

I am extremely concerned at some of the IPART recommendations for changes to Opal card fares, particularly as they relate to seniors.

I am not opposed in principle to some *reasonable* increase in the daily cap for the gold Opal card, given that the daily cap for train travel for pensioner concession card holders has not risen since 2005.

However, I am appalled at the suggestion that over-60s who do not hold a pensioner/veterans concession card should be stripped of their gold Opal card.

The proposed replacement of the gold Opal card with a concession card and the resultant increase in the daily cap to \$9, represents a 260% increase in the daily fare, which is out of all proportion to other proposed increases across all the travelling categories. This is most unfair.

IPART apparently thinks the current fare structure is unfair because it gives people on high incomes access to travel concessions “...*far more generous than those available to low income earners such as job seekers*”.

How can IPART possibly think that people who work less than 20 hours per week are “high income earners” and why should independently funded over-60s be punished in this way, simply because the Federal Government’s maximum rate of newstart allowance is woefully inadequate? I venture to suggest that very few really high income earners actually use public transport to any great extent, and IPART wants to punish the many to save some paltry dollars from the few.

I am over 60 years of age and working less than 20 hours per week. My husband still works full time and has neither a seniors card nor a gold opal card and that’s as it should be. We have spent a number of years trying to prepare for self-funded retirement so that we do not suckle from the public teat for what might prove a lengthy retirement period. We pay the general price for all our medications and might never qualify for a Commonwealth Seniors Health Card because of the tightening of the relevant means test. We receive no other rebates or concessions.

I see these IPART proposals as just another attack on older Australians like ourselves who are already trying to do the right thing and avoid becoming a burden on their families and the public purse. The proposed stripping of the gold Opal card for semi-retired over-60s is a disincentive to older Australians to remain in the workforce for as long as, and to the extent that they are able, thus remaining productive members of the community.

The proposals regarding the gold Opal cards also make somewhat of a mockery of Mr Baird’s comments in the 2016 Seniors Card Directory in which he acknowledged that seniors make an “*exceptional contribution*” to the community and that “*We want to ensure NSW remains a safe place where seniors feel valued and respected*”.

Additionally, at a time when congestion on the roads is intensifying and questions are continually being raised about the competency of older drivers generally, it is imperative that all attempts be made to encourage the use of public transport by *all* older Australians – the recommendation by IPART concerning access to the gold Opal card by independently funded over-60s runs directly counter to that aim.

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