

Hon John Brumby MP
Premier of Victoria
Level 1, 1 Treasury Place
East Melbourne Vic 3002

29 April 2009

Dear Premier,

We write to you representing some 23,000 students at the University of Melbourne who are currently ineligible for public transport concessions in this State.

The case for providing public transport concession cards for *all* students is a compelling one.

It is widely understood that the onset of the global financial crisis will transform contemporary society. In particular, some have highlighted the real possibility of a decline in international student enrolments into the future, a decline underscored by altered exchange rates, diminished financial means among the families of prospective students, and the already apparent financial struggle of currently enrolled international students who face increases in rent, university tuition fees and living expenses.

Many of these pressures are also felt by postgraduate students. Since postgraduate qualifications are fast becoming the necessary norm for entry into an increasing number of professions, it is no longer sustainable to treat postgraduate study as a simple choice.

Both international and postgraduate students contribute to our community economically, socially and academically, and these students feel that their contribution is grossly undervalued by the State Government. Melbourne in particular has a reputation throughout Australia as the cultural and culturally diverse capital city; but this reputation will be seriously undermined by your Government's current policy on transport concessions.

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.

These issues are the tip of very large iceberg. We appeal to your government to give serious and considered attention to all aspects of student public transport concessions, with a view to ending the inherent inequity in the current situation. For some time we have been engaged in a public campaign to highlight this inequity, and we will be taking our protest to the streets on Wednesday 29 April.

We have collected a significantly large number of signatures on a petition that we request be tabled in Parliament. We invite you, or your representative, to receive this petition on the steps of the Victorian Parliament at 2 pm Wednesday 29 April. A large crowd will be assembled to witness the handover of the petition, and we trust that your Government will appreciate the demonstrated workings of democracy inherent in our protest and petition.

We look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Coats
President
Graduate Student Association (GSA)
University of Melbourne

Sarah Quek
President
Melbourne University Overseas Students service
University of Melbourne

Encl. List of organisations that are sponsoring the 29 April 2009 protest.

Federation of Indian Students Australia

Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations

Persatuan Pelajar Indonesia Australia

National Union of Students

International Student Advisors Network Australia

Rail, Tram and Bus Union, Victorian Branch

National Tertiary Education Union

Monash Postgraduate Association

Latrobe University Postgraduate Association

University of Melbourne Student Union

Swinburne Student Union

RMIT Student Union