

Gallup Pakistan Analysis of Punjab Development Statistics (50 Years) Transport



PRESS RELEASE

Gallup Pakistan Analysis of Punjab Development Statistics (50 Years)

Punjab's Registered Vehicles Rise 110 Times, While Railway Passengers Fall 77%: Pakistan's Transport System Shifts from Rail to Road

Islamabad, June 2nd, 2026

Pakistan's transport data shows a major structural shift over five decades: railways contracted in fleet size and passenger volume, while road-based mobility in Punjab expanded at extraordinary scale. Between 1972 and 2021, registered motor vehicles in Punjab rose from 101,183 to 11.14 million, while Pakistan Railways passengers fell from 124.0 million to 28.4 million. This points to a long-term movement away from mass rail transport toward road-based, private and semi-private mobility.

What is the Big Data Analysis Series by Gallup?

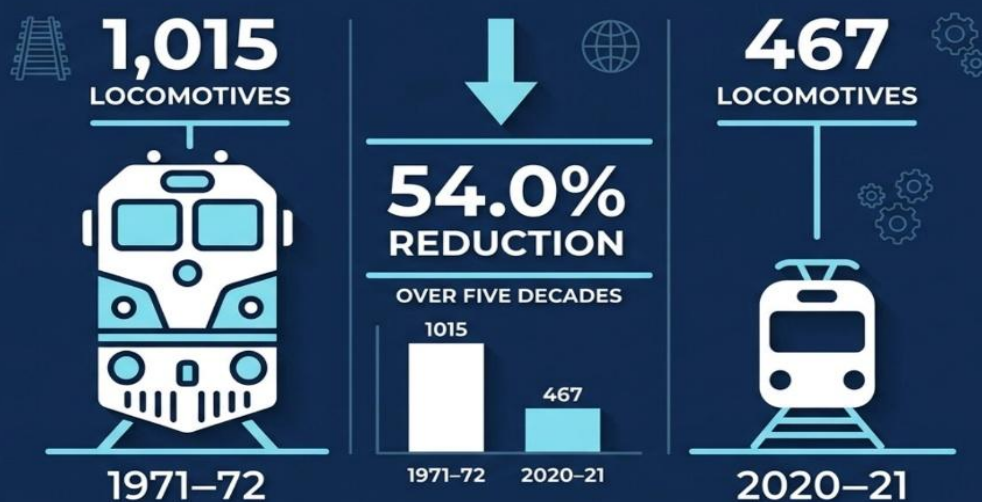
Gallup Pakistan's Big Data series was initiated by Bilal I. Gilani, Executive Director of Gallup Pakistan. As he explains: *"Pakistan does not suffer from a lack of data, but from limited accessibility and weak translation of numbers into understanding. Gallup Pakistan bridges this gap by analyzing large, often under-used datasets — from PSLM and Labour Force Surveys to Economic Surveys and National Census data — so these statistics can meaningfully inform policy and public discourse."*

What data points this current edition covers:

This analysis draws on Tables **21.1(a-c), 21.2, 21.3 and 21.4** from the transport section of *Punjab Development Statistics for 50 Years (1972–2021)*. The data covers Pakistan Railways' locomotives, freight capacity, passenger volumes, passenger-kilometres, freight traffic, passenger class composition, and registered motor vehicles by type in Punjab.

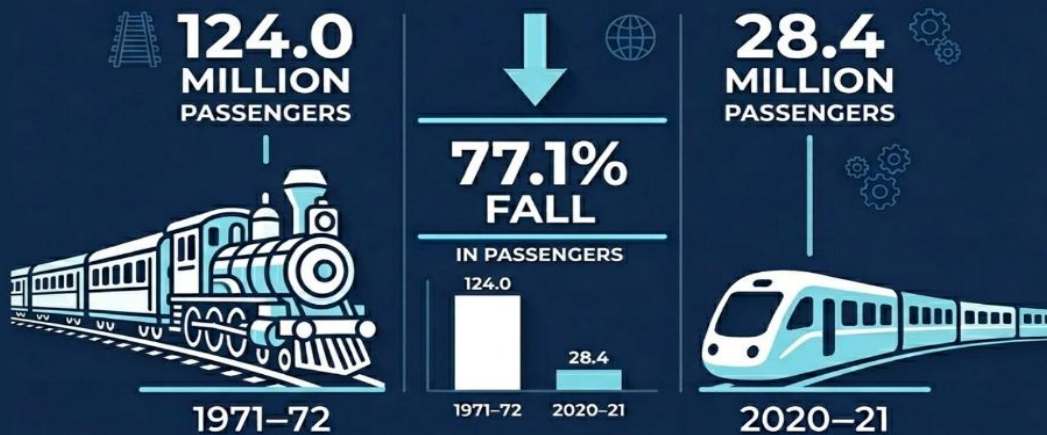
Punjab's Registered Vehicles Rise 110 Times, While Railway Passengers Fall 77%: Pakistan's Transport System Shifts from Rail to Road

