



# Two More Trains For Singleton

*Campaign for two additional daily passenger rail services from Newcastle to Singleton*

## **Submission – Draft IPART Report on Opal Public Transport Fares**

### **Background**

Two More Trains for Singleton has reviewed the draft IPART report on Opal public transport fares dated December 2015 currently on public exhibition and wishes to comment on the proposals.

Two More Trains for Singleton is a community group based in Singleton in the Upper Hunter Valley and has strong community links. The group represents a large number of Upper Hunter residents and travellers who regularly travel to inner Newcastle and Sydney.

The group has made submissions to the NSW Government over the last 5 years seeking additional passenger rail services to connect Singleton with Maitland, Newcastle and Sydney. The proposed changes to the structure of public transport fares in Sydney, Newcastle and the Hunter Region have the potential to significantly impact on accessibility, and public transport services within the Hunter Valley.

### **Overview of comments**

The draft report and draft determination on exhibition represent a significant change to the way public transport fares are determined, and will potentially result in changes to the pattern of usage and the attractiveness of public transport over the longer term. This could have significant implications for economic development and the requirements for provision of public transport services in areas outside the Sydney metropolitan area, especially in the Hunter Region.

Key issues to be considered in finalising the public transport review are as follows:

- The integration of fares between different transport modes is supported in principle.
- Intermodal transfer is an essential part of an effective transport system, and should be encouraged by a simple fare structure. Transfers should not incur a fare penalty.
- The recommended fare structure is highly complex and not transparent. Consideration should be given to a simpler structure which is easy to understand for users.
- Peak and off peak fares are inappropriate and difficult to apply in regional areas such as Singleton, and within the Hunter Region in particular.
- A discount on fares on Hunter Line trains between Maitland, Singleton, Scone and Dungog should be applied to reflect the poor level of service provided on this section of the network.
- The review should be extended to consider the long term spatial effects of the implementation of a new fare structure. In the Hunter Valley in particular, public transport fares are expected to significantly affect the usage of train services, and therefore the demand for transport infrastructure, and future land use development.



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## Detailed comments

More emphasis should be given to the objective of using public transport fares as a way of encouraging public transport use in outer urban areas. In particular, there should have been a review of the comparative cost of providing road and rail services, and recognition of the need to attractively price train services to underpin the public transport network. This has the potential to significantly affect land use and development in the longer term.

Whilst the recommendations represent a welcome move towards intermodal fare integration, the proposal for a separate fare scale for multi-mode journeys makes the fare structure much more complicated and opaque than it needs to be. We question whether making a distinction based on transport mode serves a useful purpose. Greater usage would be encouraged by a “whole of network approach” with a single fare scale across all modes.

A general criticism of the Report is that it treats the Opal Fare area (extending over 500 km to places as far afield as Scone, Bathurst and Goulburn) as a single travel region centred on Sydney. Yet it is readily apparent that this area is in fact comprised of several distinct travel regions (Sydney, Hunter, Illawarra, Central Coast) with relatively self-contained travel patterns, different levels of service provision and different operating conditions and cost structure. Consequently, many of the Report recommendations are not reflective of actual conditions present within the Hunter Region.

The IPART report needs to specifically acknowledge that Hunter Line train services are different to the rest of the Sydney metropolitan public transport network. The reason for this is that the cost structure for provision of services is distinctly different, with the cost of track and infrastructure maintenance (except carriages) being the responsibility of a private company (Australian Rail Track Corporation – ARTC) and funded by freight users not from public transport fares. This also effectively limits the ability to provide passenger trains on the track and therefore the service frequency. It is suggested that the economic modelling carried out as part of the IPART review is not valid when applied to the Hunter Region.

Another example of the need for separate travel regions is that the Opal time periods for peak and off-peak travel presume interregional journeys to Sydney, but these periods make little sense for travel within the Hunter Region itself or across regions. This suggests the need to treat the Hunter Region as a separate tariff zone.

