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11 October 2024

PRESS RELEASE

Consumer Council Highlights Unfair Practices in Student Bus Fare Tapping

The growing confusion surrounding bus fare tapping for students, especially those using yellow bus cards, has raised significant concerns among parents and students about inconsistent fare practices. In light of these issues, the Council is emphasizing the importance of clear communication and urging immediate action to protect students' rights.

Earlier this year, consumers were informed that bus fares for Viti Levu and Vanua Levu would now be calculated on a per-seat basis, as approved by the Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission (FCCC). Additionally, the Ministry of Education (MOE) committed to subsidizing fare increases for yellow card holders, allowing students to continue paying the existing half-fare rate, applicable even during the school holidays and weekends. It was also made clear that students are not required to tap their cards twice when boarding buses.

However, there still seems to be a lot of misinformation and confusion pertaining to the bus fares charged by bus operators and bus drivers. The Council has received multiple reports from consumers about bus drivers asking students to tap twice, while some students have been refused service, and offloaded from buses. Consumers are also reporting that bus drivers are insisting and at times, arguing, that tapping twice is the new policy authorized by the Land Transport Authority (LTA).

Investigations done by the Council confirms that there is no such instruction or directive from either the LTA, FCCC or the MOE. According to clarifications by FCCC, MOE and LTA, students who tap their yellow cards should still be charged the **half of the adult fare**. That is, if stage one fare is \$1.02 for adults, students should be charged \$0.51 and drivers must select the fare correctly.

Consumer Council CEO Seema Shandil, expressed her concern over these consumer complaints, stating, "It is alarming that some bus drivers continue to insist that students tap their cards twice, which effectively charges them the adult fare. Consumers, especially students must be aware that this practice is prohibited and should stop immediately."

Ms. Shandil states, "Throughout our investigations, we learned that some bus drivers are adhering to management instructions to implement the double-tap rule. Drivers have reported being instructed by their companies to require students to tap twice. However, when the Council contacted one of these companies, management denied having issued such directives. This inconsistency may indicate a communication gap between the companies and their drivers.

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We want to stress the importance of providing clear instructions to eliminate any potential for assumptions or misunderstandings," says Ms. Shandil.

The Council is calling for greater transparency and improved communication between bus company management and their drivers. "It is essential that bus companies ensure their drivers fully understand and comply with the fare structure especially when it comes to the correct use of e-ticketing machines and fare selection for students," stated Ms. Shandil.

Consumers, particularly parents and students, are urged to report any incidents where bus drivers request a double-tap for yellow card holders. Ms. Shandil reassured the public that the Council will take all reports seriously: "Any violations will be thoroughly investigated, and we will work closely with the FCCC, LTA and Ministry of Education to ensure that consumer rights are upheld."

The Consumer Council will continue its efforts to advocate for the rights of consumers and ensure that bus operators comply with regulations designed to protect vulnerable groups, including students and yellow card holders. Meanwhile, consumers are urged to report their bus fare related concerns to the National Consumer Helpline 155 or complaints@consumersfiji.org.

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