



31 January 2020

Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal
P Box K35
Haymarket Post Shop
NSW 1240

Telephone: (02) 9568 0262
Facsimile: (02) 9550 9383

Email: vinnies@vinnies.org.au
Website: www.vinnies.org.au
Donation Hotline: 13 18 12

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to voice our support for a number of recommendations included in IPART's Draft Report on Maximum Opal Fares for 2020-2024.

Each year, members of the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW provide assistance to more than 60,000 people across NSW. This includes material assistance – such as food and energy vouchers, and household goods, as well as emotional support and referrals to more specialised services. In the 2018/19 financial year we provided over \$575,000 worth of assistance with transport to people struggling to make ends meet. The actual figure is likely to be higher, given many people also use grocery vouchers to top up their opal cards.

We are therefore pleased to see the consideration given to improving access for low income passengers in IPART's Draft Report. Access to transport can open up opportunities for employment and education, it can enable people to maintain social connections and avoid becoming isolated, and is often a critical missing link in being able to access services and support.

We strongly support the recommendation that the NSW Government provide discounted Opal fares to NSW residents that hold a Commonwealth Health Care Card. Currently, many people on low incomes (including some Newstart recipients) are not able to access concession fares. Extending concession fares to all Health Care Card holders would significantly improve access for people on low incomes, including the growing cohort of 'working poor' – people who are under-employed, have insecure work, or are working in very low-income jobs. This would not only bring NSW into line with many other States, but would provide greater consistency within NSW, given Health Care Card holders are already eligible for the Low-Income Household Energy Rebate.

We also support the recommendation that the NSW Government consider implementing targeted programs for vulnerable people and see benefit in both the examples provided.

Should community organisations such as ourselves be able to provide weekly or monthly travel passes (in addition to the daily passes already available) this would enhance our capacity to support people whose needs are not met within the concession framework, including people experiencing crises. It would also enable us to bridge the gap between when someone becomes eligible for a concession, and when the necessary applications are completed and approved.

Likewise, if people who have difficulty using the opal ticketing system due to disability, cognitive conditions or mental illness were given the opportunity to apply for free travel, this would make our transport system significantly more inclusive. Our Client Support Officers report assisting people who have great difficulty keeping cards safe, frequently forget to tap off and are therefore charged the maximum rate, and who in

some instances are vulnerable enough to be the targets of theft. For these people, the current ticketing system can add to financial stress, and lead to unnecessary – and ineffective – fines.

We would welcome the opportunity to work with the NSW Government to further develop these and other targeted programs should this recommendation be accepted.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the Draft Report. Should you have any questions concerning our response to the draft recommendations, please contact Rhiannon Cook, Manager, Policy and Advocacy, on [REDACTED] or via email at Rhiannon.cook@vinnies.org.au.

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]

Jack de Groot
Chief Executive Officer