

1. I am a recent 'senior', too young for the pension and subsisting on a very limited income. Since receiving a Gold Opal Card I have been liberated to take day trips I could not otherwise afford. I am using public transport to visit parts of Sydney I have not been able to visit for years.
2. This anecdote is to illustrate that the benefits of allowing cheap Gold Opal Card travel to seniors is worth keeping. If my experience is valid, and I have many friends whose experience mirrors my own, raising the daily cost to \$9.00 will have the effect of limiting seniors' travel, rather than gaining more revenue for the Government. People who do not *need* to travel will not do so, and will therefore be denied the opportunity to utilise a public transport which is generally underutilised at present, outside of peak periods. These seniors will remain at home, rather than moving about and refreshing their experience of life.
3. As a practising psychologist (albeit only few hours per week now), I recognise the great value there is in providing the elderly and relatively inactive with the opportunity of, and access to, mobility. That is what the current Gold Opal Card system does. Providing cheap daily transport is a great incentive for the elderly and retired to get out and experience the bounds of the public transport network. If the cheap Gold Opal Card option is withdrawn, the effect will not be to raise revenue. The effect will be to have seniors ignore public transport, and either stay at home or drive.
4. If seniors stay at home, the effect will be deleterious. An increase in negative mental health outcomes, such as depression, is a likely outcome. At no benefit to the revenues of the Government, it will be bringing about negative consequences for the elderly.
5. If seniors are encouraged to make driving trips instead of using public transport, extra congestion on the roads is an obvious outcome; and an increase in road accident collisions, as a result of more elderly people driving more often, is a not unlikely outcome.
6. Bear in mind, no extra cost to the public transport system arises from seniors utilising the existing, underutilised network. The outcomes are all good. The expected outcome from raising the cost maybe of nil value, if it discourages the elderly from travelling which I contend it will. And, for the reasons quoted above (at 4 and 5), it is likely to have negative effects.
7. If extra revenue is sought, and I can see no other reason whatsoever for altering the current system, I suggest higher-cost seniors' travel during peak public transport utilisation periods could be instituted.
8. That is, seniors need to commence travel outside the hours of 7.30 to 9.00 a.m. and 4.30 to 6 p.m. in order to gain the travel discount. At least that makes some sense.
9. A change to the Gold Opal Card to raise the limit of daily cost to seniors to \$9.00 per day will not raise revenue. It will discourage seniors from getting out and travelling, and it will raise the level of mental health problems among the elderly. It will also alienate older voters from the political power that instigates this scheme.
10. There is some rationale in instituting an income threshold for the \$2.50 per day limit. Those who are on an income of, say, \$100,000 per annum can have no rational objection to paying a little more for public transport (although it is always troublesome to take away benefits that are viewed as rights).
11. However, for those who, like myself, are on a very low income and do not qualify for the pension, it is merely meanness to deny the opportunity for affordable travel, at no benefit to Government revenue. Many, like me, only use the public transport system because it is now affordable. Do not withdraw this harmless, cost-free benefit from those who have earned it by a lifetime of contributions to society.