

2 November 2007

Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal  
PO Box Q290  
QVB Post Office  
NSW 1230

Dear Sir/Madam,

**RE: Ministry of Transport Submission on Bus Fares for 2008**

I would like respond to the proposals put forward by the Ministry of Transport in its Submission to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal on Bus Fares for 2008.

While I agree with the majority of recommendations being proposed by the Ministry such as harmonisation of outer metropolitan bus fares with metropolitan fares, I am strongly opposed to the first recommendation that there should be an increase in metropolitan bus fares of 6%.

This is because much of the investment and expenditure on improved bus services has not yet been felt in all contract areas and has been restricted to certain operators and contract regions. The reforms so far have mainly benefited those in regions 10, 13, North West Tway and those serviced by State Transit, Westbus and Veolia, yet there is still more improvement to be done in other regions.

For example, it is still clear that many State Transit services are operated by modern air-conditioned wheelchair-accessible buses, while those serviced by private operators in the west and south western Sydney continue to have a larger number of older buses still in service. The Government's expenditure program on new buses seems to have been focused on replacing older buses, without necessarily expanding services.

It is not fair to ask passengers who have to travel on older buses and have not had improvements to service levels pay more for fares. The Government has an obligation to improve the bus network in all areas of Sydney before asking commuters to pay more for bus fares.

For example, in the Liverpool area, commuters who use Metrolink services are still faced with travelling on very old buses, which are not air-conditioned or wheelchair accessible and can cause injury if passengers don't watch their steps.

Despite the Ministry claiming to have spent money on reforms, many of these changes have not yet been experienced by passengers using Metrolink. Their routes service a number of areas, many of which are lower income and disadvantaged socio-economically. There is a high number of elderly and other passengers along these routes who deserve to have modern accessible buses, yet are still being serviced with old buses.

This demonstrates the discrimination and injustice being felt by a percentage of bus commuters in Sydney and it is unfair to ask these commuters to pay more for services when they have not yet seen major improvements in bus fleet and service quality.

On route 849 Liverpool to Warwick Farm, there are a total of 19 services each weekday. Only 2 or 3 services would be serviced by air-conditioned accessible buses. Saturday services run hourly and are variable with some services air-conditioned and wheelchair accessible but on other weeks, older buses are used. There is no Sunday service. This has remained unchanged despite the introduction of the Government's bus reforms.

To ask these passengers and others around Liverpool who travel on Metrolink to pay more for the same level of service and bus quality is unfair and highly discriminatory, when people serviced by State Transit have been serviced by better quality buses for many years.

Those living on or near the T80 transitway route serviced by State Transit, receive a high frequency service operating 7 days a week with night services and all buses air-conditioned and wheelchair accessible. The Ministry of Transport should ensure that all bus routes across Sydney are serviced by buses which are air-conditioned and accessible such as the T80 and have improved bus stops with indicator boards. Only then, should the Ministry demand fare increases from passengers.

While the Government has introduced cashless pre-pay buses on nine State Transit routes, it has still failed to introduce the T-card across Sydney which was meant to provide a way for passengers to use services without the need to pay cash upfront each time they used a service. These systems have been in use overseas for many years. Again, it highlights the discrimination the Ministry has shown for its preference to introduce pre-pay services on State Transit services to improve boarding and journey times, while these services have not been introduced for private bus operators.

Therefore, I believe the Ministry's submission for an increase of 6% in metropolitan fares should be rejected until the full extent of the Government's bus reform have been felt and improvements to all bus services, especially in west and south-west Sydney have been made. To grant an increase at this point in time, will continue to discriminate against passengers such as those using

Metrolink's service in socio-economically disadvantaged areas where little or no improvement has been made. Passengers should not be asked to pay more for the same level of service.

Yours Sincerely,

CLINT RAFAUD