

31 March 2006

Mr James P Cox
Chief Executive Officer
Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal of NSW
P.O. Box Q290
QVB Post Office NSW 1230

Submission on review of CityRail fares

Dear Mr Cox

I wish to make a submission on your review of fares to be charged by CityRail.

I do not believe that any increase is justified at this time, and I am particularly opposed to the higher increases proposed for off-peak fares.

While there has undoubtedly been some improvement in peak reliability since introduction of the new timetable, this has been at the expense of a slower system, and lower off-peak frequencies. A journey from my local station, Waverton, to Town Hall, is now 40% slower than it was previously. In addition, services are now less frequent with frequencies stretching to 30 minutes on Saturday and Sunday nights...and we all know, of course, that many more people go out on Monday nights (15 minute frequency) than Saturday nights!! How can CityRail possibly claim an increase in off-peak fares when there is no evidence whatsoever of the reliability of those services?

Slowing of services to improve CityRail's on-time running figures for peak services, means that off-peak trains either run early or else spend an interminable time sitting at stations like North Sydney and Central waiting for the timetable to catch up - hardly a way to make off-peak services attractive! Clearly this has absolutely nothing to do with making the system more reliable. If the costs have increased because of running the services more slowly, then the public should not be asked to pay for that.

As I have stated, there is no evidence on the reliability of services in off-peak periods. I contend that, in fact, despite reduced frequencies, reliability remains less than satisfactory in off-peak periods, when all the tired old arguments about Sydney having "one of the world's most complex rail systems" [*What a joke! Try "one of the world's most badly-run systems"!*], and slowing down the system to give longer dwell times at 'congested' stations, do not apply.

On a recent Saturday evening, I had reason to travel by train from Waverton to Bondi Junction. Of the four trains that my return trip involved, only one ran on time. Two ran between 5 and 7 minutes late, while the return train from Bondi Junction arrived 12 minutes late and left 5 minutes late....and that was between 10.30 and 11.00 on a Saturday night! To add insult to injury, on return to Town Hall, no 'up' escalators were operating from the low level platform 4, nor was the lift operable. On the same evening, the lift serving platforms 3, 5 and 6 was out of action and was observed to be still out of action the following Monday. Is this an example of CityRail... "lifting its game"?

Reduced frequencies, unreliable services, and the painfully frequent periods of trackwork inflicted on the hapless traveller: Is this is what off-peak travellers are to be asked to pay more for?

Off-peak fares are a common device in good business designed to encourage custom during quieter periods. It is patently obvious that the cost of providing services or carrying additional passengers in peak hours is much higher than off-peak when there is significant spare capacity on most services.

Surely the overriding aim should be to maximise public transport use in periods when capacity is available and additional passengers can be carried at essentially no additional cost? Unfortunately, I can see absolutely no evidence that CityRail has any desire or intent to grow its patronage. Rather, its prime driver appears to be to increase revenue relative to costs; in other words carrying the least number of people for the maximum revenue. This is clear from the ridiculous statements made to the effect that off-peak frequencies have been reduced 'to match demand'. Given the undoubted loss in patronage following the slashing of off-peak weekend and weekday services in the last two timetables, CityRail will be well positioned to "justify" further cuts in the next timetable to match the further reduced demand. Just the sort of self-fulfilling prophecy that CityRail management must love!

In summary, I do not believe that any fare increase is justified at this time. While peak reliability may have increased, other measures of service quality such as travel speeds, frequencies, graffiti, on-board announcements and passenger information have not. It remains a sadly sub-standard service masquerading as a world class 'wannabe' system. I am especially opposed to an increase in off-peak fares as CityRail is unable to produce any evidence of its performance in off-peak. Only when CityRail starts to record its performance in off-peak periods, and can clearly demonstrate improved services, will it be in a position to have its claims for an increase in off-peak fares considered, but not before.

Thank you for considering my submission.

Yours sincerely

Robert Paterson