

8 December 2021

The year that was and the year to come

2021 was jam packed with borders slammed shut and reopened only to be shut again and the thrills and spills of political storms where we have seen Ministers come and go and even Premiers! Despite the drama we have been lucky to make some inroads with the re-knighted Deputy PM Barnaby Joyce at a recent industry roundtable dinner where zero emission buses and transition, accessible transport and regional connectivity were on the menu.

We also raised the issue of Zero Emissions Buses (ZEBs) and coaches with Angus Taylor, the Minister for Industry, Energy and Emission Reductions and any bureaucrat who cared to listen to us about what is required to ensure the safe operation, maintenance, and manufacturing of ZEBs.

It is our lot in life at the BIC to instruct governments on what was, what is and what will be.

The year that was in 2021 saw accelerated activity coming out of the Federal Department of Infrastructure & Transport, the Office of Road Safety, the National Transport Commission and the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator. The first half of 2021 saw several door-stopper regulatory impact statements on national law reform and legislative review of heavy vehicle law, heavy vehicle charging, disability access, Euro VI mandate, road safety, vehicle safety and driver safety. To this end, the BIC has submitted detailed reports on a staggering 7 proposed reforms and legislative reviews.

All vehicle regulation, standards and national laws undergo cyclic updates and/or reviews in some form and it is BIC's job to minimise the impact and where possible maximise the outcomes for industry viability. A seemingly simple change to a clause within a regulation may have a potentially massive negative impact on our industry and it is the BIC's role to work with the regulators and policy arms of the federal government to assess and where required, alter or introduce clauses to achieve the intended outcome.

A recent example of our 'bus business insurance' work is the review of the Transport Standards. The Infrastructure and Transport Ministers Meeting tasked the National Accessible Transport Taskforce to review and provide options on 70 reform areas in disability access laws for public transport. This review has been ongoing since late 2020 with the BIC at the table on various focus groups. The reforms are BIG with high impact factors for operators, bus manufacturers and suppliers. Concerningly there is a push from the disability sector to include dedicated school buses in the Transport Standards. It is a tough gig to convince the bureaucrats that no student, of any status, is without access to suitable transport options. There has been a few interesting 'scrums' during this review process and the BIC is taking a hard line to ensure that the bus industry isn't placed in the position to provide costly solutions to a problem that doesn't exist.

Heavy vehicle national law reform, being undertaken by the NTC, has the equal potential to do-good or do-bad. The NTC is currently in its early phases of 'policy assessment' across 6 reform areas and their first attempt at 'easy to use and flexible' fatigue management laws was a fail. The BIC, in its quick and concise (civil) response, has put the NTC in



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retreat mode and the new proposed 'easy to use and flexible' standard hours have now been junked. Our broken record mantra 'a bus is not a truck' has hit a home run with the BIC being granted one-on-one collaboration with the NTC to ensure that the bus industry isn't left at a dead-end with a 'one size fits all' approach.

Dare we go further and discuss the whole let's-go-zero agenda coming from all governments. The critical safety impacts are of national importance to the bus industry. There are little or no recognised regulatory standards for vehicles and zero-emission components or infrastructure, let alone on road operations and safe housing and maintenance at the depot. Nationally, we will see a major skills-gap in maintaining safe vehicles as fleets move from diesel and hybrid technology to electric and hydrogen. The BIC has established a committee of subject matter experts in their fields to help develop national industry standards and advisories to ensure that buses and coaches continue to be the safest way to travel on Australia's roads.

The Australian Government is a 'brains trust' of thousands of public servants - most of whom **are not moving people** experts. It is vital that industry protects our own unique 'brains trust'. The BIC is here to help industry do just that. Due to the massive reform in the pipeline, we feel it is incumbent upon the BIC to inform industry **now** of the progress of new national law that will be coming our way in the next couple of years. A National Industry Summit will be held in Canberra on 1st and 2nd March in 2022 so that you can make the necessary business plans to stay ahead of the game. Go to www.movingpeople.com.au/summit to view the program and register.

As this is the last View from Canberra for 2021, we wish all readers a safe and joyous end of year break and we look forward to catching up with many of you early in 2022.

The BIC secretariat is committed to the *moving people* vision that enhances the sustainability and liveability of Australia's cities and regions by using bus and coach transportation. Readers can connect with us on 02 6247 5990 or by email to enquiries@bic.asn.au.

