TrackSAFE Foundation

LEVEL CROSSING FATALITIES, INJURIES AND NEAR HITS ON THE AUSTRALIAN HEAVY RAIL NETWORK 2016-2023

FEBRUARY 2024

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INTRODUCTION

This report has been prepared by the TrackSAFE Foundation to increase knowledge and inform prevention activities to reduce fatalities, injuries and near hits on the Australian heavy rail network.

The TrackSAFE Foundation, established by the Australasian Railway Association and UGL in 2012, is Australia's only harm prevention charity focused on reducing deaths, injuries and near hits on the rail network. TrackSAFE also works to improve the wellbeing of rail employees.

Every life lost and injury on the rail network is a tragedy and the impacts on family, friends, communities, rail and recovery staff and witnesses can be profound. These incidents together with thousands of near hits each year can cause trauma and work-related stress and illness to rail and recovery staff.

The Rail Industry Trauma Management Framework developed by TrackSAFE provides guidance on best practice trauma management and should form the foundation of internal policies and procedures in rail organisations. Rail RUOK? Day is celebrated across the rail industry every April. Rail RUOK? activities throughout the year build skills and confidence to ask a workmate "R U OK?" and know what to say and do if they say no. TrackSAFE also offers a range of webinars and other activities to support the wellbeing and resilience of the rail workforce.

Working closely with rail organisations, the TrackSAFE Foundation is actively engaged in a wide range of rail safety activities including public awareness campaigns and facilitation of the annual Rail Safety Week. To prevent suicides on the rail network, it advocates for fencing and other barriers to reduce access to the rail corridor, encourages individuals to seek help before and at the time of crisis and launched Suicide Awareness Training for rail staff in September 2023. It also promotes the responsible reporting of suspected and attempted suicides by the media. In partnership with Lifeline Australia, TrackSAFE implements public awareness campaigns to encourage individuals to contact Lifeline on 13 11 14 whether they are in crisis or just needing someone to talk to. The *Pause.Call.Be Heard* signage is used widely in the rail corridor as well as being delivered digitally in bursts to those in and near rail locations.

Every incident on the network can also cause disruption and delays to hundreds of services each year impacting customers and economic efficiency. The average annual economic burden of railway safety incidents in Australia during the period 2007-2015 was estimated to be approximately $360.1 million[1].

More information on TrackSAFE's activities is available via its website.

Some people may find the content of this report confronting or distressing. The information included here places an emphasis on data, and as such, can appear to depersonalise the pain and loss behind the statistics. If this material raises concerns for you contact Lifeline on 13 11 14.

1. RISSB 2015 AS 7644. 2015. Rail Corridor Access Infrastructure Standard p4.

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NOTES ON THE DATA IN THIS REPORT

- Fatality, injury and near miss data in this report has been sourced from either the National Coronial Information System (NCIS) or the Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator (ONRSR).
- Where data is described as 'suicide', the data has been sourced from a report commissioned by the TrackSAFE Foundation from the NCIS for the period 2000-2017. Information about the limitations of this data can be provided by TrackSAFE.
- Where a fatality is described as 'suspected suicide', the data has been obtained by ONRSR and includes incidents notified to the Regulator by rail operators as required by the Rail Safety National Law National Regulations. These incidents are notified to ONRSR shortly after the incident. The Coroner may make a different determination about the cause of death.
- The number of suicides in 2016 & 2017 (76 & 82 respectively) as determined by Coroners' and included in the NCIS report is lower than the suspected suicides reported in the ONRSR database (77 & 94 respectively).
- There is some variability in the time period used for the analysis included in this report due to the form and availability of data.
- Two amendments were made to the original ONRSR occurrence database by TrackSAFE. A 2017 Victorian tram incident that resulted in a serious injury is excluded and suspected suicide fatality in NSW in 2016 was misclassified as a minor injury.
- On 1/7/2022 the definition of serious injury has changed and resulted in a slight decrease of serious injuries compared to previous years. On the same date the definition of Near Miss/Near Hit has changed and now only requires incidents to be reported where a collision has only been narrowly avoided by chance and there was a high chance of collision if circumstances were slightly different. This resulted in a decrease in incidents compared to previous years.

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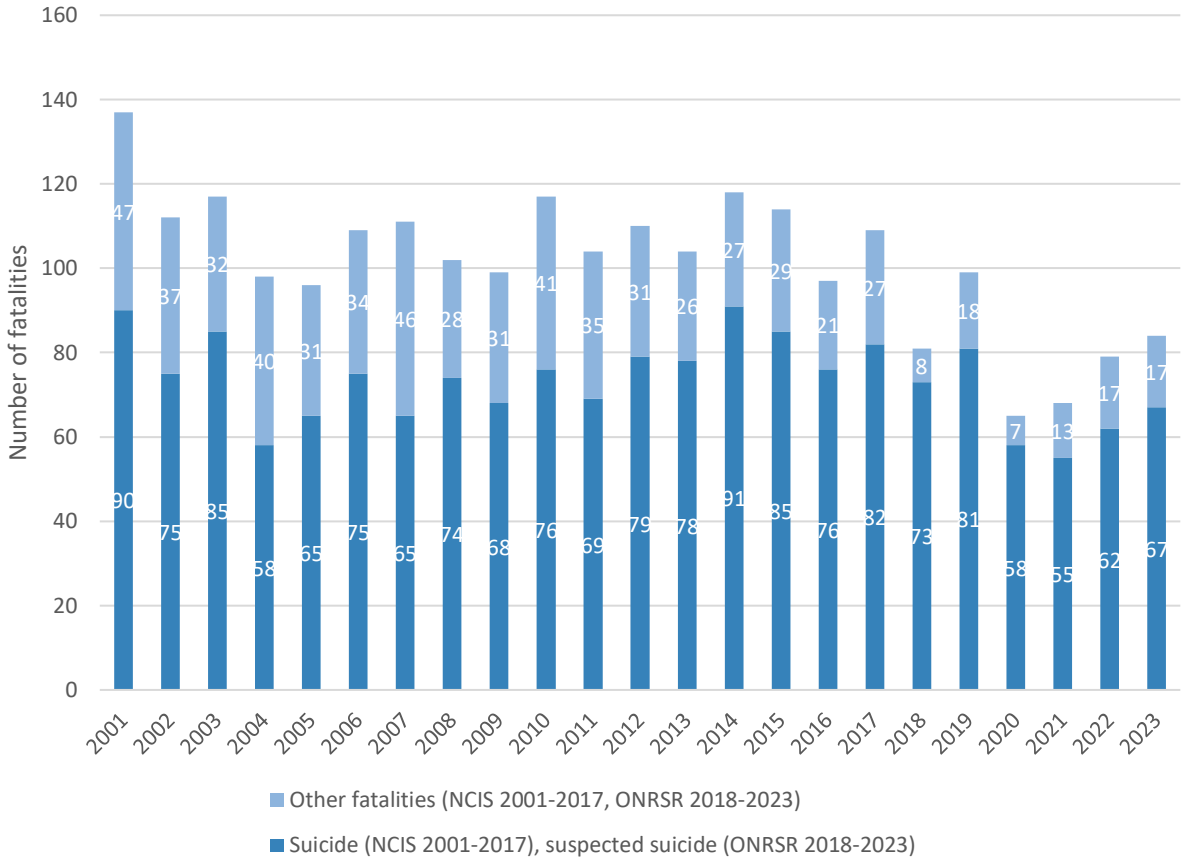
SUMMARY

- Between 2001-2023 there were 2,334 fatalities - 1,687 suicides or suspected suicides and 647 other fatalities on the Australian heavy rail network. This is a total annual average of 101 fatalities per year (73 suicides & suspected suicides and 28 other fatalities), or almost 2 each week. Most occur in Victoria (44%) followed by New South Wales (30%), Queensland (12%), Western Australia (9%) and South Australia (5%) and 7 in the Northern Territory and Tasmania and 2 in the Australian Capital Territory.
- Since 2016 rail operators have been required to report to ONRSR occurrences – be they fatalities, injuries or near hits in accordance with the National Rail Safety National Law. Between 2016-2023 there were:
    - a total of 1,426 fatalities, injuries and attempted suicides with no injuries reported on ONRSR, an average of 178 per year.
    - 672 fatalities, an average of 84 per year. 567 of these fatalities were suspected suicides, an average of 71 per year and 84% of all fatalities.
    - 489 attempted suicides. There are likely to have been many more attempted suicides and threats of self-harm that did not meet the regulatory reporting threshold.
    - 61 fatalities and 104 injuries to trespassers. In addition, there were 5,753 near hits with trespassers, an average of 719 per year. There are likely to have been many more near hits that did not meet the regulatory reporting threshold.
    - 27 fatalities and 138 injuries because of collisions with a road vehicle at a level crossing and 13 fatalities and 17 injuries because of collisions with a pedestrian at a level crossing. In addition, there were 7,445 near hits at level crossings, an average of 930 per year. There are likely to have been many more near hits that did not meeting the regulatory reporting threshold.
    - There were 4 other-struck by train fatalities and 6 injuries.

FATALITIES ON THE AUSTRALIAN HEAVY RAIL NETWORK 2001-2023[1,2,3]



In this period there were 2,334 fatalities - 1,687 suicides or suspected suicides and 647 other fatalities. This is a total annual average of 101 fatalities per year (73 suicides & suspected suicides and 28 other fatalities), or almost 2 each week.