Railway Fleet Shrinks Despite Diesel Modernization



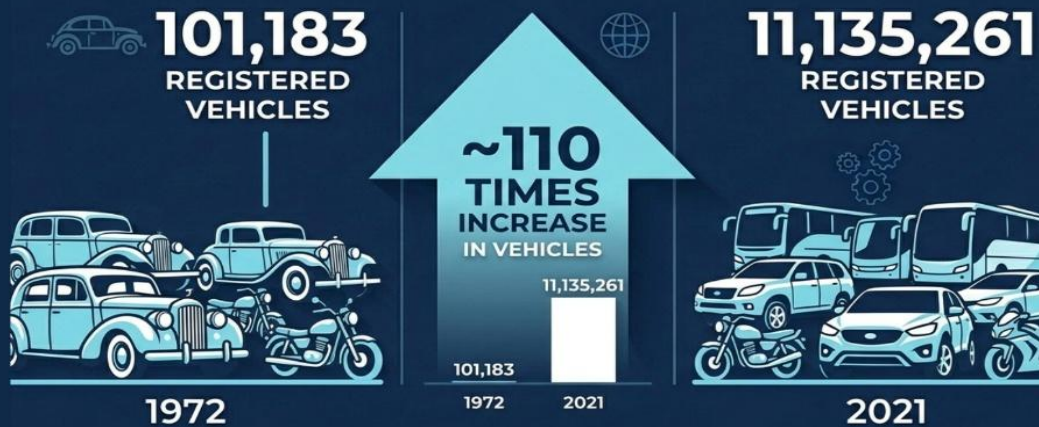
Pakistan Railways' locomotive fleet declined from 1,015 in 1971-72 to 467 in 2020-21, representing a 54.0% reduction over five decades. This decline is important because it shows that the railway system did not simply modernize its engine stock; it also became smaller in operational scale.

Rail Passenger Volumes Collapse, but Remaining Trips Become Much Longer



Rail passenger volumes declined sharply from 124.0 million in 1971-72 to 28.4 million in 2020-21, a fall of 77.1%. Passenger carriages also declined from 2,052 to 1,375, reinforcing the view that railway passenger capacity and usage both contracted over time.

Punjab's Road Motorization Expands at Extraordinary Scale



Punjab's registered motor vehicles increased from 101,183 in 1972 to 11,135,261 in 2021, an increase of about 110 times. This is the clearest indicator of the shift toward road-based mobility.

The most dramatic increase occurred in motorcycles and scooters, which rose from 39,869 to 7,499,553, an increase of about 188 times. By 2021, motorcycles and scooters alone accounted for about 67.3% of all registered vehicles in Punjab. Motor cars, jeeps and station wagons also increased sharply from 32,949 to 1,971,747, nearly 60 times.

Rickshaws, Tractors and Mixed Vehicles Show Diversification of Road Mobility



The growth of road transport is not limited to cars and motorcycles. Auto-rickshaws increased from 4,800 in 1972 to 593,346 in 2021, an increase of over 123 times, showing the rise of informal and semi-formal urban and peri-urban transport.

Tractors also reached 514,227 registered vehicles by 2021, reflecting the link between transport registration and agricultural mechanization. Pickup and delivery vans increased to 286,969, while buses stood at 108,204 and taxis at 70,152 in 2021.

Key Findings:

