Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal

24 July 2007

Re Cityrail fare review

Dear Sir / Madam

I object most strongly to any rail fare increase for periodical tickets, ie for frequent and regular users.

I am a regular user of the Cityrail Cumberland line and make the return trip from Campbelltown to Parramatta every working day and have done so for several years.

With rare exceptions the 6.46 from Campbelltown is unheated and arrives at the platform ‘at ambient temperature’, which after a winter night is usually between freezing and 5 degrees. The doors have ventilation slots to outside, some window seals are damaged, so that for the 50 minutes travel the train interior temperature remains drafty and just above freezing.

11 yrs ago the $60 million Cumberland line was opened with great fanfares by Mr Carr, train services every half hour. Now there are 2 trains to Parramatta in the morning, 3 return in the afternoon, workdays only. If one is lucky…

I usually return on the 4.50 pm from Parramatta. Cancellations are frequent, for example every time there is football or a pop concert at Homebush. The reason given is usually “you can connect at Granville”, which is true. But the train arriving at Granville from the City is already full, standing room only for most of the 200 or so passengers ‘spilled over’ from the cancelled train.

In any case, a rather strange business philosophy that ignores the regular customer – ie taxpayers returning from work – in favour of visitors to some entertainment, who could also reach the venue by changing trains somewhere.

Considering that the regular demand at that time is outbound from the City, the train could very well take its regulars to Campbelltown and pick up the visitors to Homebush on the return journey.

Recently the train was terminated at Granville (ie away from the scheduled route via Merrylands) for the following reasons given in this order:

- Because of late running (onboard PA system)
- Because of a mechanical failure (Granville station PA system)
- There is nothing wrong with this train (train driver).

Whereupon the train headed empty at full speed direction City.

At another occasion the morning train to Parramatta (which should have turned off the City line at Merrylands) carried straight on via Granville to Olympic Park, through the loop and back to Granville and arrived at Parramatta about 40 Minutes late… no explanation.

It is virtually impossible to get any relevant information through the Cityrail infoline 131 500 or through their website.

It is normal that at 16.30 the Cityrail website says “all trains on or near schedule”, 5 minutes later the video screen in the lower concourse of Parramatta station displays the same information, while the train board immediately to the right shows the Campbelltown train cancelled.

Station personnel refer any request for information to 131 500, where the cancellation often is not known at all and they are unable to provide any useful information. I have been asked by a “travel consultant” for my “preferred mode of travel to my destination”, but at the same time he could not tell me if my “preferred mode of travel” at 5.20 would be operating, I should inquire at the station. Where I got referred to 131 500…

Complaints to Cityrail are useless. Often they are not answered, so for example a complaint about cancelled trains on 19 March 07 (complaint number 532 9372), while in other instances the written reply is meaningless ‘policy whaffle’ and any subsequent request for substantiated information is ignored (for example 532 8147 and 533 0016).

The on-time statistics are misleading, since they ignore the 'flow-on' effect for the customers, ie missed connections especially where infrequent bus services are involved, or the problems of being picked-up by some one who is unable to get any up-to-date information about train cancellations before leaving from home.

By comparison Berlin (Germany) is a city roughly the same size and population as Sydney. I have a copy of the 2005 public transport information, which includes a fare refund claim form if the service arrives more than 20 minutes late at its destination. At night the taxi fare will be refunded.

This is customer service !!!

Regards

Mr J W Strauch