

VIEW FROM CANBERRA



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Intelligent and mature thinking from government

The bus and coach industry relies on good infrastructure. The federal government, through its establishment of Infrastructure Australia (IA) in 2008, opened up the opportunity for state and territory governments to obtain federal government funding to make PT infrastructure projects a reality.

The establishment of IA has proven to be a good strategic avenue for the BIC to peddle our research and policy work. Since 2010 the BIC has deliberately campaigned a 'moving people' message that embodies outcomes such as: planning for and creating 'liveable' cities and regions; providing adequate transport options for all (socially disadvantaged and people with disabilities); and reform of road pricing (charges to better reflect the real costs associated with road travel and allocation of revenue for improved PT services).

All of this industry work has proven to be a good strategic fit with IA.

On 3 September, IA released its *2021 Australian Infrastructure Plan* to achieve its 2036 vision. A vision that would seek infrastructure that "improves the sustainability of [Australia's] economic, social, environmental and governance settings, builds quality of life for all Australians, and is resilient to shocks and emerging stresses".

Ambitious? Realistic? - maybe and maybe not. Who could have predicted the current social and economic landscape? Who could have forecasted our 'pandemic infrastructure' needs looking through the lens of the last IA Plan in 2016? - a plan that aimed to "recapture the reform spirit of the 1980s and 1990s and initiate a new wave of policy and legislative reforms".

The foundation of the 2021 Plan is based on building a sense of 'place', sustainability/resilience and industry/innovation. The plan identifies a number of key reform areas which have the capacity to deliver positive outcomes for the broader bus and coach industry across operations, manufacturing and technology sectors. Integrated transport networks reform, regional and rural connectivity, industry productivity and affordable transition to a net zero future feature strongly in Australia's infrastructure needs for the next 15 years. Admittedly, the Plan will need to be periodically 'retested' based on speed of recovery from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, adoption of technological change, settlement patterns (particularly post covid) and the emerging role of a regionalised Australia and adaptation of cities.

The Plan has picked up on many transport reform areas of BIC's advocacy program. Reforms such as: a single vision between planning, funding and delivery agencies; integration of transport and land use activities; and consistent performance standards across all regions (after all - why should we expect IA to recommend the allocation of funds to a network not delivering on more liveable cities and towns or not reducing pollution and congestion).

The BIC highly commends IA on its support for regional and remote connectivity that calls for coordinated passenger transport resources to deliver access benefits for all users - this includes connectivity to fast-growing



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cities and equitable same-day access to essential services under nationally consistent performance standards. IA also calls for a better use of assets and investment in faster and higher capacity transport networks. Any multi-modal upgrades should also support local movement networks, ie. local government with first and last mile services (which would also include micro-mobility). The average Australian punter can be left in no doubt that a new era of personal travel is in a significant phase of evolution. More and more people want to live (and work) in affordable spaces with fast and affordable accessibility. Human powered transport has boomed as a result of a clear mode-shift away from driving cars.

We cannot possibly cover all of the highlights of the Plan in this column. The BIC however will conclude with a general comment. We have been a long-time supporter of IA as an organisation that could limit the ‘pork barrel’ and extend the planning timelines for Australian governments, of all types, to go beyond the electoral cycle. Infrastructure decisions should be based on the long term strategic needs of our cities and regions and not on a short term, in the heat of the moment need to get re-elected political campaigns, or to prop up a marginal electorate. In our view, IA continues to meet its mandate to advise governments, industry and the community on the investments and reforms needed to deliver better infrastructure for all Australians. The BIC will formally provide feedback to IA and the federal government in the coming weeks and readers can expect to see future columns discussing the 2021 Plan and the ‘good stuff for bus’.

One last note. The BIC has decided to postpone our planned National Moving People 2021 conference to next year. Mark the diaries – 13 to 16 November 2022 in Brisbane.

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.