STATE DISTRIBUTION OF FATALITIES

In addition, there were 7 fatalities in TAS and the NT and 2 in the ACT.

1. National Coronial Information System, 2020, Intentional Self-harm deaths at Australian railway locations 2000–2017, (DR20-31 and DR20-31A), November, Melbourne Australia (for 2001-2017 suicide data), National Coronial Information System, 2021, Non-intentional self-harm deaths at Australian railway locations 2000-2017 (DR20-43), February, Melbourne Australia (for 2001-2017 other fatality data). Total includes 4 fatalities in 2000 that occurred across WA, SA, NT.
2. Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator, Occurrence extract-fatalities, serious injuries, minor injuries, attempted suicide no consequence July 2015–December 2023 (for 2018-2023 data). The requirements for operator reporting of notifiable occurrences are set out in the Reporting Requirements for Notifiable Occurrences. See here for information about notifiable occurrences to ONRSR.
3. NCIS report less suicides in 2016 & 2017 compared to ONRSR suspected suicides (76 and 82 reported by NCIS for 2016 and 2017 respectively compared to 77 and 94 suspected suicides reported by ONRSR).

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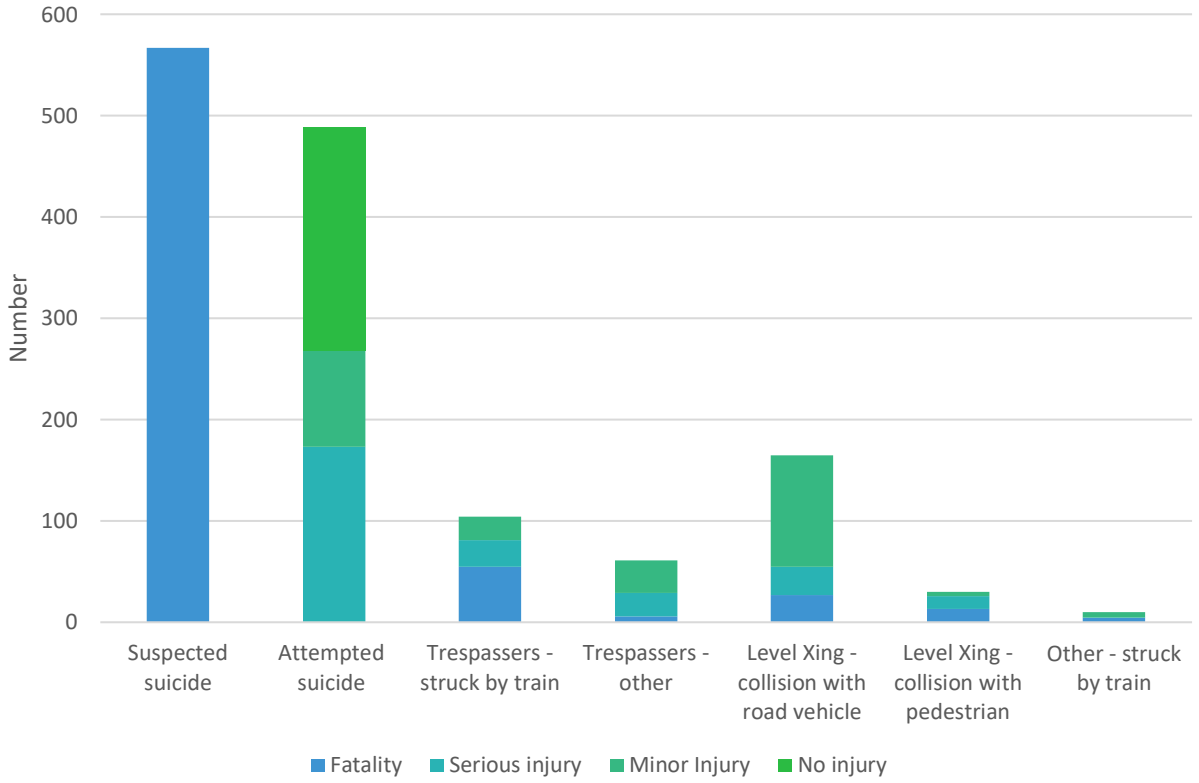
FATALITIES & INJURIES BY CAUSE ON THE AUSTRALIAN HEAVY RAIL NETWORK 2016-2023[1]

In this period there were 1,426 fatalities, injuries and attempted suicides with no injury reported to the Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator, an average of 178 per year.



	Fatality	Serious injury	Minor Injury	No injury	Total
Suspected suicide	567				567
Attempted suicide		173	95	221	489
Trespassers - struck by train	55	26	23		104
Trespassers - other	6	23	32		61
Level Xing - collision with road vehicle	27	28	110		165
Level Xing - collision with pedestrian	13	13	4		30
Other – struck by train	4	1	5		10
Total	672	264	269	221	1426

STATE DISTRIBUTION OF OCCURENCES

There were 6 incidents in NT, 3 in TAS and 0 in ACT

1. Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator, Occurrence extract-fatalities, serious injuries, minor injuries, attempted suicide no consequence July 2015–December 2023. The requirements for operator reporting of notifiable occurrences are set out in the Reporting Requirements for Notifiable Occurrences. See here for information about notifiable occurrences. On 1/7/2022 the definition of serious injury has changed and potentially reducing the number of serious injuries compared to previous years. The NCIS reports less suicides in some years.

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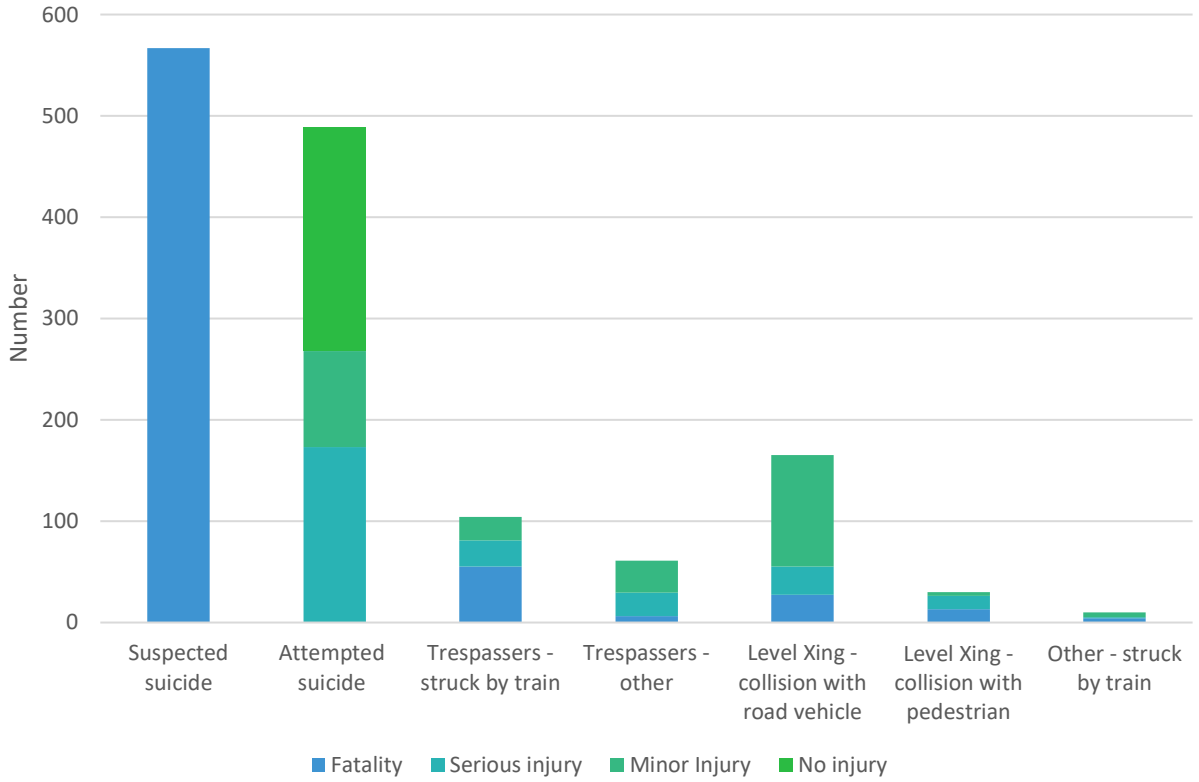
FATALITIES ON THE AUSTRALIAN HEAVY RAIL NETWORK BY CAUSE 2016-2023[1]

In this period there were 672 fatalities reported to ONRSR, an average of 84 per year, including 71 suspected suicides.



	Suspected suicide	Trespasser struck by train	Trespasser other	Level Xing - collision with road vehicle	Level Xing - collision with pedestrian	Other-struck by train	TOTAL
2016	77	8	1	3	0		89
2017	94	8	1	3	1		107
2018	73	3	1	3	1		81
2019	81	13	0	2	3		99
2020	58	2	0	2	3		65
2021	55	7	0	5	1		68
2022	62	9	0	2	4	2	79
2023	67	5	3	7	0	2	84
TOTAL	567	55	6	27	13	4	672

STATE DISTRIBUTION OF FATALITIES

In addition, there were 2 fatalities in TAS. There were no fatalities in NT & ACT

1. Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator, Occurrence extract-fatalities, serious injuries, minor injuries, attempted suicide no consequence July 2015–December 2023. The requirements for operator reporting of notifiable occurrences are set out in the Reporting Requirements for Notifiable Occurrences. See here for information about notifiable occurrences. The NCIS reports less suicides in some years.

