IPART Submission: Maximum Opal Fares 2028

Some of the ideas below may not be relevant to this review, but all affect how passengers use the Opal system. IPART should understand that ease of use will affect the cost that Opal charges customers if they make a simple mistake, making them want to check their balance.

Making simple physical or software changes that are idiot-proof will reduce the number of passengers making mistakes, encouraging more people to get an Opal card or use a credit card and jump on public transport.

If IPART can see that certain points below will help the current Opal system, could IPART please forward these to TfNSW to see if they can be changed immediately?

I would be happy to provide more information to IPART if required.

I don't think that the vast majority of people using public transport check how much they are spending, but if TfNSW advertises different discounts like Half-Price-Weekends because I think most people do not know about the discounts and caps, that would encourage more people who do not use public transport to use it on the weekend.

Could IPART please consider the following:

1. Small deposit on Opal cards bought from outlets

Currently, some passengers are buying Opal cards from shops and trying to get as close as possible to the minimum amount needed to travel on a particular mode and then travel the maximum distance. The card goes into a negative balance, and the passenger discards it and purchases a new one. Some passengers have 3, 4, and even 5 cards in their wallets.

Consider having a small deposit of $5 on all cards purchased from outlets, encouraging passengers not to continuously get new cards each time the balance becomes negative.

Victoria requires a deposit ($6), and the card expires after a few years, unlike Opal, which does not. Therefore, people from interstate or international locations can continue using their Opal card when they return to Sydney a few years after purchasing it.

Our family is going to Melbourne at the end of the month, and our Miki cards have expired. We paid $24 then, and we have to pay another $24 for new cards that will expire in a few years and will lose any money on them, so now I am reluctant to purchase new cards and will use the free trams in the CBD.

2. Immediately change the wording on Opal reader LCD screens

Ask TfNSW to consider removing/changing the word 'here' from the LCD screen of all ferry, train, and bus Opal readers. The new wording on the LCD screen would be ' **Tap On / Off below** (with arrow below pointing down)'.

or

Place a sticker with the contactless wifi symbol on the Opal symbol so passengers know where the reader is located. In Victoria and other states, the reader is behind the LCD screen.

Currently, some passengers are not tapping on / off readers properly and thus are paying the default fare due to the confusing wording on all Opal readers with LCD screens.

I watch passengers follow the instructions on the Opal reader to the letter. They tap on the LCD screen and then slide the card down to the Opal symbol.

Passengers currently:
- Tap on the LCD screen, then slide the card down in the direction of the arrow to the Opal symbol
- Tap halfway between the screen and the Opal symbol
- Tap and move the card from side to side
- Seniors find it especially difficult because the Opal symbol does not show the reader's location.

This simple change will greatly reduce the number of default fares. Buses charge 5% of fares as a default fare; half of these could be due to people not understanding how to tap correctly.

(Please see the attached pdf)

3. Allow free Opal travel on bus routes that are not well patronised and feeder routes:

Identify bus routes with low passenger numbers and allow free trips with valid Opal cards with a sufficient balance. This will increase patronage and allow people to go to local shops.

4. Increase the distance of $3.20 and $4.15 fare bands for buses:

Consider increasing the fare bands to allow cheaper travel for short bus trips.
Before MyZone bus tickets were introduced, it was more expensive to travel long distances.

Now that we are trying to have a 15 to 30-minute city, increasing the minimum fare distance would help people on buses achieve this.

Consider 0-5km $3.20, 5-10km $4.15, 10+ km $5.33

5. Default Fare for buses reduce over the length of the trip:

On buses, the default fare would reduce as the trip gets closer to the terminus, unlike the other modes with buses if the passenger suddenly looks up from their seat and the bus is at their stop. They quickly get out of the bus before the doors close, the bus has left, and they cannot tap off, or if the bus has a problem with the readers and the driver cannot get it working.

