

David Armstrong

28 March 2006

Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal of NSW
PO Box Q290
QVB Post Office NSW 1230

Submission re: review of fares for CityRail in NSW 2006

Dear IPART,

I wish to comment on the RailCorp submission seeking a fare rise for CityRail train services from July 2006.

I am a full-fare paying passenger who relies daily on CityRail services for travel to and from work, as well as travel for leisure purposes. I have used CityRail services for the last nine years at least 10 times a week on the Bankstown and Inner West lines. I also use other lines on occasions and travel at all times of the day and night.

I do not support the submission by RailCorp seeking an increase in CityRail fares, particularly off-peak fares, for the following reasons:

1. Late and unreliable services prior to the September 2005 timetable
2. Reduction in the number of weekday off-peak services since the September 2005 timetable
3. Reduction in the number of weekend services since July 2004
4. Overcrowding on peak services
5. Non air-conditioned carriages

Late and unreliable services prior to the September 2005 timetable

As is common knowledge and acknowledged by RailCorp in their submission for a CityRail fare increase, train services were extremely unreliable prior to the introduction of the September 2005 timetable. Whilst the level of reliability has risen since the new timetable was introduced, consideration must be given to the consequences faced by passengers intending to travel on trains which were consistently late or cancelled during the preceding two years. The inconvenience was significant, often having serious consequences. Whilst forced to endure late and cancelled train services, often coupled with rude and uninformed staff, loyal passengers were still obligated to pay the scheduled fare regardless of the level of service provided. It seems premature that barely five months into the operation of the new timetable RailCorp are seeking a fare increase despite *two years* of extremely poor service provision.

Reduction in the number of weekday off-peak services since the September 2005 timetable

In RailCorp's submission for a CityRail fare increase, off-peak fares have been targeted for a greater increase than peak fares to assist with cost recovery, align fare rates compared to other transport modes and improve equity between off-peak and full fares.

It should be noted that since the introduction of the September 2005 timetable off-peak train services have been reduced significantly, with some stations now only serviced by two trains per hour (half hour frequency). Off-peak services between major population centres such as Chatswood, St Leonards, North Sydney and Parramatta have also been reduced. In section 2.4.1 of the RailCorp submission, RailCorp state that there has been a reduction of 270 off-peak train services since the September 2005 timetable.

Off-peak usage should be encouraged by offering the level of discounts which currently apply. The off-peak fare discount also encourages users without urgent travel requirements to travel outside of peak times. If the level of discount for off-peak services is reduced it may encourage more people to use already over-patronised peak services.

The table in section 4 of the RailCorp submission (page 36) and section 4.4 on page 40 states the off-peak discount should be reduced to "diminish the inequity in the current fare structure", however consideration should also be given to the inequity of service provision between off-peak and peak periods. I believe that the current disparity between peak and off-peak fares is commensurate with levels of service provided, assists with the distribution of total passenger numbers and should remain unchanged.

Reduction in the number of weekend services since July 2004

In RailCorp's submission for a CityRail fare increase off-peak fares have been targeted for a greater increase than peak fares to assist with cost recovery, align fare rates compared to other transport modes and improve equity between off-peak and full fares.

In July 2004 the then Minister for Transport Michael Costa reduced the number of weekend services by 33%. At the time CityRail was experiencing a shortage of drivers which affected reliability of weekday peak services. The reduction of weekend services was a measure implemented while new drivers were recruited. On page five of the RailCorp submission it is noted that driver numbers have exceeded the target of 1,350. Since January 2006 1,370 drivers are employed on the CityRail system. Clearly the stated reason for initially reducing weekend services no longer holds true and the continued diminished service level on weekends now benefits RailCorp with reduced operating costs to the detriment of the travelling public. It is for this reason that an increase in off-peak fares cannot be justified.

Page 7 of RailCorp's submission also states that off-peak fare discounts should be reduced to "align CityRail's off-peak discounts more closely with those offered by rail services in other Australian jurisdictions" and section 4.4 on page 40 supports the discount reduction because of "a comparison with off-peak discounts offered in other Australian jurisdictions which are generally lower in value and more restrictive in the hours of operation". It should be noted in this case that weekend train service frequency in other Australian jurisdictions is greater than that provided by CityRail in Australia's biggest city. For example, trains on all suburban lines in Perth run at 15 minute intervals on weekends, double the frequency of Sydney's trains. It is also important to note that the survey results outlined in section 2.1 of RailCorp's submission, which was conducted by the Independent Transport Safety and Reliability Regulator, indicates that "frequency of trains" is an area respondents considered needs improvement. The RailCorp submission noted that this survey was conducted before the introduction of the September 2005 timetable, suggesting the survey results reflect the poor service of the past, however the new timetable introduced in September 2005 delivers less train services than before, particularly in off-peak periods.

The table in section 4 of the RailCorp submission (page 36) and section 4.4 on page 40 states the off-peak discount should be reduced to "diminish the inequity in the current fare structure" however consideration should also be given to the inequity of service provision between off-peak and peak periods.

Overcrowding on peak services

Overcrowding continues to be a problem on peak services. Since the introduction of the September 2005 timetable service frequency has been reduced to many stations, resulting in overcrowding on peak services. CityRail continue to operate six carriage trains across the network which also reduces capacity. Unable to board overcrowded trains, passengers are often left stranded on platforms. While it is acknowledged that the trains are more reliable since the September 2005 timetable, capacity has been reduced and this presents other 'reliability' problems when passengers are forced to stay behind and wait for following services. Again the passenger is late for work or misses appointments due to inadequate train services.

It is also important to note that the survey results outlined in section 2.1 of RailCorp's submission, which was conducted by the Independent Transport Safety and Reliability Regulator, indicates that "crowding in trains at peak commuter times" is an area respondents considered needs improvement. The RailCorp submission noted that this survey was conducted before the introduction of the September 2005 timetable, suggesting the survey results reflect the poor service of the past, however the new timetable introduced in September 2005 delivers less peak hour train services than before.

Non air-conditioned carriages

There are currently 498 non air-conditioned carriages on the CityRail network, which is about one third of the total CityRail fleet. Together with overcrowding on peak services it is extremely unpleasant travelling on non air-conditioned trains, particularly on hot days. It is acknowledged that these carriages are to be replaced by 2010 but an increase in fares cannot be justified at least until delivery of the new carriages commences.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the RailCorp proposal for an increase in CityRail fares effectively results in passengers being charged more money for less of a service. It does not take into consideration the reduction in service levels, particularly on weekends since July 2004, the inconvenience passengers were forced to endure during two years of late or cancelled trains, the financial costs to passengers when penalised for running late, or the fact that the last fare increase was granted just before service levels dropped to the appalling standards of 2003/2004/2005. I cannot see how an increase in fares can be justified until CityRail provide their passengers with not only reliable train services, but *frequent* and *modern* services as well. It is also still too early to tell if the reliability we have enjoyed for the past five months will continue, having endured two long years of extremely poor service.

Thank you for your consideration of my submission.