To whom it may concern,

Following this message I include a copy of an e-mail I sent recently to the Deputy Premier and Minister for Transport regarding the bigger picture of Sydney's public transport infrastructure. I encourage you to read that message once you have considered my submission to the fare rise review, as it explains the context of my submission in more detail.

I have a relatively simple submission with regard to any suggestion of increasing prices on CityRail:

Forget it.

The debate in the media is so focussed on the quality of wood of this particular tree, no-one seems to be pointing out that we're actually in the wrong forest. Whether or not the service is good/bad/awful or the maintenance is poor/average/spectacular or the level of either of those things has improved/deteriorated is completely and utterly immaterial. Passengers shouldn't pay more for a good or improved service, and they shouldn't pay less for a poor or deteriorating service.

Public transport should never be about "customers" paying for a "service" they receive - because the beneficiary of a good, well-utilised public transport system is THE ENTIRE CITY. Fares in Sydney are already high enough that some people choose not to take public transport because of the price, and the moment that starts to happen, you might as well shut down the system and go home. It isn't about economic laws of supply and demand: it's about the benefit to the city - cleaner air, less noise, fewer cars, more relaxed workers, etc. etc. etc. - from having a well-patronised system. Every time I get in my car, *that* is when I benefit from every single person that is taking the train that day... not to mention every time I open my window or go for a walk.

So forget the fare increase: have a look at the Vancouver system (mentioned repeatedly in the following message to the deputy premier), then start working on emulating that system to make our fares CHEAP and SIMPLE... and then perhaps we can begin to move *forward* to square one.

Sincerely,
Robin Darroch

Forwarded message follows:

Dear Deputy Premier Watkins,

In February of this year, I left Port Hedland, Western Australia (after living there for two years) to take up a new job based in Sydney. Prior to living in Port Hedland, I had lived in Phoenix, Arizona (USA), Adelaide, South Australia and Canberra. As a new "immigrant" to New South Wales, and Sydney particularly, I must first say that I am enjoying living in Sydney far more than I expected to.
Although it takes some determination at times, I leave the car at home most days and catch the train to and from work. I am rather fortunate in that I am presently housesitting in Woollahra, and I work at the airport, so my commute is well served by trains and - not being a terribly long distance - the commute by train is both fairly reliable and relatively inexpensive.

I believe a strong factor in my general enjoyment of Sydney is avoiding the need to drive: on occasions when I do need to drive in Sydney traffic, I find it a universally frustrating and generally slow experience. It takes about three minutes just to get out of my front driveway (onto Ocean St), and that's only the start. After years and years of

misguided investment into road infrastructure with concomitant neglect of public transport infrastructure, Sydney is now in the unenviable position of having not one but *two* inadequate transport systems: the neglected and often confusing public transport drives more people onto the roads, and the more people that end up in private cars on the roads, the less any attempt to improve road infrastructure can achieve in real terms. The latest budget included a reassuring return to funding public transport, but even so it seems like the budget only includes very "safe" attempts to fix a system now in need of radical ideas.

So, rather than complaining about the government's lack of real action on this important issue, here instead are some radical ideas learned from public transport systems that really work. All of these will cost real money, but the potential for HUGE returns in terms of the utility of our roads, the quality of our air, and the very liveability of our city makes that well worth while.

Idea #1: Unify it. It is absurd in the 21st century that any city - let alone one which considers itself (usually rightly) to be one of the great cities of the world - should have a public transport system where you need a completely different ticket, fare, and fare structure, to ride on a bus or a train or a ferry or light rail. Bus fares work on invisible sections, train fares work on the approximate distance between end stations, ferries run on liquid gold (or so it seems)... and it takes real effort to construct and pay for a journey on more than one mode of transportation. I'd suggest you have a quick look at Vancouver's public transport system - http://www.translink.bc.ca/ - to see how this could be done right:
One ticket with one simple fare structure for any journey, whether you use one, two, or three forms of transport. That also means that you have to buy back the privatised elements of it: the Airport Link access fees drive people away from that line in droves (I know - I work with dozens of people who avoid the airport trains and drive instead because of the perceived expense: most are unaware of weekly GatePasses, and otherwise the price of airport station access is simply obscene). The light rail needs to be brought fully in-house too.

Idea #2: Make it cheap. It's one of the stranger ideas in US and Australian cities (compared with most of the rest of the western
world) that public transport systems should aim to recover their costs from passengers. The problem with that approach is when people see the system as too expensive, they therefore avoid it - even if they could still use public transport for less than the real cost of driving. If you make it *obviously* cheap, then you get two benefits
- more of your trains, buses and ferries will be full, potentially gathering MORE revenue than you currently do, and more importantly, your roads will have far fewer cars on them, giving you a sudden boost in the adequacy of your road infrastructure with NO ADDITIONAL INVESTMENT. Again, I commend the Vancouver system's fare structure to you as a model of how to do it right.

Idea #3: Make it available ALL the time. You may have seen some recent articles in the press about Sydney's weekend traffic woes.
This can be directly linked to the fact that Sydney's public transport schedules on weekends are woeful. There is no reason in a cosmopolitan, 24/7 kind of city like Sydney that the trains should operate on a 18/5 schedule (just try making a journey by train on a weekend or between midnight and 6am). I'm not saying that trains should be running at the same frequency at 3am on Sunday as they do at peak hour on Friday afternoon, but even running a train every 20 minutes between midnight and 6am would be a huge improvement in the utility of the system, and apart from the boost during weekday peak hours, the daytime schedules for trains on the weekend should really be the same as on weekdays, rather than reducing to less than 1/3 of weekday capacity as they currently seem to do.

Idea #4: Reduce - or eliminate - zones. The benefit the city gains from a passenger taking public transport instead of driving is directly proportional to the distance they would otherwise travel on the road. If you can get someone in Woollahra to take a train to the airport, well and good - there's a car you've kept off the road for 20 minutes. If you can get someone from Campbelltown to take a train to the airport, that's a car you've kept off the road for an hour (more if there's traffic). The city gains more from the second journey, so why should the second passenger be expected to pay more? Only because our system runs on the misguided notion that the individual passengers are the beneficiaries of public transport, and that it should be a "user pays" system. Nonsense. On occasions when I use my car, *that* is when I benefit most from everyone else using public transport... so ironically the time I should be paying for public transport is when I'm *not* using it. Again, I'd refer you to the zone structure of Vancouver's system - even a 3-zone journey is very cheap, and the zones disappear altogether at off-peak times.

So there are some radical ideas. The reason I've kept referring to Vancouver is to show you that it is possible to implement all those radical ideas in a very similar environment (sociopolitical, geographic, mix of forms of transport, etc). Greater Vancouver is smaller than Sydney (only 2 million people), but there is no reason why their basic formula for public transport success cannot scale by half an order of magnitude.

Of course, implementing such radical ideas will be hard. It will be expensive. It will be politically difficult (although with such lacklustre opposition, now would be an excellent time to make such a move). But imagine - just imagine - being able to go down in NSW history as the government that saved Sydney. Now that's a government I could really vote for.

Sincerely,
Robin Darroch