

Dear IPART,

I am writing to you with some concerns about the impacts of your proposed Opal card fare reforms. In particular its negative and unfair impacts on university students or workers from low-income backgrounds who commute long distances to the city 4-5 days a week to get to university or work and pensioners who do not have the time, money or energy to make 'short unnecessary trips at the start of the week' and who have been consistently relying on the free travel after 8 trips incentive from when the weekly paper tickets were introduced.

First of all, you do have my complete support to wind-back the reform which made people pay twice for changing modes of transport. However, I take issue with the rest of IPART's reform proposals.

These changes are going to affect me on a personal level. I am a university student at the University of Sydney, I am still living at home as I cannot move out closer to university at this time and so catch the train from Windsor to Redfern and back on a regular basis. On average I have university classes 3-4 days a week, wanting to utilise the services such as the library that I pay for at university or doing extra-curricular activities such as volunteering and club activities often mean I travel to university 5 or 6 days a week. On weekends I will sometimes travel to the city or make shorter trips to areas like Blacktown or Parramatta, by then I normally have completed my 8 trips. My schedule and the price I pay weekly has not changed since I started travelling to university in 2014 by train using the weekly paper tickets, in fact the price was cheaper when I received my student opal, albeit by only approximate \$1 a week because I almost always travel on peak, as promised upon the Opal system's release. The weekly transport costs are at a comfortable and affordable rate at the moment. However, your proposals, apart from the one aforementioned, will undo all benefits I receive from the Opal card and end up putting an unnecessary strain on my financial situation as a university student from a low-income background who is struggling to make ends meet on Study Assist Youth Allowance.

From a public policy point of view, any reform to the fare system should encourage people to use public transport, for environmental reasons and to create demand thus raising revenue for upgrading our public transport system to be on par with other developed countries as we are currently falling very far behind. Generally, this is done by creating incentives to use the public transport system. The original structure of the Opal card system has been achieving this to date, from this viewpoint there is no reason for reform. The increased usage of an efficient and affordable public transport system could offset the losses incurred by the miniscule minority who take advantage of the tap-on-tap-off and 8 trips incentive to find savings. Furthermore on this point, it is confusing to the public that IPART's recommendations go against the message that the public received when the Opal system was released NSW Government spokespeople were encouraging the public to 'find the savings' and use public transport more often while promising that the Opal system would be and stay cheaper than paper tickets. Again, the revenue from increased usage of public transport from investing in an affordable and efficient public transport system could surely outweigh any 'losses' occurring because of the few people who use the system to find savings. On that note, I would be interested to see how you have calculated the numbers for the 'losses' incurred and came out with the \$150 million figure.

Assuming that the 8 trips incentive is creating losses that cannot be made up for, if these short unnecessary trips early in the week are the largest issue IPART has identified, I fail to see how not only removing the 8 trips system, although it has been in place since before the Opal card was released, but also increasing the daily fare rates and caps, with the largest increase in price being for long distance travel, is going to rectify this issue. Simply removing the 8 trips incentive would remove this issue and increase the weekly prices enough for ordinary commuters, although it is unfair to make the majority of public transport users pay more because a minority has the time to exploit the system to save \$10-40 a week. With removal of the 8 trips incentive there would be absolutely no need to then further increase the travel fares and caps over 3 years.

Without any offset proposal combined with the increasing costs many people who are already struggling with a week-by-week budget such as university students, low-income earners and pensioners, will now face due to these price changes on top of the cuts to many public services, such as healthcare, these changes are simply bad policy that punishes innocent people who are suffering the most from financial hardship. Please reconsider your damaging proposals, either leave the fare structure as it is or **only** remove the 8 trips incentive and **do not** increase the fare prices or caps, in fact decreasing them to counter-balance the removal of the 8 trips incentive would be optimal.

I would like to see these concerns fully addressed in a public media release, if they are not I will be raising awareness about these unfair proposals.

Kind regards,

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