

## **BIC COLUMN – JULY 2009**

In amidst all of the talk of you beaut utes, emails and scandals in Canberra you might forget that buses exist, but all the while public transport has been silently kicking goals and attracting positive attention from the Federal and State Governments.

It has been a busy month gone past with the policy debate about our transport systems in Australia growing and pushing the Commonwealth and State Governments in the right direction.

The BIC through partnerships with other groups and direct representation to Government has been very active in our lobbying efforts as we move closer to the development of a National Moving Plan which looks at how we move passengers in our cities and regions, how we build infrastructure, how we price our roads and how we develop a taxation system that encourages alternatives to the car.

### **Rapid Active and Affordable Transport**

The BIC participated in the Canberra launch of the Rapid Active and Affordable Transport Alliance (RAATA) as part of our efforts to widen support for public transport amongst groups representing public transport users, environmental, health and active transport causes.

RAATA brought the BIC together with groups as diverse as the Australian Conservation Foundation, Diabetes Australia, Heart Foundation and the ACTU.

The launch of the Alliance at Parliament House attracted national media coverage and the group held several productive discussions with both major parties and the Australian Greens during our time there.

A wider issues base, including public health and environment, to support the arguments that the BIC has put forward can play a strong role in encouraging the Commonwealth Government to take the lead in developing strategic policy for passenger transport.

The BIC will continue to take an active approach towards developing these partnerships and it's a case of "watch this space" for the development of public transport alliances in the future.

### **Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme**

The vote on the much debated Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme [CPRS (Emissions Trading Scheme)] has been delayed until August with the Government refusing to budge on the make up of the scheme.

At this stage the CPRS looks unlikely to pass through the Senate unless the Government and Opposition can come to an agreement and bypass the minor parties and independents, who look set to vote against the legislation.

The BIC's lobbying efforts in raising awareness of the counter-intuitive nature of the scheme, which will actually make public transport more expensive as a result of increased operating costs to buses, has been well received by State and Federal Parliamentarians alike. Transport spokesperson for the Australian Greens, Scott Ludlam had this to say during the debate for the CPRS:

“By including buses as public transport vehicles in the heavy vehicle categorisation, the legislation fails to recognise the bus industry's unique status within the heavy vehicle sector as an environmentally positive industry that provides a practical travel alternative to the car.”

“The removal of the proposed cent-for-cent compensation for fuel price increases as a result of the CPRS will increase public transport operating costs. This is what the bus and coach industry are saying to us... So there you have it: the Government's centre piece climate change legislation has been drafted to make public transport more expensive relative to private cars and this is not really an accident; it is something that has been known for many months.”

### **Public Transport Inquiry**

The BIC Submission to the Senate Inquiry into Public Transport has been well received with positive feedback from all major parties.

In our submission to this inquiry the BIC argued that there is an urgent requirement for Commonwealth Government involvement in public transport through the provision of funding support for State and Local Governments and a range of measures targeted at reducing Australians' over-reliance on cars.

The submission outlined a range of funding options and policy initiatives, by investigating international best practice models, to allow the Commonwealth Government to “buy in” to public transport and take an active role in moving people to achieve the best outcomes at all levels of Government for the Australian environment, economy and commuting public.

The inquiry will now report in August, a few months later than planned. The BIC will keep the industry informed about the outcomes from the inquiry and what they might mean for bus based public transport in future.

### **State Budgets – Strong Investment**

Two recent state budgets in Queensland and New South Wales have been encouraging with strong investment in public transport infrastructure and services.

The Queensland State Budget included almost \$350 million for the expansion of the Brisbane busways system and in total allocated almost \$1.5 billion to public transport related infrastructure and systems.

The NSW State Budget saw an expansion in Sydney's bus fleet with an investment in NSW bus services of \$966.2 million; this was divided between \$319.4 million for State Transit and \$646.8 million for private bus operators:

- \$323.3 million will be spent on rural and regional NSW, providing regular and school services, as well as travel concessions for pensioners and students.
- \$76.2 million will purchase 156 replacement buses for private and public operators in Sydney.
- \$74.3 million will be spent on 170 buses as part of a \$128.9 million program to purchase 300 growth buses to expand Sydney's metropolitan and outer metropolitan bus fleet, with delivery by end of 2010.
- \$37.8 million is being spent on 50 bendy buses as part of a \$113.8 million program to purchase 150 bendy buses for State Transit by 2011.

The NSW budget also included more than \$3 billion investment in public transport infrastructure and rolling stock, which is a massive increase from previous years investment.

These are encouraging signs from two key states of a commitment to working with the industry and, in the case of Queensland, with the Federal Government to deliver better transport choices for commuters and better transport outcomes for urban and regional centres.

This investment also highlights what the BIC and State Associations lobbying efforts are really about, more money for public transport means more money for your businesses and more business for manufacturers and suppliers to the industry.

### **National Heavy Vehicle Regulator**

In a move that the Prime Minister described as "historic" the Council of Australian Governments endorsed the establishment of a single national heavy vehicle regulator with responsibility for regulating all vehicles over 4.5 gross tones, including inspection standards, safe driving hours, mass limits and registration. The National Regulator is due to be fully established by 2013, with transitional arrangements to be put in place by 2011.

According to the Prime Minister the national arrangements will "remove inefficiencies arising from inconsistent jurisdictional requirements, streamline the regulatory arrangements and thus reduce the compliance burden for businesses and reduce transport costs."

While this "one stop shop" arrangement for industry regulation is attractive on the face of it, there are still some grey areas the BIC will be keeping an eye on as this process continues. The key question is really what's in and what's out if we have a National Regulator and who's really in charge? Who will make the new rules for the industry and who will enforce them?

What happens to the regulations we already have in place is another burning question that will come up during this process.

The BIC, with State Associations, will take an active role in working with the Commonwealth and State Governments in this process, which will include that we are not simply put in the “too hard” heavy vehicle category and lumped in with the trucking industry.

**BIC National Conference 25-28 October – Hotel Grand Chancellor Hobart**

The full Conference program and registration brochure for the BIC National Conference will be available soon with discounts for BIC Members and early registrations.

This year’s plenary program includes tools for your business; ideas on marketing your operation, what Operators and Supplier’s can expect in the future in relation to vehicles and the development of a best practice School Bus contract system for operators.

More details on the full Conference program will be featured in next month’s column. The draft program is available on the home page of the Ozebus website [www.ozebus.com.au](http://www.ozebus.com.au)

With the Conference being held in the historic and unique city of Hobart this is a great opportunity to arrange a pre or post Conference holiday into the mix and take a break with the family. So start planning now, mark your diary, book some cheap flights early and if you want to book accommodation now contact BIC.

I look forward to seeing you there.

Michael Apps  
Executive Director