



Council on the Ageing (COTA) NSW Submission | October 2020
IPART Draft Report, Review of the Rural and Regional Bus Fares 2021 – 2025

Council on the Ageing (COTA) NSW

COTA NSW is the peak body representing people over 50 living in NSW. We are an independent, non-partisan, consumer-based, non-government organisation. We work with politicians, policy makers, providers of services and products as well as media representatives to make sure wherever possible our constituents' views are heard and their needs met.

COTA NSW supports the right of older people to access public and community transport across metropolitan, regional and rural NSW. Accessible public transport enables older people to readily meet their needs for health and community services as well as participate in and contribute to the economic, social and cultural life of their community.

COTA NSW welcomes IPART's review into pricing and transport options in rural and regional NSW. COTA NSW broadly supports the suggestions made in the Draft Report: Review of Rural and Regional Bus Fares. In our response to IPART's Issues Paper, COTA NSW identified three key areas:

1. Low-cost fares
2. Accessible fare, timetable and route information
3. On-demand services for older people in rural and regional NSW.

These three areas were addressed in a substantial way in the Draft Report.

Maximum Fare Reduction

COTA NSW supports the Report's recommendation to reduce maximum fares¹. The COTA NSW 50+ Report on Getting Around identified cost as a barrier to getting out and about.² For older people living in rural and regional areas where services such as hospitals are scarce and access to concession fares are inconsistent, the affordability of transport can become a significant factor in determining an older person's health and their wellbeing. The Regional Excursion Daily (RED) tickets remaining capped at \$2.50 is a positive outcome. A large portion of older users receive a fixed income, or in some cases, a decreasing income. To increase this cap would negatively impact those users.

“Good access to transport makes the difference between being an independent active member of the community, or living a restricted and dependent life in

¹ Draft Report – Review of Rural and Regional Bus Fares, IPART, 2.

² COTA NSW 50+ Report on Getting Around 2015, 8.

which ordinary activities such as shopping, visiting or being visited by friends and getting to health appointments becomes difficult or even impossible. Social isolation and depression then become a real risk, especially for people who live alone.”

NSW Committee on Ageing 2000

Access to Information

COTA NSW supports the Report’s recommendation to improve service information diversity for passengers.³ COTA NSW noted in our Issues Paper submission that accessible fare and transport information is essential for user friendly regional and rural public transport. COTA NSW’s 2015 50+ Report on Access to Information showed that older people in NSW have diverse preferences for receiving information. While many older people increasingly are embracing a range of digital applications, they remain the least digitally included population cohort with many continuing to require non-digital options. As such, there should continue to be both digital and non-digital ways to access information about services, fares and updates and to purchase tickets. This includes email, face to face, internet, printed material and telephone. It will be important to invest in support for older people not yet familiar with digital interfaces to learn new systems. Consumer groups like COTA NSW, with funding, can assist with this.

On-Demand Services

COTA NSW commends IPART’s recommendation to target flexible on-demand services to “areas where the need is greatest”.⁴ The challenge of distance and population density requires innovative models of transport provision. On-demand services can provide crucial transport options to older people outside of a conventional public bus route option. COTA NSW hopes to see the expansion and development of

³ Draft Report – Review of Rural and Regional Bus Fares, IPART, 2.

⁴ Draft Report – Review of Rural and Regional Bus Fares, IPART, 2.

this service. As on-demand services are introduced, there should be a focus on educational programs to promote services among older people.

COTA NSW hopes that IPART will continue to push for lower fares, diverse access to information and on-demand services. The Draft Report is a positive step toward these objectives.