

VIEW FROM CANBERRA

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The Election – Why you should care

Election time is here again, and what can we expect for public transport?

Does it matter that the government under the leadership of the PM has jumped head first into the Cities and Public Transport space with the release on April 29 of the Governments Smart Cities Plan?

The plan is the starting point and includes a strong focus on better planning and investment in public transport infrastructure and the development of “cities deals” between the federal and state and territory governments. The Opposition through Anthony Albanese is taking credit for the Government’s announcements or as he calls them “re-announcements” of his 30 Minute City and 10 point plan that he launched at the National Press Club in 2015.

The Greens have been banging on about investing in public transport forever and a day and except for their seemingly insatiable wish to “light rail” Australia, no matter the cost or reason, they are pretty much on song with the BIC.

So, considering all of this, the election could prove interesting in that each political party is now in competition with each other to invest in our cities and regions and how we move people. This is a far cry from the last election where Tony Abbott declared that “roads is our knitting”, we build roads the rest is up to the states, taking public transport completely off the agenda as an election issue.

The political world has turned and this election will, I believe, have a strong focus on our capital and major cities (18 of them) and the importance of making them productive and liveable.

80% of the value of Australia’s GDP comes from these cities, not from agriculture or mining. Cities and major regions are the knowledge drivers of the economy. How they work is important, how people move is important and most importantly people care and the political parties know that there are votes in making our cities better, making public transport better, making public transport infrastructure better.

The BIC has been trying to convince the federal government for over a decade about the need to be directly involved in public transport. The BIC policy paper on the *20 minute city* has become the mantra of the Coalition and the ALP.

Albo and Malcolm have decided on a 30 minute city concept. This is great considering a decade ago the BIC was saying that “Australia was one of the few western developed economies where its national government did not have a direct role in public transport”.

The 30 minute city concept is a great acknowledgment of the work that the BIC has done with its advocacy efforts. It also means we still have some work to do to get the PM and Albo to understand that 20 minute cities and towns is about offering travel alternatives to the car. There is still work to be done to get them to understand that the aim is to plan neighbourhoods of the future that will allow people to do most of the things they want and need to do, most of the time, within 20 minutes of where they live by walking, cycling or public transport. The problem with 30 minutes is people start to think about taking the car instead.

My hope for this election is that with tri- partisan (Greens, ALP and Coalition) support for federal government involvement in cities and public transport, it becomes a race to see who can promise the most in this election. This

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is a far cry from the wilderness we found ourselves over a decade ago but the work is now ahead of us to get Governments to deliver on the rhetoric.

BIC released its Federal Election Primer in late April - check it out on the BIC website at www.ozebus.com.au and get it in the hands of your Federal member and candidates in this election.

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