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Woonona
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Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal
Submission to the Inquiry into Rail Fares 2006

1 1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last week CITIRAIL gave the perfect opening for my submission to IPART hearing on fares for 2006:

Wednesday March 22: the 6:53 am train ex-Bellambi to Bondi Junction was late. The stationmaster made an announcement, no doubt the only information he had at the time, that the train is 7 minutes late, leaving Fairy Meadow. I and the other passengers appreciate being told what is happening, I note that there was only one other explanation all trip.

- The train was later than that, it eventually arrived at Bellambi more than 15 minutes late and proceeded along the usual route, getting later and later. At Helensberg the train was held up to allow the following train to overtake us. This was the only other announcement on the whole trip - "we are waiting to allow the following train to go past, passengers can change trains if they like".
- We all believe that Citirail did this to reduce the statistics re late trains.
- I arrived at Redfern station 40 minutes late and arrived at work at Ashfield 50 minutes late. The train went to the Central terminal not Bondi Junction, resulting in most of the passengers being at least 50 minutes late. As one passenger stated, this shows complete disrespect for the passengers on the train. What is the flow on in lost productivity for up to more than 800 passengers arriving at work this late?
- Half the carriages for the afternoon train were suburban, and the other half interurban - the 5:23 pm ex-Redfern to Port Kembla.

Thursday March 23: the 6:53 am train ex-Bellambi to Bondi Junction was again late. It also ran with half of the carriages suburban, and the other half interurban.

Tuesday March 27: the 5:23 pm ex-Redfern to Port Kembla comprised 8 suburban carriages - no toilets.

Wednesday March 28: the 6:53 am train ex-Bellambi to Bondi Junction comprised 8 suburban carriages - no toilets. The 5:23 pm ex-Redfern to Port Kembla comprised 4 suburban carriages. The preceding train, to Waterfall had interurban carriages, why were they not put onto the Port Kembla train?

2 2. SUMMARY

The trains are still not reliable enough, often the service is poor quality - they are late on average at least once a week. Trains are cancelled without explanation. If alternate

arrangements are made, these are often not communicated in time to allow passengers to catch the alternate train.

We frequently have 'sub standard' suburban carriages on the interurban trips. The seats are plastic, sticky (your clothes, trousers, shirts, dresses all stick to the seat) and far less comfortable than the interurban seats. The level of cleanliness is unsatisfactory. I have to wash my clothes more often than when I did not travel by train.

The communication is very inconsistent and very poor. This is both on the platforms and on the trains, particularly when there are delays.

There are, without doubt, some excellent individual staff who make big effort with announcements, and do their best to help passengers. I have come across these, as noted below. The service can run efficiently, on time and in clean comfortable carriages. However, in my experience, the overall standard is too often unreliable and of poor quality. It is in my view, as can be seen below, of an unacceptable standard for a modern inter-urban and suburban passenger rail service in 2006!

I see no justification for a fare increase from my experiences over the last 18 months.

3 3. MY JOURNEY

I travel from Bellambi to Ashfield in the Inner West of Sydney, and return. Since last year I make this trip on average 4 days a week. The other day I travel to Wollongong and back by train. I have been travelling on this route for several years. I sit with other passengers who have travelled for far longer than I, some are newer to the trains. We discuss the service and standards. I do not speak for others. However, there are many who share my sentiments. I travelled on public transport for much of the time I was at school and university and a lot of my work life.

4 4. CRITERIA FOR A RELIABLE CONTEMPORARY TRAIN SERVICE

The several things that contribute to a safe reliable train system. On top is safety. The others are - arriving on time; comfortable travel; replacement of cancelled trains; and good communication. I have measured the first 3 of these to have the performance for Citirail on the South Coasts line.

5 5 PERFORMANCE ON SOUTH COAST LINE

I kept a note of the train problems that happen and have details for various periods over recent years. My records are not a scientific study, however, they are accurate records of my experience. I have included some details in a table below from four random periods (of 2 months duration each) since 2004 to provide evidence of my experiences of the inadequate service of Citirail. These are very valid figures. The details of dates and time are attached as Appendix 1.

Table 1: Bi-monthly record of train performances on the South Coast line 2004-2005.

Criteria	July/August 2004	Feb/March 2005	July/August 2005	Feb/March 2006
Trains late	21	28	14	12
Suburban carriages	6	36	34	26
Cancelled train	1	3	1	2
Total	28	68	49	40

5.1 Overall performance

The table tells the story. On the 3 measurable criteria – lateness, cancelled trains and suburban carriages (sub-standard on an interurban route) - the overall performance has deteriorated since July/August 2004. It got worse in 2005 and has picked up a bit in 2006. The overall performance has not yet returned to 2004 standards.

