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Dear Sir/Madam

CITY RAIL FARE REVIEW

1. Summary

- 1.1 The CityRail submission for a 2.9% increase in fares and reduction of the off-peak discount from 39% to 25% is well put together and provides cogent supportive information. It is difficult to put forward persuasive counter arguments and this submission does not attempt to do this. Rather it draws attention to the need for CityRail to improve its operating performance in a number of areas.
- 1.2 CityRail has put forward a reasonable justification for the changes it seeks, though not on the basis of its current performance or practices. In making its determination, IPART is asked to give consideration to making its decision conditional on CityRail taking action to rectify the problems and shortcomings identified below, thereby increasing the efficiency of its operations and the service it provides to the public while ensuring that the public is kept fully informed of the improvements made.
- 1.3 Areas in which it can be agreed that CityRail has made substantial improvements over the last 3 years are in the areas of passenger safety, train cleanliness, curbing fare evasion and station access. In these areas of real achievement, CityRail should be congratulated – even though station access improvements are limited to Sydney suburban stations.
- 1.4 Each car of trains operating on the Southern Highlands route is provided with an electric mains plug at each end of the car (2 plugs/car is not enough) so that laptops can be used. This is an excellent innovation but why is this facility not provided on InterCity or suburban trains?
- 1.5 However, it remains the contention of this submission that CityRail needs to improve its performance in the following areas:

Access

Improve platform access and pedestrian rail crossings at country stations.

Cleanliness

Provide passengers with rubbish bins at station entrances or on platforms, or stop threatening them with prosecution for littering.

Concession Fares

Include these in the proposed fare increase with concession increases of 10-20 cents.

Delays

Obtain and publish accurate record of arrival/departure delays by fitting all trains with GPS and monitoring their station movements by computer. Identify and remove causes of delay. Use timetable times as performance targets. Initially work to Performance Targets = + or – 1 minute of that time.

Modernisation

Work towards a regime where the use of rail lines, the entire signalling system and the driving of trains is fully managed and controlled by computer and set performance targets for achievement of this. Improve alignment and gradient of tracks to highest 21st century standards and continuously adopt and apply the latest technology. Work to improve the speed of trains and introduce world class InterCapital express trains.

Planning

Undertake and publish on the internet comprehensive business planning of the kind described below. Regularly monitor, publish and report on the achievement of performance targets to demonstrate improvement of CityRail performance and services.

Staffing

Undertake in depth review of staffing levels, identify areas of overstaffing and retrench supernumerary. Work towards further reduction of staff through adoption of latest technology, improvements to structure and organisation, by multi-skilling and by improving resource management.

Timetable Reform

Make optimal use of available rail lines and do so in a way which delivers the greatest number of passengers to their destinations in the shortest time possible and consistently on time. Introduce new fast train services stopping only to pick-up/set-down passengers at focal points, or by other means shorten train journeys. Inform the public of changes and encourage them to use the train which is most convenient to them.

Superfluous Assets

Identify and classify all assets which become superfluous by virtue of non-use or adoption of innovations and prepare timetables for their disposal so as to realise best possible prices in the shortest time possible.

2. Access

2.1 There is an on-going need for improvement in non-suburban stations such as:

Bargo where to change platforms it is necessary to climb a 15m. height, 200m. length overhead bridge – difficult for the aged, particularly if they have arthritis in leg joints.

Picton where to change platforms it is necessary to leave the station, proceed along a public highway then reach the other platform by descending stairs. There is no access for the disabled.

2.2 An alternative which far better serves the public is to have a gate controlled pedestrian crossing over the rail lines such as that provided at Tahmoor. This is particularly true for a place like

Bargo where the rail line bisects the village with shops on one side of the rail and Post Office, hotel and school on the other.

- 2.3 A number of other non-suburban stations have limited or no access for the disabled. Presumably this will be rectified, though this assurance was given when fares in 2002. The CityRail submission does not give an undertaking in this regard or explain inertia to date.

