



Submission to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal of NSW

**Determination of Public Transport Fares 2001/2002
CityRail**

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Introduction:

Western Sydney Community Forum (WSCF) is a regional peak organisation representing more than 200 community managed groups and organisations in 14 local government areas of Western Sydney. WSCF is actively involved with transport issues across Western Sydney through the Western Sydney Regional Transport Development Worker (WSRTDW) position. This position works with a range of transport stakeholders from across Western Sydney and across a range of transport related issues.

Issues raised in this paper are those that have been raised at various forums and meetings in Western Sydney. WSCF focus on issues of access and equity in public transport provision including fares, service levels and performance standards.

This submission focuses on CityRail services as few STA services operate in Western Sydney, with the majority of bus services being provided through private operators.

Fare increase:

WSCF has concerns that CityRail has opted for increasing fares whether through direct increases or reducing discounts as its dominant strategy to increase fare box revenue rather than developing strategies to increase patronage. While acknowledging that there is limited scope to increase patronage on peak services, plenty of scope exists to increase patronage during off peak travel times.

In relation to a reduction in discounts given during off-peak times, as service and performance levels diminish during off peak times, WSCF cannot support a reduction in the discount given to fares during these times. Nor can WSCF support a decrease in the discount given for periodicals and other multi-journey/multi-modal tickets. Reducing the discount on these tickets ignores the role these tickets play in encouraging and committing people to public transport usage and the substantial environmental benefits to the community this brings.

As stated WSCF has concerns that there appears to be no strategy to increase patronage as a means of increasing fare box revenue, while not opposing the CPI increase requested by CityRail, WSCF can not support further increases in CityRails fares until a strategy is developed and implemented that would see an increase in fare box revenue that includes increasing patronage, particularly during CityRails off-peak periods. Continual increasing of fares as the dominant means of increasing fare box revenue is not sustainable nor does it encourage efficiency gains or increased performance standards, particularly during off-peak times.

In relation to Western Sydney specifically either a direct increase in fares or an increase through reduced discounts has a cumulative impact on Western Sydney's CityRail users as the train journey may be preceded by a bus trip. As the majority of the bus companies in Western Sydney are privately owned and operated, fares are often more expensive than in other parts of Sydney serviced by STA due to the lesser financial subsidies received by private bus operators. This particularly impacts on transport concession card holders, as not only is the initial fare more expensive but as the private bus

industry does not receive the same level of concession reimbursement as STA, concession fares are either not available or more expensive. Therefore whole of journey costs can be higher in Western Sydney than other parts of Sydney and we believe this needs to be considered in any fare determination.

Performance standards:

While CityRails service reliability is close to meeting performance standards outlined in the Customer Service Commitment the current method used to measure on time running can result in negative customer service outcomes with stations being skipped, and at times no information being given to those waiting on platforms or on trains.

Though not explicit, safety concerns arise from this with delays that can result in people being stranded or departing from trains in unfamiliar places. The practice of skipping stations is not restricted to peak times, also occurring in off-peak times where the safety concerns arising are heightened due to lesser services being available along with lesser connecting services.

Safety issues:

The above example of a less explicit safety issue is one of a number that have been raised at forums across Western Sydney that are not addressed through the introduction of Transit Officers or other forms of increased security measurements currently on trains and platforms.

Incorrect information relayed through CityRails public announcement system, is raised regularly at forums across Western Sydney in the context of safety, as is the use of inconsistent and confusing information displays (indicators) by CityRail. Incorrect information and/or confusing information decreases a persons confidence in a system, increases their vulnerability, placing them at increased risk. Loss of confidence in a system etc will reduce the likely hood of a person continuing to use CityRail as a means of transport if alternative options are available. Given that there is a general decline in patronage numbers in public transport and that perceptions of safety decreases when there are few passengers using a service we believe that there is a need for CityRail to develop a passenger security and safety plan that encompasses a number of strategies addressing a range of issues that impacts on passengers safety and their perception of safety.

Customer Service Commitment:

CityRail introduced their Customer Service Commitment in 2001. Since that time consultation to review the Charter appears to have been undertaken in an ad-hoc way with limited opportunities for wider input into this from CityRail users and other relevant stakeholders. Again we would like to reiterate that performance measurements used in the Charter relating to reliability and on time running do not include off-peak services and that we believe that CityRail needs to measure this and make results available on their web site.

CityRail also needs to make publicly available the results from their customer surveys and to ensure that concerns raised through this and other opportunities for feedback (eg 131 500) from their customers are also used in measuring their performance.

Conclusion:

In this submission we have raised concerns regarding the dependency of CityRail to increase fare box revenue through increased fares rather than developing strategies to increase patronage. We believe that CityRail needs to develop strategies to achieve increased patronage and that these strategies need to encompass whole of journey concerns as well as increased marketing of their services.

Increasing the political and economic climate appears to favour increasing the cost of public transport to users of public transport. WSCF does not support this view believing that the environmental, economic and social benefits provided by public transport are of benefit to the whole community and that this needs to be supported by all three levels of government.

WSCF welcomes the improvements that have been made by CityRail in a number of areas and believe that greater investment by the NSW government needs to occur in infrastructure investment to continue to improve the reliability and safety of CityRail.

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