Specific comments are as follows:

- A separate review of the fare structure for the Hunter Line trains and Hunter Valley services is needed, together with a review of the impact of the proposed fare structure on usage of services. The current report is Sydney metropolitan area focused and fails to recognise specific issues associated with the provision of public transport in the Hunter and other regions.



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- The recommendations will result in substantial fare increases for all services from Singleton as a result of the changes to the current distance bands for the calculation of fares. Because distances of travel are much longer (from Singleton normally to Maitland, Newcastle and Sydney) this means users will be paying much more unless fares are calculated at off peak rates, or concessions apply.
- Fares in the Hunter Region should be lower because of the poor level of service provided. The closure of the Hunter Line between Hamilton and Newcastle in December 2014 has drastically degraded an already limited service, and increased travel times and inconvenience, as evidenced by a significant reduction in patronage. Consumers should be compensated for the reduction in services through the fare structure. Whereas travellers on the Newcastle – Central Coast line have a half hourly or hourly service, Singleton users have only two early morning and two late afternoon services with a gap of 6 – 8 hours between trains in the middle of the day.
- Many train users from Singleton are only occasional and infrequent, for reasons such as travelling by train to Sydney and the airport, or for specialist medical appointments and will be using a paper ticket not an Opal card. The proposed 40% surcharge on paper tickets is unfair in such cases.
- There is a need to ensure a socially optimal train service for provision of trains especially on the Hunter Line, and not simply consider socially optimal fares. The current review fails to consider this. It is proposed that fares should be lower on all train services that have less than an hourly frequency.
- If the draft proposal is proceeded with, then only off-peak ticket pricing should apply to fares on the Hunter Line. The reason for this is that (1) there is no option to travel at different times, (2) there is no evidence that the current morning and evening services incurs a higher cost structure than if services were provided at other times, (3) there is no congestion on trains and no need for fares to influence travel journey time, and (4) it provides a way of compensating for a sub-standard service frequency and the inconvenience to public transport users. Alternatively, there could be a lower daily cap applying where journeys are commenced from regional locations.
- Discounted weekly, monthly and annual travel passes should also be available as a separate ticket option, consistent with overseas practice. The ‘pay-as-you-go’ structure built into the present Opal card encourages users to ration their public transport travel, whereas a travel pass encourages users to maximise their use of the system, and supports modal shift policy objectives. Travel passes could replace the current weekly cap.



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## Proposal

The following proposals should be included in the final IPART review of Opal public transport fares:

1. A separate Tariff Zone should apply to the Hunter Region, recognising its status as a distinct urban travel region. This might be broadly bound by Scone, Dungog, Wyee and Doyalson, similar to area covered the draft *Hunter Regional Plan* recently prepared by the NSW Department of Planning and Environment. This approach is consistent with best European practice.
2. The fare structure should identify and compensate for situations where there is socially sub-optimal provision of train services, such as is the case on Hunter Line Services between Maitland, Singleton, Scone and Dungog. A sub-optimal service is weekday services operating at less than an hourly frequency.
3. Only off-peak ticket pricing should apply to all fares on the Hunter Line to maintain equity with metropolitan users.
4. A separate review should be undertaken of the impact of the final fare structure on usage of train services in the Hunter Region, and the long term impacts on land use and development within the region, especially outer metropolitan and regional areas.
5. The report should acknowledge that it fails to consider the spatial impacts of the proposed fare structure, a fundamental issue for the long term economic viability and liveability of the Sydney, Hunter, Illawarra and Central Coast regions.

## More information

For further information or details concerning this submission, please contact Two More Trains for Singleton by email – [2moretrains@gmail.com](mailto:2moretrains@gmail.com)  
or Facebook at [www.facebook.com/pages/Two-More-Trains-for-Singleton](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Two-More-Trains-for-Singleton)

**Prepared by Two More Trains for Singleton - 4 February 2016**