



5 February 2016

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Review of Public Transport Fares
Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal
PO Box K35
HAYMARKET POST SHOP NSW 1240

Dear Sir/Madam

SUBJECT IPART Draft Report – More efficient, more integrated Opal fares

Blue Mountains City Council makes the following submission to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal regarding the draft recommendations arising from the Opal report published in December 2015.

Impacts on Blue Mountains residents

As reported in the 2011 census, 50.3% of Blue Mountains residents who are employed travel outside of the local government area to their place of work; 12% of whom utilise public transport. The use of public transport is lower than the rates of use by residents in Sydney, and while Greater Sydney has experienced increases in the use of public transport in the period 2001 to 2011, the use of public transport in the Blue Mountains area has declined.

The proposed fare increases, in particular rail fares, will disproportionately impact residents who travel beyond the Blue Mountains for employment, particularly to centres such as Parramatta and the Sydney CBD. The proposed increases, if implemented, incentivises a modal shift leading to increasing use of private vehicles. It is reasonable to assume that any reduction in use of public transport will be replaced with private car travel, and particularly increased vehicle movements along the Great Western Highway, and the M4 motorway, further creating traffic bottlenecks within these already congested roads.

Additionally, the Blue Mountains has a higher than average proportion of residents aged 65 or older. This age demographic in the mountains has a greater dependence on public transport. The draft changes to the availability of the Gold Opal card, based on a means test, and an increase of the Pensioner Excursion fare of at least 44% (and in many cases 260% if the full concession test is applied) of the current fare will result in members of the Blue Mountains Community no longer being able to connect with other residents, family, friends and significantly key services due to the increased cost of public transport. This will also impact those residents who use this fare to contribute to community activity by volunteering at local based community services.

Impacts to local tourism

The proposed changes to the Opal fare structure will have impacts on tourism within the Blue Mountains area. Tourism is the highest generator of local economic activity, with annual expenditure in excess of \$300M, directly providing over 1700 jobs.

The proposed changes to the Opal fare structure will in particular reduce the number of visits undertaken by day trip tourists, specifically those who have accrued the Opal travel reward benefit, who utilise the opportunity to visit the Blue Mountains. The potential impact of a reduction to daily visitor numbers as a result of the changes to the Opal fare system will have a significant impact on the economic development of the Blue Mountains local government area.

Should you wish to seek clarification of the above matters, please contact Andy Turner – Manager - Community & Economic Outcomes, either by phone on [REDACTED]

Yours faithfully

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STUART LIDDELL
Acting General Manager