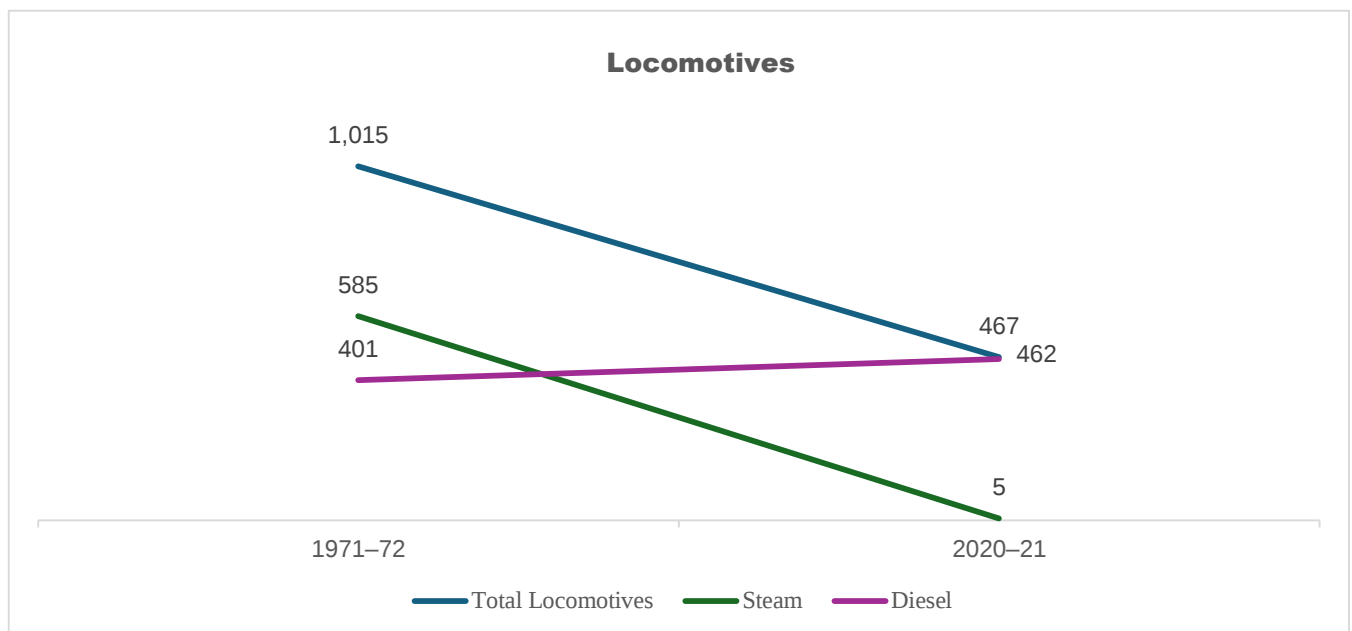
1. Pakistan Railways' locomotive fleet declined from 1,015 in 1971–72 to 467 in 2020–21, a fall of 54.0%.
2. Steam locomotives almost disappeared, falling from 585 to 5, while diesel locomotives increased from 401 to 462, showing modernization without fleet expansion.
3. Railway passengers fell from 124.0 million to 28.4 million, a decline of 77.1%.
4. Despite fewer passengers, passenger-kilometres rose from 9,515 million to 17,969 million, while average passenger distance increased from 76.6 km to 632.2 km, showing a shift toward longer-distance rail travel.
5. Freight wagons declined from 38 thousand to 14 thousand, but freight tonne-kilometres rose slightly from 7,756 million to 8,179 million, meaning rail freight became smaller in capacity but more long-haul in use.
6. Economy class accounted for 26.45 million out of 28.42 million passengers in 2020–21, or about 93.1% of total rail passengers.
7. Registered motor vehicles in Punjab increased from 101,183 in 1972 to 11,135,261 in 2021, an increase of roughly 110 times.
8. Motorcycles and scooters became the dominant vehicle category, rising from 39,869 to 7,499,553, and accounting for about 67.3% of all registered vehicles in Punjab by 2021.

1. Railway Fleet Shrinks Despite Diesel Modernization

Pakistan Railways' locomotive fleet declined from 1,015 in 1971–72 to 467 in 2020–21, representing a 54.0% reduction over five decades. This decline is important because it shows that the railway system did not simply modernize its engine stock; it also became smaller in operational scale.

The composition of locomotives changed sharply. Steam locomotives fell from 585 in 1971–72 to only 5 in 2020–21, while diesel locomotives increased from 401 to 462. Electric locomotives, which stood at 29 in earlier years, disappeared from the latest years of the table. This indicates a strong transition toward diesel traction, but not toward an expanded or diversified rail fleet.

The key interpretation is that modernization occurred alongside contraction. Diesel replaced steam, but total locomotive availability fell substantially. This suggests that Pakistan Railways moved toward a more limited operating base rather than a broader modern rail network.



