

BIC Column April 2014

BIC's lobbying philosophy is less about bells and whistles and more about grinding away slowly until we achieve a breakthrough. Breakthrough moments are rare, but when they come they make a real difference to how policy is made by the Federal Government.

March saw a big win for the Bus Industry Confederation's lobbying in Canberra and this month's column tells the story of what it was and how it happened.

As reported in last month's column the BIC made a strong Senate Inquiry submission related to the proposed Infrastructure Australia Amendment Bill. We joined up with members of the Moving People 2030 Taskforce to make the argument that Infrastructure Australia (IA) needed to be strengthened as an independent review body to assess all classes of infrastructure projects, including public transport projects. We were worried that the proposed amendments would weaken IA rather than improve it.

In our lobbying the BIC and six other national organisations began grinding away, making sure that the issue was mentioned every time that these groups spoke to Federal Parliamentarians.

The BIC then appeared at the Senate Inquiry into the Infrastructure Australia Amendment Bill. You can see all of the fireworks of the appearance on the OzeBus website via YouTube www.ozebus.com.au.

The view that the Amendment Bill would weaken, not strengthen Infrastructure Australia and give the Minister too much discretionary power received coverage in a number of daily newspapers and was raised by a number of Opposition and Green Members and Senators in Parliament.

This all came to a conclusion at the BIC's Annual Industry Dinner in Canberra where the Assistant Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development, the Hon Jamie Briggs MP, answered the question in his speech. In his speech Minister Briggs said:

"...[F]irstly can I say, Michael, one of your requests, I can tell you tonight we can meet and that is that Infrastructure Australia, under our reforms, will be able to assess public transport projects and make recommendations on them. Of course, they will. Of course, that will be an important part. Public transport is an important part of our infrastructure mix, and our commitment is we want to spend extraordinary amounts on road transport and freight rail, which we think will help free up additional amounts for - as you acknowledge - for state governments to do more when it comes to public transport. We think, as part of our audits that we want Infrastructure Australia to do and part of our plan to build the pipeline of infrastructure projects for the next 15 years, that of course, public transport projects will be part of that, and we would hope the state governments, and we would be working proactively with state governments to ensure that we work our cities or plan our cities in a way that they are funding those projects which will make our cities stronger and more effective."

An extraordinary step in the right direction from a drop dead "public transport is a States issue" stance, to committing the Government to play a role in how we move people in our cities and regions. But, and there is always a but, the Government needs to do more than make a commitment to allow IA to assess public transport infrastructure projects. If IA shows that a public transport project will deliver the best outcomes for the economy and community; the project needs to be funded, not just assessed! This is our industry's next big challenge.