

Subject: Opal fare review submission
Date: Monday, 12 February 2024 6:20:18 PM

Submission into Setting maximum Opal fares until 2028

Dear IPART,

The IPART issues paper states: ‘The last time [2019] we estimated cost recovery, we found fares covered about 27% of the total cost of providing services and taxpayers covered the remaining 73%.’... ‘Because of these factors, we expect that cost recovery (the proportion of transport costs covered by fares) has reduced since 2019’... ‘IPART’s role is to determine the maximum fare for Opal services until 2028. • We will assess the impact of fare changes on customers, users and taxpayers. • We will consider financial sustainability of the transport network. • Our review will bring transparency about the sustainability of Government funding and policy outcomes. • The Government will decide final fare changes as long as they remain below the maximum we determine’

The implied assertion from the above statements is that the price of fares is what will drive the sustainability of public transport services across the opal network. This assertion is either breathtakingly naïve or negligently incompetent on the part of IPART and the Minister for Transport.

This statement further confirms this incompetence: ‘ We will consider the impacts of our proposed fare determination. Setting the price too low might result in too many people taking public transport journeys when they didn’t need to (because they could have walked or didn’t need to travel). This means services can become too crowded, slow down, be overused or need costly extra services.’ Where is the evidence that setting the price too low might result in too many people taking public transport? IPART seems to be asserting that Transport for NSW has a policy of maximum users of opal services which is set much lower than the actual carriage capacity of opal services. That opal services MUST run partially empty.

The statement that IPART and the NSW Minister for Transport are concerned about ‘too many people taking public transport’ is disgusting.

We are living with the impacts of catastrophic climate change; there is ample evidence that private motor vehicles are environmentally unsustainable (1000s of kilograms of mined materials for a vehicle that in Australia is parked for more than 23 hours each day and the huge amounts of energy to produce, maintain and run each private motor vehicle); there is ample urban planning evidence that you can’t have an effectively functioning city with private motor vehicles but rather there is a need for effective public transport in an effectively functioning city.

Yet despite the problems caused by private motor vehicles, IPART and the NSW Minister for Transport are concerned about ‘too many people taking public transport’.

IPART and the NSW Minister for Transport are clearly not interested in an effective public transport system across the Opal network, ignoring facts that traffic jams are mostly made up of environmentally unsustainable private motor vehicles, that taking a near universal approach to public road planning that prioritises private motor vehicles (small space of verge and footpath, one lane of motor vehicle parking for each direction of travel and a minimum of two traffic travel lanes) continues to create traffic jams, delays and costs in urban spaces; and that the profitability of the public transport network would increase with increase use of public transport by the public.

Aside from the evident incompetence on show in this discussion paper by IPART and the Minister for Transport, there is a more insidious motive evident in this paper – that is to justify the unacknowledged fears of

IPART and the Minister for Transport. Needless to say that each decision maker in IPART will get into their environmentally unsustainable private motor vehicle at the end of today and travel home. The inherent fear of loss of social status (witness the gross purchases of massive offroad SUVs for use mostly in our cities and suburbs), fear of scarcity of time and the fears of safety/security are all on full display in the assumptions and assertions made by IPART and the Minister for Transport in this issues paper.

It's a question whether the Minister for Transport is happy that IPART has interpreted her referral from a place of fear and limited public policy imagination. Is the Premier aware that IPART convenient public survey is so restricted as to not actually canvas feedback on the full scope of the Minister's referral? Or that Transport for NSW want to limit the use of public transport?

Rather than behaving from a place of fear, IPART and the Minister for Transport in the Setting maximum Opal fares until 2028 could behave from a place of hope for a more effective public transport system. One that prioritises public transport motor vehicles on our roads and one that actually want the maximum public use of our public transport system. One that sets a decreasing scale for opal fares with increased use by a customer of opal services.

Get real. Stop acting from fears. Be better than your fears. Start acting from hope. Or our future is doomed to continue this fear driven environmental catastrophe.

For your consideration.

Jean-Paul Leung