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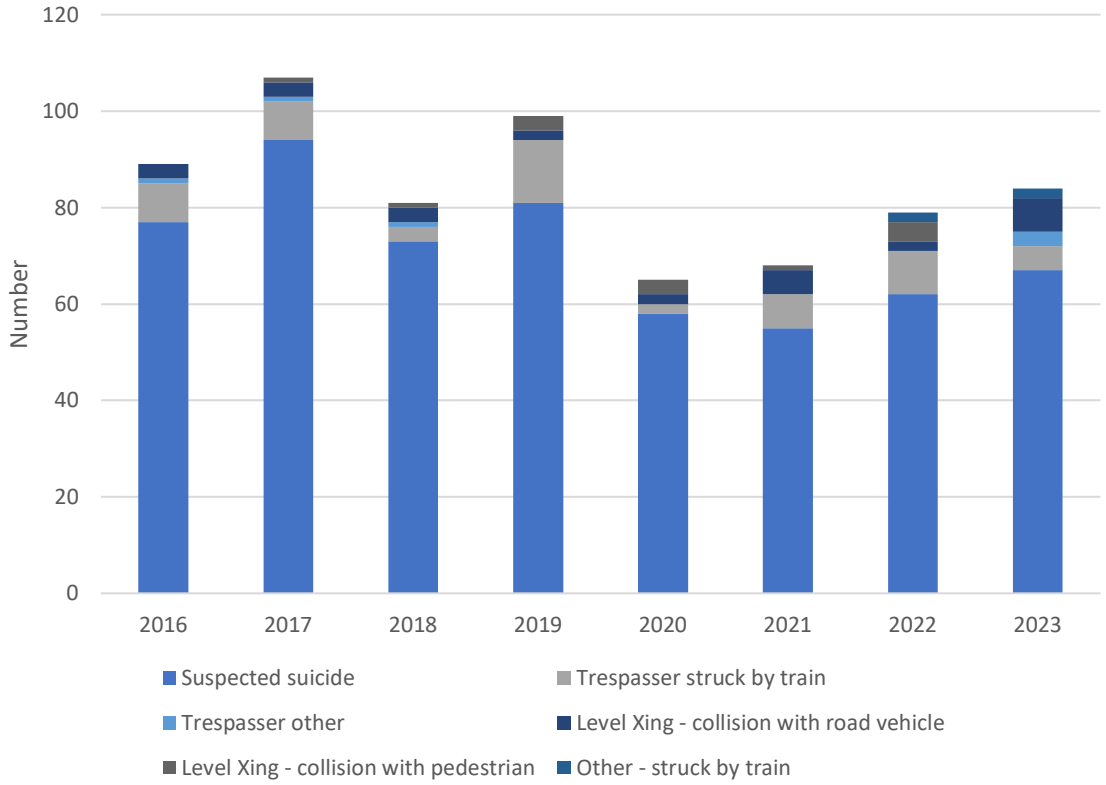
FATALITIES ON THE AUSTRALIAN HEAVY RAIL NETWORK BY YEAR 2016-2023[1]

In this period there were 672 fatalities reported to ONRSR, an average of 84 per year, including 71 suspected suicides.



	Suspected suicide	Trespasser struck by train	Trespasser other	Level Xing - collision with road vehicle	Level Xing - collision with pedestrian	Other-struck by train	TOTAL
2016	77	8	1	3	0		89
2017	94	8	1	3	1		107
2018	73	3	1	3	1		81
2019	81	13	0	2	3		99
2020	58	2	0	2	3		65
2021	55	7	0	5	1		68
2022	62	9	0	2	4	2	79
2023	67	5	3	7	0	2	84
TOTAL	567	55	6	27	13	4	672

STATE DISTRIBUTION OF FATALITIES

In addition, there were 2 fatalities in TAS. There were no fatalities in NT & ACT

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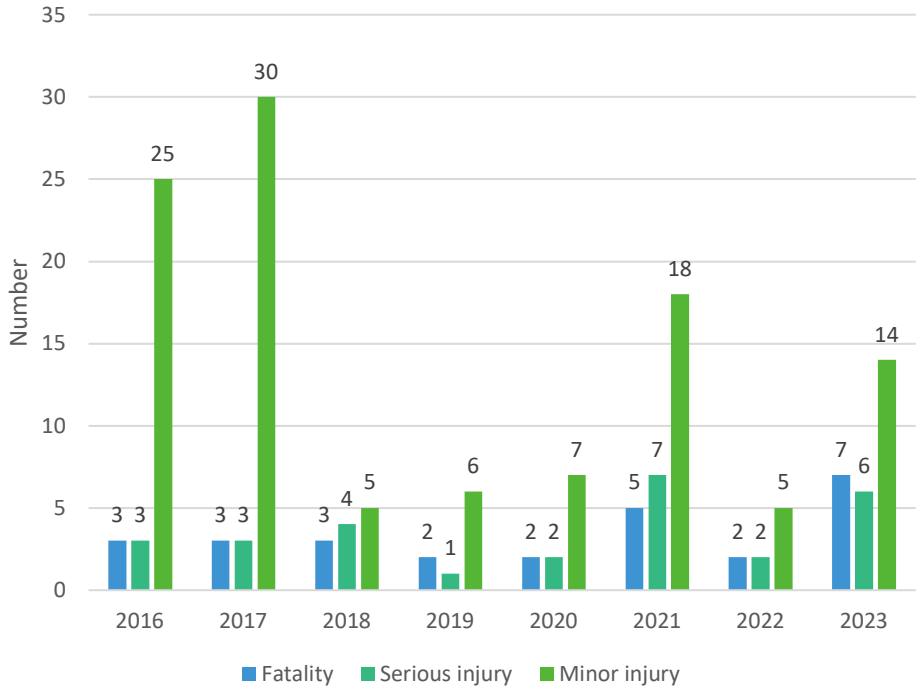
TOTAL LEVEL CROSSING OCCURENCES ON THE AUSTRALIAN HEAVY RAIL NETWORK 2016-2023[1]

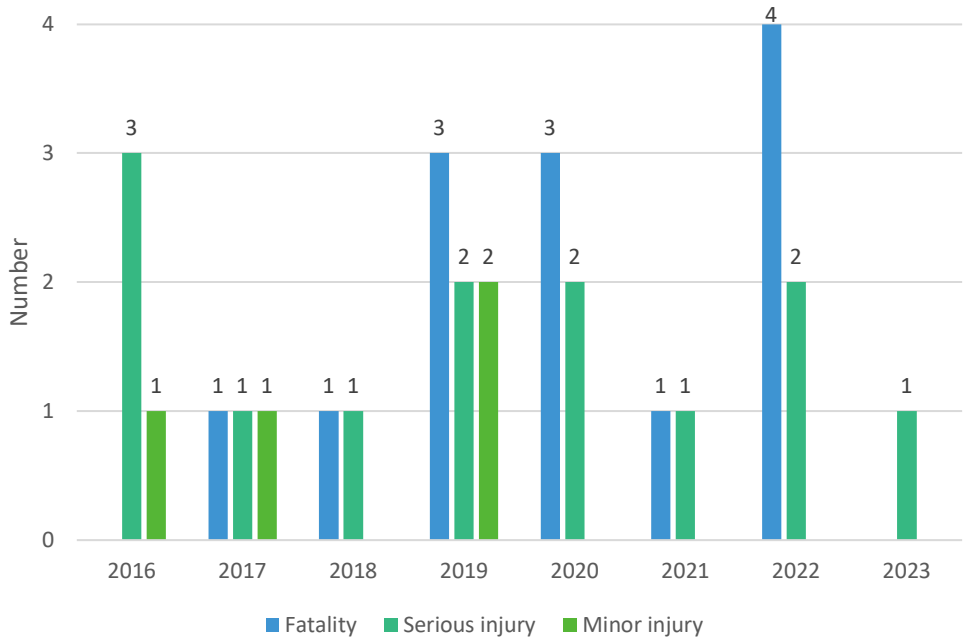
COLLISION WITH A ROAD VEHICLE

In this period there were 27 fatalities and 138 injuries because of road vehicle collisions at a level crossing.



