

As the Manager responsible for the promotion of sustainable transport at the Australian National University I would like to raise a few of points regarding this review of ACTION bus pricing.

First, I would like to applaud ACTION for its commitment to providing alternative transport options for ANU staff and students. ACTION and ANU have had a close working relationship for a number of years now and this has led to an increase in bus patronage over time. The ANU Sustainable Transport Survey (2003) indicates that bus patronage by ANU students stands at 18%, 300% higher than the ACT average, and patronage by staff is 8.1%, also substantially higher than the ACT average. These data are now 3 years old and when we do this survey again in the coming months I expect these figures to be higher still.

Second, while I agree with the Commission's view that service is the most critical factor in determining patronage (this has been borne out in our surveys), I think price is still very important to certain segments of the population - especially students. Many of the students who use ACTION's services at the ANU are from overseas (about 2500 students) and many of these face financial difficulties. A great majority of these students have no choice but to use the Bus service. It is important to ensure that this segment of the population is not unduly affected by any fare increases.

Third, I think there are issues with ticketing structures. One of the problems rests with the fact that there is no specific 'University' or 'Tertiary' concession ticket. While University students can purchase School Term Faresaver 10 tickets, or School Term tickets, this is not advertised widely by ACTION and the dates for the latter do not always mesh with the University timetable. I propose ACTION develop and market a new University ticket that can be used throughout the semester. University students are often confused about what ticket to buy and as a result many of them purchase the wrong ticket. ACTION needs to ensure that ticketing structures are clear and targeted to the right audience.

Fourth, while this is not within the scope of the ICRC mandate I think the issue of Fringe Benefits Tax needs raising (and I raise it whenever I can). One of the barriers to promoting sustainable transport initiatives with staff in large institutions is the fact that salary sacrificing bus tickets attracts FBT. This is farcical considering one can salary sacrifice motor vehicles. Our research at the ANU suggests that staff would be attracted to bus travel if it could be salary sacrificed. I believe it is important to ensure flexible payment options for alternative transport exist, and that the current FBT barriers are removed. I note the Queensland Premier Peter Beattie recently commented on this issue. I would appreciate hearing the ICRC and ACT Govt opinion on this matter.

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