

Joan Chan
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Submission against increased train fares

To whom it may concern

There is absolutely no justification for an increase in train fares for the following reasons:

1. From 1992 to the end of 2005 I used the Northern line to commute to the City, originally from Pennant Hills and more recently from Normanhurst. I left home at the same time each weekday morning and usually left the city at the same time each evening. During the last five years I've witnessed a gradual deterioration in the reliability of the train service. My husband continues to commute and is often late for work and late arriving home. Please note that our clocks and watches are set to Eastern Standard Time and not to 'RailCorp Time'. Our employers also observe Eastern Standard Time and not 'RailCorp Time'. There was a slight improvement in timekeeping following the introduction of the new timetable but this has not continued.

2. I can't rely on your trains to get me anywhere on time. When keeping appointments I need to board an earlier train than necessary and even this isn't foolproof. I hesitate to use the trains to connect me with a flight because of their unreliability. This means I have to pay the cost of a shuttle or taxi service or to rely on someone's goodwill in order to reach the airport.

3. Trains under the new timetable are less frequent, more crowded and still prone to cancellation. Here is one example:

Last week I used your online trip planner to plan a journey from Normanhurst to Helensburgh. The plan required me to board the 8.10 a.m. train to Hornsby, the 8.19 a.m. Hornsby to Central express and the 9.08 a.m. Central to Helensburgh express. Unfortunately for me (and for hundreds of stranded school children waiting on platforms along the Northern Line) the 8.10 a.m. to Hornsby was cancelled. Instead I boarded the late running 8.11 a.m. train to Central, changed at Epping, and connected with the late running 8.32 a.m. Epping to Central express. This failed to reach Central in time to connect with the 9.08 Helensburgh train. The saga continued when the Helensburgh train I finally boarded reached Sutherland, it then became an all stations train instead of an express. A crowd of people who boarded at Sutherland were loud in their complaints about the problems they'd encountered in their own journeys south.

4. Normanhurst has been forgotten in several peak hour services under the new timetable, however, the station provides a service for many residents as well as students from a large private school and a selective high school. Students from both of these schools live outside the area and rely on the train service from Normanhurst station. Yesterday I found myself in Hornsby when a train I boarded at Meadowbank failed to stop at Normanhurst. There were no announcements at Meadowbank Station and the announcement on the train was barely audible and only came when the train was about to depart Thornleigh.

5. Stations are overstaffed and the service provided is poor. Staff cuts would save thousands of dollars that could be used to improve service or even reduce fares. On returning to Town Hall after a busy day at work I used to marvel at the number of customer service, security and cleaning staff who were standing around idle or were chatting to each other. I rather envied them their jobs. I would have been quite happy to work under those conditions. While waiting for my husband I observed the cleaners - sweep a bit, miss a bit, sweep a bit, miss a bit. On arriving at Central on the Helensburgh journey detailed in Point 3, I noted that 6 train presentation staff were standing around with nothing to do. On leaving Hornsby last Friday I noted that 3 ticket inspectors were required to check the ticket of an elderly lady who was loaded with shopping and unable to negotiate the ticket gates. Not one of them offered to help as she struggled to locate the ticket in her handbag.

6. With so many cleaners and presentation staff standing idle why are the stations and trains still dirty? Chewing gum on seats and sticky drinks spilled on the floor are the norm as is the trackside graffiti. If you want to retain your idle staff then use them to do the jobs they are paid for.

7. Air-conditioning in your trains is nonexistent or unreliable. Your customers either cook or freeze. When air-conditioning exists a warm jacket can be needed on the hottest of days while in winter we're tempted to strip to our undies.

8. There is no provision for prams or luggage on interurban trains. What are we supposed to do with these? Prams block the passageways while suitcases block seats required by other passengers.

9. Your much-lauded Millennium Trains do not run on the Northern Line. Someone failed to calculate the power requirements for this train when working out its specifications.

10. Announcements at stations are confused and inaudible, indicator boards are often inaccurate. When there are problems your customer service staff no longer have the courtesy to offer explanations or apologies to your long-suffering customers.

11. Large amounts have been spent on advertising the benefits of a rapidly deteriorating service. Why waste money on advertising? If you provided a good service it would speak for itself.

The move to increase fares for a decreased and unreliable service has confirmed my opinion that the majority of RailCorp management and customer service staff are required to fail examinations in managerial skills, common sense and courtesy before they are employed. You say you compare favourably with the rail service in other cities. Not so, I've used rail services in London, Vienna and Hong Kong and have found their service to be more efficient with better value for money.

The reaction from the travelling public can easily be determined by reading newspaper articles and feedback. These back up my submission that RailCorp is far from providing the standard of service required to justify a fare increase.

Yours faithfully,
Joan C Chan