

PENRITH CITY COUNCIL - SUBMISSION TO IPART REVIEW OF FARES FOR TAXIS, PRIVATE BUSES AND PRIVATE FERRIES IN NSW

Council appreciates the opportunity to comment on fares for private transport providers in Western Sydney. Council supports the concept of the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal assisting the Minister for Transport in setting fares for the private transport industry, particularly in regard to private buses in Western Sydney, which are a major public transport provider for residents in the region.

The importance of public transport has been recognised in State strategies and has been reflected in the State Government's Transport Planning document, "*Action for Transport 2010*" and the State Government's Air Quality Improvement Strategy, "*Action for Air*".

In the last twenty years, the Penrith LGA has experienced a significant population growth. This growth has been predominantly in the residential sector (as in other growth areas in the greater western Sydney Region) and has not been matched with employment generating developments.

The lack of local employment opportunities in the Penrith LGA, compared to the workforce, has led to a need for the workforce to travel long distances (beyond the City boundary). While the number of jobs in the Penrith LGA has increased over the last 5-10 years, the 1996 Census Data still identifies that over 62% of the local workforce commutes to employment centres in Parramatta, central Sydney, North Sydney, and generally to the centres in eastern and northern Sydney.

In addition to the imbalance between residential and employment generating developments, the traffic network and public transport system has not kept up with the population increases, and further burdens the journey to work. Changes to travel behaviour over the last twenty years have also seen a threefold increase in car usage compared with population increases.

Council has been responding to this issue with strategies that will encourage greater use of public transport as an alternative mode to the single occupant motor car. Council's current four year (2000 to 2004) Strategic Plan, has re-emphasized the need to improve accessible transport to the City and has included in its Management Plan actions to secure improved regional and local transport links and services to accommodate existing and future urban developments.

Council has been faced with further burdens in improving public transport given that the future release areas are all located remote from major public transport nodes such as the Western Railway Line. This has highlighted the need for effective, efficient and attractive public transport services to provide the appropriate connections between these areas and the major nodes.

Council has reviewed the public transport fares by the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) and raises concerns in the areas of attractiveness and equity of public transport services.

- ***Charter Vessel Association - Submission***

The Penrith LGA is not serviced by ferries and Council has not provided comments on this issue.

- ***Bus and Coach Association - Submission***

The Penrith LGA is serviced by two private operators, Pearce and Westbus and does not have any bus operations provided by Government run services.

Council has raised concerns regarding the potential inequities associated with this arrangement where subsidies may be applied to the Government run facilities that are not

equally applied to those in the Penrith LGA that are provided through private operators. Council requests that IPART examine the differences between these areas and benchmark the services provided by the private operators against those State provided.

Council is aware of inequities in this area that relate to the availability of excursion tickets for seniors/pensioners and have previously raised this issue with IPART, the Department of Transport and the Minister. There may well be other inequities that relate to frequency, levels of service and fare structures.

Given the nature of the public transport problems that face Penrith LGA and, indeed Western Sydney, that have been outlined above, the encouragement of the use of public transport may well require consideration of some form of subsidy to achieve the mode shift that Council and the State Government is seeking. Whilst Council acknowledges that cost increases have occurred and these need to be reflected in the financial arrangements for the private operators, consideration of the cost to the user for public transport needs to be made in determining fares that will result in those services being attractive to the commuter.

Council does not support the increase in fares for Western Sydney bus passengers without a rectification of existing inequalities between private and Sydney Buses in the metropolitan area. In general, private bus operators' fares are consistent for short trips with Sydney Buses for single purchase fares. However, they have considerably higher fares for longer trips and do not offer the discount for multiple trips and multi-mode travel that Sydney Buses provides. In general, this equates to residents in Western Sydney paying higher fares and having less flexibility to use multi-modal public transport (ie, combined bus and train journey).

- ***NSW Taxi Council - Submission***

The Penrith LGA has a metropolitan area boundary (Nepean River) running through it and Council has been made aware that taxi services have a fare provision that burdens the passenger when they travel across that metropolitan boundary. Council sees this as a significant disincentive, particularly for residents within the LGA. Whilst full details of this fare provision have not been provided to Council, it is understood that passengers are required to negotiate fares with the taxi driver on journeys that cross the river. This is considered to be neither fair nor equitable when comparisons are drawn with services provided within other locations in the metropolitan area.

Concerns have also been raised with Council through public transport forums that have been held regarding the provision of Wheelchair Accessible Taxis (WAT). These concerns relate to the number of taxis that are provided. The public transport forums have been advised that there is not a sufficient number of such taxis and additionally that these numbers, for the Penrith LGA, are declining.

Council requests that IPART examine the provision of Wheelchair Accessible Taxis and comment on the proposed 10% provision of such taxis in fleets servicing the area and whether this is adequate and is indeed being achieved in the Penrith LGA.

In conclusion, Council is concerned about the justification for the fare increase for the private bus industry under the cost index approach, and would like to see a more complete assessment of the industry, subsidy regimes, concession fares and equity of service provision across the Sydney metropolitan area. Similar concerns are raised with the provision and fare structure for taxis.

Should you wish to discuss the issues raised in this submission, you may contact Council's Design & Technical Advice Manager on 4732-7573 or Council's Transportation Planner on 4732-7721.

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