



Submission to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal of NSW.

Determination of Private Bus Fares: July 2003

*Contact:
Joan Gennery
Transport Development Worker
Western Sydney Community Forum
Tel: 9897 2677
Fax: 9897 2655
Mob: 0411 644 619
Email: joang@wscf.org.au*

Introduction:

WSCF (WSCF) is peak regional organisation representing more than 200 community managed groups and organisations in the 14 local government areas of Western Sydney. WSCF is actively involved in transport issues across Western Sydney through the Western Sydney Regional Transport Development Worker (WSRTW) position. This position works with a range of transport stakeholders across Western Sydney 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 the provision of public transport including fares, service levels and performance standards.

This submission is in regards to the commercial contracts of the private bus industry in Western Sydney.

WSCF supports an increase in bus services and usage across Western Sydney within an industry that has the capacity to respond to changing travel patterns and populations within the region, and believes that potentially the bus industry could play a significant role in reducing the negative environmental, economical and social impacts currently inflicted on Western Sydney resulting from an inadequate public transport system in what is the fastest growing region of NSW.

A responsive bus industry with supporting infrastructure (policies as well as fixed infrastructure) could play a role in achieving better outcomes for Western Sydney. Unfortunately the rigidity of the current contractual arrangements between the bus industry and the Transport Coordination Authority, inequitable fare subsidies to low-income earners and government policies that improve travel by the private vehicle rather than public transport contribute to inhibiting the growth of public transport patronage in Western Sydney.

Fare increase:

The BCA in their 2003 submission to IPART is seeking a fare increase of 9.41%. WSCF cannot support this increase for following reasons. While not supporting the increase, WSCF acknowledges issues that have been raised by the BCA specifically those relating to the introduction from the ANTS system.

- ***Cost index approach:***

Last year WSCF raised concerns regarding the cost index approach in determining increases in fares. Our concerns remain about the validity of increases related to movements in the cost index approach.

Our main concern in relation to this approach is that the model ensures that fare increases will almost be automatically granted. The cost index approach does not encourage or consider other efficiencies made within the industry to reduce overall costs to the operator.

- **Social impacts:**

WSCF believes that a fare increase of 9.41% would have negative impacts on many bus users in Western Sydney, cause further financial hardship and result in fewer opportunities to engage with society.

As discussed in the BCA submission there are fewer concessions available on private buses than there are on STA services due to government policy, yet it is people who use private buses that on average have lower incomes than those using STA services. In the IPART issues paper 20% of trips on private buses are made by full paying passengers and 20% of trips are concession fares. The number of people paying a concession fare on private buses would increase if the range of concessions available on STA services were available on private buses. Those not eligible for concessions on private buses include but are not limited to; 1st, 2nd, and 3rd year apprentices, students over the age of thirty, full time TAFE students.

To increase fares by 9.41% to the above low incomes groups would cause financial hardship, in some cases severe hardship This hardship is further compounded by the lack of ticketing options available on private buses. The majority of private bus journeys are made with single fare tickets. Unlike STA the government does not provide subsidies to the private bus sector for multi-ride and multi-modal tickets. These subsidies as with concessions are only available where government services operate, excluding these benefits to the vast majority of New South Wales public transport users regardless of need.

Furthermore as IPART considers fare increase for each mode of transport in isolation, the cumulative increases and costs borne by the user are not considered nor are the cumulative impacts.

Incentives:

The BCA in its submission discusses issues that have affected bus patronage that are largely outside of an operators control; ie congestion, taxation policy and growth in car usage. While this is true there are possibilities within operators control to increase patronage while reducing costs that are not being explored by the bus industry.

We believe that the current contractual arrangement based on exclusive rights and competition, while not preventing cooperation, create an environment where operators limit the scope of their services to their exclusive zones and reduce opportunities for cooperation. WSCF would like to see more incentives to encourage cooperation between bus operators particularly during off peak times that would maximise the use of transport available without negatively impacting on public transport users.

Customer Charter:

WSCF welcomes the development of a Customer Charter by the BCA. The BCA submission does not include whether or not there has been an uptake by bus operators of the Charter and how the Charter has been distributed. WSCF would like to see

copies of the Charter available broadly and would also like to see opportunities for stakeholders to have input into the development of the Charter.

Stakeholder consultation:

WSCF would like to see consistent consultation processes developed in consultation with stakeholders used across the private bus industry that includes those stated in the BCA submission. Lack of consultation especially in relation to changing route services can have negative impacts on public transport users, the bus operator and can reflect negatively on the industry as a whole.

The introduction of Movezone services in the Penrith and Mt. Druitt areas is an example where negative outcomes have occurred that may have been avoided or at least limited through better consultation. The result has been decreased services to residents, unsafe travel, increased use of hitch hiking by young people in the area, increased fares on a service and diminished relationships between Westbus and the local communities. While Westbus has moved to address some of the concerns raised by the local communities this has been a long process with peoples overall confidence and use of public transport reduced.

Complaints handling:

There are a number of different ways people can make complaints as there are a number of different options on where to lodge a complaint regarding public transport. Complaints can be made to transport providers, including bus operators, the Transport Coordination Authority and through the 131500 info line or web site. While the variety of options available are welcome, the current system allows for limited reporting back to the public as to the type of complaints made, how they have been resolved or whether or not there is a reduction in complaints over time.

WSCF would welcome the development of a central public transport complaints/feedback system where issues would be published and commented on as part of the IPART fare determination process.

Accessible Transport Action Plan:

In Western Sydney there are few accessible buses available and few services that have timetables showing the availability of accessible transport on routes. This limits the mobility of people with a disability who do not have access to a private vehicle. In October 2002 the Disability Standards for Accessible Transport were introduced. The standards have a timetable for the introduction of accessible buses which the private bus industry is complying with. While acknowledging the stock of accessible buses being built up by bus operators WSCF would welcome the introduction of an Accessible Transport Action Plan that would outline strategies for the provision of accessible transport services, accessible information and other requirements as per the Act.

Conclusion:

As stated above, WSCF cannot support a fare increase of 9.41% as requested by the BCA. We acknowledge that there are inequitable policies that give financial advantages to STA and in turn this disadvantages users of private transport in Western Sydney and other parts of New South Wales. We believe the inequities must be addressed by the government in a way that would see public transport patronage grow giving economic, environmental and social benefits to Western Sydney.

For further information please contact Joan Gennery, Transport Development Worker at Western Sydney Community Forum on (02) 9897 2677 or fax (02) 9897 2655 or email joang@wscf.org.au.