

VIEW FROM CANBERRA

The Definition of a Carnival or is it a Circus

November 2018

The last BIC Column for the year and what a turn up it is going to be next year for the bus and coach industry.

We have just seen a Victorian election that has seen the Andrew's Government romp it in and seemingly send a message that the traditional voting patterns in most electorates has changed. The so called "rusted on" voters in traditionally blue blood Liberal electorates in Victoria, for example seem to no longer exist.

Inner city electorates are becoming more the domain of the ALP and the Greens. It will be interesting to see how this plays out for the NSW election in March and the Federal election which now has to be mid-May.

Mr. Morrison has no choice but to use all the time he has to see if he can turn the polls around. At the moment Prime Minister Shorten is the unbackable favorite.

But why this change in the electorate, what is happening to change the traditional "rusted on" party voter, in this instance in what were traditionally safe Liberal seats in Victoria?

I am almost certain that it has to do with population growth, it has to do with congestion, it has to do with where people are being forced to live, it is about affordable housing, it is about the cost of transport, it is about the cost of living, it is to do with a lot of things. But let me tell you population growth in our cities has not been dealt with very well by past governments and we are now playing catch up to keep our cities liveable and moving.

Population growth in our cities has seen urban growth and sprawl result in electorate boundary changes and the traditional voting patterns of the past in electorates is no longer as predictable as they used to be.

The Liberals in my view have missed this demographic and voting change that has been occurring in our cities and Victoria has punished them for this reason in this recent election.

Gladys' Berejiklian, the NSW Liberal Premier should scrape through the March election on the back of the reconstruction of the State of NSW and Sydney that has been underway for the past few years under her watch. But who knows? - maybe the Liberals have not read the tea leaves in regard changed demographics and electorate boundaries in Sydney and like in Victoria, will campaign on the wrong issues in the wrong areas.

The federal election will also ride on the outcomes in our cities. This focus of cities is not new to the bus industry. At the BIC we have been talking about the challenges of our cities for more than a decade and the need to get organised, build the right infrastructure and provide the right public transport services to reduce the impact of transport costs on families and give them a real option to driving the car everywhere or having to own two or three cars per household to get to work.

In my view this has come home to roost and state and federal elections are riding on the political party who can address these challenges and have a vision for the future cities that over 80% of voters live in.

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There is more to improved cities than reducing immigration levels as the pretend population policy that is also the answer to busting congestion. This is so simplistic it is embarrassing and a direct challenge to the intelligence of every voter.

People are looking for leadership, vision, smart policy and good programs that are going to address the challenges of our cities today. Cities where urban sprawl and lack of public transport services especially in middle and outer metro suburbs are so poor they directly correlate to the level of traffic congestion that is making our cities unliveable and unproductive and placing enormous pressure on household incomes through transport costs. And let's not start with power prices.

This is a time bomb that has been ticking for a long time and despite the warnings and messages from Industry groups like BIC, most political parties and politicians have been left behind and playing catch up on issues that are important right now, (for the future), to get elected.

Andrews was building stuff and got re-elected. The Liberals in Victoria offered very little in this space and focused a lot on law and order, an area many say is the result of an underclass that exists because it is struggling financially and receiving very little access to transport and other services - funny that.....well not really.

Berejiklian in NSW has been in a building frenzy, trying to catch up on 16 years of inaction by the Carr government and I can't see her losing because of this.

So the federal election is going to be won and lost in our cities and both major parties need to step up with strong policies that are focused on a long term vision for our cities and a clear understanding of the federal government's role and not short term projects for votes, mealy mouth words that are an insult to our intelligence about population or why it is a state government responsibility and not the federal government's.

This stuff no longer cuts the mustard for the punter and the key will be to see how Morrison and Shorten step up to the plate or just give us more of the same for this election. Take the time to ask your federal candidates what they are going to do to improve PT and how your city moves and if they say it is a state government responsibility, tell 'em "their dreamin".

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