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Submission: Springwood Fitness Walkers is bushwalking group based in the Blue Mountains and registered with the NSW Department of Sport and Recreation. Our group consists of seniors with a common interest in bushwalking and fitness and the use of the opal card plays a big part in the planning and operation of our group. The proposed changes will affect our group adversely in planning, operation and function.

A copy of our submission is attached.

Thank you in anticipation of your favourable consideration of our submission.

Sharon Cox

Submission from Spring Fitness Walkers

IPART More efficient, more integrated Opal fares Transport — Draft Report December 2015

- There is an element of deception by the NSW Government to the general public concerning the above issue as their report was released in December, the busiest time of the year for most people when they would be distracted by Christmas and holiday preparations. In addition, there has been little or no publicity requesting input from the public about this proposal. Consequently, many people who would ordinarily make a submission are unaware of the proposal. Furthermore, the time for making a submission is very short as the report was released in December 2015 and submissions close on February 5 2016.
- Springwood Fitness Walkers is an organisation based in the Blue Mountains that runs a weekly bushwalking programme with members consisting of those in the seniors' age group drawing from a wide area. We are able to provide a weekly programme of walks in the Blue Mountains as well as a number in the City and surrounds. Our Group is with the NSW Department of Sport and Recreation.

The majority of travel is taken by public transport where our members can use their Seniors Card to participate in the walks. Consequently, no member is restricted for financial reasons to attend the programme. Our organisation not only provides members with the opportunity to improve their physical health through regular walking, but it has become a supportive group where friendships are made and care given to others. So our members gain physical and emotional wellbeing from our group. Many of our members are widows/widowers or carer's for an unwell spouse so this support is invaluable. The proposed fare increase from \$2.50 to a \$9 cap for Seniors would hinder many of the group from receiving these benefits. Additionally, this would put our programme out of reach to many of our members and would jeopardise their physical and emotional well-being and make some quite isolated.

- It would make the reason the Seniors Card was introduced void due to excessive cost - see below for statement from NSW Government Seniors Web site:

"The NSW State Government introduced the Seniors Card scheme in 1992 to encourage older people to enjoy an active and healthy retirement. The scheme is free to join, is not assets-tested and you are not required to disclose your income. To qualify, you must be a New South Wales permanent resident, aged 60 or over and work no more than 20 hours a week"

The current proposal effectively asset-tests eligibility for the scheme.

- An increase from \$2.50 to \$9.00 is excessive at 360%!!!!
- Those qualifying for a Seniors Card already have limits on their income as they may only work up to 20 hours per week and many are already fully retired.

- Seniors who, in the past, have all had the same travel rights/privileges within the NSW Public Transport system, irrespective of whether they have a pension card or not, should continue to do so.
- It is unreasonable to means test the Gold Concession card above the limitations set to qualify for a Seniors Card.
- Now that the age at which a person may become eligible for an age pension has been raised, there is a longer waiting period after turning 60 to qualify for age pension benefits and to obtain a Gold Opal Card.
- The huge price increase would discourage the use of public transport, which in turn would reduce the anticipated financial return from the fare increases.