

I catch the train to and from work between Sutherland and Town Hall / Martin Place 5 days a week for 48 or more weeks each year.

Prior to Opal's introduction, I purchased quarterly or yearly travel passes as this provided me the most convenience and the best value for money. Up until a few years ago, when they were discontinued, I used to get periodical tickets where I was able to specify exact start and end dates as these were even better value as I didn't waste part of the ticket when I was on leave.

By default, these tickets were between Caringbah and "City" as that was the zone covered for the same fare. This had the added benefit of enabling me to occasionally travel between Sutherland and stations up to Caringbah on weekends or holidays.

I've purchased these types of tickets for my regular commute for most of the last 30 years.

Once Opal was introduced and hearing that travel passes were to be discontinued, I assessed the difference in cost between getting a quarterly or yearly ticket compared to using Opal. Even though 8 single fares for Opal was \$2 - \$3 less than weekly paper tickets Opal was \$160 per year more than travel passes was taking into account all public holidays and 4 weeks annual leave.

I purchased a yearly ticket just before they were discontinued and that has since expired. So even before any of IPART's proposed changes come in, **I'm already \$160 per year worse off under Opal.**

The way I understand it, the current Weekly Travel Reward was introduced to replace Weekly paper tickets which were the same price as 8 peak single (or 4 peak return) tickets. That 20% discount over a working week has been around for decades. Fortnightly and 4 week tickets received the same 20% discount.

Quite clearly it was inconceivable that Opal would have gained traction with full-time employed commuters if that discount was not replaced hence the introduction of the Weekly Travel Reward.

The proposal to only provide a frequency discount after the 10 most expensive trips in a week effectively removes the frequency discount that has been around for decades for those who primary use of public transport is commuting.

The fact that the design of the weekly travel reward was flawed in allowing the cheapest trips to be included in no way justifies removing that long standing frequency discount.

With this proposed change **I will be a further \$424 worse off or over \$580 overall.**

Under this proposal almost everyone who travels 45km or less to and from work by train 5 days a week will be more than 20% worse off. The only exceptions are where the straight line versus track length drops under 35 km and they still have increases over 10%. For a few cases where the straight line distance is less than 8 km but the track distance is greater than 10 km then the weekly difference is zero.

The proposed increases at July 2017 & July 2018, which are considerably higher than likely inflation rates for most sectors, compound the increases even further such that for some commuters their fares will increase by more than 65% over 3 years.

How can this even remotely “encourage greater use of public transport” or be considered as fair when thousands and thousands of commuters will be 20% worse off?

As stated in section 1.3 “This scheme is fairer than the current arrangements, because it removes the perverse incentive for customers to make unnecessary short trips early in the week to qualify for the frequency discount and then travel for free the rest of the week”. Clearly the loophole that encourages unnecessary trips needs to be closed however in no way does that warrant the removal of discounts that have been established for decades. Increases of greater than 20% without the slightest improvement in service cannot remotely be considered to be fairer.

The proposed method of refunding cheaper trips at the end of the week is perfectly acceptable however it is utterly ridiculous to use that as an excuse to remove long standing discounts.

Single fares don’t need a minor reduction only for them to be swallowed up the next year. 10 cents is hardly going to be the deciding factor between catching a train and driving.

The 8 most expensive trips should be charged and the remainder refunded. Small increases in single fares and providing frequency discounts after 8 trips is fairer for frequent commuters and will still recoup some revenue lost due to the mistakes made in the original pricing structure.

The changes for single multi-mode trips are appropriate as they are merely a correction of the awful pricing structure when Opal was initiated and the multi-mode paper tickets were removed. However, by requiring people to pay for 10 trips before any discounts start wipes out any benefit for full-time multi-mode commuters.