

# MEDIA RELEASE



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## Employers in the bus industry desperate for workers

The Bus Industry Confederation (BIC), the Australian industry peak body for the safe operation and manufacture of buses and coaches, has released a major industry report on the economic and social benefits of using buses as an alternative travel mode to the car. The report presents a decade of evidence-based data on Australia's bus and coach fleet, its operators, suppliers and passengers.

The industry report provides evidence that the number of bus passengers are growing each year as Australian's opt for a speedier journey on rapid transitways rather than being gridlocked in their car. Amongst the five largest capitals, the average annual growth rate has been highest in Melbourne (4.6%) and Brisbane (4.6%), Sydney (1.6%), Adelaide (1.4%) and Perth (1.2%). Among the smaller capital cities, Darwin had the highest average annual growth rate of bus passenger transport (26.3%) albeit from a very low base, followed by Canberra (3.8%) while Hobart experienced negative growth (-0.4%). Brisbane's success since the turn of the century (averaging 5.7% per annum) has been remarkable, and attributable to the staged opening of their dedicated busway network.

The growth in patronage has required more buses on the road and more drivers. However, there is now a major driver shortage in the bus industry. "The shortage we were experiencing before Covid has been compounded by many of our older bus drivers simply 'opting out' of work", Executive Director of the BIC, Roz Chivers stated. "The average age of the driver workforce is 56 years. Many of our drivers were easing into retirement and Covid made the decision of hanging up the keys to the ignition just that little bit easier".

The industry currently employs about 60,000 drivers. Despite the disruption of the pandemic, public transport and school bus operators continued to provide an essential service for Australia's frontline workers and students, delivering nurses to hospitals, retail workers to supermarkets and children to school.

The long-distance coach tourism and charter sectors suffered badly with international and domestic borders closed. Many of these drivers retired, swapped a bus for a truck or moved onto other commercial driving work and are not returning to bus work. "We all saw photos of big planes sitting idle in the desert. We experienced the same situation with the coach fleets sitting idle in depots", says Chivers.

"The long distance coach and charter sectors are particularly suffering as businesses transition from a lengthy hiatus to 'back to normal' activity. We need to attract people back to these important moving people roles. We recognise the responsibility required for driving a heavy vehicle and older workers bring with them the maturity needed to move people safely."

The BIC contends that the federal government needs to relax pension rules for people to earn more without penalty. State and territory governments could also incentivize youth employment and career pathways by lowering the age eligibility for driving passengers in a public transport vehicle and by reintroducing subsidised training and certification programs.

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### CONTACTS

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Industry report downloadable at <http://www.movingpeople.com.au/>