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## **SUBMISSION TO IPART REVIEW OF FARES FOR METROPOLITAN AND OUTER METROPOLITAN BUS SERVICES JUNE 2013**

Save Our Rail is a large volunteer community group, based in the Hunter Region, with an interest in transport. Its aim is to ensure the retention of public transport infrastructure, maintain the viability of transport provision and to pursue improvements to public transport.

Public transport is an important community need and the components of it should be fully integrated, conveniently connected and easily accessed by all members of society. Save Our Rail therefore speaks for the community in ensuring these aspects are addressed in planning and implementation phases of transport provision.

The bus system in the Hunter Region needs urgent attention as it is not meeting the needs of the community and is therefore massively underutilised.

The specific issues listed in the discussion paper are addressed:

**1. *Should we base our determination of fares on the costs and benefits of providing bus services in the four largest contract regions (STA Regions)?***

It is inappropriate to base the fare structures for this largely rural region on the cost/benefits of Sydney Metropolitan regions.

There are very different needs and difficulties in the Hunter where bus services operate over greater distances than many Sydney services. Sydney has a vast rail system, covering most areas (with some notable exceptions) Train and bus usage are well accepted and many bus routes connect to rail.

Newcastle has no such urban rail network, but has essentially an intercity rail connection. Sections of the heavy rail are used for short trips within the urban area according to availability. Bus routes rarely serve to bring passengers to the rail line,



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but attempt to convey them to a destination. Some situations require short distance routes, other need are for a much longer trip and there is also a need for some meandering routes.

\*Currently in trying to link these needs into single services, the system is failing to meet commuter needs and is therefore hugely under- patronised.

FARES are not the issue. People will pay if the service satisfies the need. (e.g. in the Hunter people pay dearly to put petrol in cars, because they have a need to get from point A to point B and can't always achieve this efficiently using public transport.)  
Transport should be:

- Where it is needed
- When it is needed
- Punctual
- Accessible
- Time efficient
- Comfortable
- Safe

These are some examples in which different bus routes attempt to meet various needs:

- Newcastle buses are said to “run round the moon.” Passenger A boards a bus labelled University. He needs to go from Newcastle Station to the University, finds he has gone off onto Industrial Drive and into Carrington, from there to various parts of Mayfield ... reaching the University very late for lectures.
- The long distance transfer – e.g. from Swansea to Newcastle CBD. This bus might go via Windale, round to Warners Bay along a scenic route ... Passenger B needs an express bus direct, while the Windale pensioner, Passenger C may need a service that collects him near his home and takes him to the specialist at Warner’s Bay.
- Short trip needs e.g. Transfer to the rail line. Glendale to Cardiff Station or from “The Hill” to the Junction Shopping Centre. These two examples illustrate how passengers can be frustrated by winding route which they do not need, and will drive their car in preference. (maybe 10 minute drive.)
- Specific destinations – e.g. John Hunter Hospital, University of Newcastle – need buses for specific purpose.
- Commuter transport. There is need for this service to be distinct from the all stops bus. Efficiency of time is vital for the CBD worker, the industry worker or the student. (Need to consider 7 day timetable.)
- Shift Worker transport e.g. John Hunter Hospital workers, Mater Hospital,( nurses cannot use public transport because of shift times) Industries, Hunter Valley mine workers – need specific times and locations.



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- School Transport – duplication of routes, children being transported over huge distances, by-passing suitable schools. Needs review and cost/benefit analysis.
- There is a need for fares to be based on what the passenger gets for his money.

The operator needs flexibility to be able to tailor the service according to passenger need. **The fare structure for the Hunter, with low population, long distances and a tradition of high car use with easy road movement cannot be based on cost/benefits of any Sydney Metropolitan region with very different types of route needs and factors such as efficient alternate transport provision, including rail.**

**2. *Should the length of the determination period be 3,4 or 5 years?***

Full annual review of efficiency, fares and routes is needed in the Hunter. The current system is in urgent need of revision of all aspects. It needs fixing. The system is running with large almost empty buses, time inefficiency and inappropriate routes.

It is a total failure. The recent provision of additional buses, revised routes based on Sydney's example, even free buses (indiscriminately plonked into the system for political advantage) has made no difference to the extremely low patronage.

**The game needs lifting!** Fares need to be based on actual value to the passenger. Express services are needed for the long haul. Industry needs to contribute to buses. e.g. for shift workers at Hunter Valley mines – currently New England Highway is congested with high car use. This should be eased by adequate bus/train provision. **INDUSTRY SHOULD CONTRIBUTE.**

**3. *We propose to use a building block approach to establish the efficient costs of providing bus services in the four largest contract regions. Do stakeholders agree with this approach?***

This doesn't seem to add up. Which "building block" can we use in the failed Hunter bus system? The Lego blocks have fallen down!

**4. *Have there been any changes in the four largest regions( STA regions) that would warrant a revaluation of existing assets that make up the RAB?***

Sydney's public transport need is increasing., with demand up and patronage increasing. It is the opposite in Newcastle.

Because of long term inadequate public transport provision in Newcastle and Hunter there is an entrenched mindset that public transport is a second rate option. **IT IS THEREFORE SHUNNED.**

As stated, even if is free it is not used. – The Fare Free Zone and "Loopy Green Buses" are both failures and should be abolished, the assets reallocated.

**Remove the "FARE FREE" and charge a "FAIR FEE."**

Put in a service that is efficient and runs when and where it is needed. Then



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people will begin to value public transport and use it.

**5. *We propose to allocate the efficient costs to be recovered from passengers and taxpayers on the basis of the external benefits of bus services in the four largest contract regions. Do stakeholders agree with this approach?***

Buses in Newcastle are shunned because they are unwieldy and uncomfortable. People are thrown about and feel unsafe without seat belts. It is unacceptable and only used by those who really need it.