COLLISION WITH A PEDESTRIAN

In this period there were 13 fatalities and 17 injuries because of collisions with a pedestrian at a level crossing



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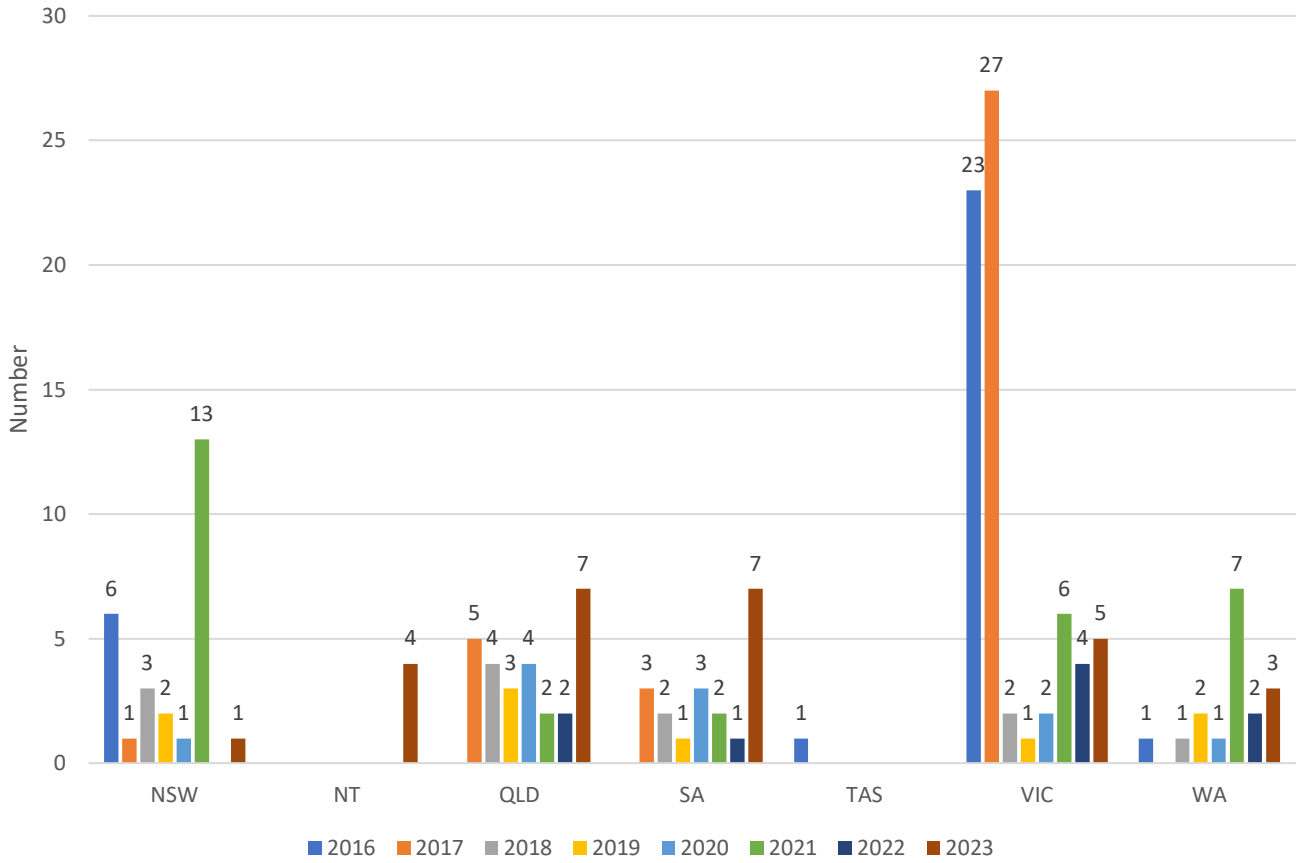
FATALITIES & INJURIES BECAUSE OF COLLISIONS WITH A ROAD VEHICLE AT LEVEL CROSSINGS ON THE AUSTRALIAN HEAVY RAIL NETWORK 2016-2023[1]

In this period there were 27 fatalities and 138 injuries because of road vehicle collisions at a level crossing.



	NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA	TOTAL
2016	6	0	0	0	1	23	1	31
2017	1	0	5	3	0	27	0	36
2018	3	0	4	2	0	2	1	12
2019	2	0	3	1	0	1	2	9
2020	1	0	4	3	0	2	1	11
2021	13	0	2	2	0	6	7	30
2022	0	0	2	1	0	4	2	9
2023	1	4	7	7	0	5	3	27
TOTAL	27	4	27	19	1	70	17	165

There were no incidents in the ACT.

	Fatality	Serious injury	Minor injury	TOTAL
2016	3	3	25	31
2017	3	3	30	36
2018	3	4	5	12
2019	2	1	6	9
2020	2	2	7	11
2021	5	7	18	30
2022	2	2	5	9
2023	7	6	14	27
TOTAL	27	28	110	165

1. Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator, Occurrence extract-fatalities, serious injuries, minor injuries, attempted suicide no consequence July 2015–December 2023. The requirements for operator reporting of notifiable occurrences are set out in the Reporting Requirements for Notifiable Occurrences. See here for information about notifiable occurrences. On 1/7/2022 the definition of serious injury changed potentially reducing reported serious injuries compared to previous years.

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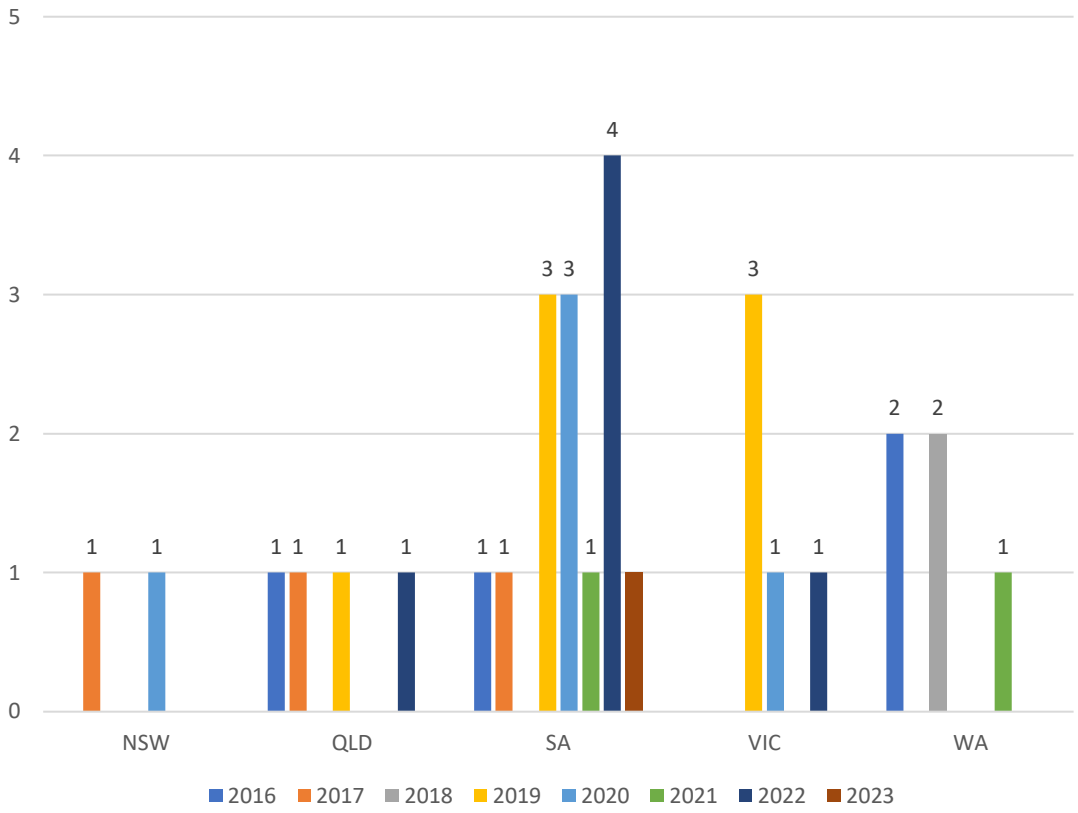
FATALITIES & INJURIES BECAUSE OF COLLISIONS WITH A PEDESTRIAN AT LEVEL CROSSINGS ON THE AUSTRALIAN HEAVY RAIL NETWORK 2016-2023[1]

In this period there were 13 fatalities and 17 injuries because of collisions with a pedestrian at a level crossing.



	NSW	QLD	SA	VIC	WA	TOTAL
2016	0	1	1	0	2	4
2017	1	1	1	0	0	3
2018	0	0	0	0	2	2
2019	0	1	3	2	0	7
2020	1	0	3	1	0	5
2021	0	0	1	0	1	2
2022	0	1	4	1	0	6
2023	0	0	1	0	0	1
TOTAL	2	4	14	5	5	30

There were no incidents in the ACT, NT or TAS.

	Fatality	Serious injury	Minor injury	TOTAL
2016	0	3	1	4
2017	1	1	1	3
2018	1	1	0	2
2019	3	2	2	7
2020	3	2	0	5
2021	1	1	0	2
2022	4	2	0	6
2023	0	1	0	1
TOTAL	13	13	4	30

1. Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator, Occurrence extract-fatalities, serious injuries, minor injuries, attempted suicide no consequence July 2015–December 2023. The requirements for operator reporting of notifiable occurrences are set out in the Reporting Requirements for Notifiable Occurrences. See here for information about notifiable occurrences. On 1/7/2022 the definition of serious injury changed potentially reducing reported serious injuries compared to previous years.

