

BIC COLUMN – NOVEMBER 2009

The 2009 BIC National Conference

The only thing small about the 2009 BIC Conference was the charming town of Hobart which many of the readers of this Column had the pleasure of visiting in the last week of October.

Everything else, like the ambitions and scope of our industry was BIG. The plenary sessions tackled the big ideas and big challenges we face as an industry and the social events wowed everyone in the crowd.

The attendance at the sessions throughout the Conference was record-breaking not only in the amount of people sitting in on the sessions, but the amount of positive interaction between delegates and speakers. The Volvo cocktail party was just the right start to proceedings, the Mercedes-Benz and Scania dinners were both grand affairs and the Iveco Big Arvo out was... well you get the idea.

In total more than 500 delegates attended the National Conference this year and remarkably many of them were new to the BIC National Conferences or were returning to one for the first time in years.

These are very encouraging signs for the industry showing greater unity amongst operators , manufacturers and suppliers and a broader interest in the major issues than we have ever had before.

This sort of industry wide agreement on the approach we take and understanding of where we fit into the picture as far as urban and regional passenger transport is important as we grow towards becoming part of the "Transport Solution" for Australia's cities and regions.

This "Transport Solution" was touched on by Minister Albanese in his opening message to the Conference where he indicated that the money from the Building Australia Fund for public transport infrastructure in the 2009 Federal Budget was the start of something solid from the Rudd Government.

The strength of the sessions and the great social events were the highlights of the Conference with some strong outcomes for the delegates and some really positive feedback from those who attended.

If you have not attended the BIC Conference previously or did not attend this year's Conference I encourage you to try and make it to the 2010 National Conference. The 2010 BIC National Conference will be held in **Sydney at the Four Seasons Hotel October 24-27** so mark you diaries early and get on board a unique industry experience.

The Right Noises from the Right Places

The end of the Conference is the beginning of not only our planning for the next one, but also delivering on some of the agreed positions that we develop during the Conference sessions.

There is no slowing down after National Conference for the Bus Industry Confederation and we have even more to do after hearing some more of the right noises coming from the right places in Canberra.

In his speech to the Business Council of Australia Prime Minister Kevin Rudd proposed a move to infrastructure funding of State Governments based on criteria laid out by the Commonwealth Government through a process involving all levels of Australian Government.

According to the Prime Minister the new criteria for the strategic planning systems in our major cities would include:

- Implementing credible plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions - through initiatives such as energy efficiency measures, changes to town planning, practical improvements in public transport infrastructure and reform of building codes and regulations.
- Providing for building and upgrading nationally significant infrastructure, such as transport corridors, intermodal connections and communications and utilities networks.
- Providing an effective framework for private sector investment and innovation in the urban infrastructure given that with the fiscal constraints on governments, the nation will need to harness private capital.

This is a continuation of the Infrastructure Australia concept where funding is delivered for projects, including public transport infrastructure and systems, when the proposals from State Governments satisfy essential criteria.

The process of developing this set of urban planning essentials is set to take place during 2010 and the BIC will work to ensure that transport accessibility and the availability of transport alternatives in outer-metropolitan areas remains high on the list of criteria for urban planning in future.

In his address the PM also identified “building productive cities - with efficient transport and communications networks...” as one of the three major challenges facing our cities in the future.

We are hearing the right sort of rhetoric from the Government and in a change of approach the Opposition has taken on the task of holding the Government to their word about the Commonwealth Government playing more of a role in urban planning and public transport infrastructure development.

In a recent press conference Malcolm Turnbull not only addressed the challenge of our growing cities and the need for better urban planning and public transport, but said the opposition would hold the Government accountable if they failed to deliver on their promises.

“Well clearly our cities are getting bigger and they will become more densely settled but the reality is that in order to cope with this population, we need better urban planning and a much greater investment in public transport infrastructure in our cities. Now that of course has historically been the responsibility of state governments and they have manifestly failed, as indeed they have with water planning as well. Mr Rudd said there was going to be a new era of federal-state cooperation but we have not seen any benefits from it and so what he has to do is live up to his rhetoric. “

It is not all just rhetoric either, the Federal Department of Education, through the Australian Research Council recently agreed to fund a Monash University Project which looks into the public transport priority initiatives in our major cities.

The project which will be overseen by Professor Graham Currie aims to develop approaches for traffic priority design, to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of on-road public transport.

The right rhetoric hasn't just been forthcoming from our politicians, it is also coming out of our Government Departments with the Secretary of the Treasury, Dr Ken Henry borrowing from the BIC submission to the Review of Australia's Future Tax System (available on the Ozebus website www.ozebus.com.au) and making the case for road pricing reform – including congestion charging in a recent speech.

Road Pricing Reform – What does it Mean for Public Transport?

In our submission to the Taxation Review, the BIC called for the development of congestion pricing systems in our major capitals, which could then be used to fund congestion clearing initiatives including mass rapid transit, such as BRT.

In his speech Dr Henry identified traffic congestion in our urban centres as “one of the biggest public policy issues of the age. “

He called for an investigation into the possibility of developing congestion charges where commuters were “compensated through additional funding for public transport” and the investigation of best practice examples including Seattle and London.

Again the right noises from Canberra and the BIC will be working hard in 2010 to turn the rhetoric into action from our Federal and State Governments.

Future Events – Turning Rhetoric into Action

Our next major event, the BIC Lobbying Day in March 2010 also plays an important role in making our presence felt with the Federal Government ahead of the announcement May 2010 Budget, which will be the “Election Year” budget.

The BIC will also be participating in several smaller events in the lead up to Lobbying Day including a half day workshop in Parliament House in November with the ACF and Heart Foundation on sustainable transport issues and a bus industry dinner for the ALP Infrastructure Committee, which will focus on

reinforcing the industry's key messages during the crucial campaign planning stage for the 2010 Federal Election and keeping public transport on the agenda.

I thank all of you who attended the 2009 BIC National Conference and welcome any feedback you have on how we can make the 2010 Conference an even bigger, better and more valuable experience for delegates and their families.

For those of you who could not make it this year, I encourage you to make the journey next year and participate in shaping the future of our great industry.

2010 BIC National Conference, Four Seasons Hotel Sydney MARK YOUR DIARIES.

Michael Apps
Executive Director