“External benefits” are non-existent, because the system of large empty buses is not providing an external benefit by reducing traffic congestion, providing efficient transport for commuters or reducing pollution levels.

In effect the buses are adding to the road congestion and the large empty vehicles are adding diesel emissions out of proportion to the number of passengers carried. The presence of rail infrastructure adds value because people like to travel that way and use it where it is provided, reducing the number of cars and the level of emissions. If the bus system can be upgraded, with better comfort, greater safety and if it becomes valued, then “external benefits” could flow.

**6. *Should we determine the average charge in fares rather than determine maximum individual fares for bus services.***

Ipart should not set an “average charge.” The fare per km travelled should be determined in a responsible, fair deal for paying passengers. Pensioner and student discounts should then be subtracted from the fair and reasonable amount set.

**7. *Should we allow a “catch up” factor so that if fares increase by less than the maximum allowed amount in one year, the foregone revenue can be recovered in subsequent years?***

No. There is no logic in the notion of “catch up.”

**8. *Should we apply additional price limits to any individual fare types?***

No. The fare should be set at a fair price per kilometre travelled. Any discounts should be from the base price.

**9. *Should we consider the merits of introducing peak and off-peak fares for buses?***

No. In Sydney there could be some justification for this, but in The Hunter there is no crowding on buses, no “peak.” Buses struggle to achieve any patronage.



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***10. Are our proposed pricing principles relevant to determining fares for buses?  
Are there any other factors we should take into account?***

Generally not relevant as stated in responses to earlier questions. Hunter Region has greatly different needs from those in Sydney. There is no case for a “one size fits all” approach.

Ipact could consider some form of incentive for bus operators, which could involve allowable fare setting. The degree of success through patronage increase could be a criterion for fare setting, with a points system in place.

Efficiency could also be a factor. The current situation of very large, almost empty buses does not constitute efficiency. Perhaps incentives for the introduction of smaller vehicles, more frequent running and with added comfort, including seatbelts, IT connections and other amenities could be part of an efficiency rating which could attract a bonus or other reward.

Time is an important commodity in public transport . Commuters take into account the time taken for their trip to work, as well as punctuality. Time equals money. This is a problem for Newcastle buses. The reason for their unreliability is not clear but it exists and needs addressing if there is to be any advance in the usage. Trains, being much more reliable are preferred where available. Bus provision is higher than rail in Newcastle and the Hunter but the patronage is lower than that of trains.

There is a need for promotion of public transport as a valuable commodity. In Newcastle and the Hunter Region it has been very easy to get around by car and this has become the accepted means of transport for the majority. With projected increases in population this will need to change and a re-education program should be undertaken. How the fare structure fits into that needs to be thoroughly examined. Currently as already stated, even when the buses are free there is a reluctance to use them. The psychology of this factor needs to be taken into account and studies undertaken to determine the effect of cost on usage.

***11. Are there any factors we should consider when determining forecast patronage growth over the next 3 to 5 years?***

- The current forecast is one of gloom and doom. Until an attitude shift occurs, which can only be brought about by massive improvements in bus provision, including increased frequency, more relevant route planning , safety additions (seat belts) and overall consideration of passenger needs bus patronage will not improve.



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- There is a need to allow for the provision of public transport in the planning stage of new housing estates. Developer approval should not be given until evidence of public transport planning and provision is indicated. There needs to be assurance of bus or train availability, otherwise the car culture already prevalent, will expand into the future. Many new estates have been built in the Hunter with no consideration as to this aspect of planning. Because of the non provision of public transport car use is forced onto many. Triple garages and multiple cars per family have become the norm in new estates.. This is very evident in the sprawl of housing around Maitland and other Hunter cities.

## DEVELOPERS COULD CONTRIBUTE TO TRANSPORT PROVISION

### EXPRESS BUS SERVICES.

In November 2010 Save Our Rail NSW Inc put forward a proposal to introduce commuter express buses, ( “Commuter Clippers”) which would ‘clip’ the time taken to get to work. The colour coded buses would have a frequency of 15 minutes and would operate with limited stops. The Clippers would not replace current all stops buses but would provide an additional service. The proposal was part of the “Western Transport Initiative” or WESTRANS and included suggested routes for operation as well as suggested Park ‘n Ride sites. ( available on line at: [saveourrail.org.au](http://saveourrail.org.au))

### IDENTIFYING BUSES

It would help passengers if buses were easily identified as to not only final destination but intermediate stops, whether the service is an express or all stops, whether it has disability equipment or other relevant information.

There could be a system of colour coding to assist passengers in this regard, perhaps in the form of LED lights. It is off-putting to have to be in the position of not knowing, until half way into the bus and asking the driver as to whether it is the appropriate bus to board.

Also clear information about time tables would assist – the small-print information on the wall of the bus stop, or telegraph pole is not good enough. Solar powered electronic signage is suggested.

### CONCLUSION

- It is clear that the setting of fares needs to have a different basis – rather than the cost of running the bus, there needs to be a fare based on the value of the trip to the passenger. If it is a good experience the customer will pay up and come back.
- Public transport should be provided according to passenger needs.



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- Fares should be determined on an estimated value to passenger at a set price per kilometre travelled.
- Newcastle bus provision requires an annual review until more efficiency is achieved.
- Industry and developer contributions should be considered.
- Promotion and upgrading of Hunter Region bus provision are urgent requirements.

Please consider this contribution to the issue of bus transport in the Hunter Region.

Joan Dawson, on behalf of Save Our Rail NSW Inc.