

## BIC COLUMN – DECEMBER 2009

### Thrills and Spills: Another Day in Canberra

Excitement is a rare commodity in Canberra; almost as rare as excitement in Federal politics, but I write this column in the wake of one of the more eventful days we have had at Parliament House in the last year.

Leader of the Opposition, Malcolm Turnbull narrowly survived what was effectively a vote to go to a vote for the leadership of the Liberals.

While the vote went the right way for Turnbull, the leadership speculation and tension within the party has done no great favours for the Opposition.

Of course those of us who have long enough memories remember a time when the ALP in opposition was accused of being in similar dire straits and that was less than 15 months out from the 2007 Federal Election.

Interestingly the MP who put his hand up to challenge for the leadership was the Hon Kevin Andrews MP, a Minister in the former Government who recently voiced his opinion about congestion and overcrowding on public transport.

In an online opinion piece the MP argued for a debate on how many people Australia could fit.

"Our roads are congested, our public transport overcrowded, our water supply inadequate, and our amenity under threat...

"So why are we bringing more and more people to Australia?"

The cause of the rift in the Opposition was the Emissions Trading Scheme which will be put to a vote in a few days time. Following the dramas in Parliament today it is expected that the modified version of the Emissions Trading Scheme will be passed with support from the Government and Opposition with the Greens voting against the scheme.

The amendments to the bill agreed on by both parties include further Government relief for emissions intensive industries, but do not include any recognition of the added cost to public transport operators or any solid undertaking to provide compensation for these cost increases through complementary measures to encourage public transport use and develop public transport infrastructure.

This is the position the BIC has been pushing for since the debate about what an Emissions Trading Scheme should include and we will continue to send this message to our Federal Parliamentarians. A plan to develop sustainable transport systems and encourage travel behavior changes amongst Australians is vital if the Government or Opposition are at all serious about addressing the emissions caused by over-reliance on the car.

We don't know yet what the 'complementary measures' to address climate change will be under the new laws and in the year ahead will work to make sure public transport planning and investment from all levels of Government, including the Federal Government remains high on the agenda when climate change strategies are being created by the Government and Department.

Recent patronage figures from Victoria show the dangers of Governments playing catch up where public transport services are concerned. While patronage in Victoria grew 13 per cent in the 12 months to March this year it only grew by 7 per cent in the 12 months to September. Some of this reduction in patronage growth comes from overcrowding on the metropolitan network forcing commuters back into their cars.

To be fair to the Victorian Government, their Transport Plan will see record levels of investment in public transport infrastructure. It is an excellent piece of long-term planning, but to prevent similar high water marks in public transport patronage being reached in our other major cities, immediate measures are needed to meet extra demand and buses are best placed to provide those solutions in the short to medium term.

This response to peaks in demand will be one of the focuses of our lobbying in the year ahead, especially during an election year in 3 States and at a Federal level. Where plans don't exist they are needed, but where plans do exist action is needed. We need solid leadership from all Governments to capitalise on the growth that we have seen in public transport use and make it ongoing rather than a flash in the pan response to economic factors such as fuel prices and the financial crisis.

### **Taking the Message to the Government**

One of our first major lobbying events of 2010 will be a dinner held for the ALP Infrastructure Committee at Parliament House.

This Committee is a 'Friends of Infrastructure' group within the Parliamentary ALP consisting mostly of backbenchers who live in outer-metropolitan and regional seats where there is a strong demand for infrastructure development, with a focus on passenger transport infrastructure, within their electorates.

This is a group of ALP politicians who are serious about the issues we have been bringing to the forefront in our lobbying and the ideas we present at this dinner will focus primarily on the key messages we will take into our Federal and State election campaigns about the need for programs not just one off projects and plans WITH action not just targets in the far off distance.

Just this week we saw a member of the Committee Belinda Neal MP, the Member for Robertson announce she was starting a campaign to see more commuter car parking built in her Central Coast (NSW) electorate.

### **RAATA Symposium**

This month the BIC joined like minded groups who form the Rapid Active and Affordable Transport Alliance (RAATA) at Parliament House to present a symposium on meeting Australia's future transport challenges to a group of Federal parliamentarians.

The day was a great success and we saw representatives from the ALP, Greens and Coalition join in the debate about how to best address the transport needs of Australians and build a sustainable transport future for the nation.

### **Smart Infrastructure Inquiry**

One of the themes at the symposium was how we better use what we have, getting more out of the infrastructure and systems in place instead of building more.

In our presentation at the symposium, the BIC identified investment in intelligent transport systems as a key element of getting more out of our existing systems and infrastructure. This is not a new idea but one that needs to be properly investigated and invested into by State and Federal Governments.

Shortly after, Minister Albanese announced the House Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government will conduct an inquiry into smart infrastructure and make recommendations on ways to maximise its potential benefits to Australians.

The inquiry will look at the role that smart infrastructure can play in areas including transport and provide industry with the opportunity to have our say on the ways smart infrastructure can lift productivity, enhance service delivery, reduce congestion, make infrastructure greener, and improve safety.

The BIC will be working on a response to the inquiry in the months ahead and putting the case forward for delivery of intelligent transport systems led by all Governments with the support of industry. As always busy times ahead at the BIC, but we will take a short break over the holidays.

The BIC office will close on 24 December and reopen on January 4. I wish you all a safe and Merry Christmas and look forward to working with you all in the New Year.