

Submission for Public Transport Opal Pricing

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Gold Opal Card/Pensioner Excursion Ticket

Submission

That the costs, restrictions and accessibility to the Gold Opal Card/Pensioner Excursion Ticket should not change, ie be accessible to all 60+ aged individuals, working less than 20hrs per week with a maximum cost of \$2.50 per day used and no restrictions on accessible time or area.

The argument that fares should be fair is valid but underestimates the value of Gold Card users travelling in our society and therefore underestimates the net negative value of increasing Gold Card fares or reducing Gold Card accessibility.

Gold Card usage can be broken into three distinct journey types:

- 1 Volunteering for societal or cultural activities
- 2 Family and extended group support
- 3 Ease of access for individual requirements

1 Volunteering for societal or cultural activities

Many Gold Card users volunteer with a range of social, cultural or non-profit organisations. Examples include, Friends of the various Art Galleries and museums, pastoral care activities for churches and clubs, supporting the work of Red Cross or other charity organisations.

Attendance of Gold Card users at such activities is not paid and therefore saves the specific organisations millions of dollars in unpaid labour. If the value of such labour was counted, it would amount to a significant proportion of the local economy.

Attendance is often at the behest or determined by the timetable of the organisation and Gold Card users may not have the flexibility to choose non-peak hour journeys.

2 Family and extended group support

Talking to others, meeting with others, supporting family networks and allowing the aged and new mothers (specifically) to interact and support each other is the basis of a healthy society. Reducing the availability of such things as hospital visitors and the grandparent group (many Gold Card users) to visit with and support young families reduces our humanity in a way which is incalculable from a narrow economic viewpoint.

Involvement of Gold Card users in family support activities reduces the effect of stress related diseases, supports a caring society and makes all our lives better. If the value of such interaction was counted, it would save many millions from an already stretched health budget.

On some occasions, regular travel to fit in with the work requirements of the needy family may result in unwanted but necessary peak hour travel

3 Ease of access for individual requirements

Gold Card users, use public transport to attend medical appointments, shopping opportunities, cultural and leisure visits, all of which add to the personal wellbeing of the individual. This, in turn reduces the cost to society of the inevitable mental and physical health problems resulting from lack of mobility and lack of social interaction.

The other aspect of Gold Card users (read elderly) changing their public transport behaviour to use their cars more is the danger this creates for all road users. Mandatory tests of driving and sight for drivers above a specific age are responses to a problem which could be reduced by encouraging public transport use for Gold Card users.

Conclusion

Purpose of Public Transport

The public transport system in NSW, like all systems should support community, otherwise it is not doing its job. An increase in the daily cap or reduction in accessibility hours do not advantage society, in fact they create the problems which are long term and difficult to account for in a monetary sense. Such accounting difficulty does not make them any less real.

Immeasurable advantages of Public Transport Use

The arguments also present the idea that Gold Card users produce a large revenue loss for transport providers. It is self-evident that government and its services should serve the people rather than people serve some accounting scenario. Maintaining connection, supporting community, reducing car use, reducing pollution, reducing health care costs and reducing psychological separateness are all very valid reasons to subsidise Gold Card users on public transport.

Wealthy Gold Card Users

There has been argument that self-funded retirees are wealthy and thus should pay more for public transport. I question how many wealthy self-funded retirees USE public transport. If the costs of public transport were to rise for Gold Card users, in many cases the wealthy would not be touched.

I submit that all taxpayers want to support today's aged and maintain services for the aged in society for tomorrow when it is their turn.