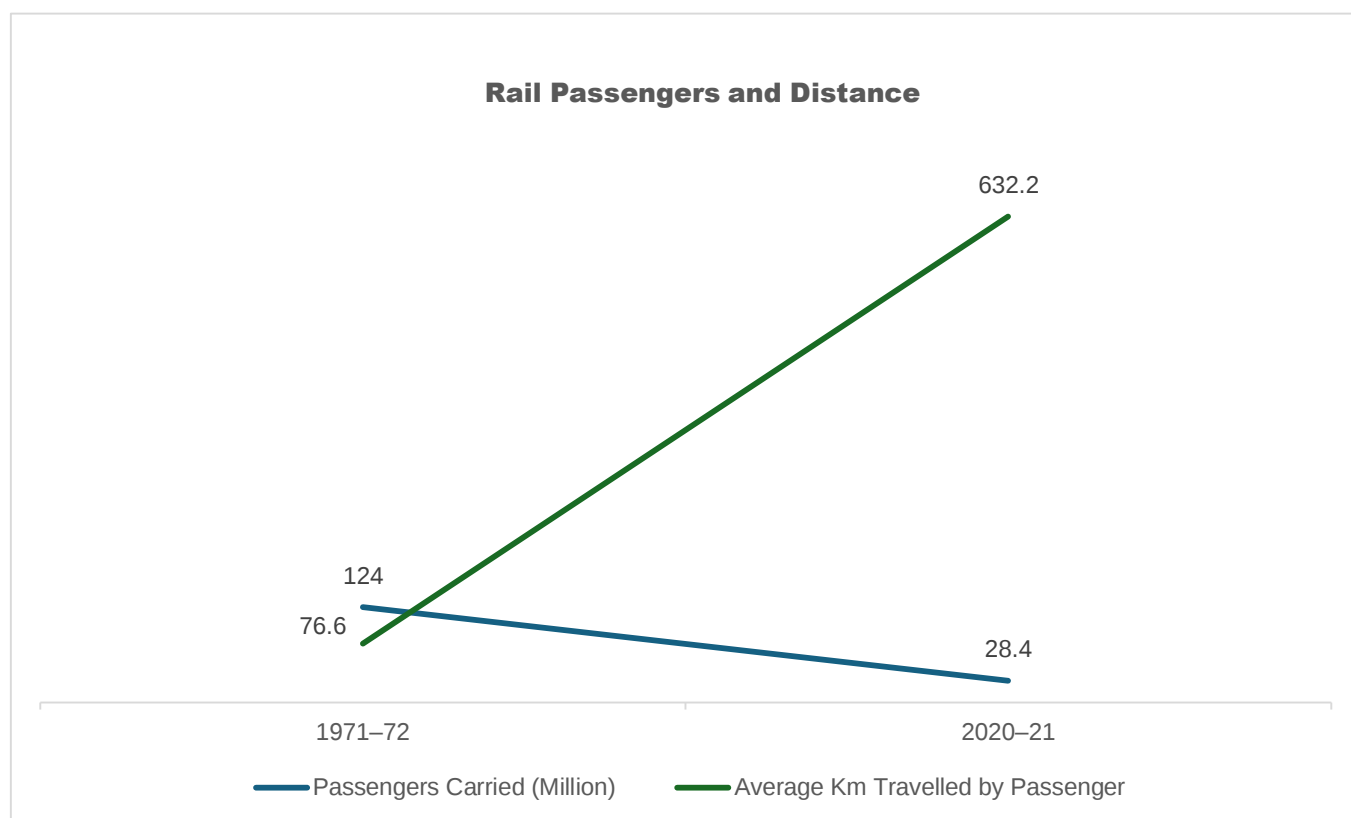
Source: Bureau of Statistics, Planning & Development Board, Government of the Punjab — Punjab Development Statistics for 50 Years (1972–2021).

2. Rail Passenger Volumes Collapse, but Remaining Trips Become Much Longer

Rail passenger volumes declined sharply from 124.0 million in 1971–72 to 28.4 million in 2020–21, a fall of 77.1%. Passenger carriages also declined from 2,052 to 1,375, reinforcing the view that railway passenger capacity and usage both contracted over time.

However, passenger-kilometres moved in the opposite direction, increasing from 9,515 million to 17,969 million. Average distance travelled by a passenger rose from 76.6 km to 632.2 km, an increase of more than 8 times. This is one of the most important structural findings in the transport data.

The data suggests that rail lost much of its short-distance or routine travel role, but retained relevance for longer intercity journeys. In other words, fewer people are using rail, but those who do are travelling much farther. This points to a shift in railways from broad-based passenger mobility toward a narrower, long-distance travel function.



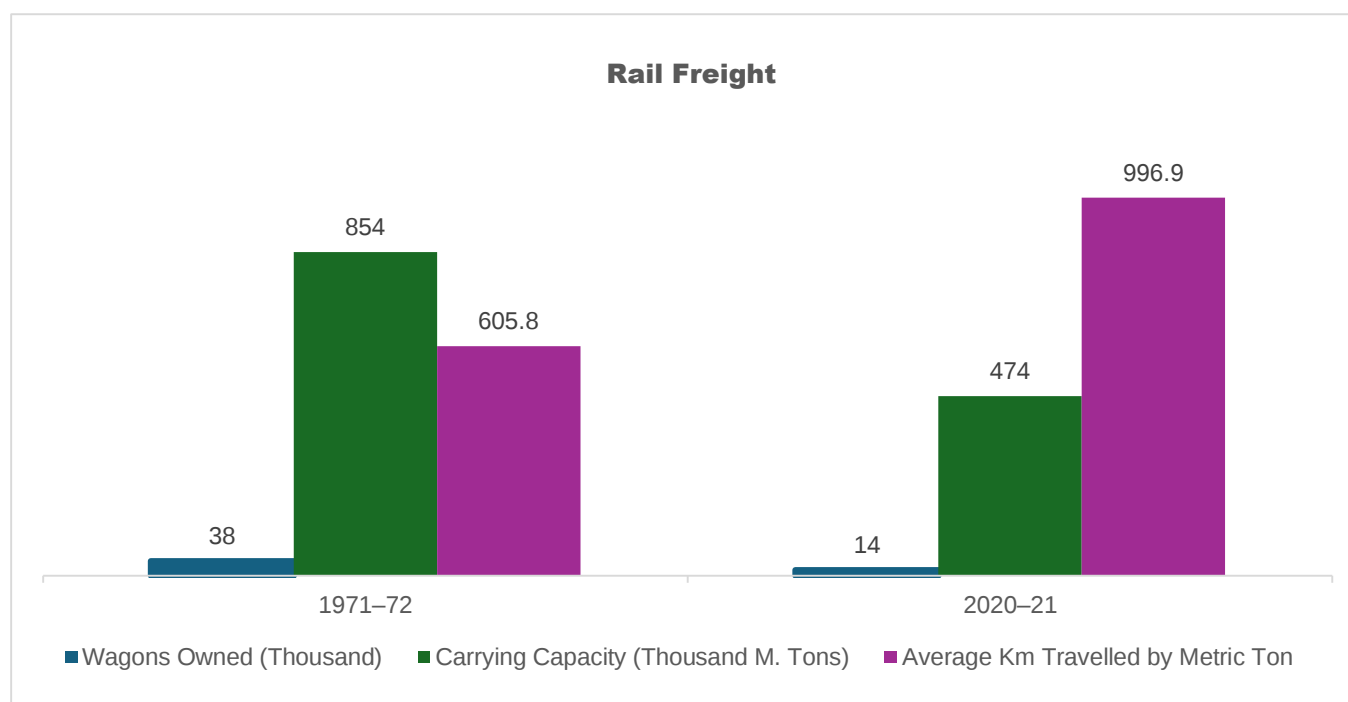
Source: Bureau of Statistics, Planning & Development Board, Government of the Punjab — Punjab Development Statistics for 50 Years (1972–2021).

