

BIC Column – September

There is real intrigue in Canberra at the moment and a lot of doubt is being cast on the future of the Government.

It is worth noting that if the ill fated Member of Parliament from the Central Coast does resign and a by-election is held it doesn't spell the end of the current Government even if the Opposition take the seat.

In the event of a by-election being held and the seat going to the Coalition the Government still has the option of bringing the Speaker of the House into the Parliament, giving them an extra seat in the house to make up for the seat they lost. And the cross benches have agreed not to change their agreement with Gillard whilst she is in power, so the full term is my prediction bi-election or no bi-election.

The good news for the industry is that it makes no difference to the way we do things at the BIC because our arguments are based on evidence based policy and equally relevant to all political parties, each of them just have their own nuances.

The BIC's dedicated approach to research over the years has resulted in our advocacy efforts having strong appeal to good policy making and policy makers. There are strong indications from all the major parties that the Federal Government does have a role in investing in and developing policy for public transport in cooperation with State Governments. Their approach is just different. We have come a long way since BIC was established in 2001

National Heavy Vehicle Regulator

The National Heavy Regulator (NHVR) was signed off to at the last meeting of the Council of Australian Governments held in August

In its involvement in the development process for the NHVR, the BIC argued that buses should be treated differently from trucks under the National Heavy Vehicle Law.

The nature of a generally low kilometer industry, the relative absence of commercial pressures related to time and a tightly regulated and Government accredited bus industry has on many occasions not been taken into account when Federal and State Jurisdictions address "heavy vehicle" issues and the national law.

Buses are not trucks and to treat them under one category heading of "heavy vehicles" is and has been problematic, and it looks like this will continue to be the case under the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator.

In our submission to the NHVR we identified some key areas including driving hours, Performance Based Standards, accreditation, vehicle mass and driver licensing where differences between the industries and the nature of work we undertake should be recognised.

This looks unlikely to happen and the bus and coach industry is likely to be lumped into the "one size fits all" approach we have dealt with in the past.

To the credit of the NHVR Project Director, Richard Hancock, he has agreed to form a Bus Taskforce made up of operators and regulators to address Industry concerns.

The Taskforce has met once and whilst not overjoyed by the "what we can't do" focus of the meeting, we are awaiting draft Bus Taskforce Terms of Reference from the Director so the Taskforce can address Industry concerns and present solutions. Hopefully we will get Terms of Reference with teeth and this is not just a lip service exercise. Only time will tell.

It does seem that as an Industry we could end up half pregnant or have a foot in each camp, with some parts of bus regulation being managed by the NHVR and others by State Governments through existing public transport legislative requirements. This is hardly a national approach and a good reason to just exclude us from the NHVR process. This is not going to happen of course, so we need to make the exercise of being half pregnant as painless as possible for the Industry.

The BIC will continue to state the case that we are not trucks and that by recognising the differences in the heavy vehicle law, Governments will deliver better safety, environmental, social, efficiency and productivity outcomes for the bus industry, the community and the economy.

Moving People - The Next Decade

The NHVR is a part of the “Increasing federalism” we are seeing in Australia and this is further reflected in policies like the National Urban Policy and the Sustainable Population Strategy which look at a nationally coordinated approach to managing the issues of population growth, urban congestion and land use and transport planning.

One of the key topics of discussion at the 2011 BIC National Conference is how we represent the industry in the face of this growing “federalism”.

Registration for the 2011 BIC National Conference is now open.

The theme for the 2011 BIC National Conference is *Moving People – the Next Decade* and this year’s Conference is a forum that will focus on bringing operators and suppliers together to plan the direction of industry representation and business direction for the next decade

To download a copy of the BIC National Conference Registration Brochure go to BIC’s Ozebus website www.ozebus.com.au.