As the passenger taps off the Opal reader and it is not read properly, the passenger is charged for the full length of the trip even though they travelled a few stops near the end.

As passengers tap onto the bus, a default fare is loaded onto the card:

- If tap on stop is more than 8km from the end terminus, the default fare would be $5.33
- If tap on stop is between 8-3km from the end terminus, the default fare would be $4.15
- If tap on stop is less than 3km from the end terminus, the default fare would be $3.20

Passengers cannot cheat the system, but if they make a simple mistake, they will not be charged the full distance of the trip even though they have travelled a few stops.

6. All Opal / Contactless Fares Half Price on Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Public Holidays

Currently, on Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and public holidays, single Opal and contactless fares have a 30% discount until the half-price cap is reached (except Friday peak).

Consider that all weekend Opal and contactless fares are 50% (except Friday peak hours).

This may not make much of a difference for most passengers, but it would be gold as an advertising slogan to get more people to use public transport on weekends.

Get an Opal card or a contactless device to enjoy half-price weekends and public holidays*.

Use an Opal or contactless card on Sydney's public transport, where the half-price weekend starts on a Friday*.

Most people, especially tourists, know nothing about the half-price cap on weekends. When I explained the fare structure, I tell them that all single fares are 30% off except Friday peak until you reach 50% of the cap.

Instead, except for Friday peaks, all fares and caps are half-price.

Transport could have advertising at stations and ferry wharves to encourage people to use Opal cards or contactless and travel on the weekends.

On the weekend, when tourists have bought a single ferry ticket for $8.20, including for their children, I tell them that if they used their contactless credit cards for 70 cents more, they could have travelled on all public transport in Sydney for the rest of the day, they are quite disappointed.

7. Reduce fare evasion and school children not tapping on

Currently, an SSTS button that was used by private operators during the transition to the new Opal school cards is on all bus driver consoles. The bus driver could use this button to record all school children who do not tap on it, and it could also be used to record adults who fare evade, reducing bus driver assaults.

Currently, the bus network during peak periods is bursting at the seams on many services, but this may not appear in the Opal data, as most school children do not tap on. This data may show only twenty adults on board but not include over forty school children who have not tapped on.

School children do not tap on as there are no consequences for not tapping on, but if school children think that they are being monitored if they do not tap on, then most will tap on, allowing for better Opal data for future planning.

During peak periods, drivers must leave school children and adults behind as the bus is full to the front window.

8. **Opal Family Fare Deal**

Allow Family travel - 2 children pay, and all other kids travel free:

Old paper tickets required only one child in a family to have a valid ticket, and all other children travelled free. Currently, with Opal, all children over the age of 3 must have an Opal card.
This is making certain travel on Opal double the cost of paper tickets for families with multiple children.

Consider an Opal Family Fare Deal. The first 2 children of a family must have an Opal, and all other children travel free.

9. Allow families to link cards together to get discounts:

Allow families to link cards together via the Opal website or Transport shops and be able to get discounts whilst travelling together.
Only 2 children will be charged a fare as family members tap on. All other children tapping on will travel free or get a discount.

10. Increase free travel for all children up to five years of age.

Currently, free travel is only for children three years and under and increasing the age to school-aged children would return it to the previous age limit, encouraging more young parents to use public transport.

11. Yearly Cap :

Allow yearly caps similar to current daily and weekly caps.

Cap yearly travel at maybe 48 weeks, then free the rest of the year, allowing passengers to travel free on holidays.

Currently, $50 per week 52 weeks = $2,600 per year
Proposed $50 per week 48 weeks = $2,400 per year

Saving up to $200 for travellers without a vehicle and relying wholly on public transport.

12. Increase pensioner $2.50 PET ticket price for all-day travel:

Maybe consider having a surcharge during peak periods, like the cost of a single adult bus ticket, i.e., instead of $2.50, it would be charged at $3.20.

