

View from Canberra



11 November 2019

The BIC Chairman, Wayne Patch, couldn't have said it better in his report given at the BIC Annual General Meeting held on November 17 at the National Convention Centre in Canberra.

His thoughts on how we need to think of our industry as the enablers and providers in future mobility and the important task that our industry undertakes in Australia's communities and how the government needs to be involved, will form the basis of this column.

Some people argue that the day of public transport and other bus type services are coming to an end as "disruptive technologies" bring new services to the market.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

The age of public transport and more personalised passenger services is coming - not ending.

The bus and coach industry will be at the forefront of how we move people in the future, covering all aspects of mobility choice including the spine of public transport; On Demand; First and Last Mile; and personal transport services.

The fact of the matter is that these services have been delivered by the industry in one form or another for decades, the only difference today is what some people like to call disruptive technology.

It is not disruptive – it's adaptive technology. Technology that is about adapting to change.

Modern phones and apps let us better connect and this industry is already a leader in how these transport services will be delivered.

If we look at the telco model of service offerings, providing transport services could be in the form of a subscription that allows customers to bundle a range of services to meet their individual mobility needs. This subscription would include public transport concessional arrangements and commercial arrangements. This is, in fact, already happening.

Bus operators will continue to be at the core of future transport – as the "enablers" – connecting the passengers and as the "providers" – transporting people on a mass transit scale through to providing personal transit options.

Future population growth projections will place enormous pressure on our cities and growing regions. That is why future mobility can't be left to technology or commercial interests. All levels of government have a role to play.

As an industry we don't want just good public transport for our customers - we want great public transport services. This is why the federal government has a strategic and active role to play in public transport for our cities and regions of the future. There are a few key messages that the BIC has been taking to federal government.

1. Public transport infrastructure investment is a no brainer.



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2. Bus rapid transit and bus priority are measures that cost 4 to 10 times less than fixed infrastructure but hardly get a go at federal level.
3. Infrastructure Australia has recently stated that major public transport projects must be more closely scrutinised and all modal options more fully assessed. This would be a good start.
4. Federally funded roads should be conditional on integration with public transport and include bus priority measures.
5. And some food for thought, if governments are serious about autonomous vehicles in the next 10-20 years, then autonomous buses will be the future.

The BIC 2019 Federal Election Primer addressed to all political parties prior to the last election, made a number of suggestions on how the federal government can influence service delivery improvement in return for state and territory and local government incentives.

Incentives could be provided for example to states and territories for the purchase of new buses on the condition of increased passenger services, better branded bus services and timetable free bus services.

Frequency, span of hours and reliability are the three key drivers of public transport patronage. These should be conditional benchmarks for state, territory and local governments who provide public transport services in return for federal funding and other incentives.

It was good to have our National Conference in Canberra in November to highlight the critical thinking undertaken by our industry to address the future challenges in the moving people task in our ever-expanding cities and regions. Next month, I will expand further on the BIC's core message that we have been taking to governments across Australia in 2019 and our plans for 2020.

Bus Australia Network

