

# Letter of Complaint to NSW Trains

Cc: Transport for NSW, Transport Asset Holding Entity (TAHE), Minister for Transport

## Introduction

Dear Recipient,

I hope this letter finds you well. I am a regular commuter on NSW Trains. I rely on your services to travel to and from work every day. The purpose of this letter is to bring to your attention the negative impact of the repeated announcements regarding fines for feet on seats and smoking on the trains.

*"You could be fined for placing your feet on the seat."*

*"Smoking, including e-cigarettes are not allowed on this train. Fines apply. Thank you."*

## Negative, Fear-Based, Authoritarian Environment

The tone of these announcements is notably authoritarian, creating an atmosphere where passengers feel like they are under constant surveillance. The use of fear as a deterrent, specifically the threat of fines, adds unnecessary stress to the commuting experience. This constant bombardment of negative messaging tarnishes the overall experience, making it less enjoyable and more stressful for passengers.

## Announcement Fatigue and Its Implications

The frequency of the announcements on NSW Trains contributes to auditory pollution, adding another layer of stress to an already taxing environment. This constant bombardment of messages can lead to a phenomenon known as 'announcement fatigue,' where passengers may start to ignore even important announcements. This is not only counterproductive but also poses a safety risk, as passengers might tune out critical safety information.

The concept of 'announcement fatigue' is supported by academic research. For instance, a study titled "Message fatigue: Conceptual definition, operationalization, and correlates" by Jiyeon So, Soela Kim, and Heather Cohen, published on November 2, 2016, delves into how repeated messaging can lead to decreased attention and engagement from the audience. [Source](#)

Another relevant study, "Alert Now or Never: Understanding and Predicting Notification Preferences of Smartphone Users," published on January 6, 2023, by Tianshi Li at Carnegie Mellon University, discusses how frequent notifications can lead to decreased user engagement and attention. [Source](#)

Given these findings, it's clear that the frequent announcements on NSW Trains are a disproportionate response to a problem that may not be as widespread as implied. This not only diminishes the effectiveness of these announcements but also negatively impacts the overall passenger experience.

## Extent of the Problem and the Circular Counter-Argument

In my daily commute on NSW Trains, I have observed that the behaviours these announcements aim to deter—specifically, placing feet on seats and smoking or vaping—are exceedingly rare. This raises questions about the necessity and proportionality of such frequent and intrusive announcements.

It's worth noting that a common counter-argument might be that the very reason I haven't observed these behaviours is due to the frequency of the announcements. While this may seem like a valid point, it actually creates a circular argument that is difficult to substantiate without concrete data. If the announcements are indeed so effective, then their continued frequency should be unnecessary, as the behaviours they aim to deter would have already been significantly reduced.

Moreover, if the announcements are the sole reason for the absence of these behaviours, then one would expect similar issues to be rampant in environments without such announcements. However, that does not appear to be the case, at least not to the extent that would justify the current frequency and tone of the announcements on NSW Trains.

Therefore, I would like to request data or evidence that supports the need for such frequent announcements. Specifically, what studies or surveys have been conducted to assess the prevalence of these behaviours on NSW Trains? And how have these findings been used to calibrate the frequency and content of the announcements? Without such data, it's difficult to assess the necessity and effectiveness of these announcements, and whether they do more harm than good by contributing to a negative and stressful environment.

### **Ethical and Psychological Implications for a Captive Audience**

As passengers who rely on NSW Trains for our daily commute, we have no alternative but to use this service, making us a captive audience to the constant announcements. This unique dynamic raises ethical questions about the appropriateness of subjecting passengers to frequent negative messaging. The ethical dilemma is further exacerbated when considering the health and psychological impacts of such messaging. Research has shown that constant exposure to negative stimuli can elevate stress levels and even contribute to anxiety disorders over time, especially in individuals who are already predisposed to such conditions. Given that passengers are essentially a captive audience with limited options to avoid these messages, the ethical implications of subjecting them to potential psychological harm become even more pressing. Therefore, it's crucial to weigh the purported benefits of these announcements against the ethical and psychological costs they impose on a captive audience.

### **Research to Support the Case**

Research articles such as "Global study: In public health messaging, negative framing triggers anxiety — not better outcomes" by James F Smith, published on October 4, 2022, discuss the negative impacts of incessant negative messaging on mental health and overall well-being. [Source](#)

### **Suggestions for Improvement**

I suggest that the frequency of these announcements be reduced and that the language and tone be changed to be more positive and less authoritarian. Alternative solutions could include the use of signage or periodic checks by train staff. Additionally, I request the sharing of data that supports the need for such announcements.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, the current approach to announcements regarding fines for feet on seats and smoking creates a negative and stressful environment for passengers. I kindly request a timely response to this letter and thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,