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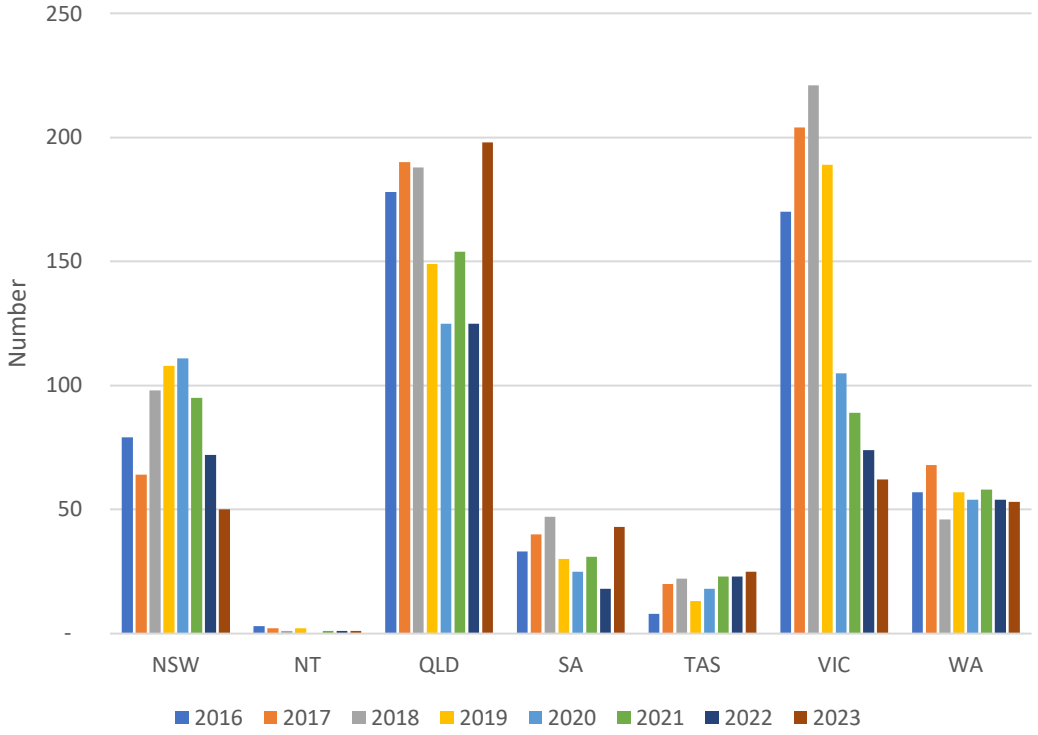
NEAR HITS AT LEVEL CROSSINGS ON THE AUSTRALIAN HEAVY RAIL NETWORK 2016-2023[1]

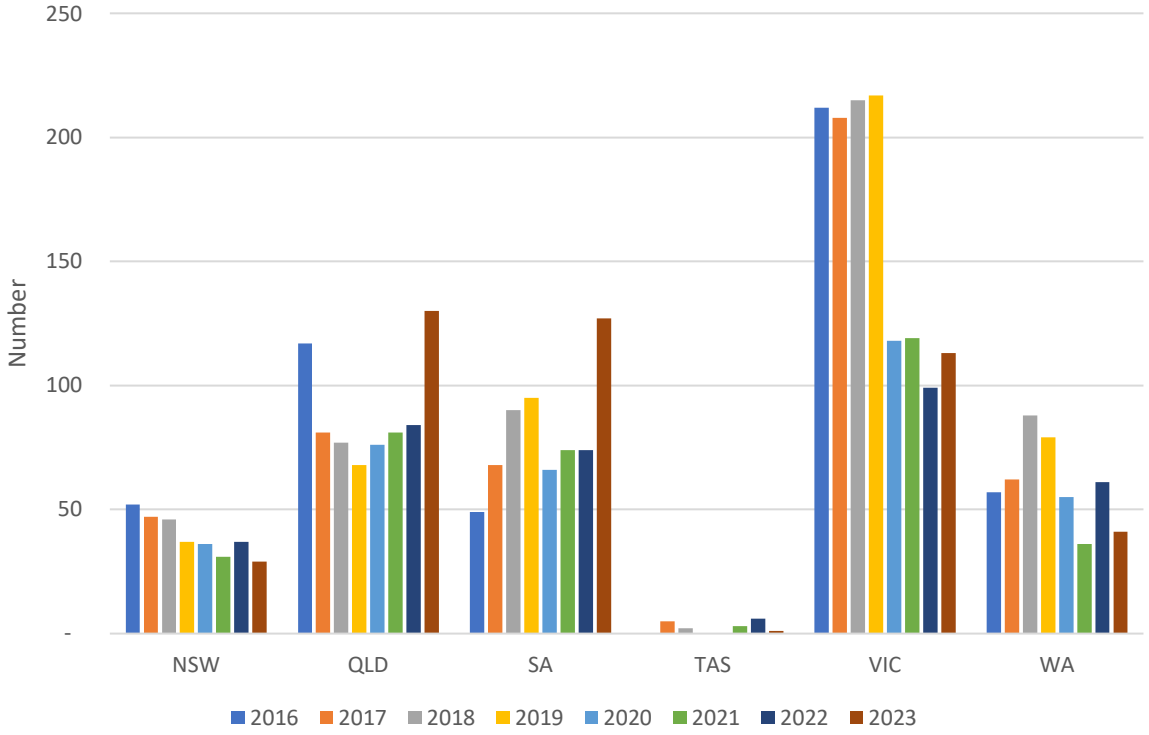
NEAR HITS WITH ROAD VEHICLE

In this period there were 3,975 near misses with a road vehicle at a level crossing, an average of 497 per year. There were no incidents in the ACT.



NEAR HITS WITH PEDESTRIAN

In this period there were 3,470 near misses with a pedestrian at a level crossing, an average of 434 per year. There were no incidents in the ACT and 1 incident in the NT in 2022.



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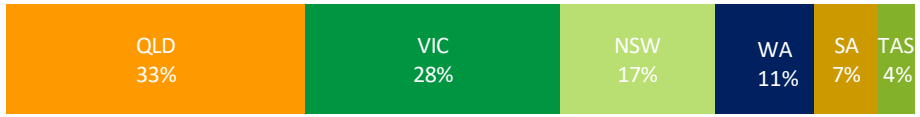
NEAR HITS AT LEVEL CROSSINGS ON THE AUSTRALIAN HEAVY RAIL NETWORK 2016-2023[1]

NEAR HITS WITH ROAD VEHICLE

In this period there were 3,975 near hits with a road vehicle at a level crossing, an average of 497 per year. There were no incidents in the ACT.

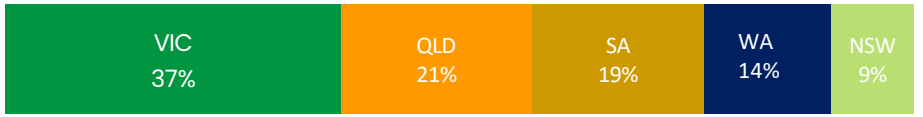
	NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA
2016	79	3	178	33	8	170	57
2017	64	2	190	40	20	204	68
2018	98	1	188	47	22	221	46
2019	108	2	149	30	13	189	57
2020	111	-	125	25	18	105	54
2021	95	1	154	31	23	89	58
2022	72	1	125	18	23	74	54
2023	50	1	198	43	25	62	53
TOTAL	677	11	1,307	267	152	1,114	447
AVERAGE	85	1	163	33	19	139	56



NEAR HITS WITH PEDESTRIAN

In this period there were 3,470 near hits with a pedestrian at a level crossing, an average of 434 per year. There were no incidents in the ACT.

	NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA
2016	52	-	117	49	-	212	57
2017	47	-	81	68	5	208	62
2018	46	-	77	90	2	215	88
2019	37	-	68	95	-	217	79
2020	36	-	76	66	-	118	55
2021	31	-	81	74	3	119	36
2022	37	1	84	74	6	99	61
2023	29	-	130	127	1	113	41
TOTAL	315	1	714	643	17	1,301	479
AVERAGE	39	0	89	80	2	163	60



In addition, less than 1% in TAS and NT.

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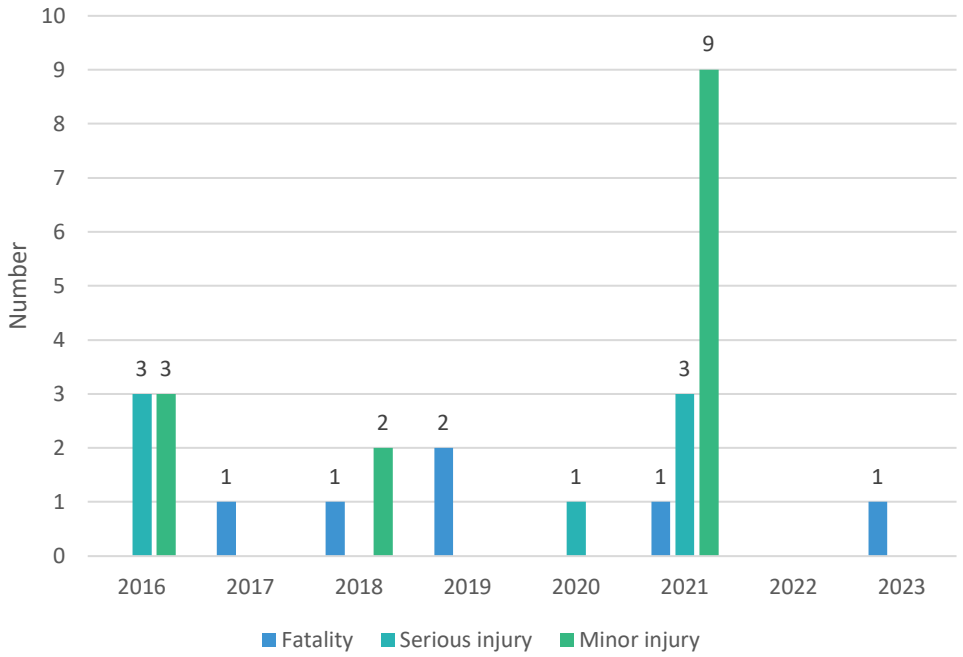
LEVEL CROSSING OCCURENCES ON THE NEW SOUTH WALES HEAVY RAIL NETWORK 2016-2023[1]

COLLISION WITH A ROAD VEHICLE

In this period there were 6 fatalities, 7 serious injuries and 14 minor injuries because of road vehicle collisions at a level crossing.



