Office-goers
- School and college staff
- Passengers travelling outstation either by buses or domestic flights

TOP FIVE STATIONS ATTRACTING CROWD

Chennai Airport | High Court | Thirumangalam | Meenambakkam | Alandur

which were recently converted into women's only coaches, too are crowded during the morning and evening peak hours. The reduced frequency is also leading to more passengers waiting for trains especially at interchange stations like Central Metro.

"Passengers sit or stand very close to each other on trains despite the markings to help them follow social distancing. But the crowd during peak hours is so much that it is difficult to follow rules. It would be convenient for regular commuters like me if they increase their peak hour frequency to five minutes, like they used to operate before they closed services in March," said Geetha, a government employee who takes the metro to office from Thirumangalam.

CMRL officials say around 45,000 people are using metro trains every day

though it is only one-third of the pre-Covid numbers when an average of 1.16 lakh people used the service daily.

"All passengers wear masks while entering the station as it is mandatory but a few of them remove after getting inside the trains. Besides the increase in frequency, there should also be staff on the train to regulate passenger crowding in one place and make sure all of them wear masks inside the trains as well to ensure others feel safe," said Vijay Kumar, a regular commuter from Egmore.

Officials say passengers are mandatorily checked for temperature and provided with hand sanitizers. "We allow passengers only if they wear a face mask. Frequent announcements are made both in stations and on trains to wear masks and maintain social distancing," an official earlier said.