

Although my service operates out of Armidale I visit Sydney fairly frequently both for business and to catch up with friends as I used to live there.

On these visits I often use the bus services around the Marrickville and Manly areas to and from the city. Since the Opal card service has been introduced on these routes, on about a quarter of the times I've used the bus service the Opal readers have been down. This wasn't to my advantage until the end of last year when I had to get a Gold Opal card instead of the excursion tickets I'd been using as I'm over 60. My point is, that as an infrequent traveller on Sydney buses, on a relatively high number of those occasions the Opal card readers on buses have been out of service, with a massive loss of revenue especially when the readers are down during the morning and evening rush hours.

It is appalling to see Sydney Transport attempting to recoup more money from retirees – whether self-funded or on Centrelink benefits they are all on fixed or low incomes – when the Opal Card system is failing to collect the revenue it should be producing. Until the fare collection system is fixed, how can Sydney Transport be able to judge an adequate charge for Gold Opal users – or for any other users, for that matter?

In my role as a Volunteer Coordinator I have great concerns for the impact fare increases could have on the volunteer sector in Sydney. I have a friend in Sydney who's a self-funded retiree and she has done so much volunteering over the past 10 years frequently using public transport. It is disgraceful that her efforts are so inconsequentially regarded by a government intent on squeezing every drop out of citizens whose reasons for travelling on public transport are for the good of the community. My friend's partner is also a volunteer for his church, a community theatre company and a Men's Shed – he also relies on public transport to get him to his volunteer commitments.

Many of the people assisted by volunteers are also reliant on public transport and the ability to move around and meet people can contribute to a their physical and psychological well-being. Having yet another of our services means tested is simply not fair, especially when the system of fare collection which has been introduced is failing.

Melbourne has for several years used miki and this has not been without it's problems, so I'm surprised Sydney has not attempted to learn from the failures of Melbourne's system to meet the needs of their transport revenue in its implementation of the Opal Card.

Again, all I can say is that until Sydney has a properly working fare collection system on its buses (trains and ferries seem more reliable) then proposing to restructure the fare system for older citizens should be left alone as it can adversely impact many areas of their lives and our community.