

BIC Column January 2015

As I write the year has started with a bang, with an early state election called in Queensland by Premier Campbell Newman. The election is to be held on 31 January, more than two months ahead of schedule.

It is unclear why the date for the election has been brought forward in Queensland, but with the latest polling showing voters split 50-50 between the major parties, it looks like it will be a close contest. The enormous existing majority for the Government means it is unlikely a change of Government will occur. The key questions in Queensland are what the extent of the swing against the Government will be and whether the Premier can hold his own seat, where he is under considerable pressure from a very popular candidate.

The Queensland election is one of two key state elections that will be held in 2015, the other one being the NSW state election on Saturday, 28 March. Both of these elections could have big implications for our industry.

In Queensland the uncertainty surrounding bus contracts, is a key issue for the Queensland industry. The BIC understands that the Newman Government proposes to tender bus contracts in September 2015 including Brisbane Transport. The Queensland Bus Industry Council (QBIC) and their members are opposing this proposal.

The privatisation agenda, particularly of state owned assets, was in part an underlying cause of the heavy defeat the Bligh Government suffered in 2012. It will be interesting to see the public response in this election to asset privatisation and the bus tendering proposals.

The NSW state election is also interesting for our industry because until the resignation of John Robertson as Opposition Leader we had a distinct contest between a strategy aimed at winning seats in regional centres and a strategy focussed on Sydney.

Through the announcement of his enormous \$20 billion infrastructure plan for the Greater Sydney Region, including significant investment in public transport infrastructure and services, NSW Premier Mike Baird played a hand geared towards retaining and winning key marginal electorates in urban areas. As Opposition Leader, John Robertson's focus on retaining state ownership of the electricity poles and wires, in order to keep electricity costs down, was in stark contrast to the Premier's and was aimed at retaining and winning key seats in regional centres.

As the polls have shown over the past few months Premier Baird's strategy is working, with the Government holding a significant lead going into 2015. John Robertson, perhaps miscalculated in assuming that people living in regional centres, particularly regional cities, do not hold similar lifestyle aspirations to those living in capital cities. This includes access to good public transport services, and in outer metropolitan areas of Sydney and regional centres this means bus services.

The appointment of Luke Foley as Opposition Leader in NSW is an opportunity for the Labor opposition to pivot away from poles and wires as a strategy and focus more on urban and development and public transport investment. As Shadow Minister for Planning and Infrastructure Luke Foley would be well aware of the electoral value of good policy in this area.

The BIC will watch both elections with interest and work with State Associations to ensure that moving people policies feature in both campaigns. As seen in the recent Victorian state election the public transport policies of major parties were a crucial factor in deciding the outcome. No doubt the pressure coming from the Federal ALP for Federal involvement in public transport and functioning cities and regions can only further influence the Prime Minister to rethink his Government's position on positive policies and investment into buses and public transport generally.