

I must admit that I am completely amazed that serious consideration is given to increasing train fares by such a large amount when it is time for government to be encouraging environmentally friendlier ways of commuting and living. Train usage is up due to rising costs of petrol and the fact that the M's are effectively expensive parking lots during the rush hours. The government should be encouraging further increases in public transport usage, but they should also be investing in further infrastructure, though not by fare increases.

I wish that I could walk to work, but the housing prices were unaffordable within the 3 nearest suburbs of my work, which is near Epping. We bought a house in Quakers Hill which is about 10 minutes walk from the train station. I take the 2 hour door to door commute and enjoy it as I am able to spend time on the train doing work, listening to music, and otherwise staying relatively stress free. The occasional times that I drive, I get frustrated, pay about the same in tolls as riding the train, and can't get to work in a reliable time frame (trip typically takes anywhere from 40 to 90 minutes). The train is much more reliable. I also get over an hours worth of walking in each day with the train commute. I am not in a profession that allows me to select a work place closer to my home. Over the past 3 years of riding, I have noticed the significant increase in train usage, especially in the Strathfield to Epping morning run. 3 years ago, most seats were empty, now all benches have at least one person sitting in them suggesting a nearly factor of 3 increase in usage.

Fortunately, I do make a decent salary, but I know that many in my neighborhood and surrounding towns are likely stretched given the cost of housing and rising costs for nearly everything else. To hit them with a fare increase is likely to have a very negative impact.

I strongly urge your committee to think carefully about the message sent and to seek out alternative methods for raising the funds needed to improve our pathetically poor public transportation system. Tax the gas, tax the tolls, tax the un-environmentally friendly ways of commuting to help enhance the more greener ways of getting to and from work. What you will do with a fare increase is put more people back into their cars making the M parking lots more congested as well as the surface streets, increasing road rage, and generally creating a less healthy environment for everyone.

Please reconsider your tactics.

Thank you.
S Barden