

Comments in response to IPART paper on public transport fares in NSW

I travel into work in the Sydney CBD from Fairlight (Northern Beaches area) three days a week. I use the Travel 10s, as they offer the best value - \$3.76 per trip. To make the same journey using my Opal card costs 20% more - \$4.50. Nowhere in the IPART review document is any reference made to this massive 20% increase, or how it could possibly be justified. This glaring omission undermines the claims peppered throughout the report that the proposed changes will proportionately benefit part-time workers and others who travel infrequently.

Removing the current, bizarre 'perverse incentive' that clearly favours full-time workers and anyone else who makes a minimum of 10 trips per Monday to Sunday week over part-time workers and anyone else who travels fewer times per week may be a sensible 'no-brainer' reform, but it doesn't actually 'benefit' anyone. It just levels the playing field.

The fact that there are off-peak fares available for train travel but not for buses is also perverse, and no proposals are put forward in the report to rectify this inequity. Apart from the fact that this must make Sydney unique in the world – in what other major city is rail travel cheaper than bus travel? – no adequate evidence is produced to justify the claims that it somehow makes economic sense to subsidise off-peak fares on trains but not buses. Such a claim should be backed up by rigorous, quantitative research and analysis, which is what I would have thought a body like IPART would be expected (and presumably taxpayer-funded) to provide. Without evidence to support it, this claim totally lacks credibility and effectively undermines the validity of the IPART paper – its findings and recommendations – overall.

From where I'm sitting, the lack of off-peak bus fares reinforces the discriminatory Opalcard fare structure faced by Sydneysiders without access to rail services in their areas, such as the Northern Beaches. The discrimination faced by bus passengers is further reinforced by the relatively more expensive cost per kilometre of travelling by bus as opposed to by rail. How is this justified?

The proposed hikes in the daily and weekly caps over the three years (2015 – 2018) covered by the report seem extraordinarily high, especially since they are apparently completely unrelated to any projected cost of living index or other meaningful index of inflation. The suspicion that the introduction of the Opalcard has been used as a blatant opportunity to profit-gouge Sydney's hapless travelling public (given that all ferry and bus fares are more expensive than the old Travel 10 fares), is only reinforced by these proposed increases. One has to ask oneself: what is the objective of the introduction of the Opalcard? If it is genuinely intended to encourage people out of their private vehicles and onto public transport, then fares need to represent good value for everyone, whether they're travelling five days a week or making only one journey per week. And what represents good value? Single fares that at least match, if not better, the Travel 10 fares. It's not rocket science, it's basic logic and commonsense.

Finally, a fare structure that offers value for money is of course not the only component in making public transport an attractive option. Other factors (that I appreciate are not the subject of this IPART report), which I believe merit consideration include the following propositions:

1. Make Pittwater Road, Condamine Road, Spit Road and Military Road 24-hour clearways; no roadside parking at any time.
2. Scrap the current, ludicrous T3 lanes; three people in a private vehicle do not constitute a legitimate form of mass public transport.
3. Consider increasing tolls for roads/bridges giving access to the CBD during peak hours so that they are truly prohibitive to all but the most determined private vehicle drivers (the congestion charge in London, for example, is sufficiently high to act as a deterrent to private drivers).
4. Prohibit private vehicle access to York Street during peak hours. At present, buses

entering York Street from the Sydney Harbour Bridge are forced to queue in a single lane; while private vehicles stream past them in lanes on either side. Prioritise the buses; give them more lanes in peak hours (at present buses queue across the harbour bridge while private cars sail past them – surely not how bus priority lanes are supposed to function).

5. Either widen York Street and build an island in the middle so that more than one line of buses entering York Street can disgorge its passengers at any one time; or modify the bus fleet so that passengers can alight from either side.