

Mr James Cox,
Chief Executive Officer,
IPART,
PO Box Q290
QVB Post Office
NSW 1230



Dear Mr Cox,

Off Peak Rail Fare Increase Should be Rejected

I refer to the submission by Railcorp for a fare increase from 1st July on Cityrail trains. I particularly object to their request for a large increase in off peak fares because Off peak and weekend services have deteriorated markedly since the last IPART Review. Specifically IPART should consider the following:

1. Service frequently drastically reduced by 30% on some lines and 50% on others.
2. Travel times increased significantly in some cases well above that claimed by Cityrail.
3. The “public consultation” with regard to the new timetable on the Illawarra line was a complete farce.
4. Railcorp appears to be concealing from the minister the true nature of complaints made in letters to him.

1. **Service frequently drastically reduced by 30% on some lines and 50% on others.** One would have thought that any application for a massive fare increase would be based on a better service. Service frequency is one of the most important measures by which the quality of a city’s rail service should be measured. Since the last time IPART reviewed fares the above reductions in service frequency (with presumably cost savings) have occurred. The reduction in service frequency is often even worse for people who have to transfer from one line to another where missed connections and resultant further increases in travel time are much more likely.
2. **Travel times increased significantly in some cases well above that claimed by Cityrail.** In Railcorp’s submission they claim a “slight” increase in journey times of 3 to 6 minutes. However if you take the typical weekend service from Bondi to Waterall and compare the new timetable starting in May 2006 to the weekend service prior to the 30% cuts in service when Costa was Minister for Transport the journey has increased from an average of 59 minutes to 73 minutes – hardly a slight increase. Worse still changeover times for connections at Sutherland (for travellers travelling to/from stations between Loftus to Waterfall and the Cronulla Branch) have increased from 3 minutes to 27 minutes making such journeys unworkable.
3. **The “public consultation” with regard to the new timetable on the Illawarra line was a complete farce.** In written submissions to my local member, the Minister and Cityrail I pointed out that there was a serious flaw in the new timetable (due to come into effect in May 2006). This is the wait of almost half an hour that will be experienced by passengers changing trains at Sutherland in off peak and weekend times when travelling to/from stations

Loftus to Waterfall and the Cronulla branch. **THIS IS A FLAW THAT DID NOT EXIST IN THE PREVIOUS TIMETABLE.** However Cityrail has ignored this issue and not even acknowledged it in their published findings of the survey. (I also know of other people who raised this issue as well and it was front page news in the *St George and Sutherland Shire Leader*). Railcorp obviously had no intention of doing anything other than making very minor adjustments to the timetable despite the fact that it is seriously flawed. Why introduce a timetable that is much worse than the present one? (And then ask for a massive fare increase!!!!)

- 4. Railcorp appears to be concealing from the minister the true nature of complaints made in letters to him.** In recent times I have written to both my local member and the minister about issues to do with Railcorp and Cityrail. The resulting replies have been an insult and worse still I believe amount to Railcorp concealing from the minister the true nature of complaints. For example in response to my *specific* complaints (detailed above) concerning dramatically increased journey times due to the failure of trains to connect at Sutherland in the new timetable I got the following reply signed by the minister on 16th February.

The new timetable will be introduced for this line on 28th May 2006 following completion of works relating to the Clearways Plan being undertaken at Bondi Junction. Currently only fourteen trains can be turned around at Bondi Junction during the peak periods. The new turnback will allow more trains per hour to turn around at Bondi Junction, increasing capacity on the line. [my comment – if so where are the increased train services in the new timetable?]

New safety measures introduced following the inquiry into the Waterfall train accident made the previous timetable unworkable. The new timetable, the biggest overhaul of rail services since 1992 means we will have a safer, more reliable train system. [And so on blah, blah, blah]

The minister will be signing the above and if he doesn't know the nature of the original letter will think the reply sounds reasonable. However I had pointed out a *specific* major flaw in the new timetable and get served up this rubbish (lifted out of a Railcorp press release no doubt.) I had asked the minister "Do you consider a wait of half an hour which will in many cases triple the travel time to be an improvement, especially considering that this flaw did **NOT** exist in the previous timetable?"

Another example. I had complained that the practice of suspending trains totally on the Illawarra line (and others) was not necessary in 99% of cases and *specifically* pointed out that there were four tracks between Hurstville and the city and that it should not be necessary to close all four tracks except in unusual circumstances. Again in the same letter the minister replied:

The Eastern Suburbs and Illawarra Line requires a level of ongoing maintenance to ensure the safe and reliable operation of trains. Generally works are carried out in off-peak periods such as weekends or at night to ensure the least inconvenience is caused to rail customers.

Again the minister doesn't know the true nature of the original letter and is unaware that the response has nothing to do with my original complaint.

Finally another example. I had complained that the announcements on rail stations were:

- Too loud
- Too frequent and therefore counterproductive

Amongst other points I had given two examples. "I recently was on Town Hall station and every announcement was preceded with someone shouting "Attention Passengers". How rude it that? !!! There is also at least one train still fitted with a recorded voice that shouts "Stand Clear, Doors Closing" in an extremely loud voice. I thought this feature had been abandoned following complaints from passengers. It is extremely rude!)"

The practice of saturation announcements is counterproductive because passengers will simply tune out (like the kids whose mother continually yells at them). Therefore if an important announcement is ever made it is likely to be missed. The loudness of announcements is frequently too loud and very unpleasant. Contrast this with the Melbourne system (and in their submission Cityrail has compared themselves to other systems where it suits them) where closing door warnings are given by a simple beeping sound. This works brilliantly. It happens at the right time, everyone knows what it means and it is not intrusive. And only essential announcements are made on stations and you know to listen if one is made.

The minister's reply? ... *announcements on stations are controlled by a Digital Voice Announcement system. I understand that the system is set to ensure that all announcements are made at the same volume.* Again the reply has nothing to do with my specific complaint.

The point of all this is that in their submission Railcorp attempts to portray themselves as customer focussed and improving customer service. Instead they are an arrogant organization that simply ignores complaints and then conceals them from the minister.

Unless IPART is simply a rubber stamp I cannot see how, in the light of the above, that you can approve a large increase in off peak rail fares.

Yours sincerely,



Owen Heldon