3. Rail Freight Capacity Declines, but Freight Moves Over Longer Distances

Rail freight data shows a similar pattern of contraction with longer-distance use. Wagons owned declined from 38 thousand in 1971–72 to 14 thousand in 2020–21, a fall of 63.2%. Carrying capacity also declined from 854 thousand metric tons to 474 thousand metric tons, a reduction of 44.5%.

Yet freight tonne-kilometres increased slightly from 7,756 million to 8,179 million, while average distance travelled by a metric ton increased from 605.8 km to 996.9 km, a rise of 64.6%. This means that even though the freight system became smaller in terms of wagons and carrying capacity, the freight that remained was moving over longer distances.

This pattern suggests that railway freight became more concentrated in long-haul movement rather than broad freight handling. The decline in physical capacity indicates a shrinking freight base, but the increase in distance travelled shows that rail retained some importance for longer-distance cargo movement.



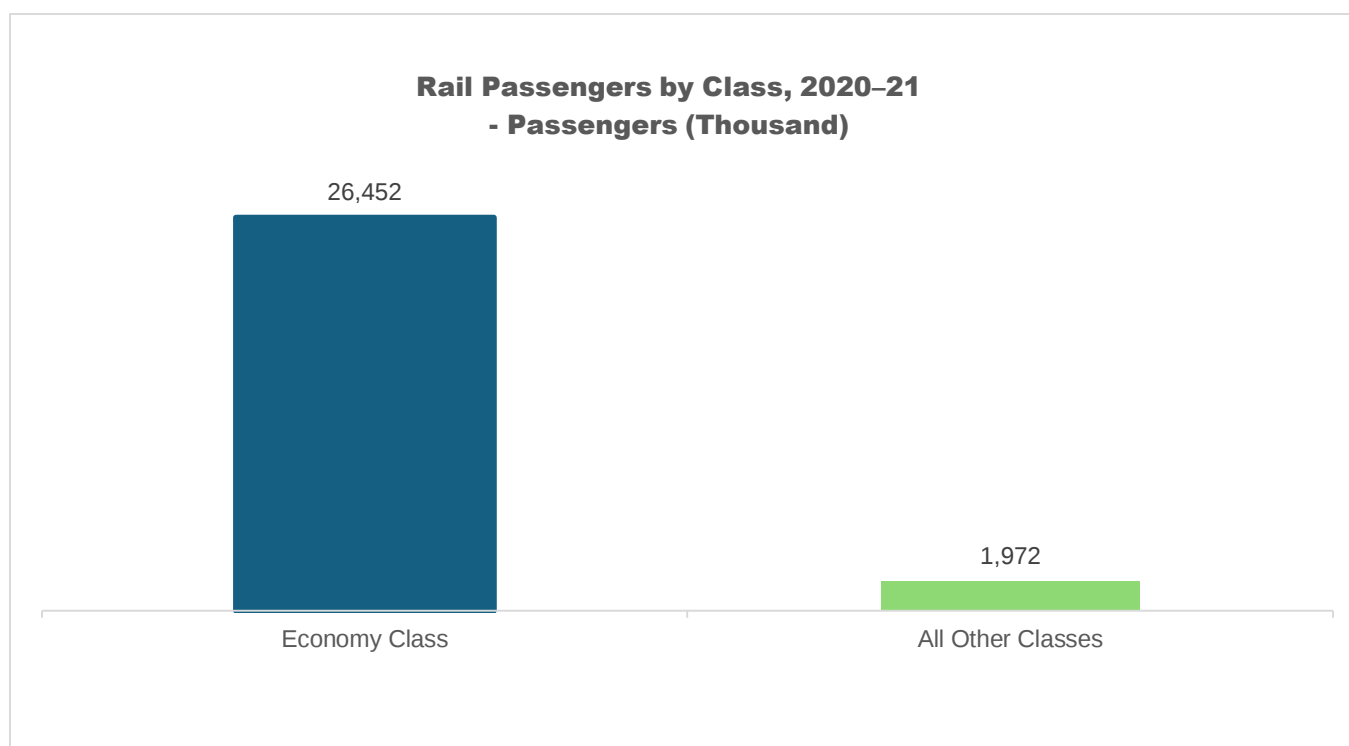
Source: Bureau of Statistics, Planning & Development Board, Government of the Punjab — Punjab Development Statistics for 50 Years (1972–2021).

