

Please find my submission in regards to the IPART draft report for “more efficient, more integrated Opal fares”. It is with great unhappiness that I find this report with very little advertising of the fact that the fare system is going to change. I have viewed many television commercials regarding the changes on George Street and that the NSW community needs to work together yet there has been not been a similar level regarding fare reform on television which will have greater impact on the people of Sydney than the Light Rail will.

My first comment on this draft report is that I believe the level of consultation with Opal customers is insignificant compared to the number of Opal users. The report advises of 1900 submissions for an online survey which had not been communicated to me as an Opal customer. I believe that this would also have not been communicated to the millions of other Opal users. For example, using one million Opal card users as a guide, your report is based on less than 0.2% of Opal users. I imagine that there are more than one million Opal users so your report is based on much less of a percentage. A comprehensive report cannot be produced based on this number of submissions and is therefore not in line with the Transport for NSW and Opal philosophy of “The Customer is at the Centre of Everything we do”.

Opal uses a very successful way of contacting customers through email for their monthly statements. This method should be adopted for advising of a survey that changes the fare structure. The email should be very clear to the customers the results will be used to change the fare structure and it should also give them the option that if they don't respond, they will be counted as being in favour of the existing system of “no change”. This should be backed up by television commercials during peak viewing periods for a period no less than 4 weeks to advise customers how the survey is being conducted and that they don't have to complete if they are happy with the existing system of “no change”.

The report discusses the current frequency discount and advises that customers make “unnecessary” trips. However, the report is based on five submissions from the 1900 submitted. How do the people that made these submissions know if the trip is unnecessary or not? This information has come from their opinion and from media hype. Making a change to the frequency discount system based on this number is not an accurate representation of the Opal users. This should have no merit in the decision making on fare change or the frequency discount.

It has long been advised in the media that there is a “loop hole” in the Opal system and The Hon Gladys Berejiklian challenged the people of Sydney to break it. My question is, “have the people of Sydney broke it?” The Hon Gladys Berejiklian is a very intelligent person and produced a system to encourage public transport use that mirrors the level of service that can be offered by the public transport system. Customers on public transport services, in particular trains and buses, are frequently plagued by late, cancelled or rerouted services that cause unwanted stress on the customer, yet no compensation is provided for this stress or loss of time. The current system implemented by The Hon Gladys Berejiklian is very intelligent as it provides understanding from the regular commuter that they are getting the level of service that they are paying for. i.e. they get free travel after 8 trips and it is their choice how they get those 8 trips. The report that has been drafted does not allow for this understanding for regular customers who support the whole network. Instead this report advises that the 10 most expensive trips will be deducted yet the same level of service will be provided. The report does not advise of the greatly reduced and stressful service

during the closure of the Epping to Chatswood line and the Bankstown line for the implementation of Sydney Metro or the disruption caused by vehicle traffic in constructing the CBD sections of the Sydney Metro. The report actually advises of increasing fares during the worst level of disruption ever encountered in the history of Sydney. How is this “customer focussed”? Compensation should be made available to customers with the inclusion of full fare refunds for any late, cancelled or rerouted timetabled service. The customer plans their day expecting a level of service based on documented timetables and when they do not get that service, there is no recourse. The recommended action if this draft fare structure is introduced would be that any service delivered by a public transport mode that does not deliver to the documented timetable is fully refunded no matter how small that difference is.

The report advises of a credit system debited back to the Opal card after deducting the 10 most expensive trips. Customers want money in their pockets. This system only puts more money in to the coffers of government for a public transport system that frequently has disruptions and does not provide the level of documented service. There are many people in Sydney that live pay check to pay check through no fault of their own. This system takes more money from them which adds more stress on to the customers. This again is not very “customer focussed”

In conclusion, this report has not provided the level of consultation to provide for an informed decision on fare reform. The public awareness of this report is poor and needs to be communicated better to provide for an informed decision. All Opal customers should be able to comment and a no comment would advise a “no change” to the system. The fare structure system cannot be reformed without looking at the future disruptions that the Sydney customer will face in the future and offers of compensation.

A final thought is that this fare change will put more people back in their cars causing more delays on the roads and more than likely, accidents/deaths. The fare change will increase fare evasion which is something the current system has reduced to an all-time low. Generally, this is a poor report that is not customer focussed and has not been determined through adequate consultation.