Tram crashes rise on crowded roads

Timna Jacks
Rachel Eddie

The number of trams crashing into pedestrians and cars is the highest it has been in the past five years – and growing congestion on our roads is the reason.

Pedestrians have been hit by trams with increasing frequency: the number of reported incidents shot up from 35 in 2014 to 51 last year, Transport Safety Victoria has revealed. Two pedestrians died in a crash involving a tram last year, marking the first deaths since 2014, when one pedestrian died in a collision with a tram.

Mobile phones and headphones are considered among the biggest distractions for pedestrians, who sometimes do not see or hear trams coming.

In its latest annual safety report, the watchdog has warned that our increasingly crowded roads are leading to a rise in dangerous crashes involving trams.

A report last week revealed Melbourne's traffic has slowed more than any other Australian city's.

Transport Safety Victoria called for more separation between trams and cars to help avoid serious injuries and deaths, with almost 80 per cent of tram tracks shared with cars.

More than 70 per cent of crashes are caused by cars turning or merging onto tram tracks.

There was a 15 per cent increase in the number of times trams crashed into cars or trucks last year, with 1122 incidents reported to the watchdog.

The number of slips, trips or falls on trams has also surged every year since 2014, with 25 incidents resulting in serious injury last year.

The total number of people falling on trams has nearly doubled from 180 in 2014 to 380 last year.

About three-quarters of those seriously injured in incidents involving trams (which includes passengers and railway staff) were over the age of 60. The number of passengers caught in tram doors or falling on stairs or ramps has soared over the past five years. These incidents rose from 10 in 2014 to 73 five years later.

However, overall, the number of serious injuries to passengers and railway staff has declined over three years to 2018. Commuters took 189 million journeys on public transport across Melbourne last year, up 4.3 per cent over five years.