4. Economy Class Now Defines Rail Passenger Travel

Passenger class data shows that railway use has become overwhelmingly concentrated in economy class. In 2020–21, total rail passengers stood at 28.424 million, of which 26.452 million travelled in economy class. This means economy class accounted for about 93.1% of all rail passengers.

This is significant because it shows that rail continues to serve a specific social and economic function despite the overall fall in passenger numbers. Rail remains most relevant for price-sensitive passengers, especially for longer-distance travel where affordability matters.

The collapse in total passengers therefore does not mean that rail has disappeared as a public transport mode. Instead, its passenger base has become narrower, more economy-focused, and more dependent on long-distance travel demand.



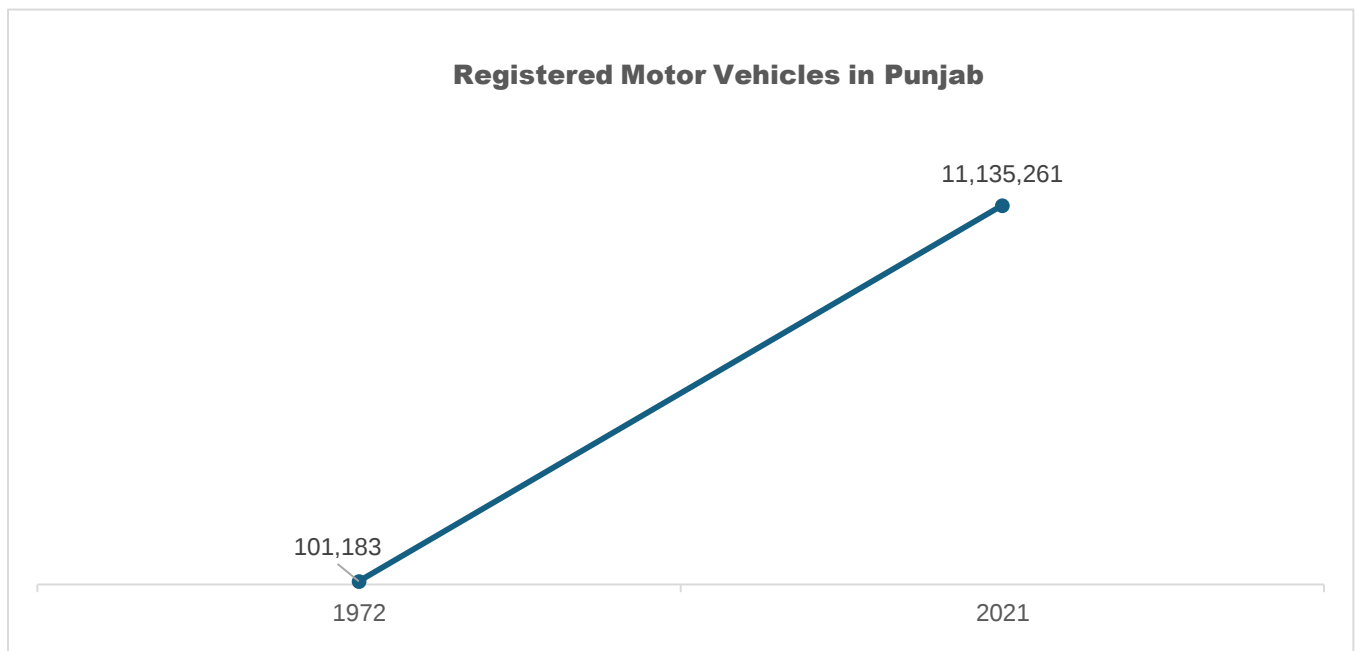
Source: Bureau of Statistics, Planning & Development Board, Government of the Punjab — Punjab Development Statistics for 50 Years (1972–2021).

5. Punjab's Road Motorization Expands at Extraordinary Scale

Punjab's registered motor vehicles increased from 101,183 in 1972 to 11,135,261 in 2021, an increase of about 110 times. This is the clearest indicator of the shift toward road-based mobility.

The most dramatic increase occurred in motorcycles and scooters, which rose from 39,869 to 7,499,553, an increase of about 188 times. By 2021, motorcycles and scooters alone accounted for about 67.3% of all registered vehicles in Punjab. Motor cars, jeeps and station wagons also increased sharply from 32,949 to 1,971,747, nearly 60 times.

This shows that mobility growth in Punjab has been driven mainly by individual and household-level transport, especially two-wheelers. The rise of motorcycles suggests that affordability, flexibility, and gaps in mass public transport may have pushed households toward private mobility solutions.