COLLISION WITH A PEDESTRIAN

In this period there was 1 fatality (2017) and 1 serious injury (2020) because of collisions with a pedestrian at a level crossing.

1. Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator, Occurrence extract-fatalities, serious injuries, minor injuries, attempted suicide no consequence July 2015–December 2023. The requirements for operator reporting of notifiable occurrences are set out in the Reporting Requirements for Notifiable Occurrences. See here for information about notifiable occurrences. On 1/7/2022 the definition of serious injury changed potentially reducing reported serious injuries compared to previous years.

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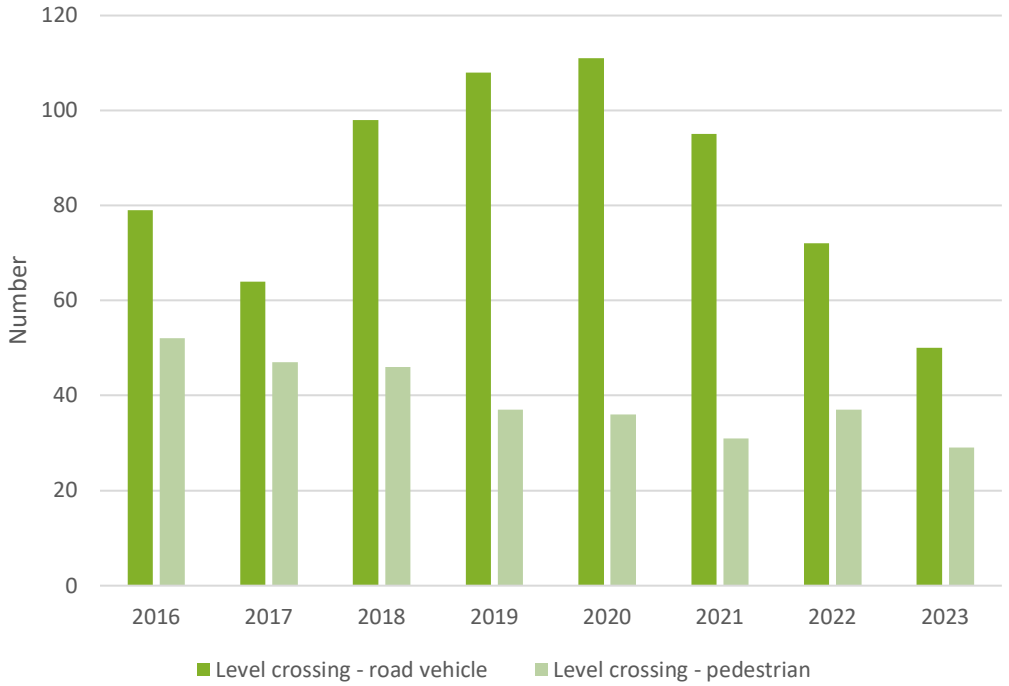
NEAR HITS AT LEVEL CROSSINGS ON THE NEW SOUTH WALES HEAVY RAIL NETWORK 2016-2023[1]

In this period there were a total of 677 near hits at a level crossing with a road vehicle (an average of 85 per year) and 315 at a level crossing with pedestrians (an average of 39 per year) reported to ONRSR.



1. Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator, Occurrence extract-fatalities, serious injuries, minor injuries, attempted suicide no consequence July 2015–December 2023. The requirements for operator reporting of notifiable occurrences are set out in the Reporting Requirements for Notifiable Occurrences. See here for information about notifiable occurrences. On 1/7/2022 the definition of Near Miss/Near Hit has changed and now only requires incidents to be reported where a collision has only been narrowly avoided by chance and there was a high chance of collision if circumstances were slightly different. This may result in a decrease of incidents compared to previous years.

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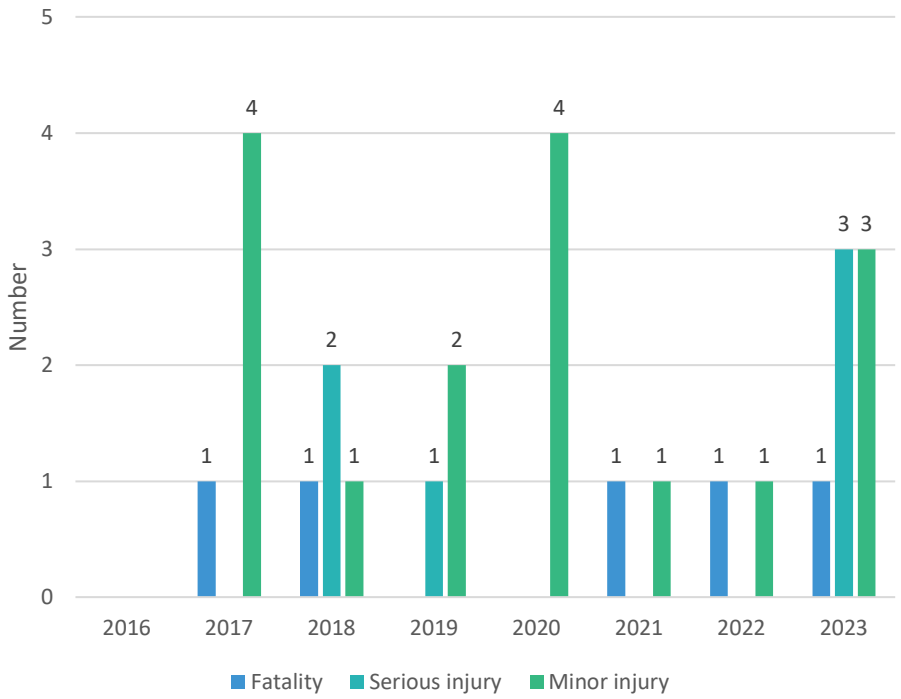
LEVEL CROSSING OCCURENCES ON THE QUEENSLAND HEAVY RAIL NETWORK 2016-2023[1]

COLLISION WITH A ROAD VEHICLE

In this period there were 5 fatalities, 6 serious injuries and 16 minor injuries because of road vehicle collisions at a level crossing.



COLLISION WITH A PEDESTRIAN

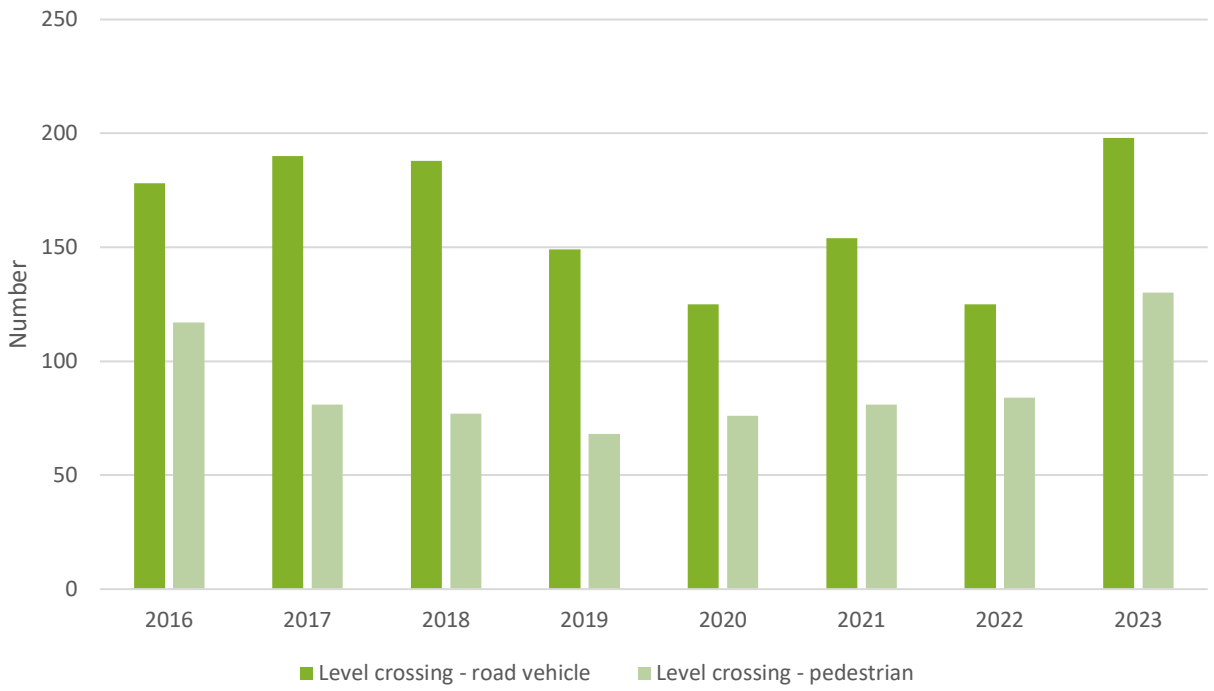
In this period there was 2 fatalities (2019, 2022), 1 serious injury (2016) and 1 minor injury (2017) because of collisions with a pedestrian at a level crossing.

1. Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator, Occurrence extract-fatalities, serious injuries, minor injuries, attempted suicide no consequence July 2015–December 2023. The requirements for operator reporting of notifiable occurrences are set out in the Reporting Requirements for Notifiable Occurrences. See here for information about notifiable occurrences. On 1/7/2022 the definition of serious injury changed potentially reducing reported serious injuries compared to previous years.

TrackSAFE Foundation

NEAR HITS AT LEVEL CROSSINGS ON THE QUEENSLAND HEAVY RAIL NETWORK 2016-2023[1]

In this period there were 1,307 near hits at a level crossing with a road vehicle (an average of 163 per year) and 714 at a level crossing with pedestrians (an average of 89 per year) reported to ONRSR.



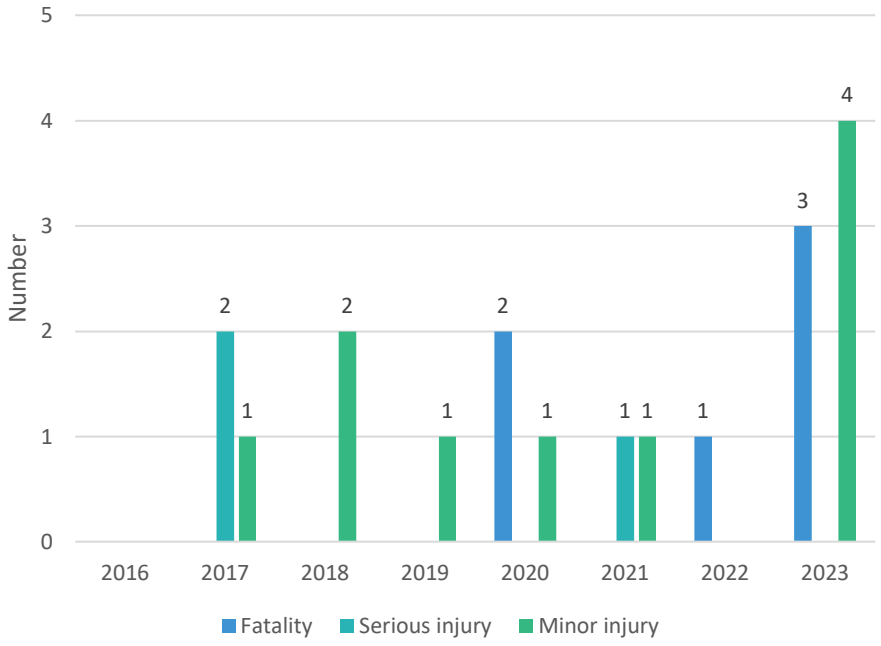
1. Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator, Occurrence extract-fatalities, serious injuries, minor injuries, attempted suicide no consequence July 2015–December 2023. The requirements for operator reporting of notifiable occurrences are set out in the Reporting Requirements for Notifiable Occurrences. See here for information about notifiable occurrences. On 1/7/2022 the definition of Near Miss/Near Hit has changed and now only requires incidents to be reported where a collision has only been narrowly avoided by chance and there was a high chance of collision if circumstances were slightly different. This may result in a decrease of incidents compared to previous years.

TrackSAFE Foundation

TOTAL LEVEL CROSSING OCCURENCES ON THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN HEAVY RAIL NETWORK 2016-2023[1]

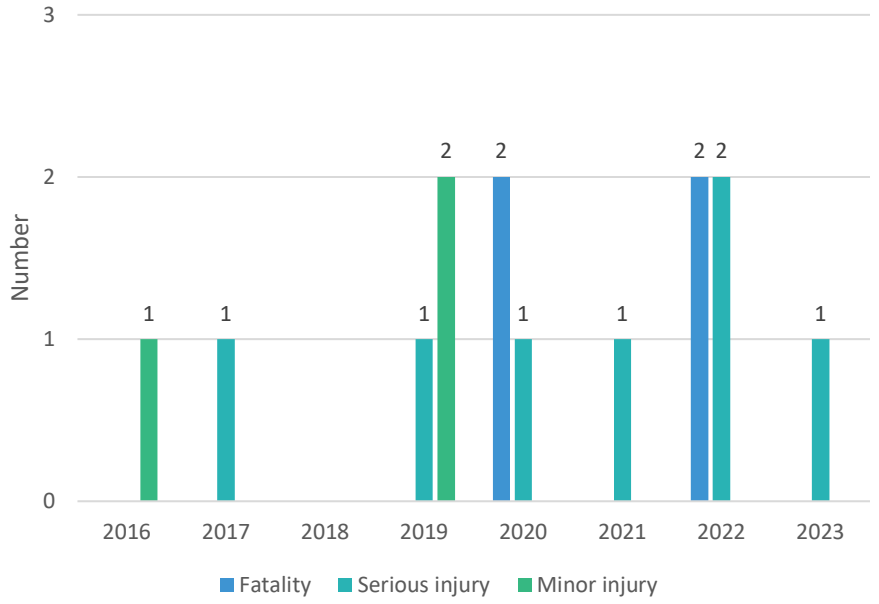
COLLISION WITH A ROAD VEHICLE

In this period there were 6 fatalities, 3 serious injuries and 10 minor injuries because of road vehicle collisions at a level crossing. There were no fatalities or injuries in 2016.



COLLISION WITH A PEDESTRIAN

In this period there were 4 fatalities, 7 serious injuries and 3 minor injuries because of collisions with a pedestrian at a level crossing. There were no fatalities or injuries in 2018.



1. Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator, Occurrence extract-fatalities, serious injuries, minor injuries, attempted suicide no consequence July 2015–December 2023. The requirements for operator reporting of notifiable occurrences are set out in the Reporting Requirements for Notifiable Occurrences. See here for information about notifiable occurrences. On 1/7/2022 the definition of serious injury changed, potentially reducing reported serious injuries compared to previous years.

TrackSAFE Foundation

NEAR HITS AT LEVEL CROSSINGS ON THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN HEAVY RAIL NETWORK 2016-2023[1]

In this period there were 267 near hits at a level crossing with a road vehicle (an average of 33 per year) and 643 at a level crossing with a pedestrian (an average of 80 per year) reported to ONRSR.

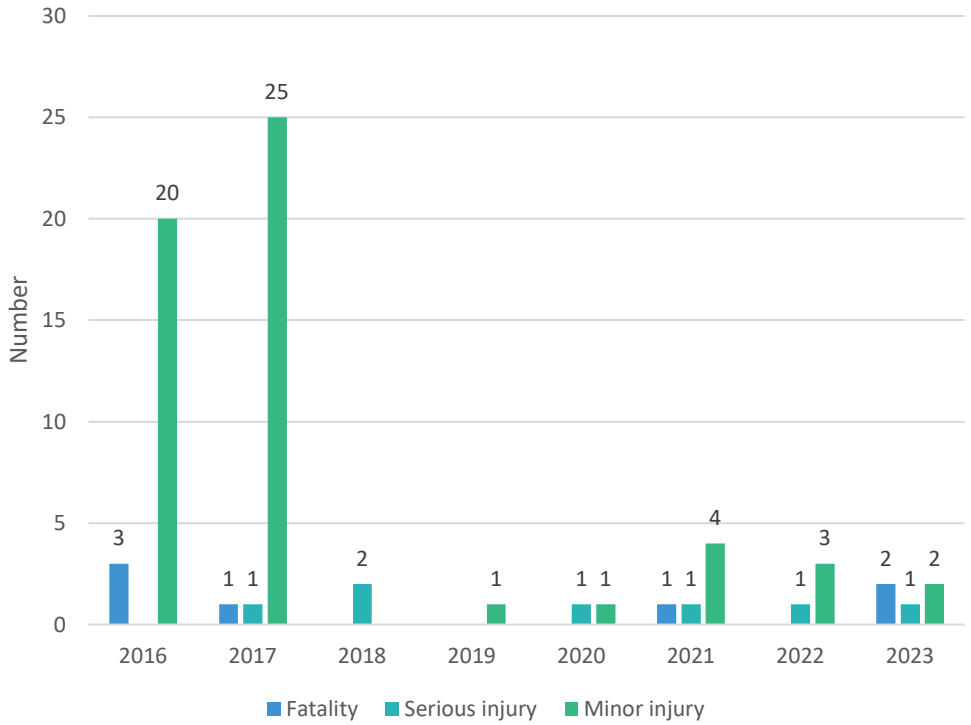
1. Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator, Occurrence extract-fatalities, serious injuries, minor injuries, attempted suicide no consequence July 2015–December 2023. The requirements for operator reporting of notifiable occurrences are set out in the Reporting Requirements for Notifiable Occurrences. See here for information about notifiable occurrences. On 1/7/2022 the definition of Near Miss/Near Hit has changed and now only requires incidents to be reported where a collision has only been narrowly avoided by chance and there was a high chance of collision if circumstances were slightly different. This may result in a decrease in incidents compared to previous years.

