

**Submission to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory
Tribunal**

2003-04 public transport fares determination



NCOSS

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Council of Social Service of NSW (NCOSS) is the peak body for the social and community services sector in NSW and seeks to represent the interests of low income and disadvantaged people. Through our membership we represent more than 7,000 community service organisations in NSW.

NCOSS believes the goals for public transport should be to:

- (a) Maximise the community's access to transport with high quality, convenient services; and
- (b) Provide mobility at a price that is affordable to individuals from all socio-economic groups in the community.

The pricing and regulation of passenger transport has a major impact on the lives of disadvantaged people and in this regard NCOSS maintains an ongoing policy interest in ensuring that access to services is enhanced and extended.

NCOSS believes that fares should be set by comparison of the full social costs and benefits of all modes of transport. In the absence of adequate pricing of road transport, NCOSS believes that those who choose to use public transport and particularly those who, for economic reasons, have no choice but to use public transport should be subsidised. Such subsidies should be reflected both in fare pricing and investment decisions. However as this approach has not been adopted, we regard service standards and performance as integral factors in determining any fare increases.

2. STATE RAIL AUTHORITY: CityRail

The State Rail Authority, CityRail (SRA) is seeking a general fare increase in line with CPI. The submission from SRA also refers to a reduction of the discount for weekly and other periodical tickets. In effect the proposed reduction in the discount for these tickets is a fare increase.

Customer Service Commitment

While the Tribunal has acknowledged that the Customer Service Charter released by SRA in 2001 is an 'evolving' document, it clearly 'expects feedback from SRA during next years determination on progress in further developing the service commitment.'¹ There is no additional information provided in this year's submission from SRA regarding its Charter, except that it is being updated and will be released in July 2003. As this version of the Charter is unavailable to the Tribunal at this point, it is not possible to assess if this new version addresses the gaps previously identified by stakeholders.

NCOSS reiterates its position that an effective Customer Charters needs to be developed in consultation with stakeholders and should include comprehensive customer focused service standards that are independently monitored and regularly reported. In previous submissions a number of areas have been suggested for inclusion in the Charter. Some of the key areas have included;

- Independent passenger surveys
- An independent monitoring authority
- Provision of public phones
- Cleanliness and Safety
- Cancellation of services and 'skipping' of scheduled stops
- On time running during peak and off peak services
- Comfort and overcrowding
- Consultation on timetable change
- Performance against standards published regularly and widely

The lack of progress on the development of the Charter appears to be a continuing trend. As mentioned previously in this submission, NCOSS regards service standards and performance as integral factors in determining any fare increases.

Customer Satisfaction Surveys

The SRA submission states that customer satisfaction increased from 70- 78% between 2000 and 2002. NCOSS encourages the on-going assessment of customer's needs, issues and satisfaction ratings. However we would appreciate a full summary of the questions and findings included in future submissions. In additional customer surveys should be conducted quarterly and ensure they include customers from a range of socio-economic backgrounds, travel times and stations.

NCOSS recommends that SRA receive a general fare increase in line with CPI as an acknowledgment of costs incurred. However NCOSS does not support any other fare increases (reductions of the discount for weekly and other periodical tickets), as there is insufficient detail on service standards and performance in the submission to assess such a request.

3. STATE TRANSIT AUTHORITY: Sydney Buses

The State Transit Authority, Sydney Buses (STA) is seeking increases in line with CPI 'plus such increment as the Tribunal considers appropriate to respond to the increasing cost base.'² In last years determination the continuing absence of a customer charter for STA services was noted as a stakeholder concern.

Customer Charter

In 2001 NCOSS recommended that STA 'develop a Customer Charter, with key stakeholders, by December 2002.'³ While NCOSS appreciates the delays by TransportNSW in the development of a Performance Assessment Regime (PAR) for both SRA and private operators and the joint venture with TransportNSW to develop a generic service charter, the lack of progress on a distinct charter for STA is an on-going concern.

The recent accreditation of STAs Sydney buses as quality endorsed in accordance with the international standard ISO 9001:2000 and its on-going compliance requirements is a positive step. NCOSS also welcomes the advice that a draft charter has been developed and a consultation program is imminent. NCOSS looks forward to participating in this process and contributing to the development of the charter.

Performance Measurement

The details on the six key customer-related performance indicators (KPI) provided in the STA submission are of limited use as the summary on page 13 of the submission does not fully correlate with the KPIs detailed on page 14. It is essential that the draft charter currently being developed includes clear, measurable indicators and more comprehensive ways to measure customer satisfaction and feedback. NCOSS would also like to acknowledge the progress STA has made in improving the accessibility of its fleet. The number of accessible buses increased by 5% in the last 12 months and it is anticipated that the entire fleet will be wheelchair accessible by 2015.

NCOSS recommends that STA receive a general fare increase in line with CPI, as an acknowledgment of costs incurred. However NCOSS does not support any other fare increases, as there is insufficient detail on service standards and performance in the submission to assess such a request.

Conclusion

NCOSS is unable to assess requests for fare increases (other than CPI) by measuring performance against service standards in the current environment. The continuing lack of customer charters including comprehensive, customer focused and measurable standards and reporting mechanisms makes this impossible.

NCOSS recommends that SRA and STA provide IPART with detailed plans for the further development and finalisation of their Customer Service Commitments/Charters for 2003-04, specifying its plans for the involvement of key stakeholders and the development of measurable performance standards, by August 2003.

Endnotes

¹ Ipart, CityRail and STA Buses and Ferries, Public Transport Fares from July, 2002,pg 20

² State Rail Authority Submission 2003, p.10

³ NCOSS Submission 2001,p.4