

- **Introduction**

The Youth Action and Policy Association (YAPA) is the peak non-government organisation that represents young people and the youth sector in NSW. YAPA aims to improve social justice for young people and does this through a number of strategies and projects, including the Western Sydney project. The Western Sydney project works with young people and youth workers in Western Sydney to conduct training, campaigns, conferences, advocacy and provide information and resources.

YAPA's Western Sydney project covers the eleven local government areas of Auburn, Blacktown, Bankstown, Blue Mountains, Baulkham Hills, Holroyd, Hawkesbury, Fairfield, Liverpool, Parramatta and Penrith.

The information presented in this submission was gathered from case studies collected from young people in Western Sydney during 2001. These case studies asked young people to comment on the types of public transport they use, what purpose they use it for, the cost to them and the impacts this cost has on them personally and their family.

The comments in this submission are limited to private buses as this is the form of public transport most used by young people in Western Sydney relevant to this review.

- **Social impacts of fare increases**

Young people use public transport for a variety of reasons, including looking for work, studying, training, health and fitness, volunteering, entertainment and for social and support networks. All of these activities benefit young people and the broader community. When young people do not have safe, affordable and accessible public transport their life opportunities become more limited. Specifically, the costs of public transport for young people can lead to increased family tensions, inability to adequately look for work, continue work, attend appointments and buy necessary study materials.

1. ***Differences between private and government services***

Most of Western Sydney is serviced by private bus operators. Young people in Western Sydney who use private buses for travel are at a clear disadvantage in comparison to young people travelling in the inner city who have STA services available to them. Not only do many young people in Western Sydney not have access to concessions on weekends or at night when those using STA services do

(see the table below), but they also do not have access to special tickets such as TravelTen or combined bus and rail tickets.’

YAPA supports the Bus and Coach Association’s point that the disparity of fares between the city and other areas such as Western Sydney needs to be resolved, particularly in relation to concessions.

The table below summarises transport concession entitlements for young people in NSW as at early 2002. This table demonstrates further the inequities that exist between young people travelling on private buses on those travelling on STA buses and trains.

<b>Status of young person</b>	<b>Public buses (STA) &amp; trains (SRA)</b>	<b>Private buses</b>
Full time university and TAFE students.	Full range of concessions and discount tickets on all routes at all times	Concessions only available to/from place of study, Monday to Saturday and if aged under 30 years.
TAFE students under 18yrs attending 20hrs over 4 days	Free rail travel between home and study for journeys commencing before 9.30am	Free travel on private bus to and from study if more than 3.2km walking distance
Trainees and apprentices aged 16yrs and older	Concessions available to/from work, study and home – for 1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> year apprentices	No concessions available
Young people on age based rates of pay (junior wages)	No concessions available	No concessions available
Young unemployed	Under 21yrs : only available if combined parental income is below \$25,150  Over 21 years : available unless earning over \$31 per week from part-time work  No concessions available if ‘breached’ by Centrelink	Under 21yrs : only available if combined parental income is below \$25,150  Over 21 years : available unless earning over \$31 per week from part-time work  No concessions available if ‘breached’ by Centrelink
Yong people in JPET programs	Concession fare available	Concession fare available
Young people in CDEP programs	No concessions available	No concessions available

<sup>1</sup> YAPA understands that concessions are not an issue being considered within this review. However, we feel that when considering the social impact of fare increases, particularly on young people, concessions are an essential part of the issue.

## **2. *Availability of discount and special tickets***

As stated above, young people in Western Sydney also do not have access to discount and special tickets as those using STA services do. Young people in Western Sydney have commented on how useful a weekly bus ticket would be. They have said it would assist them more with budgeting for the week. This is particularly important for those young people who are on low or junior wages, for example shop assistants. They may only earn \$150 per week and be paying up to \$50 per week for bus fares. Young people have also said a weekly ticket would be useful **so** they wouldn't have to make sure they have change to catch the bus everyday. Many young people reported that they regularly have to walk, as the bus driver would not accept large denominations of money for the bus fare.

Various private bus operators in Western Sydney have had, and continue to have, discount and special tickets available *to* passengers. YAPA encourages the use of these special priced tickets and would like to see them extended across all bus services in Western Sydney. YAPA also urges the NSW Government to encourage the use of special priced tickets by providing subsidies for such tickets.

## **3. *Financial impact of private bus fares on families***

The cost of transport impacts negatively not only on young people, but their families as well. More and more young people are staying at home longer. This is as a result of a number of social issues, including the high costs of living in Sydney. This puts pressure on family relationships. Parents are often paying young people's costs of living, including transport fares, up until they leave tertiary study, which can be up until a young person is 25 years old.

## **4. *Distances traveled by young people in Western Sydney***

Fares for short distances are similar on private and STA buses, however they are considerably higher on private buses for those travelling longer distances. This impacts on many young people in Western Sydney who are often not travelling short distances on buses. For example, a young person may travel from Baulkham Hills to Westmead to attend university or to Parramatta to then catch a train to Quakers Hill to attend Nirimba TAFE. Young people often do not get a choice **which** university or TAFE they wish to attend as many courses are not offered at all campuses, forcing them to travel long distances. Young people may also need to travel these distances to go to the library and study on the weekends or late afternoon, times when they are not able to use their concession cards on private buses, thus costing them double.

The difference between different companies and different routes can also disadvantage young people. Young people are being charged different fares depending on where they live in Western Sydney. Again, YAPA agrees with the

point in the Bus & Coach Association's submission that one funding and concessions system should exist uniformly across Sydney.

- **Service Quality**

Young people have also stated that they are reluctant to use private buses because they take too long to get to places, they are unreliable and infrequent. Young people who work Saturdays say that timetable frequency and coordination is even worse than during the week, so much so that this is one reason for them having to say no to work because they cannot get there in time.

The delays and risks of not making connections to catch other public transport are other factors that deter young people from catching private buses in Western Sydney. Young people who are studying state that they have to leave earlier in the mornings to catch an earlier bus and make sure they don't miss their connections. As a result they end up spending most of their day travelling to TAFE or University when they could be spending that valuable time studying.

Young people are often questioned about their age and concession cards and feel that many bus drivers treat them unfairly as passengers compared to the way they treat older people. For this reason YAPA also supports the adoption of a customer service charter for private bus operators. However, we feel that it is essential that members of the community, including young people, have input into the development of such a charter.

- **Conclusion**

Many young people in Western Sydney can not afford the cost of private bus fares currently. Any fare increase would only have a negative effect on young people's capacity to pay and widen the disparity between those living in Western Sydney and those in the city. This would particularly impact on those young people on junior wages, apprentices and trainees, students and part-time workers, as well as young people from low socio-economic backgrounds. These categories of young people either do not have access to concession cards, or can only use them at select times, such as during school hours for students. Until such time that public transport concessions for young people are distributed more equitably, YAPA strongly opposes any fare increase.