

Statement in Support of Public Transport Concessions for All Students

SUPRA has been campaigning for greater equity in New South Wales's public transport concession scheme for the past thirty-five years. We believe that all students deserve equal treatment. For international students who are excluded on the sole basis of their nationality, exclusion from public transport concessions is a clear example of discrimination.

For part-time students, this exclusion is unfair. Studying part-time allows students with dependents or financial obligations to return to study. These students are often profoundly in need of travel concessions, yet they are prevented from accessing them due to their enrolment status.

We believe all students need concessions. Concessions recognise students' reduced earning capacity, as well as their contributions to the state of NSW by pursuing higher education. For both international and part-time students, the exclusion from transport concessions adds insult to injury. By arguing that inclusion in the scheme would be too expensive for the state of NSW, we deny these students' extensive economic, cultural and social contributions to NSW.

In 2006, SUPRA's position was upheld by the NSW Administrative Decisions Tribunal, when it held that "the NSW Government's longstanding policy of not providing full-fee paying overseas university student with concessional travel on public transport services contravenes the Anti-Discrimination Act (1977)." However, the Transport Administration Act (1988) was later amended to avoid needing to comply with the Anti-Discrimination Act (1988). As such, the Government was able to avoid complying with the Tribunal's ruling.

In 2023, transport concessions are more important than ever. All students are facing a cost-of-living crisis. Housing is increasingly unaffordable, and students are increasingly priced out of living close to their university campuses. As a result, they pay more in public transport costs—and, for part time and international students, this means paying full-fare. These inequitable fares have far-reaching consequences—part time and international students then face increased risk of food insecurity and poverty.

Transport concessions are a workers' rights issue too. International and part-time students use public transport to get to and from their workplaces. In healthcare, social services, and education, students use public transport to get to their placement sites where they contribute to workforces facing acute shortages. Part time and international students are forced to pay double the fares paid students domestic, full-time students for the same journey.

SUPRA believes that travel concessions are a vital way to ensure all students have an equal opportunity to pursue education and training—from the moment they set out for campus to the moment they arrive home. Transport concessions are a vital vehicle for a more fair, equal NSW.