16/07/2007

Re: Response to CityRail Fare Review

To whom it may concern,

As I rely on CityRail trains for my daily commute between home and work, I would like respond to the CityRail Fare Review (submitted to the NSW Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal). I have read through the CityRail Fare Review thoroughly and would like to voice my opinions towards the issues raised by CityRail.

CityRail believes that an increase in train fares is partly justified by improvements in **safety**, **reliability**, and **service quality** (p. 3). In fact, I would like to demonstrate that the service provided by CityRail has suffered a decline in quality in every aspect. Given CityRail's poor performance, it is therefore unreasonable for CityRail to increase fares and further punish its long-suffering patrons.

Safety

CityRail claims that **"our revised Safety Management System is improving safety practices and processes across the organisation."** In light of the recent debacles involving CityRail, this statement has been proved to be false.

- In March 2007, 35,000 commuters were delayed during peak hour and many were left stranded for up to three hours after an electrical fault[5].
- More recently, on 5 July 07, a faulty maintenance hatch came off a train and blew into electrical wiring, resulting in 42 train services being cancelled, 35 services delayed, and tens of thousands of commuters were left stranded[5].

RailCorp Chief Executive Vince Graham has admitted that both incidents were the direct consequence of a "lack of a maintenance culture"[3,5] within RailCorp. For example, CityRail was told two years ago about problems with the type of maintenance hatch that caused the Harbour Bridge train debacle - yet they did not take preventative action. Considering CityRail's atrocious safety record, how is it possible that a fare increase is justified?

I was personally affected by both these incidents. In particular, on 5 July 07, the situation at Wynyard Station (particularly Clarence St) was so chaotic that it was impossible to get out of the city at 5pm. I later caught an 8:45pm train from Wynyard station that had been delayed for half an hour. Imagine my dismay when, just a week later, I read about more safety problems due to a roof grille at Lindfield [4]. CityRail has thus demonstrated its utter inability to maintain an adequate safety record, and should not be allowed to increase fares.

Furthermore, I do not believe that CityRail is able to manage the extra funds due to a fare increase. For instance, the next $4 billion generation of CityRail trains[1] have no wheelchair evacuation ramps, meaning disabled passengers will be stranded during emergencies. This appalling situation is already happening. I am referring to the completely shocking occurrence that a wheelchair-bound person, stranded on a train during the 5 July 07 incident, could be told by CityRail that help would come for him in two or three days[1]. To conclude, CityRail does not maintain the trains properly or prevent avoidable incidents from happening – then they fail to look after disabled people affected by the train breakdowns.

Reliability

CityRail claims that **"sectorisation of the CityRail network, the introduction of new timetables, a successful door motor replacement program and a reduction in the number of delays due to infrastructure incidents has improved service reliability."** Perhaps revising the definition of on-time running from 4 minutes to 5 minutes (in July 05) also had something to do with the situation? More seriously, however, I would like to point out that some lines experienced far from reliable service during the month of June 07. From CityRail's website:

Airport Line 87.2%	South Line 82.1%	Western Line 78.1%
East Hills Line 82.5%	North Shore Line 91.0%	Northern Line 80.2%

This far-from-reliable performance affects passengers who only have minutes to catch a connecting train. The daily unreliability of trains, combined with recent major incidents in which services are completely disrupted, certainly cannot warrant a fare increase.

Service Quality

CityRail claims that **"in the ITSRR survey in 2006, 44% of our customers rated the cost of train travel as either good or great value for money".** 44% represents a minority of the people who were polled. Were the same survey to be conducted today, in light of recent CityRail debacles, I am sure that even worse figures would result. I, for one, can express my dissatisfaction at CityRail's provision of 6-car trains during peak hour. Services on the inner-west line are so packed that passengers risk life and limb to squeeze onto the train as the doors are closing, rather than wait for a cancelled or even fuller train. Is it any wonder that car usage has skyrocketed and public transport usage has declined? In order to maintain a sustainable earth and discourage people from driving, CityRail must provide improved transport services at the current fares before imposing a fare increase.

I would like to conclude by providing IPART with an example of five articles published on CityRail by the Sydney Morning Herald in as many days:

- Wheelchair train commuters 'stranded' [1], July 16 2007
- Rail system is off track again [2], July 15 2007
- Railcorp failed to resolve safety issue – union [3], July 13 2007
- Another train grille comes loose [4], July 11 2007
- Rail chief admits maintenance problems [5], July 11 2007

Cityrail certainly cannot justify a fare increase until they improve their safety record, reliability, and service quality. Thank you for your attention. I look forward to the outcome of IPART's review.

Yours sincerely,

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[1] http://www.smh.com.au/news/NATIONAL/Wheelchair-train-commuters-stranded/2007/07/16/1184438176171.html
[2] http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/rail-system-is-off-track-again/2007/07/14/1183833835479.html
[3] http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/railcorp-failed-to-resolve-safety-issue--union/2007/07/12/1183833688054.html
[4] http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/another-train-grille-comes-loose/2007/07/11/1183833564860.html
[5] http://www.smh.com.au/news/NATIONAL/Rail-chief-admits-maintenance-problems/2007/07/11/1183833573786.html