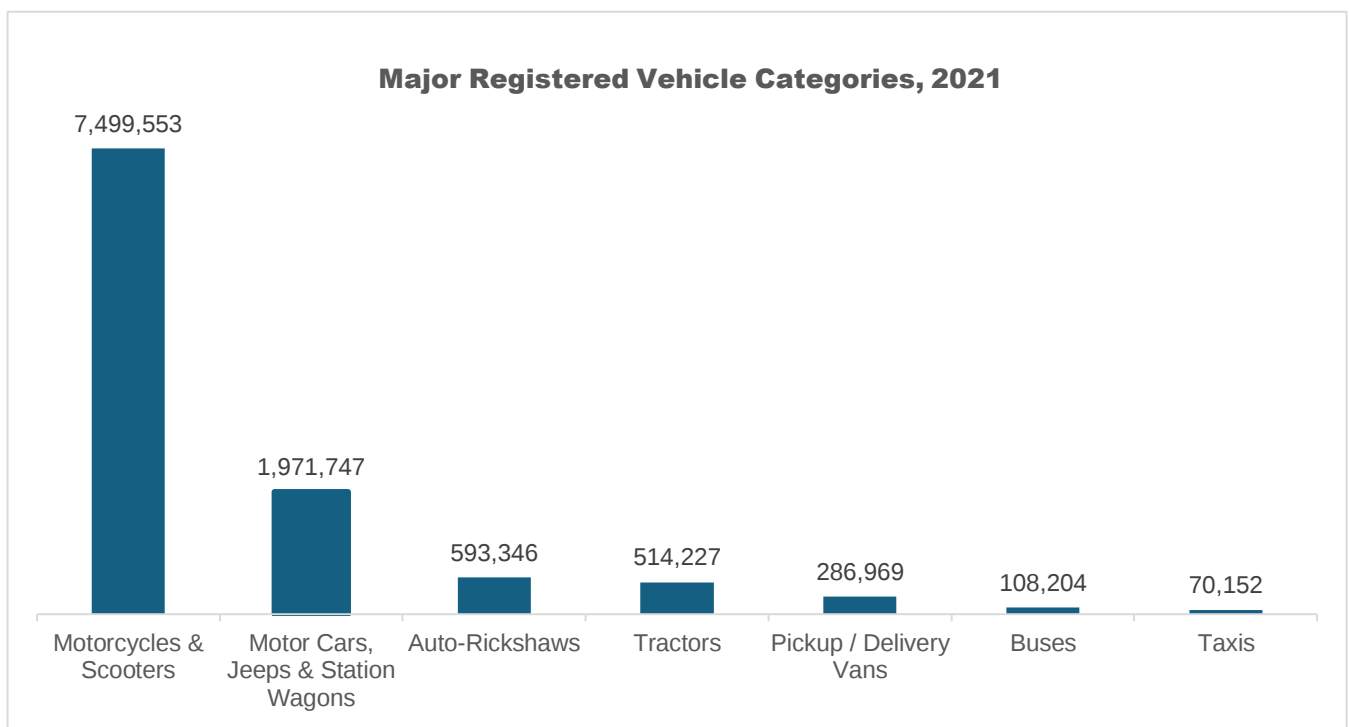
Source: Bureau of Statistics, Planning & Development Board, Government of the Punjab — Punjab Development Statistics for 50 Years (1972–2021).

6. Rickshaws, Tractors and Mixed Vehicles Show Diversification of Road Mobility

The growth of road transport is not limited to cars and motorcycles. Auto-rickshaws increased from 4,800 in 1972 to 593,346 in 2021, an increase of over 123 times, showing the rise of informal and semi-formal urban and peri-urban transport.

Tractors also reached 514,227 registered vehicles by 2021, reflecting the link between transport registration and agricultural mechanization. Pickup and delivery vans increased to 286,969, while buses stood at 108,204 and taxis at 70,152 in 2021.

This diversification shows that Punjab's vehicle growth is not only about private commuting. It also reflects changes in goods movement, informal passenger transport, agricultural mobility, and small-scale commercial transport. The road system has become the backbone for multiple layers of economic and social activity.



