

Public Transport Fares in Sydney and Surrounds

I wish to make a submission about the proposed increase in Opal transport fares particularly in relation to Gold Opal cardholders who are Seniors Card holders.

I've read the report in detail and it certainly targets Seniors Card holders with a proposed large fare increase.

The following extract from the report states; 'The current system is unfair as it allows some customers on relatively high incomes to access concessions that are far more generous than those available to many low income earners, such as job seekers, who are eligible for a Concession Opal card, but not a Gold Opal card. Our draft recommendation is for Seniors Card holders to be eligible for an Opal Concession card. This would mean they would have a higher daily cap, so they would face stronger peak/off peak price signals, but still have some protection from higher daily expenditure.'

There are multiple issues with the above proposal;

1. Many Seniors Card holders are not on relatively high incomes as stated here but are self funded retirees who often exist on incomes below that of low income earners and pensioners.
2. Nowhere within the report is there any indication of the impact of the increased fares on the number of hours of volunteering performed by many Gold Opal card holders. Volunteering rates are already in decline and an increase in fares with only further increase this decline.
3. Many volunteer roles require travel in peak periods so there would not always be some protection from higher daily expenditure.

From the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS); 'In 2014, volunteering rates declined for the first time since the ABS began national voluntary work surveys in 1995. Between 1995 and 2010, volunteering rates increased, reaching a peak of 36% in 2010, but in 2014, the proportion of people aged 18 years and over who were volunteering fell to 31%.'

Again from the ABS; In 2014 230.9 million hours of volunteering was undertaken in NSW.

I have a Gold Opal card and have two permanent volunteer shifts each week both of which require travel in peak hours. This currently costs me \$5 a week but with the proposed changes to fare structures to a Concession Opal card this will increase to potentially \$15.20 (200% increase) without any change to my low income. I would need to seriously consider continuing in both shifts. The fare increase would certainly prevent me taking on additional shifts when there are staff shortages as each additional shift could potentially cost me \$7.60.

I know there are many volunteers who undertake some of those millions of hours of volunteering each year and will be impacted with the proposed fare increases. I hope my comments can help lessen the fare impact for Seniors Card holders.