

Media Release

Passenger exposes multi-million dollar Opal ticketing bungle

Customers using the Opal card have been overcharged by around 25% on certain routes due to poorly implemented pricing rules. Furious passengers are now demanding that the Transport Minister conduct a full inquiry, and refund overcharged fares, estimated to be millions of dollars[#] since the implementation of new pricing arrangements.

Francis, a resident of Ashfield, first noticed something amiss in September of this year - "I noticed that the fare from Ashfield to Town Hall had increased quite dramatically, from \$3.30 to \$4.10". Further investigation uncovered a situation where old world distance measurement practices were corrupting the newer Opal fares. "When I investigated further, I learnt that this is because Opal charges are distance based, in this case that Ashfield was allegedly greater than 10km from Town Hall." Francis consulted friends with technical expertise, and the railway's own measurements, and found that the distance was 9.6km[^], and therefore should be a \$3.30 fare according to the Opal website. "However the minister advises me that the current fare is based on a dated practice that estimates the distance as 11.61km^{*}. Quite a discrepancy."

"If the government has made this mistake for this fare, how many other passengers are being overcharged? I'm happy to pay for public transport, but poorly implemented, and unfair pricing structures are not acceptable. The Minister must take responsibility for this, as she took the praise when Opal was first rolled out".

Notes and references:

The minister referred me to the resource below (ticketing handbook) as the justification for the fare – but the interesting thing is that Section 3 in the ticketing handbook refers the reader to a separate site, www.opal.com.au for the Opal fares. So really, they are confusing the two pricing structures

<http://www.transportnsw.info/resources/documents/general/TfNSW-ticketing-customer-handbook.pdf>

Quote from Minister in response "Train fares to CBD stations are calculated using the distance from the origin station to the edge of the CBD, plus 3.21 km. This is consistent with long standing practice". This 3.21km is referenced in sections 1.4 and 1.5 of the handbook.

* 11.61km is calculated by distance to Central (as city gateway) 8.4km + 3.21km = 11.61km

[^] Distance has been verified by sighting the distance markers on network stanchions between Ashfield and Town Hall. Also verified as a track centreline measurement by a GIS professional

[#] I cannot substantiate the quantum of overcharge, but it must be a lot