

Response to Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal Transport Pricing Report Martin Maguire

I am a resident of Epping in NSW. I hold a Senior Citizens Card. I am a self funded retiree. My wife and I use the \$2.50 Senior's excursion fare on a regular basis. We have been forced to apply for a Gold Opal Card and seem to remember a promise that the \$2.50 fare was protected.

The Review has recommends sweeping changes which involve steep fare increases as well as a new pricing policy which breaks a long standing transport pricing policy which does not differentiate between pensioners over 60 years and Senior's Card holders. This has provided a big incentive for NSW senior citizens to use public transport for essential and recreational travel.

This crucial change in policy has never been flagged or discussed by Government with Senior citizens or other NSW residents. This radical principle needs to be ratified by all residents before it is tampered with. If it is adopted it may have flow on effects to other aspects of NSW pricing.

The maximum cost of a day's travel for my wife and I will increase by 260% to \$9.00 under this proposal while a Pensioner's maximum fare will increase from \$2.50 to \$3.60 a rise of 44%.

The family excursion fare of \$2.50 to encourage families to travel on Sundays will rise from \$2.50 to \$7.50 or by 200%. These increases are far in excess of the rise in CPI.

Inevitably, all of these increases will work as a disincentive to public transport use, both for those who do not drive and those who have a vehicle. If the cost of an outing from a couple rises from \$5.00 to \$18.00, the incentive to take their car onto the road will be increased. NSW Government policy encourages commuters to switch to public transport for many good reasons but these steep increases will have the opposite effect.

The Tribunal has justified its changes on the \$150 million loss in revenue which has resulted because of the "perverse incentive" proposed by the former Transport Minister for commuters to try to "beat the system". The changes are to take effect from the middle of 2016, only six months after paper tickets will be nearly completely phased out.

One wonders if this raft of increases and change in fare structure were always inevitable: that they had been planned all along for seamless implementation once Opal Cards became ubiquitous.

Examples of this tactic are numerous. We were promised by Government that there would never be any extra charges associated with Bank Cards while these were being offered to all bank customers. We were encouraged to use ATMs quite freely while these were being rolled out across the nation. Both technologies are now user pays with fees difficult to avoid since consumers have become so dependent on them.

In summary, I ask the Tribunal not to break a long standing principle that concession fares for those commuters who no longer work and are over 60 be the same for pensioners and non pensioners. This radical change should not be made without a full discussion of the principles and other possible ramifications of its introduction.

Therefore any increase of the \$2.50 fare should be available for all Senior's card holders. I am not arguing that some of the increase from \$2.50 to \$3.60 may not have merit but realise that to some card holders who depend on public transport on a number of occasions during the week for necessary travel, this may be quite an imposition.

Finally, keep the increases close to the inflations rate. It is not the commuter's fault that the \$150m hole appeared, especially since they were encouraged to exploit the loophole that was obviously planned for.