Or maybe if travelling long distances/multiple modes, charge $3.20 instead of $2.50

Or consider increasing the $2.50 all-day travel for pension tickets to maybe $3.00. The last PET ticket price increase was more than 17 years ago.

Currently, a single child fare on a bus for 8km is 16 cents more expensive than all day PET $2.50

All other fares, including normal concession fares, have risen nearly yearly, but the $2.50 pension ticket has stayed the same for 17 years.

13. Ferry and 'Ferry Link Buses' have fares linked:

Ferry Link buses to and from wharves would be free.

If a passenger hops on a bus or ferry within 60 minutes of hopping off another service, the bus trip would be free. This would encourage more people to catch the most direct route due to the high ferry cost compared to buses.

14. Free travel within major CBD centres only with a valid Opal card with sufficient funds:

Free travel on all modes of transport within certain CBDs is allowed as long as the Opal card has sufficient balance.

CBDs could include Sydney, North Sydney, Wollongong, and Parramatta CBDs.

This would encourage people to leave cars at home and use public transport.

This would also encourage residents of these CBDs not to purchase a vehicle & park on the road.

This could allow the removal of free-loop buses in certain CBDs, Parramatta and Wollongong, saving money by having empty buses looping the CBD.

Melbourne recently introduced free travel on all trams in the CBD to encourage more people to return to the city. Unfortunately, because the system does not require people to tap their cards, it cannot plan future services accurately.

15. Allow purchase of child fares from Opal ticket machines

Purchasing child fares from Opal vending machines is not allowed, but this disadvantages many people, including tourists with children, who do not have contactless credit cards.

If someone wants to cheat the system, they purchase and use a child's Opal card.

16. Have a paper Day Opal ticket - $20 Adult, $10 Child issued from Opal ticket machines

Many international tourists do not have contactless credit cards and must buy with cash or multiple single ferry tickets. By having a paper Opal Day ticket available from the Opal vending machines, people, including tourists, can buy a paper ticket to use public transport all day from the first tap.

17. Link single paper ferry tickets to Ferry Link buses

Consider allowing people who purchase a single ferry ticket to use a ferry link bus at the other end of their trip.

Many international tourists without contactless cards buy a single ticket and get stuck at the other end of the ferry trip because they cannot purchase a ticket on the bus. For example, at Taronga Zoo, these tourists cannot take the bus up the hill to the zoo's main entrance as the single ticket will not allow travel on the bus for one stop. They do not have a contactless device, and a trip to the zoo is their only trip on public transport in Sydney.

18. Have a return paper ticket

Consider having a return paper ticket issued by Opal ticket machines.

Many International tourists do not have contactless credit cards and want to go to the Zoo by ferry or the Blue Mountains by train. When they get to the train station in the Blue Mountains, the station most likely does not have a ticket machine to buy a return ticket. When they finish at the zoo, they must queue up to buy a single return ticket as the ferry is about to leave, or they may be stranded because the machine for the return trip is out of order.

19. Have a Tourist page on the Opal Website

Consider having an additional page on the opal.com.au website that would give tourists from other countries and interstate information on the Opal system before they come to Sydney.

Maybe have a picture of our iconic ferries and say it is the cheapest way to see our city by boat, the location at Sydney airport to get an Opal card and translate it into different languages.

Different attractions and hotels could post the link on their websites, giving their guests up-to-date information about Opal ticketing.

20. Advertise on Opal ticket machines the use of a contactless device

When someone uses the Opal ticket machine and starts the transaction, give the discounted price if a contactless device is used instead of purchasing a paper ticket.

Advertise the maximum cap if someone uses a contactless device when they use the machine on a Friday, Saturday, Sunday, or a public holiday.

21. Allow Opal integration for transport to major sporting events and concerts:

Allow free transport to and from major sporting events and concerts.
As people book for major sporting events or concerts, they can click a link to access their Opal account, which allows free travel.

