

Office of Rail Transport

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Record highs in passenger transport, less optimism in freight transport. Summary of 2023 on the railway transport market

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In 2023, over 374.4 million people used the railway services. This means an increase of 9.4% compared to 2022. It is also the highest number of passengers in Poland after 1999. The weight of cargo handled by trains amounted to 231.7 million tons and was lower by almost 6.8% compared to the previous year. Smaller declines concerned the transport performance, which amounted to 61.6 billion tonne-kilometres – the second highest result over the last decade.

PASSENGER TRANSPORT

In 2023, the railway served over 374.4 million passengers. Compared to 2022, this result is higher by 32.2 million (+9.4%). Over the recent years, more people travelled by train in 1999 (395.2 million people, according to Central Statistical Office data). Transport performance amounted to almost 25.9 billion passenger-kilometres, which means an increase of 2.1 billion passenger-kilometres (+8.8%) during 2023. With regard to operational performance, which exceeded 191.3 million train-kilometres, the increase amounted to 5.2 million train-kilometres (2.8%). The values of transport and operational performances have been record-breaking since the statistics have been kept by the Office of Rail Transport (UTK). The average length of a passenger railway trip in 2023 was 69.1 km, which was slightly less than in 2022 (by 0.4 km).

"Such good results in recent years are a signal that rail passenger transport is back on track. The growing awareness of the need to use ecological means of transport, rising fuel costs and favourable offers from carriers – this certainly makes travelling by train more profitable, e.g. compared to travelling by car. At the same time, the potential for greater railway use is still significant. Therefore, there is a need to further increase the scope and quality of railway services. The development of railways should also be seen in the context of areas that are currently not accessible by train," summarizes Mr. Ignacy Góra, PhD, the President of UTK.

In the last month of 2023, almost 31.4 million passengers used railway services. Compared to the year before, this result is higher by over 2.3 million people (+8%). This is also the highest value achieved this month since 2012. In December 2023, the transport performance reached over 2.1 billion passenger-kilometres. This means an increase of 0.2 billion passenger-kilometres (+9.4%) when compared to December a year earlier. The value of operational performance amounted to almost 16.5 million train-kilometres, i.e. 0.7 million more (+4.6%) compared to December 2022. The average distance travelled by a rail passenger by train in December was 67.7 km. This result is higher than that of December 2022 by little less than a kilometre.

In line with the seasonal trend, December was slightly lower in terms of passenger numbers than November – by over 1 million people (-3.2%). However, other parameters in the month-over-month comparison achieved higher values. Transport performance was over 0.1 billion passenger-kilometres higher (+5.5%), in the case of operational performance it was an increase by 0.6 million train-kilometres (+3.9%). The average travel distance in December was almost 7 km longer than in November 2023.

FREIGHT TRANSPORTATION

In 2023, the railways transported almost 231.7 million tons of goods, which means that compared to 2022, their weight was lower by 16.9 million tonnes (-6.8%). A smaller year-over-year decline was recorded in transport performance, which amounted to 61.6 billion tonne-kilometres - 0.9 billion tonne-kilometres less (-1.4%) than a year ago. Despite the value declines, the total volume of transport performance in 2023 is still the second highest result over the last decade.

Freight trains performed operational work of almost 84.4 million train-kilometres. This is 2.7 million (-3.1%) less than in 2022. The average distance of transporting 1 tonne was almost 266 km, which is over 14 km more than in 2022. This is also the highest value of the average distance in recent 10 years.

“Weaker results in the transport of goods by rail were caused by broadly-defined consequences of events related to the situation in Ukraine. In these uncertain times, carriers who will appropriately diversify their activities with new directions and delivery structures will gain an advantage,” says President Góra.

In December 2023, the weight of goods handled by freight trains exceeded 17.7 million tonnes, which means 1.2 million tonnes less (-6.5%) year-over-year. Transport performance of over 4.6 billion tonne-kilometres meant a result lower by 0.3 billion (-6.4%) than last year. In the case of operational performance, which amounted to 6.3 million train-kilometres, this is 0.5 million train-kilometres less (-7.1%) than in December 2022. The average transport distance of one

tonne of cargo in December 2023 was 260.3 km, i.e. 0.3 km more than a year earlier.

December, month-over-month, was weaker by 2.3 million tons (-11.5%) in terms of the weight of transported cargo. In the case of transport performance, it brought a decrease of almost 0.6 billion tonne-kilometres (-11.4%). In terms of operational work, it was 0.8 million train-kilometres less (-11%).

Basic operational data on [passenger](#) and [freight transport](#) have been published on the [Railway Data](#) website (Polish version only).

Details on the operational parameters of passenger and freight transport for 2023, market shares of individual carriers and a comparison of results to previous years can be found in the [Railways in 2023](#) study (Polish version only).