3. Cleanliness

- 3.1 In general, CityRail trains are cleaner than they have ever been, thanks to the practice of cleaning teams moving through coaches on a regular basis to remove litter.
- 3.2 It should be noted that cleaning teams are necessary because passengers continue to leave rubbish on trains, despite dire warnings of prosecution and urging passengers to 'leave rubbish in receptacles provided'. This problem is compounded by the fact that CityRail does not provide rubbish bins on suburban or city stations. Indeed it has gone so far as to have bins removed from those stations.
- 3.3 If passengers with rubbish do not leave it on trains, they must carry it with them until they can find a rubbish bin on a street - and these are often difficult to find in suburban streets - or carry it home with them - or of course, leave it on the train.
- 3.4 CityRail staff at Central Station when asked why, contrary to their notices, rubbish bins were not provided, advised that rubbish bins were removed from stations because they represented a security threat. They were seen as receptacles in which bombs could be placed. For this reason additional staff had been engaged at larger stations to pick-up rubbish left on the platforms. They agreed that notices claiming that CityRail provided bins was misleading and contrary to policy. Nevertheless fines would be imposed on litterbugs.
- 3.5 If rubbish bins in railway stations are a security threat, why are they not a security threat when provided at the corners of major intersections where hundreds of people wait to cross the roads in the centre of Sydney? CityRail claims do not sound true.

4. Concession Fares

- 4.1 The CityRail proposal is that no change be made to concession fares. If a fare increase is to be granted this too should be questioned. There are no cogent reasons why these highly concessional fares should remain unchanged.
- 4.2 The Government, as opposed to City Rail, is to be congratulated for the special consideration given to those on low incomes, usually concession card holders. I have to say that travel by rail, indeed any travel, would be prohibitively expensive were concessions of the kind provided for Sydney Bus and Ferry services and CityRail not given.
- 4.3 However, if fare increases are to be introduced it seems less than equitable for concessional fares to be unaffected and consideration should be given to increasing them, possibly by as much as 20 cents or 4%. This would recognize the fact that concession tickets can be used for multiple journeys - eg: travel by Train from Campbelltown to Circular Key and then by Ferry to Manley.

5. Delays

5.1 The claim made by CityRail that this problem has been overcome to the extent that in January 2006, 93% of trains operated on time must be challenged. The normal practice of City Rail not giving a full and cogent explanation for delays also needs to be questioned.

5.2 Appropriateness of the methodology and its application by CityRail to determine the level of on time running needs to be critically reviewed, possibly by an external authority, before CityRail claims of running on time are accepted.

5.3 An acceptable definition of running on time should be that arrivals and departures achieved are as published in the CityRail timetable, with these times being treated as performance targets. They are either achieved, or they are not, within a tolerance of + or - one minute.

5.4 The reality seems to be that Departure and Arrival delays are commonplace and a daily occurrence which cause particular problems for those who are dependent on linking with other transport in order to reach their final destination. Picton buses usually wait up to 10 minutes for late trains but longer than that, they go and passengers on late trains must walk to their end destination or make other arrangements.

5.5 A survey of the Central to Goulburn service in the first week of March 2006 shows the following:-

1/3/06. 15.46 train from Central to Goulburn delayed departure 2 minutes while guard finished chatting. Train got to end of platform and stopped for further 4 minutes. Arrived Campbelltown and stopped for 17 minutes waiting for a driver. Why the driver in charge from Central to Campbelltown could not continue to Moss Vale not explained. Train arrived Bargo **20 minutes late.**

2/3/06. 15.46 train from Central to Goulburn arrived Moss Vale **5 minutes late.**

3/3/06. 15.46 train from Central to Goulburn arrived Mittagong **2 minutes early.**

4/3/06. 17.25 train from Central to Goulburn arrived Mittagong **7 minutes late.**

6/3/06. 15.46 train from Central to Goulburn delayed reaching Picton by 28 minutes due to suburban train break-down at Macquarie Fields and apparent inability or unwillingness to re-route around the break-down. By dint of hurtling through the countryside at break-neck speed the train arrived at Mittagong **30 minutes late.**

7/3/06. 15.46 train from Central to Goulburn departed Central on time but arrived at Moss Vale **6 minutes late.**

8/3/06. 15.46 train from Central to Goulburn delayed departure by 5 minutes, then proceeded only just beyond the end of the platform before stopping for a further 7 minutes, before creeping its way to Glenfield which it reached at 16.37 or **18 minutes late** and departed Campbelltown at 16.56 or **20 minutes late.**

5.6 It should be noted that the most frequent and substantial delays occur with trains that are outward bound from the city and that country trains inward bound to Sydney are far less frequently delayed until after they reach Glenfield. Most delays to inward bound trains occur thereafter when they are using suburban lines, suggesting need for better management in this area.

