

Hon John Brumby MP
Premier of Victoria
1 Treasury Place
Melbourne Victoria 3002



Monday 24 August 2009.

c/- Graduate Student Association
Graduate Centre
University of Melbourne
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Dear Premier,

We write in reply to your previous correspondence, dated 29/06/09, regarding the provision of public transport concessions to Postgraduate and International students in Victoria.

We note with some disappointment that your reply to our initial letter, enclosed with a petition of some 10,000 students and supporters, was not drafted until a whole two months after our initial correspondence.

We also express our disappointment that the petition we asked for you to table in the State Parliament was struck out on a technicality of "parliamentary procedure".

In the meantime, and in the spirit of our unwavering conviction, we have been busily arranging a subsequent petition which puts forward the same demand unabridged. This time the signatories *have* included their residential addresses. The signatories to this petition, to date, number well in excess of the number previously submitted, and this figure is still growing.

From your previous letter we know that you have heard us. However hearing is, as we understand, quite different to being listened to. With that in mind we have a number of subsequent points to advance:

1. Commonwealth low income Health Care Cards

We note that you *alert* us to the availability of transport concessions to domestic students holding a Commonwealth Health Care Card. However returning to our previous correspondence we would draw your attention again to the fact that we then wrote:

"While we acknowledge that recent changes to concession fare eligibility (allowing any domestic student with a Commonwealth Health Care Card the right to concession) is a step forward, we reject the notion that this meets the genuine need experienced by the entire student body.

Aside from the difficulty associated with actually obtaining the Commonwealth Health Care Card, this policy maintains a three-tiered approach to concession fares - namely, ineligibility for all international students, restricted eligibility for all postgraduates, and full eligibility for all undergraduates. We assert that eligibility for the Commonwealth

Health Care Card is an inadequate measure of ‘need’, as it hinges on eligibility parameters that are outside the jurisdiction of the State of Victoria.

We firmly believe and assert that *all* students ‘need’ concessions, and that in many cases postgraduate and international students need them more than others. For example, postgraduate students undertaking research are frequently required to undertake extensive travel to conduct research activities. And, for a number of reasons, international students are often compelled to live further away from their educational institution than their domestic counterparts, thus facing substantial public transport costs on a daily or at least regular basis.”

(Letter from Paul Coats and Sarah Quek, 29 April 2009)

Could you please provide a fulsome response to these points, being the actual content of our previous letter.

2. Your assertion of “need”

In your reply, you state that “The current [State Government] policy is intended to target concessions to students in genuine financial need. There are no plans to provide postgraduate students with concessions that are not means tested”.

Can you please explain this statement, and in particular demonstrate why Postgraduate students and International students do not fulfill the category of “need”, whilst domestic Undergraduates and Pensioners (including Veteran pensioners) do? Should not your policy be consistent?

Obviously we are not seeking to have transport concessions from the latter groups removed – it would be cynical for the government to bring about equality by removing rights from those that equally deserve them.

3. International Students

In your correspondence you state that “Fee-paying international students are not entitled to public transport concession fares. The majority of the cost of providing public transport to international students is met by the State of Victoria”.

In making this claim are you, in reality, asserting any (or all) of the following:

- a) International students will *never* be allowed to have transport concession in this state?
- b) International students are not really part of the Victorian “public”?
- c) International students receive a *net* ‘subsidy’ from the State Government?
[we note here the reality that they contribute over \$4 billion to the Victorian economy, and their fee contributions have sustained the - often dwindling - viability of our so-called ‘public’ universities].

4. Public Transport Minister

We note that you wrote of your intention to forward our previous letter to the Minister for Public Transport, The Hon Lynne Kosky MP, “to bring [our] concerns to her attention”.

We have received no correspondence from Minister Kosky, and wonder whether her attention has been garnered sufficiently.

Your hasty response to all of the above points would be most appreciated.

However, in light of your government's continued unwillingness to act for transport concession equality for students in this State thus far, the *Concession Card Coalition* has organised (once again) for a sizeable protest march - involving students from many public Universities and private education providers – to assemble on 2nd September.

The 'Fair Fares' protest will arrive at the State Parliament building at approximately 3pm on Wednesday 2nd September 2009. We will, once again, be there to present to you (or your representative) the aforementioned petition.

We invite you to receive this petition and table it in the State Parliament as we have requested. We hope that the Parliament, the Public Transport Minister, the State Cabinet, and relevant state departments will this time be prompted to *listen* to the tertiary students of this state.

Never before have public transport concessions been so urgently needed by the students we represent. If we are to thank you further for something, it's that your refusal to respond courageously continues to strengthen the bond between our organisations, and has steeled our resolve to maintain the cause of equality.

This is, once again, a historic opportunity for your government to act in the spirit of genuine equality, and we urge you to seize the moment.

Yours Sincerely,

Paul Coats

President

University of Melbourne Graduate Students Association (GSA).

Dongping Huang (Sally)

International Student Officer

Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA), and;

President

La Trobe University Postgraduate Association (LUPA).

Anwar Shah

International Student Officer

Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA), and;

University of Melbourne Graduate Students Association (GSA).

On behalf of the newly formed 'Concession Card Coalition', of which active membership includes (to date):

University of Melbourne Graduate Students Association

Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations

National Union of Students

Perhimpunan Pelajar Indonesia, (Indonesian Students Association (Australia))

Victorian Malaysian Postgraduates Association

Melbourne Overseas Vietnamese Students Association

Federation of Indian Students Australia

Monash Postgraduate Association

Monash Students Association

University of Melbourne Student Union

La Trobe University Postgraduate Association

La Trobe University Students Representative Council

Swinburne Student Union

RMIT Student Union

Victorian College of the Arts Student Union

International Students Legal Advice Clinic

Individual Students and Staff supporters from:

Holmes Institute

Cambridge College

Hales Institute

Victorian Institute of Technology

Gurkha Institute

Lonsdale Institute

Cc: Victorian Minister for Public Transport, Hon Lynne Kosky
Universities Australia
Australian Council for Private Education and Training
Federal Education Minister, Hon Julia Gillard
Prime Minister, Hon Kevin Rudd