

Response to Review of City Rail fares, 2009-2012

I am writing this letter in response to the recent review and proposed changes to the City Rail fare structure.

As a public transport system City Rail exists to service the commuting needs of the general fee paying public on a seven day weekly cycle.

It is a service that is offered to fare paying customers and as such has an expectation on it that the service it provides is value for money.

The advantage City Rail has is that it is the only provider of such a service and as such it has a monopoly hold on the rail commuter market.

While I am not apposed to fare increases I am very concerned that the fare increases proposed do not match up to the service levels given to the fare paying public.

It is also very worrying that in part the justification used for the rise in fares is the average yearly income of City Rail commuters.

The way in which IPART has come up with this amount is totally incorrect and inaccurate, the TDC survey is not an independent organization so the results used are biased towards the provider of a service and not the user of a service.

It is unthinkable that the “You can afford it” argument is being used by IPART whose member’s undoubtedly do not use City Rail services on a weekly basis.

The use of such an argument means the provider of this service only needs to show it’s customers can afford an increase in order for it to be granted a fare increase rather than the fair way of the service provider showing it deserves the increase because of the increase in the levels of service being given to their customers.

There are various types or categories of service levels that City Rail can be measured against all of which have been referenced in the IPART submission but I have only referenced a few below:

Level Of Customer service – how friendly station and office staff are.

Level Of Safety – how many patrols are on the trains which leads to how safe people feel travelling on the trains at certain times during the day or night.

Level Of Cleanliness – how clean the stations and trains are.

Whilst it is true passengers would like these above points and similar service levels to be met by City Rail the average commuter would state the On Time and Frequency of service of trains would far out way the need for a clean carriage or a friendly station assistant.

It is also important to commuters that the line “on-time is considered as 5minutes either side of the timetable time” be removed as it allows City Rail to inaccurately report service times.

The average commuter would also like to see above all else the old carriages phased out and the new carriages brought in as promised by the previous governments.

It is totally unacceptable that City Rail will be allowed to increase prices when they have made no attempt to increase the frequency of services and they have not tried to address the over crowding issues faced on all lines.

There are plenty of carriages available to achieve this but City Rail has withheld carriages simply to allow them to claim only a fare increase could result in more carriages, which is an absolute lie.

A lie this IPART recommendation is attempting to validate.

If City Rail wishes to increase their fares in anyway they must first show real improvements in service times and frequency as well as address over crowding. A theoretical approach including promises from the minister is not good enough.

Only by City Rail doing these things consistently for 12months can a fare restructure be imposed, to do it any earlier would be to continue to encourage City Rail to rely on the “You can afford it” principle so stupidly referred to by IPART in the past.

It is a ridiculous notion that the fare structure nominated will see the cost of a weekly ticket from Penrith move from it's current \$48 per week to between \$59.50 – \$76.50 per week over the next 3 years and that is not taking into account inflation.

IT is unfair on the commuters to be asked to pay such an extraordinary increase when City Rail themselves have not been forced to reduce their own internal and external costs. It is quite clear that City Rail is mismanaged (I would assume that only for political reason IPART has not mentioned such a fact) and with any mismanagement of an organisation comes mismanagement of the company's balance sheets, the recent ICAC court proceeding into rorts by maintenance staff is a good example of mismanagement of company finances within City Rail and only an idiot would not say it has not had an effect on the ability of City Rail to better maintain it's aging rail network.

IPART can clearly see that if City Rail first addresses these inadequacies within City Rails management structure then the need to increase prices by such an amount would be unnecessary as City Rail would not be bleeding money as it has for the last 10 years.

It is unfair to say to commuters you have to pay in the way of increased fares for a company that has been mismanaging it's own budget, when quite clearly if this mismanagement of funds had not occurred then there would be money to fix many of City Rails issues.

The bottom line response to this inaccurate and ill-informed IPART recommendation is that City Rail needs to start to provide better services in relation to trains being on-time, more trains travelling on the network during peak and off peak times and less over crowding before a fare restructure can be imposed upon people and they need to be doing this for 12months consistently.

The “You can afford it” argument is a slap in the face of commuters and does not encourage City rail to make any worthwhile improvements in order to get a fare increase.

Regards,
Bruce Gabin