22. Have Opal readers at the gates of major events, allowing free travel

People who take public transport to major sporting events and concerts normally use their Opal card to catch public transport. Normal charges would be added to the card along the journey.
As people enter through event gates, they tap the Opal card on a reader, and the journey to the event is refunded onto the card. The reader would also load onto the card data, allowing the person a free journey home from the event. As the person goes home, they use their Opal card as normal, and all travel is free.

This would not require complex website links or an Opal system to download information to every Opal reader in the network. The Opal card would operate normally until tapped on the Opal reader at the event.

23. Have themed Opal cards for football clubs with free travel on event days:

Opal cards with football club colours allow free travel on match days to and from events as long as a person taps onto a reader at stadium gates.

24. Trial relocation of front Opal reader to reduce bus dwell times

Opal data will show that in buses, most Opal tap-ons are only at the front reader, which slows down bus boarding.

Consider asking TfNSW to trial moving the front Opal reader to opposite the second Opal reader so that passengers can tap on either reader whilst the passenger in front is fiddling with their card or unlocking their phone.

25. Use a credit card for concession travel

Many school children use credit cards to travel, so they are charged adult fares.

Consider being able to register a credit/debit card via the Opal website as a concession/child fare.

With concession cards, the name on the credit card must match the name on the concession card.

Improving Opal Tap Speeds

Is it possible in the next firmware update to change the wording on the Opal reader screens and stick a small sticker or clear perspex disk on the Opal symbol to help identify the location of its reader?

It's great that Apple has improved its phones so that passengers do not need to unlock their phones to use Opal readers, but this is not why people are slow at tapping.

The reason is that passengers think that they have to tap on the screen at the top of the reader instead of down the bottom on the Opal symbol and also think that the rear of their iPhone is the antenna, so they completely miss the mark and get frustrated.

I continuously yell, 'Tap the top of your phone on the Opal symbol down the bottom' at passengers down the back of the bus as I see them rubbing their Opal card or phone on the screen. Or, 'Don't swipe your card. Hold it still over the Opal symbol' as pensioners slowly swipe their card down the reader, and the screen goes red and reads, ' Try again. '

If the passenger uses the first reader next to me, I point to the Opal symbol or sometimes touch their phone and guide them to the right location until the reader goes green.

This is because people think they need to tap onto the screen as it says 'Tap on/off here' with a small arrow down, which means swiping their card to some people.

Miki in Melbourne has 'Please touch your card below' with an arrow down and a card symbol at the location of the reader on old machines and new machines, which you touch on the screen. However, they have had an advertising campaign to educate people.

People not tapping on correctly has been ongoing since the first Opal reader was installed at Neutral Bay Wharf. Ever since, as I waited for the ferry to arrive, I have watched passengers having difficulties tapping their Opal cards and sometimes walking down to show them the correct way.

These two simple, cheap changes will dramatically improve Opal read speeds with all forms of payment - Opal cards, credit cards, smart watches and mobile phones.

Please see the attached pictures.

Other improvements

- Trial the location of the front reader opposite the second reader behind the driver to double tap on speed and passenger safety, as ~95% of taps are at the front machine.

- If a reader has a bad read - it instantly scans again before displaying a red screen.

- Except for the front reader, bus readers stay on and switch to the next stop halfway.

Next firmware upgrade, change wording

**Please tap
on & off below**

Place a sticker in the middle of the Opal symbol with a wifi symbol so passengers know this is the location of the reader (shape of white section).

OR

Stick a raised circular disk of clear perspex with a rounded edge on top of the Opal symbol to make it more prominent so people know this is the location of the reader. Have a wifi symbol printed on the back of the perspex

Touch your myki on the screen

Touch Here 09:50

CR6000

PUBLIC TRANSPORT VICTORIA PT>

Tap on/ off here

opal

myki

Please touch your card below

11.36 am

Picture of Miki a card

VIX

myki

Touch here