

VIEW FROM CANBERRA



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A great turnout in Scarborough Perth at the BIC Conference would indicate that Industry is fully focused on the future and the nature of possible future business models that might emerge for existing bus businesses.

As the world moves forward toward new on demand transport services, some already with us such as Uber, and others emerging such as Lyft and Bridj, new transport and destination based technology, autonomous vehicles and new vehicle and passenger transport fleets, the Conference heard from leading edge speakers, and discussed, what the options will be for the bus and public transport industry in the future.

It is clear, and I think agreed at the Conference, that mass transit will continue to be provided in the medium to long term in some form and bus will have a role especially on key trunk routes where rail does not exist.

Having said that, the types of buses and vehicles used may be different and this would be especially the case, most speakers agreed, for “last mile” or feeder services to trunk routes and also for off-peak services such as late night services and later for low patronage services where route optimisation based services might be introduced.

Paul Retter the CEO of the National Transport Commission (NTC) presented on “Public Transport 2040” as part of the key session of the Conference titled “PT Futures”, the topic title itself exemplifies the focus of the entire Conference.

An outcome of this session was that I called on the NTC to establish a Bus Futures Working Group involving Industry and State jurisdictions to look at all of the issues that might limit, restrict or not allow the bus industry to play its part in a changing passenger transport industry driven by high customer expectations and demand for better public transport and more personalised transport services.

This Futures Working Group would look at existing contractual arrangements, Passenger Transport Acts and regulation and identify where the current contractual and regulatory framework is in fact stifling innovation and the opportunity for entrepreneurship by the bus Industry. The aim, to create a business environment and framework that gives the bus Industry every opportunity to diversify its transport services and offerings, deliver the objectives of Government in relation to Minimum Service Levels (MSL) and Community Service Obligations (CSO) and at the same time meeting customer demands for more commercialised services whether it is by a bus or other vehicle.

Don't get me wrong, this conference was not all about urban transport. The Conference had a strong focus on future regional, rural and remote passenger transport. It was recognised that whilst Uber and all of these flash new technology driven services were great for cities and big populations, what is the “Regional Uber” solution and what kind of public transport and other service can these communities expect in the future.

I think one of the big take outs from this conference is that Governments are not going to walk away from the social and other obligations that lay at the core of providing mass and social transit services.

The Bus Industry will have a continued role in delivering the economic, environmental and social outcomes that Governments are seeking from the land tra

