



Consumer Council of Fiji

www.consumersfiji.org

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PRESS RELEASE

Disposable Cards Must Stay

The Consumer Council of Fiji is disappointed with the announcement of the phasing out of disposable cards made by the Fiji Bus Operators Association (FBOA) president Nisar Ali Shah in the media last week.

Unavailability of disposable card was already a grave concern, now the announcement by the FBOA that they would be phasing out the disposal cards is utterly uncalled for.

Disposable cards were meant to cater for emergencies and one-off travel on buses and to cater for visitors and tourists coming to Fiji. Phasing out the disposable card leaves consumers with no alternative when faced with unforeseen circumstances such as loss of cards and emergencies.

Additionally, the tourism sector will also be affected as many tourists will face difficulties commuting, should this phase-out eventuate. Globally, public transport, including bus industries provide disposal cards to tourists so that they can move around discovering places easily and in an affordable manner. In other words, by phasing out the disposal card, tourist will have to go through the hassle of purchasing e-ticketing cards, which he/she would be required to dispose of at the end of his/her vacation. This requirement may also restrict their movements.

The Council would also like to remind FBOA that they are required under the law to provide disposable cards on buses. Stating that it was a “temporary solution” is incorrect. Section 5a (1) of the Electronic Fair Ticketing (Budget Amendment) Act 2017 *stipulates that a passenger may purchase a disposable card from a solution provider, top up issuing agent or an **omni-bus driver***. Planning to phase out the cards is contrary to their requirements under the law.

Furthermore, the Regulations 7 A of the Electronic Fare Ticketing (Omnibus) (Amendment) Regulations 2017 clearly stipulates that “*An omnibus operator must ensure that disposable bus cards are available for sale at all times on any omnibus owned by the omnibus operator*” Lack of adherence by the bus operators shall incur a penalty of \$1000 and a failure to pay the fine on their part will result in a maximum fine of \$5000.

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The Council also noted that the FBOA's reasoning for phasing out bus cards was to ensure that consumers save money as opposed to disposing off cards that still have balance. This is incorrect. Consumers have the option of redeeming unused monies from disposable cards by simply going to any solution provider to have it transferred to permanent bus cards.

A quick survey in the Central, Western and Northern bus stands earlier today, revealed that out of 41 buses, 11 did not have disposable cards available. Hence, commuters in certain areas where there is no top-up issuing agents and non-availability of disposable cards on the buses can face problems if they wish to travel. While consumers are encouraged to get their personal e-transport cards recharged and kept safely, the disposable cards should be available in the buses at all times for the convenience of the many consumers in situations of unforeseen circumstances.

The Council is firm in its position that disposable bus cards must remain and that the FBOA is bringing up issues that already have solutions. Consumers should not be subjected to limitations by FBOA that is only considering the ease of commute of one faction instead of the whole.

Consumers facing commute issues relative to disposable bus cards is urged to the Council on toll-free helpline 155 or email complaints@consumersfiji.org

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