5.7 Even if it is assumed that there are no delays to inward bound trains reaching City Circle stations – and this is not true - the above survey of delays to Goulburn trains indicates a rate which is far higher than admitted delays affecting 8.5% of arrivals/departures claimed in the CityRail submission.

5.8 CityRail should be required to install GPS tracking equipment on each train so that the position of each train and its arrival/departure times can be automatically recorded. This would ensure all delays are accurately classified and recorded. Reasons for certain categories of delays could then be identified and investigated, then removed and prevented from reoccurring.

6. Modernisation

6.1 Is it too much to expect an organisation clinging to 19th century practices (see para. 8.3) to commit itself to continuously modernise and adopt the latest technology? It should not be and an ironclad commitment to this process and publicly reporting on adopted innovations put in place must be obtained from CityRail.

6.2 CityRail should be actively aspiring to and working towards a regime where the use of rail lines, the entire signalling system and the diving of trains is fully managed and controlled by computer. Although these goals will not be realised in the short-term, they will never be achieved by CityRail unless targets are set and they are actively pursued and progress towards their attainment is measured and publicly reported on. IPART should insist on this.

6.3 Much of the rail track currently in use was built on gradients and alignments which took into account the traction of steam engines used in the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries. Although some improvements have been made having regard to the improved power and traction of electric and diesel engines, these do not appear to be extensive and there is certainly a need and scope for considerable improvements. Without them, significantly better services are not likely to be delivered to the public.

6.4 Without these improvements, it may not be possible to significantly increase the current speed at which trains move, let alone introduce true express services such as those which now exist between Tokyo and Osaka or Paris and Lyons, benchmarks which CityRail should be keen to emulate. An objective of CityRail should be the introduction and operation of high speed InterCapital express trains to Canberra, Melbourne and Brisbane.

7. Planning

7.1 'Development of customer focus Strategic Plans and Sectorisation Plans'. What are these and why are they, and CityRails' Business Plan not made available through publication on the Internet so that the public can judge and make comment on their content. Given that CityRail has a public monopoly, there should be no reason for their non publication and the public should not need to rely on investigative journalism to learn what is being done - or not done to overcome shortcomings.

7.2 At the very last, the public have a right to know what detailed performance targets are set out in the CityRail Business Plan¹ as well as the methodology used to monitor and report against them. Platitudinous statements about the future asserting that CityRail is creating 'clearways' by untangling our complex rail system do not satisfy or reassure public demands improved train services now, not some unspecified time in the future.

¹ It is assumed that CityRail prepares, maintains and implements rolling Business Plans covering the current 12 months and a period of at least 10 years, which include material under basic headings such as Objectives, Policies, Major Strategies, Marketing, SWOT Analysis, Functions, Organisation and Staffing, Overview, Capital and Recurrent Budgets, Performance Targets and stipulating requirements for Monitoring and Reporting and Review and Revision.

8. Staffing

- 8.1 CityRail appears to be overstaffed. I use the word ‘appears’ because I am not informed of either the structure or staffing levels of CityRail and can only make this observation from sightings of employees who appear to be supernumerary because they are under-employed.
- 8.2 For example, it is frequently observed that a group of three or more employees are found at ticket barriers to ensure that passengers pass through without problem, when one employee could undertake that task.
- 8.3 Given that it is the 21st century, it is astonishing to see CityRail engages staff to signal with a flag to train drivers may depart the station, in a manner reminiscent of 19th century practice. In this age of modern reliable communications technology this is entirely anachronistic, as is the need for three employees in a drivers cabin or delay in train departures because of the need to change or take on board additional drivers – see para. 5.5 above.
- 8.4 It is not unusual to see groups of CityRail employees having a chat or otherwise clearly under employed, or to see them sitting alone apparently ruminating on what should be done next. At many stations, particularly after 5.30 pm., it is impossible to find any CityRail staff when one is in need of information.

