

14th March 2024

The Hon. Jo Haylen
Minister for Transport
NSW Parliament House
6 Macquarie St Sydney
NSW 2000

Dear Minister,

I am writing on behalf of the Australian & International Pilot's Association to add our voice to the growing calls for airport workers to be exempt from paying the Station Access Fee applied to rail passengers accessing Domestic and International stations. Currently capped at \$33.84 per week (\$1625 per year) this fee is charged on top of the price of a train ticket from the worker's home to the relevant airport train station. AIPA represents over 2,300 Qantas Group pilots of whom approximately 1,000 are based in Sydney.

Approximately thirty thousand people work at Sydney Airport, from pilots and flight attendants to air traffic controllers, engineers, mechanics, baggage handlers, retail and hospitality workers, security guards, firefighters and AFP officers. Indeed, Sydney Airport has been described as a "mini-city". It has been estimated that Sydney Airport contributes 2% to national GDP.¹

Charging an "access fee" on top of the rail fare puts NSW out of step with the other states. The Brisbane AirTrain offers significant discounts for employees, and the newly constructed Perth Airport rail line does not add any additional surcharge to the standard rail fare. All other capital city airports are serviced by government bus services with no surcharge.

As you are no doubt aware Australians are suffering a cost-of-living crisis. The minimum wage is currently set at \$23.23 per hour (\$882.80 per 38-hour week before tax). As such, an airport worker earning minimum wage, who is paying \$1625 per year just to get through the front door of their workplace is effectively working two weeks a year for free. It is this context that many airport workers choose to get off the train at Mascot or Green Square stations, and then walk to the airport, rather than pay the fee. This adds extra time to their daily commute and involves walking through a heavy industrial zone of Sydney, often at night. As I am sure you can appreciate this is a less than safe situation.

Pilots are of course relatively well paid, as is commensurate with our high level of technical skill and the safety critical nature of our role. Pilots believe that as a matter of principle no one should have to pay a fee to enter their own workplace. Pilots also wish to add their voice in solidarity with their fellow aviation workers, many of whom they work with closely on a daily

¹ Deloitte *Economic Contribution of Sydney Airport 2019* (February 2021) (page ii).

basis. Both Qantas and the Sydney Airport Corporation are on record supporting this proposal. Few issues unite both the union movement and the business community as this proposal does.

Apart from the economic aspects of the proposal, there is a strong sustainability element as well. Through the Net Zero Plan, the NSW government has committed itself to achieving a 70% reduction in carbon emissions compared to 2005 levels, by 2035.² Encouraging public transport usage is an invaluable way of empowering the public to make sustainable choices.

This proposal is not new. In 2013 the NSW Government General Purpose Standing Committee investigated removing (or at least reducing) the Station Access Fee at Sydney Airport. The committee recommended:

“That Transport for NSW investigate the feasibility and publicly report the findings to remove or discount the station usage fee cost for single and return tickets to Domestic and International Airport stations for workers in the Sydney Airport precinct. If found feasible, then Transport for NSW should enter into negotiations with Airport Link Company to implement this measure.”
(Recommendation No.6)³

Are you able to confirm if Transport for NSW ever conducted this investigation?

When AIPA member 737 Captain David Collits wrote to you regarding this issue he received a reply from the Parliamentary Secretary for Transport, Marjorie O’Neill MP⁴. Ms O’Neill stated:

“The airport stations are privately owned and operated by the Airport Link Company (ALC), under a private-public partnership that runs to 20 May 2030.....The SAF is set independently by the ALC”.

Shifting responsibility onto the Airport Link Company leaves airport employees and their families with nowhere to turn. Governments are responsible to the people, whereas private companies are responsible only for their own self-interest. All too often over the past forty years we have seen governments and corporations ‘privatising profits and socialising losses’. It is worth noting, to take just one example, the ALC contract includes restrictions on the provision of public bus services which would be in competition with the Airport Link⁵. The ALC charges customers like a private business, yet they enjoy protected status as part of their contract with the state. It is one thing for governments to outsource construction and operation to the private sector. Government’s cannot however outsource responsibility.

Despite the statement by Marjorie O’Neill that the Station Access Fee is set independently by the ALC, there is already a precedent for change. The Keneally government was able to remove the station access fee for Mascot and Green Square stations. There is no reason the same arrangement could not be implemented for Domestic and International.

² www.energy.nsw.gov.au

³ Report 29 (February 2014) General Purpose Standing Committee No.3. (page 47).

⁴ Letter from Marjorie O’Neill MP to David Collits (Ref: 01823459).

⁵ Report 29 (February 2014) General Purpose Standing Committee No.3 (page 21).

Furthermore, Labor went to the 2019 election promising to reduce airport rail fares for all commuters. Now that Labor is in government, this proposal represents a perfect opportunity to begin the process of moving towards implementing that election promise.

To this end, I make the following recommendations for your consideration:

1. Request Transport for NSW if they ever implemented Recommendation No.6 of the 2013 the NSW Government General Purpose Standing Committee Investigation into removing or reducing Station Access Fees at Sydney Airport.
2. Utilise the removal of Station Access Fees at Mascot and Green Square as a template for the removal of Station Access Fees at Domestic and International for airport workers.
3. Consider reducing the cost of accessing the Domestic and International train stations for all customers in line with Labor's 2019 election promise.

Please direct correspondence on this matter to AIPA's National Industrial Officer Scott Rickard at scott.rickard@aipa.org.au or by phone (02) 8307 7714.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "A. Lucas".

Captain Anthony Lucas
AIPA President