TrackSAFE Foundation

LEVEL CROSSING OCCURENCES ON THE VICTORIAN HEAVY RAIL NETWORK 2016-2023[1]

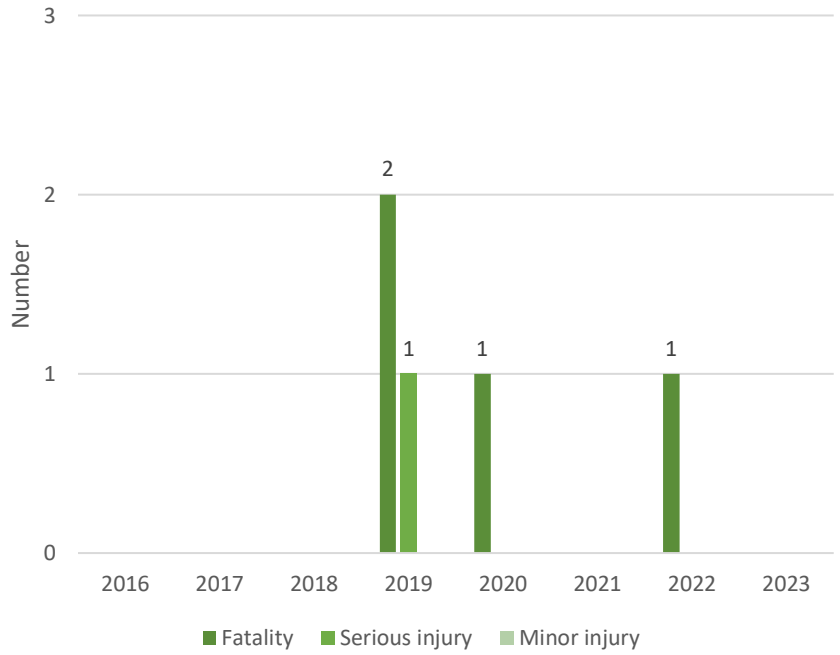
COLLISION WITH A ROAD VEHICLE

In this period there were 7 fatalities, 7 serious injuries and 56 minor injuries because of road vehicle collisions at a level crossing.



COLLISION WITH A PEDESTRIAN

In this period there were 4 fatalities and 1 serious injury because of collisions with a pedestrian at a level crossing.



1. Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator, Occurrence extract-fatalities, serious injuries, minor injuries, attempted suicide no consequence July 2015–December 2023. The requirements for operator reporting of notifiable occurrences are set out in the Reporting Requirements for Notifiable Occurrences. See here for information about notifiable occurrences. On 1/7/2022 the definition of serious injury changed potentially reducing reported serious injuries compared to previous years.

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NEAR HITS AT LEVEL CROSSINGS ON THE VICTORIAN HEAVY RAIL NETWORK 2016-2023[1]

In this period there were 1,114 near hits at a level crossing with a road vehicle (an average of 139 per year) and 1,301 near hits at a level crossing with a pedestrian (an average of 163) reported to ONRSR.

1. Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator, Occurrence extract-fatalities, serious injuries, minor injuries, attempted suicide no consequence July 2015–December 2023. The requirements for operator reporting of notifiable occurrences are set out in the Reporting Requirements for Notifiable Occurrences. See here for information about notifiable occurrences. On 1/7/2022 the definition of Near Miss/Near Hit has changed and now only requires incidents to be reported where a collision has only been narrowly avoided by chance and there was a high chance of collision if circumstances were slightly different. This may result in a decrease of incidents compared to previous years.

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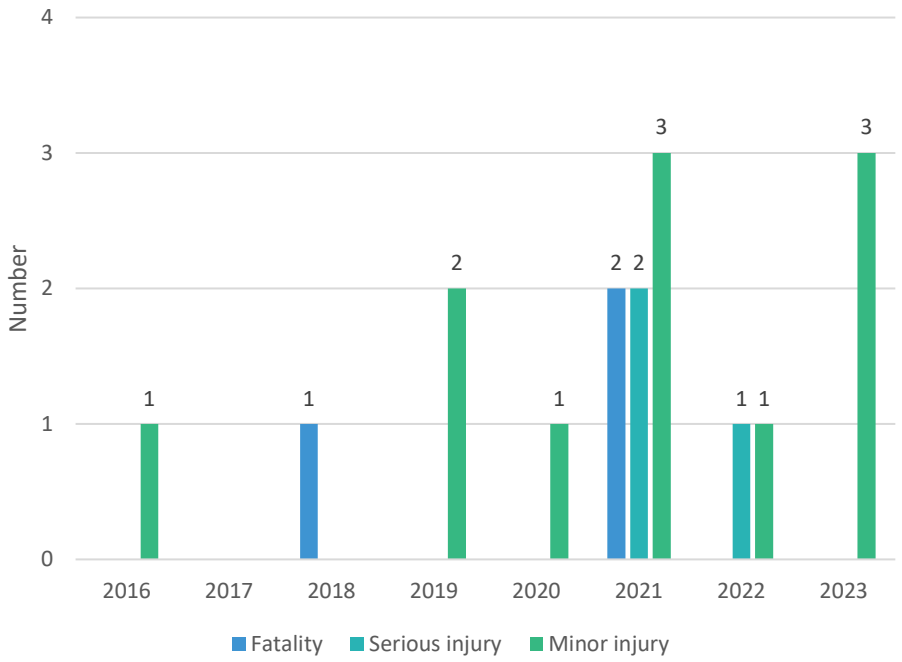
TOTAL LEVEL CROSSING OCCURENCES ON THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN HEAVY RAIL NETWORK 2016-2023[1]

COLLISION WITH A ROAD VEHICLE

In this period there were 3 fatalities, 3 serious injuries and 11 minor injuries because of road vehicle collisions at a level crossing. There were no fatalities or injuries in 2017.



COLLISION WITH A PEDESTRIAN

In this period there were 2 serious injuries in 2016, 1 fatality and 1 serious injury in 2018 and 1 fatality in 2021.

1. Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator, Occurrence extract-fatalities, serious injuries, minor injuries, attempted suicide no consequence July 2015–December 2023. The requirements for operator reporting of notifiable occurrences are set out in the Reporting Requirements for Notifiable Occurrences. See here for information about notifiable occurrences. On 1/7/2022 the definition of serious injury changed potentially reducing reported serious injuries compared to previous years.

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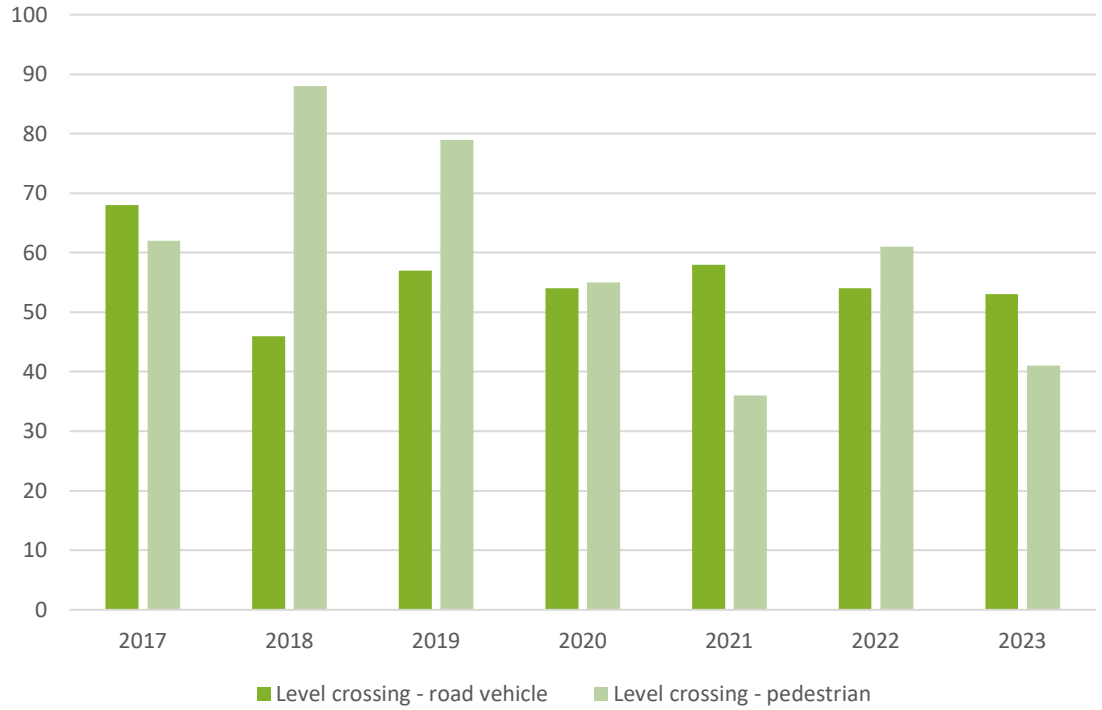
NEAR HITS AT LEVEL CROSSINGS ON THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN HEAVY RAIL NETWORK 2016-2023[1]

In this period there were 447 near hits at a level crossing with a road vehicle (an average of 56 per year) and 479 near hits at a level crossing with pedestrians (an average of 60 per year) reported to ONRSR.



1. Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator, Occurrence extract-fatalities, serious injuries, minor injuries, attempted suicide no consequence July 2015–December 2023. The requirements for operator reporting of notifiable occurrences are set out in the Reporting Requirements for Notifiable Occurrences. See here for information about notifiable occurrences. On 1/7/2022 the definition of Near Miss/Near Hit has changed and now only requires incidents to be reported where a collision has only been narrowly avoided by chance and there was a high chance of collision if circumstances were slightly different. This may result in a decrease of incidents compared to previous years.

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