

David M. Cooper

28 May 2003

Thomas G. Parry
Chairman
Independent Pricing and
Regulatory Tribunal of NSW
Level 2
44 Market Street
Sydney NSW 2000

· Submission on ·
Determination of CityRail and STA Fares

Mr. Chairman

I am in the position of having to commute from Epping to Wollongong five days per week and occasionally on Saturdays by rail. I have done so since early 1995 and as such consider that I am in a position to pass judgement on State Rail. I pay over two and a half thousand dollars per year (which I cannot claim as a tax deduction) for a service which I consider to be so substandard that it approaches third-world status. There have been a number of fare rises over the past ten years, each of which was claimed by State Rail to be necessary either to meet increased costs or to improve services. In the almost ten years that I have been travelling on the South Coast line, there has been no discernable improvement in the services returning from Wollongong. The trains that I usually catch, the 5.44pm or the 6.14pm (departing Wollongong) are chronically late, either arriving/departing Wollongong or arriving at Central, often by as much as half an hour or more. The staff on Wollongong station are either unwilling or unable to announce why, and sometimes have to deal with understandably irate commuters. If I have an appointment in Sydney, I have to advise the people I intend to meet that I cannot guarantee that I will arrive on time, if at all. The trains, when they arrive, if they arrive, are little better than garbage dumps on wheels. (Although this is obviously a passenger fault; a partial solution to this would be to remove the junk-food machines from platforms).

There seems to be an assumption by State Rail and the Transport Minister that every train traveller can afford not only the existing high fares but also any fare increase that State Rail demands. I am on a below-average wage. I lose over two-thirds of my net pay on rent and rail fares. The rich do not travel by train. People travel by train because (as in my case) there is no alternative. Hence the attitude that State Rail has a captive audience who will pay any fare increase because they have no choice. An unnamed CityRail spokeswoman was quoted in the Daily Telegraph (May 16) as saying "We want the users to pay more and the taxpayers less". I am a user and also a taxpayer, as would be the majority of daily commuters, and for my taxes I get very little in return, particularly in terms of an efficient, safe public transport system. It has also been claimed that taxpayers who do not use public transport need to have the subsidies spent on it by the Government justified to them. This is simply not the case. Taxpayers expect governments to provide, and support via taxation, those essential services which define advanced societies. One of those is an efficient public transport system. It is not the purpose of State Rail to make a profit. Its *raison d'être* is to provide a service, paid for by consolidated revenue via taxation and the imposition of reasonable (ie affordable) fares on those who have to use it.

If State Rail wants to increase its revenue take, why not install electronic ticket barriers on all stations, not just on those regarded as major interchanges. This was, I believe, the original intention when installation of the barriers began some years ago. State Rail also obviously fails to see the relationship between high fares and fare evasion. Given the penalties for fare evasion, I doubt that most evaders do it out of choice. If fares are increased by 50%, as has been quoted in the media, evasion is only going to get worse. There is a limit to what commuters can afford to pay, out of necessity. Most of those who commute by train are, almost by definition, those who can least afford the added financial burden of an

increases in fares. Currently, the Illawarra has the highest unemployment rate in NSW and quite possibly in Australia. Over the past two decades, public infrastructure in the Illawarra was allowed to run down. Because of the voting pattern, ie predominantly Labor, it was simply ignored by successive Labor governments and abandoned by Liberal governments. Last year a refurbishment of Wollongong Station was completed. However, the trains returning to Sydney are still regularly late, unclean and frequently unsafe due to the presence of violent, intoxicated or unstable individuals and the absence of effective security. Station staff are as uncommunicative as ever. Based on what I and other commuters have to put up with, there is no justification whatsoever for any increase in fares, whether supposedly due to inflation or in response to the ludicrous amounts being quoted by State Rail. Commuting to and from Wollongong on a daily basis is costly enough in physical, social and financial terms for those who must do so. Increasing fares will only make it more so.

D. M. Cooper

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'DMCooper', written in a cursive style.