

Changes proposed for GOLD OPAL CARD concession fares and card holders:

I wish to raise my concerns and opposition to the proposed changes to Gold OPAL card senior concession fares and eligibility for obtaining concession fares.

Many of the Gold OPAL card holders are 'self funded' retirees who receive little or no government grants, subsidies, pensions or benefits.

The current eligibility and fare structure of daily \$2.50 cap allows many self funded retirees to remain physically, mentally and emotionally fit and well, thus reducing the demand that these citizens place on the medical and welfare systems provided by both State and Federal Governments. Not only do the opportunities provided by the daily \$2.50 cap maintain the well being of seniors, especially those who are widows/widowers and others living in single person households, it allows seniors to remain independent by providing affordable and easy access to social events, medical and other appointments, meeting friends, shopping, walking and exercise groups, attending cultural and religious activities, child minding and other grand parent duties, attending educational courses and the like.

The impact on the well being of self funded retirees if they choose to stay at home due to higher transport costs increases the risk of loneliness, social isolation, depression, disconnectedness and poorer physical and mental outcomes which will create an increased demand on welfare and health services. Social isolation can hasten dementia so the Government should be doing everything it can to keep seniors active and going out.

In addition, self funded retirees make up a vast portion of the volunteering force engaged across the State in hundreds of activities supporting government and non-government departments, hospitals, libraries, schools, galleries, environmental, charity and welfare organisations. Any increase in the daily cap would very much reduce the number of voluntary hours that self funded retirees would be able to offer due to the increased costs of travel. This will put pressure on the volunteering sector at a time when volunteering is declining. A further reduction in numbers of volunteers will have a flow on effect for individual volunteers, the not-for profit organisations that rely on volunteers to deliver services and the wider community and society that benefit from Volunteer effort.

Without volunteers many services could not function.

The increase in fares will also mean increased costs on Not-for-profit organisations who reimburse volunteers travel expenses which may create further cuts to services.

A fare raise from \$2.50 per day to \$9.00 per day is almost a 260% increase, which is unfair and unreasonable. There should be no move to introduce a two-tier system for Gold OPAL card eligibility as it is discriminatory to penalise former tax payers who for various reasons due to their own previous budgetary efforts to cater independently for their retirement needs do not qualify for a Centrelink benefit.

Many people go out every day and instead of \$17.50 for a week's outings tickets would cost \$63 so some activities would have to be dropped.

Active seniors stimulate the economy by going out to movies, plays, musical performances, Art Galleries etc and when they go out they stimulate the economy through purchases of coffees, meals and find other shopping to do whilst out. This incidental spending would decrease.

With such a large increase in fares, seniors may choose to drive more instead of using public transport and use their cars more at a time when our roads are clogged. This may increase safety risks (recent research shows that people over 70 years of age are involved in road accidents more than any other age group) and traffic congestion Government should be doing everything it can to be encouraging everyone, especially seniors to be using public transport.

Seniors who live in suburbs further from the city or in the country will be further disadvantaged by the proposed increase if they pay concessional fares because their fares would always be the the \$9 because of the distances that they travel. This is discriminatory and should not be implemented. Country people already pay more for petrol.

With the proposed 50% increase to GST the cost of tickets to pensioners and seniors will be rising even higher and not everyone will be given compensatory packages so it is important that the fare remain as it is at \$2.50 and not the 260% increase proposed.

Educational institutions such as WEA and U3A depend heavily on retired self funded retirees for enrolments so the increase in fares will have an impact on their course provision and financial viability. Many long term courses are for 36 weeks and the increase would add substantially to the costs of the course. Seniors would cut back on the number of courses that they did during the week. The intellectual stimulation for the attendees, keeps brains active and healthy so for increased community well being the fares should not be increased.

\$3.60 Increase for pensioners will also impact on their activities as many of their pensions have been cut and hundreds are already living below the poverty line.

The timing of this announcement just before Christmas means that unfortunately many affected citizens are unaware of this media release or the need to respond. I'm sure that should the proposal be implemented they will be very unhappy and their unhappiness may be reflected in the coming election.

Please make the Gold Opal Card available to all Senior Card holders and keep the fare at \$2.50 instead of the \$9 cap proposed.

Yours faithfully,