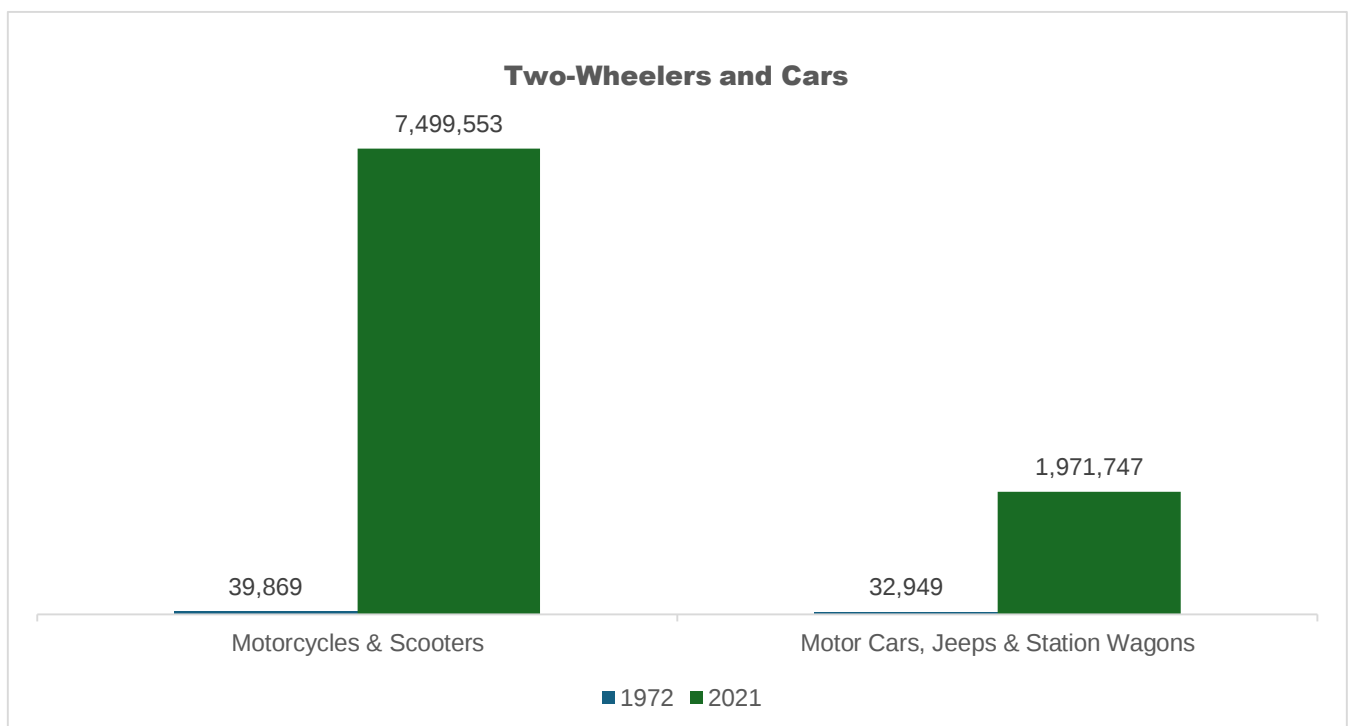
Source: Bureau of Statistics, Planning & Development Board, Government of the Punjab — Punjab Development Statistics for 50 Years (1972–2021).

7. Transport Shift: Rail Contracts While Road-Based Mobility Becomes Dominant

Taken together, the data shows a major modal transformation. Pakistan Railways contracted in locomotives, passenger volumes, passenger carriages, freight wagons and freight carrying capacity. At the same time, rail journeys became longer, suggesting that rail shifted toward a narrower long-distance role rather than serving as a broad mass transport system.

Punjab's road transport moved in the opposite direction. Registered vehicles increased from just over 0.1 million to more than 11.1 million, with motorcycles becoming the dominant mode. This points to a transport system increasingly shaped by private vehicles, two-wheelers, rickshaws, and road-based freight rather than rail-based collective mobility.

The implications are substantial. Greater road motorization expands mobility access, but it also increases pressure on roads, fuel demand, congestion, parking, emissions and road safety systems. The data therefore suggests that Punjab's transport challenge is no longer simply about mobility expansion, but about managing the consequences of a deeply road-dependent transport system.



Source: Bureau of Statistics, Planning & Development Board, Government of the Punjab — Punjab Development Statistics for 50 Years (1972–2021).



Wish to Contribute to Gallup Big Data Analysis?

Gallup Pakistan is looking for collaboration with researchers to expand the Big Data Analysis project. If you have any ideas, please write to Bilal I Gilani, Project Director, Big Data Analysis at Gallup Pakistan.

Disclaimer: Gallup Pakistan is not related to Gallup Inc. headquartered in Washington D.C. USA. We require that our surveys be credited fully as Gallup Pakistan (not Gallup or Gallup Poll). We disclaim any responsibility for surveys pertaining to Pakistani public opinion except those carried out by Gallup Pakistan, the Pakistani affiliate of Gallup International Association. For details on Gallup International Association see website: www.gallup-international.com

Disclaimer: The views and inferences expressed in the article are that of the author himself and Gallup Pakistan does not take any responsibility in this regard. This series, and many such initiatives, are internally funded by Gallup Pakistan and Gilani Research Foundation. No outside country or local funding has been received for this current activity.



Gallup Pakistan is not related to Gallup Inc. headquartered in Washington D.C. USA. We require that our surveys be credited fully as Gallup Pakistan (not Gallup or Gallup Poll). We disclaim any responsibility for surveys pertaining to Pakistani public opinion except those carried out by Gallup Pakistan, the Pakistani affiliate of Gallup International Association.

Contact Details:

Islamabad : +92 51 2655630

Email: isb@gallup.com.pk

www.gallup-international.com