The net result is that passengers have to put up with what I believe is a service that is not up to standard. This is no justification for fare increases.

5.2 Arriving on time

As can be seen trains are still running late, with between 12 and 28 trains late for a 8-9 week period, noting that I currently only record for 4 days a week. This would indicate possibly a worse result for the third and fourth periods.

It is reasonable to expect trains to run on or close to time. The result is that they do not and I have been late for work, late for appointments and late for family and children's activities such as concerts.

I record arrival time outside of scheduled time of more than 5 minutes, a reasonable expectation for a modern rails service in 2006. There are few less than 7 minutes late, with most more than 10 minutes late, as can be seen in Appendix 1.

I have not counted all situations where one train (say the 6:53 ex-Bellambi) is 3 minutes late, and I miss the connecting train to Ashfield and get to work 10-15 minutes late. I have generally recorded where the train is late ex-Ashfield in the afternoon and I miss the 5:23 to Port Kembla and I get home later than usual. The number of late or missed connections from Ashfield in the afternoon has reduced since the timetable change in late 2005. This is an improvement.

5.3 Cancelled trains

Trains are cancelled and not replaced and this makes the passengers both late and results in more crowded trains. Recently this happened and I was with passengers in the entry section of the carriage. It was quite hot and a lady fainted. I and a Citirail employee helped move her to a room in Sutherland station. She recovered and was assisted back to the train. The guard kept an eye on her for the remainder of the journey. I do compliment the staff involved who helped the lady. However, this should not happen - ie over crowded trains due to cancellation and no replacement.

My experience of some cancellations is that on some occasions Citirail may start a replacement train at another station, such as Hurstville or Redfern. However, I have also

experienced no announcement of the changes to allow me and other passengers to catch the replacement train. Others who travel from the city including my daughter have also experienced this, ie no announcements. Most times the replacement trains have a lot fewer passengers.

5.4 Quality of the service

There is continued use of sub urban carriages instead of interurban carriages on the trip from Wollongong to Sydney. These carriages are less comfortable, for example people have stiff and sore backs, clothes stick to the seats and they are plastic which is hotter.

There are difficulties with lack of toilets, this is further exacerbated when all 8 carriages are suburban. There are potentially more than 800 passengers travelling up to 2 hours without a toilet. This would not be allowed in other public events, why are we subjected to it? This is another example of what passengers see as a sub-standard service.

I have not counted the occasions of poor air conditioning (varied temperatures, bad smells), poor equipment or driver skill (such as jerking the train to a halt) and other discomforts.

6 6 COMMUNICATION

6.1 Announcements

The announcements in my experience are sometimes very good and at other times very poor and sometimes totally absent. I find the train guards and real person platform announcements inadequate in content (no explanation for some delays or changes or not enough information); lacking clarity (poor equipment, soft voices, poor diction and some very strong accents make it very hard to understand the content when some staff try to make an announcement); consistency (it is very varied in terms of what is said and when it is said).

The automated announcements on the platforms are certainly clearer and much better than they used to be. However, the platform announcements when there is a problem are often difficult to understand.

The key thing for a passenger is that they are kept informed of what is going on – especially in a delay. Unfortunately in my experience this does not happen consistently.

6.2 Feed back line

I have sent feedback via e-mail to the Citirail site. The first time I received what I considered to be a reasonable, rational explanation, and an apology. This was a very satisfactory response for me.

The second time, I received a ‘stock’ standard answer that was factually wrong. When I challenged this I received what I consider to be a very poor response. After a couple of exchanges I had received an inadequate explanation and no apology for incorrect information.

Other who have used the e-mail feedback line report similar responses.

I do use it occasionally, but have low expectations of the response.

7 7 SAFETY

I travel the same line that experienced the Waterfall disaster. I am not in a position to know if the recommendations of the inquiry in to Waterfall and the Blue Mountains disaster have yet been fully implemented. Independent advice on this would be reassuring.

8 8 CITIRAIL INFORMATION

I note that when Citirail most recently changed the South Coast timetables, they added time to each journey. They propose to change them again and to add more time to our journeys. This effectively changes the counting rules.

There are problems in comparing performance measures over a period of time. This is not adequately explained in the Citirail submission. Similarly the survey data from the most recent survey is questionable in terms of construct validity and the results questionable.

9 Conclusion

In conclusion, I do not feel that the service achieved the reliability or quality that warrants further fare increases. I am not sure of the adequacy of the safety measures taken. I urge IPART not to accept the recommendations for increases.

Philip Smith