

Comments on Draft Report December 2015

Pricing for different modes

I agree that pricing should encourage people to use the cheapest mode available, where it has spare capacity (ie the train) especially in off peak periods.

Multi mode trips

I agree with the suggestion to change the way multi mode trips are charged. If someone is catching a train for part of their journey, they would generally use it for the whole journey if they could - the only reason they are using a bus for part of the journey is because the train is not available for part of their route. This will at least mean I can now catch the bus to the railway station, rather than driving and parking, and the cost is not prohibitive.

Pricing outside Sydney where free parking is available at the destination

Something that seems to be missing from the report is modelling regarding commuter behaviour for commuters who have a car available - ie there are no estimates of these numbers and how these people might change their behaviour in response to fares. In a congested CBD with prohibitive parking cost, the elasticity of demand might be small, but in regional areas, such as Newcastle, I submit that elasticity of demand is considerable.

On page 78 there is an implicit assumption that full time workers who catch the train, would catch it every day - so they were essentially receiving two of their trips for free 'for no reason' as the discount was not actually incentivising them to use public transport for all their commutes, because they would have used it 'anyway'. There is no attempt to include in this thinking, commuters who might have reasons to use other transport modes on some days of the week.

Also, there is no incentive for part time workers to use public transport for **all** their commutes – even though the price is now going to be slightly lower but the reduction doesn't produce an incentive because if the person who works 4 days a week currently only uses public transport for two of those days, they have no incentive to use it for more because it is still relatively expensive compared to driving a distance of less than 20km (see below) and they have no prospect of receiving a discount for being a regular user.

For commuters to the Newcastle CBD most workers would live within 20 km of the CBD (say 80%) and almost all working adults would have a car available on the days they use public transport. As free parking is still available within a 15 minute walk of most CBD locations, commuters are very price sensitive. I know people in Maitland who commute daily to the Newcastle CBD by car because they say the train is too expensive.

I live 15 km from the CBD, with 12km of that distance covered by rail. At present (with the changes to the heavy rail line) my door to door time for driving to the station and using the train, as against driving and walking from free parking is generally the same. If I travel outside the peak, my driving time is shorter than the train time. The cost for using the train, at approx \$8 a day, is almost double my fuel costs. I already have one day when I drive to work because I need to go somewhere on the way home where it is not practical to use public transport. Many people would have days in the week where they are picking up kids from after school activities on the way home from work on some days and be in this situation. I have another two days each week where I get a lift home with my son, who travels close to my location around the time I finish work.

It is worth my while to catch the train to work on these two days because I am not paying for the return journey. However for the other two days, my decision as to whether I will catch the train or not is determined by whether I would be driving in either peak (what will my driving time be?) and whether it is particularly hot/raining etc and I want to minimise my time walking in the weather, which the train facilitates. So for example, in January, when the parking situation is better, unless it is very hot, I tend to drive on those two days when I could have had a return trip on the train.

Therefore, I believe to give commuters like me some incentive to catch the train there should be a MONTHLY travel reward when no weekly travel rewards have been given (this applies even more so under the new system, now that the weekly travel reward is less).

I don't think the monthly travel reward needs to be a lot - it just needs to be **something**, so that people feel that their choice to travel on the train, and provide significant external benefits:

- reduced carbon emissions
- reduced traffic congestion
- reduced parking pressure

compared to the benefits they receive is being recognised.

In my case, my only benefit is slightly decreased walking (but no timesaving), balanced against increased cost and being tied to the timetable.

Therefore I would suggest that there be a MONTHLY reward so that where no weekly rewards have been given in a calendar month that for example:

1. Where 24 trips per month have been taken that the cheapest 2 trips are credited
2. Where 40 trips per month have been taken that the cheapest 4 trips are credited

Off Peak

One of the things that does make rail travel very attractive is the off peak rates. However, in order for these to be effective there need to actually be services available in the off peak period!

In Newcastle on the central coast line, the morning is OK for this, but the evening is very poor. Before the removal of the heavy rail, there was a service at 6.29 (peak) from Newcastle station, and then no service until well after 7pm. I would submit that travelling after 6pm from the Newcastle CBD is outside the peak. Usually, I would be the only person boarding the train after 6pm at my station (before the closure of the heavy rail) - especially in winter. I don't see why the timing of the peak can't be adjusted for the boarding location - OPAL knows where I am, so if I am travelling south from anywhere North of say, Hornsby after 6pm, I would submit this was off peak.

At present, I generally catch the 6.25pm service from Hamilton, which is the express service and which I can walk onto from the connecting bus. If I catch the off peak 6.36 service the actual rail journey time is a few minutes longer and the gap between the bus and rail time are increased so that my total journey time from boarding the bus, to arriving at my rail destination is 32 minutes instead of 19 minutes. So for the sake of 5 minutes before the off peak period commences, I then have to choose between waiting at the station for 10 minutes (and missing the opportunity to call into my local shops near my destination station before they close at 7pm) or the off peak saving. This is just another annoyance that makes me wonder why I am catching the train at all.