

Mr Nick Hague  
Program Manager, Transport  
Taxi, private bus and private ferry reviews  
Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal  
PO Box Q290  
QVB Post Office NSW 1230

D02/1726

Dear Mr Hague

I refer to correspondence from the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal seeking comments on an Issues Paper concerning reviews of fares for taxis, private buses and private ferries.

Thank you for asking the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care to comment on the Paper. I will confine my comments primarily to the social impacts of any recommendations that may be made by the Tribunal to raise fares on these modes of transport.

Transport is a crucial factor in the continuing independence and social participation of older people and people with a disability. A great number of them are totally reliant on private transport services to undertake daily activities such as shopping, attendance at health services, or workforce participation. This may be due to the fact that they do not drive a motor vehicle, or in the case of older people, may have relinquished their licence.

In addition, older people and people with a disability are at a particular risk of being socially isolated, and as non-drivers, depend on public transport generally to participate in their local communities and maintain contact with friends and family. As many of these people are on low incomes, they are particularly sensitive to fare increases. Availability – and affordability – of transport are critical issues in their ability to stay connected with the community. This is particularly true in regional and rural NSW where private buses can be the only form of transport.

Many older people and people with a disability use public transport to travel short distances to local shops and facilities. Some may not be recipients of concessions or in areas where concessional transport is available, and are often disadvantaged, in that they do not have high incomes. If short distance fares incur a flag-fall or are disproportionately high relative to long distance fares, this would have a significant negative effect on older people and people with a disability who are reliant on public transport to travel short distances. Therefore, IPART is encouraged to investigate and remove any measure that disadvantages short distance fare payers from the fare-setting process.

I should also point out that a number of inequities arise out of the current system of concessions and subsidies. For some older people living in outer metropolitan areas, private buses are the only transport option to which they have access. The non-availability of the Pensioner Concession Ticket scheme on private buses in these areas is one that has been discussed for many years, but without resolution. I strongly recommend that, as a first step, consideration should be given to the balance between inner-metropolitan areas, where there is a greater range and intensity of services, and outer metropolitan areas, in any fares review.

I acknowledge that there has been some progress in addressing transport accessibility issues for people with a disability and older people. However, the issue of affordability is still to be dealt with. Many people with a severe disability (including some older people) who cannot use public transport are totally reliant on taxi services. Proportional rises in taxi fares have a greater impact on users of these services than other transport services. While the Taxi Transport Subsidy Scheme clearly benefits older people and people with a disability who are eligible, transport costs for these people are still extremely high relative to their income.

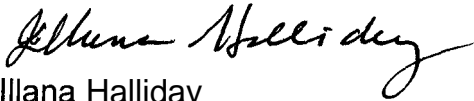
The Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care is in the process of implementing policy frameworks to assist these two large and growing population groups. Both the *Healthy Ageing Framework* and the *Disability Policy Framework* aim at supporting full community participation by older people and people with disabilities through improved access to government provided goods and services.

The growth in the number of older people in this State is a major policy issue for the New South Wales Government. I would like to point out that, under the *NSW Healthy Ageing Framework*, the Government aims to keep the seniors of this State active and engaged in the community in which they live. The healthy ageing approach applies to *all* older people, and an objective of the Framework is the increased participation of older people in community activities. Clearly, affordable transport will assist in this objective.

Similarly, the Government's *Disability Policy Framework* acknowledges that transport is a key issue for people with a disability. Many people with disabilities would take a much fuller part in community life if they were able to use public transport to the same extent and with the same independence as other community members. As you may be aware, the Department is currently working with the Department of Transport to develop a coordinated approach to transport access under the Framework.

Therefore, I would ask that the impact of any fare increases on these groups be kept in mind when the Tribunal is formulating recommendations for the Minister. I would also appreciate you keeping the Department informed of the Tribunal's deliberations on this issue. Thank you for asking for our views on this matter.

Yours sincerely



Illana Halliday

**Director**  
**Strategic Policy and Planning**