9. Timetable Reform

- 9.1 Does CityRail regard it as acceptable that a journey of 200 kms., from Goulburn to Sydney Central, should take 3.25 hours when a coach travelling on congested roads can do the journey an hour quicker? The answer is yes, because that is the way it operates.
- 9.2 Is it reasonable for a train travelling from Newcastle to Sydney Central to stop at 29 stations en-route? CityRail thinks so, because it runs such trains.
- 9.3 The above gives little indication that CityRail operations *make optimal use of available rail lines and do so in a way which delivers the greatest number of passengers to their destinations in the shortest time possible and on time*. What they do indicate is the need for reform of the timetable to make these fundamental objectives a reality.
- 9.4 It is certainly possible to devise a computer program which will address the last three criteria noted above and show optimum use of the rail network consistent with their achievement together with options available in the event of rail blockage at any specified location. The program should also take into account the number of passengers using each station and their destination – information which is already available to CityRail from its ticketing system.
- 9.5 Why CityRail has not devised and used such a computer program is not known. However, it is evident from its current timetables that it has not. This may be due to the realisation that if trains can not be operated so that they arrive and depart with less than 1 minute delay of the stated time in the timetable – and do so consistently - it becomes very difficult if not impossible to ensure that rail lines are used in an optimal way. Can IPART require that it do so as a condition of it approving fare increases?
- 9.6 An obvious way of improving the availability of train services and shortening the duration of travel – though inferior to that suggested above – is to pick up passengers at smaller stations using ‘local’ trains which (a) after a given number of station stops proceed as expresses to Sydney Central/City Circle and vica-versa, or (b) drop off passengers at ‘focal point’ stations

where they are picked up by express trains stopping only at a few select 'focal point' stations before stopping at Sydney Central/City Circle.

- 9.7 A poor example of such trains is to be found operating from Sydney Central Station to Goulburn at 3.46 each weekday. On leaving Sydney Central it stops only at Glenfield and Campbelltown before stopping at all stations to Goulburn. The service might be improved were it to stop only at 'focal point' stations with passengers for smaller stations being conveyed to them by local train or small bus.
- 9.8 On week days there are two trains from Sydney Central to Goulburn and one in the other direction which only stop at Glenfield and Campbelltown before stopping at all other stations en-route to Moss Vale/Goulburn. These three trains appear to be the only ones offering a de-facto express service to Glenfield/Campbelltown and as such are much patronised by people travelling to these destinations.
- 9.9 CityRail does all it can to prevent anyone boarding these trains unless they hold a ticket for travel to or from stations beyond Campbelltown. The reason for this conduct is not known, but passengers boarding these trains at Campbelltown or Glenfield are often threatened with a \$200 fine or being hauled before a law court. At Central station announcements make no mention that the Goulburn train stops at Glenfield or Campbelltown with the deliberate intention of duping the public who wish to make use of an express service to those places.
- 9.10 A similar case exists where the Canberra train is concerned. Passengers are only permitted to board this train if they hold seating tickets – even though the train usually consists of 3 cars with some 300 seats of which less than 10% are filled. 'Casual' passengers are required to travel from Central to Campbelltown (21 stops) then by another train to Moss Vale (12 stops) taking 3 hours. An almost empty Canberra train reaches Moss Vale (after only 2 stops) in half that time.
- 9.11 Rather than threatening people with legal action, fines or refusing access to 'casual' passengers, which CityRail has no right to impose – and it knows it – the public might be better served were express trains to focal point destinations such as Campbelltown operated more frequently. Apparently CityRail staff have yet to learn the difference between serving the public and stupid duplicity and regulation.

10. Superfluous Assets

- 10.1 CityRail should have a task force – possibly part of its Internal Audit Branch – to systematically identify its unused and un-required assets so that they or others branches of management can determine and implement the best way of disposing of them.
- 10.2 There does not appear to be such a group or, if there is, their advice on unused and un-required assets does not seem to have been acted on. CityRail continues to own assets of significant value some of which are highly visible (others not so) which do not appear to be required for its efficient operation.
- 10.3 Their timely identification and sale might raise significant sums which could be applied to off-setting operating losses or, preferably, investing in new technology and capital purchases.

Yours faithfully,

Mike Pope.