

15/03/2006 12:49 PM

new cityrail fares

To Whom It May Concern,

I wish to add my voice to the debate about cityrail and their submission to raise ticket prices. I live in strathfield and commute daily on the northern and western lines to Milsons Point, as well as regularly visiting friends in the Hornsby area. I am a shift worker so not only do i frequently travel in the late morning peak (9:05-10am) but late in the evening of the same days (10-11:30pm).

Most times, my trains are usually on time, according to me, not cityrails standards. I expect a service to pull into a station at the time indicated in the timetbale books. I consider it on time when it is within 1 minute either way of this time. I find cityrail's definition of "on-time" insulting. No boss in the world would call a train 5 minutes behind time on schedule, except the bosses at cityrail, who seem to think changing the rules to hide incompetence is acceptable. The only reason cityrail has not gone under as a business is because it's a government service.

In the past 2 weeks, i have 3 times been badly let down by cityrail, the descriptions of which follow, which all highlight the fact that the current system is flawed and not worthy of a price hike.

On Saturday March 11, i caught a train from strathfield to central, planning to change at central for the buses to wynyard, so i could again change back onto trains, just to get to Milsons Point. Our train stopped at a signal just part Macdonaldtown, where we then remained for the next 42 minutes. The guard had the volume on the pa system too low to hear any messages that he tried to give us, it was only when the entire train went silent and strained to listen that those with very good hearing picked up the msg that the train in front of us had broken down on the tracks. We couldn't be transfered onto the northern line tracks or inner west tracks as they all had crews carrying out maintenance on them, so in effect, every train coming into the city from the west was shutdown for 42 minutes. The carriage was freezing due to the air-con being set 2 high, i was lucky i had a jumper, but even so, i was very cold after being trapped for 42 minutes and lucky not to fall ill due to the exposure. What bothered me the most was that 1 train effectively brought the entire network from the west to it's knees, not acceptable by any standards. My regular 25 minute trip ended up being close to 1 1/2 hrs, completely unacceptable. Would cityrail bosses keep their jobs if they turned up 1 1/2 hrs late to all their meetings? No, of course they wouldn't.

Thursday 9th March, i was planning to catch the 9:5am to work. I arrived at strathfield to find the train indicator monitors saying the next train to the north was due in 15 minutes. Thinking i had just misssd the service i was aiming for, i headed to the platform to instead find that i hadn't just missed that train, but all services were 15+ minutes behind. The reason was signal failure all the way out at penrith that morning around 7:30am, hours before i was due to catch my train, but thanks to the problem not being quickly sorted out, i was more than 20 mins late for work, due to your services being so badly affected.

Most evenings, when trackwork takes place, the bus system works well to replace them as needed. However, one Saturday recently (either the 25th Feb or 4th March) I again encountered bad planning/management by CityRail. The evening buses were supplied, but only dropped us at Wynyard, while the western lines were running from Central. This forced me to wait 10 mins for a bus, get off at Wynyard, wait 10 mins for a train, change at Central then wait another 15 mins to get a Western line train. Every other time trackwork has been scheduled, buses have gone all the way to Central, what idiot changed the plans this time and blew travel times out by such a large margin.

All these things would not bother me so much if the system as a whole was better. Time and again, I have travelled on litter-filled trains, trains that have no air-con or too much, suffered major overcrowding to the point where I sometimes struggle to breathe in such a stuffy atmosphere and trains late at night where people have vomited, rendering the entire carriage un-useable due to the overwhelming smell.

Until CityRail can provide a system that doesn't get so affected by one accident, I will not support a price hike to the long-suffering commuter. Two incidents I included were directly caused by lack of maintenance on an ageing system and 1 was caused by managerial incompetence. You are judged by the ability to put clean, working trains on the tracks, with enough carriages to meet demand (which definitely doesn't happen on the 9:03am train from Strathfield to Hornsby which is only a 6-car while 8 are clearly needed), on a working timetable where trains actually arrive WITHIN ONE MINUTE of their scheduled time. This is why CityRail is failing so badly. Only when you meet these conditions will more people travel on your trains, which will ultimately give you what you want, more revenue.

Miss Christabel Marsh.