

2002/2003 PUBLIC TRANSPORT FARES DETERMINATION BY IPART
Submission from Save Our Bus Services (SOBS) Committee

Dear Sir

I am writing on behalf of the Save Our Bus Services (SOBS) Committee.

We wish to oppose the application by the STA for a fare rise in the Newcastle area.

The Newcastle area is one which unfortunately has more than a fair share of disadvantage. With a significant aging population and unemployment rates well above the State and National average many of our Citizens are dependent on income support. Unfortunately a number of our suburbs made the top 20 of Prof Tony Vinson's list of the most disadvantaged areas in NSW and Victoria (Unequal in Life 1999)

This picture of a disadvantaged area is confirmed by data provided in the 2001/2002 PUBLIC TRANSPORT FARES DETERMINATION BY IPART Council of Social Service of New South Wales (NCOSS) submission April 2001

"Data from the Transport Data Centre (Household Travel Survey, 2000, unpublished) in relation to Newcastle STA bus users reveals the following:

- 17% are adults in full time study (not secondary school)
- 14% are in part-time or casual work
- 5% are in full time work
- 52% pay a concessional rate (pensioners/aged/students/other)
- 43% have an annual income below \$10,399

This pattern of usage and the reflections of disadvantage are confirmed in the 1996 census data. In particular 19.4% of households own no motor vehicle as against a national average of 11.6%. Further 44.2% of households own only 1 motor vehicle as against a national average of 39.8%. (Community Profiles Series 2 Newcastle City Council) These figures point to a greater dependence on public transport as the only option for many of our citizens than in the rest of the nation.

What is clear to us is that the new Bus timetable introduced in March 2002 has significantly reduced service for many of the public transport users of our region. There has been a significant reduction of routes, of services on those retained and new routes particularly on weekends and evenings and significant overcrowding on many of the retained services. Trip times and transfers (sometimes up to 3 services to replace one previous direct service) have dramatically increased for many consumers.

The replacement of the 306 with the 319 is a typical example. The previous service provided access to Belmont Charlestown and Newcastle for residents of Warners Bay. This ensured access to health services, shopping and a range of recreation activities. The replacement service operates six times a day with no weekend services between Windale (a housing estate) and Warners Bay. This change typifies the lack of any real understanding of the impact that the withdrawal of services has had under the new timetable.

There are a large number of other concerns which we are in the process of documenting and will be presenting to the STA and to the state government.

Overall we are concerned that the primary focus of the changes was to reduce the variously claimed \$10-11 million annual deficit. We would argue that cost recovery through fares is particularly inappropriate in the Newcastle context. The attempt to reduce a deficit by reduction of services has impacted adversely on the aged, the disabled, students and unemployed. The reduction of services and the resultant overcrowding and lengthening of trips will, we predict, even further reduce the number of full fare paying customers.

To at this stage, allow the STA a fare increase in the Newcastle region would be a further slap in the face for those many people now suffering from the savage reduction to services.

We would call on IPART to refuse this request.

Further we call on the STA to undertake to reinstate needed services and on the State government to actually increase funding to Newcastle Buses to upgrade both the fleet and the quality of the services provided.

Yours sincerely

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