Bus & Coach Association SA

Annual Report

to 30 June 2021

President's report

We will continue to drive the policy position that government focus on the mobility needs of regional communities, and that investment in services is what is needed in South Australia.

The 2020/21 year has been a challenging one for Bus SA and our members in general, overshadowed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the massive changes it has wrought in the way we run our businesses and live our lives. With everything in a state of flux, the only certainty in the past year has been change.

As an Association we have continued advocating into Ministers' offices, and actively advising Members about the ever-changing raft of developments in COVID policy and direction, including grants and initiatives to support businesses during the most critical points of the last financial year. To support professional development and to help operators signal their safety credentials to customers, we provided COVID Clean training – an RTO-led certification – to Members and their staff.

In Bus SA project work, we devised comprehensive Bushfire Emergency Management Planning documentation for operators in consultation with the CFS. It was released in time to prepare for the 2020 bushfire season and was supported by an online information session for Members with the CFS. The first half of 2021 has seen us laying the groundwork for a school bus safety initiative targeted at regional and rural students across the State, more on this in the Director's and Executive Officer's reports.

On the political front, COVID and a pending election have made for a fairly stagnant environment but as we look towards the 2022 State election, we will continue to drive the policy position that government focus on the mobility needs of regional communities, and that investment in services is what is needed in South Australia.

On behalf of South Australian operators I would acknowledge the work of the BIC and APTIA for their ongoing support of Bus SA, along with their policy work and industry representation at the Federal Government level.

I thank you for your membership and the Board for their time. I particularly wish to thank outgoing Board Member, Ashley Barnes from KD, for his long-term contribution to the Bus SA Board, and I welcome Cathy Allen who has joined the Board in his place. We look forward to the coming year, with an election to plan for and our bus safety initiative to bring to fruition, it will be a busy and rewarding one.

Stephen Lucas, July 2021

Board

- President – Stephen Lucas (24 November 2021 – present)
- Vice President – Chris Cudsi (24 November 2021 – present)

Board members

- Cathy Allen (from 24 November 2021)
- Jared Kent
- Stephen Lucas
- Dean McGinty
- Ben Romanowski
- Chris Cudsi
- Lauran Huefner

Director, Government Relations

- Lauran Huefner (24 November 2020 - present)

Executive Officer

- Andrea Overall (15 August 2019 – present)

SA councillor to BIC and APTIA*

- Steven Lucas (1 July 2020 – present)

Auditor

- AccruHarris Orchard

*BIC - Bus Industry Confederation. APTIA - Australian Passenger Transport Industrial Association.

Director, Government Relations report

As might be expected, COVID-19 has dominated the political landscape for the past 12 months, although there were a number of other matters of interest.

The key large policy decision made over the course of the year related to the School Bus Review, with a Report on the Review completed by the Department of Finance and officially received by the Minister for Education around October 2020.

As we foreshadowed in last year's Annual Report, this particular review did not achieve the reform that we believe is a necessary part of the improvement of regional mobility. To quickly summarise, the Report investigated a number of different models, including the full privatisation of all school bus operations, through to the integration of school bus services within a regional mobility strategy in an effort to find efficiencies.

None of these possibilities emerged triumphant in this process due to the costs associated with them, the historical challenge that has existed since the 1990s. If one thing emerges from this Review, it would be that there is no overarching government vision for regional mobility in South Australia. The Review reported feedback from parents as seeing school buses as part of the community, which was presented as seemingly at odds with associated services being operated by the private sector. In this narrative it appears that only good outcomes happen for communities if the bus service is operated by government, something that we would contend is inconsistent with good practice in every other jurisdiction in Australia. The truth is that this is about the budget, not about communities, otherwise there would be significant integrated services already in place in regional South Australia.

Where we have achieved traction with government, and the Minister for Education, is in the area of safety. Minister Gardner is strongly committed to a focus on continuously improving our safety systems and processes for children travelling to school by bus. This was particularly evident after the tragic death of a young student early in 2021.

As a result, Bus SA has commenced working with the Department for Education on an education program that is designed to bring heightened awareness to students about safe behaviour around buses. Bus SA will coordinate the delivery of in-school bus safety classes, with a focus on early primary years (R-3) and early secondary (7-9). We will report more on this as it rolls out in the 2022 year.

> We will keep pushing for solid outcomes for industry, with a focus on servicing communities – a safe, reliable, quality service at a fair price to the traveller, and with a fair return for the operator.

The other challenge for 2021 has been the significant change in the political landscape ahead of the 2022 state election. Various regional MPs have left the Government, and it appears that any reform agenda for South Australia may be unbalanced by this political instability. In that, however, there is an opportunity for our policy work, and we continue to build a suite of materials that will be strongly promoted during the election lead up.

Mindful of this, we expect that during calendar year 2022 the Government will issue tenders for regional services, but as yet we don't know what they will look like – maybe the Election will indicate the direction they plan to take. Moving further ahead, we expect discussions on school bus contracts will likely commence in 2023. We will keep driving towards solid outcomes for industry, with a focus on servicing communities – a safe, reliable, quality service at a fair price to the traveller, and with a fair return for the operator.

Lauran Huefner, July 2021

Executive Officer's report

This past financial year has been something of a scramble due to the pandemic, with a constantly changing landscape of government policy and business recommendations to navigate. Keeping up-to-date information flowing via Member Alerts, emails to members, and ad-hoc member support has been an important part of our work.

Bus SA website

New sections on the Bus SA website were implemented during the year to respond to issues such as school bus safety for children and bushfire season preparation. With the website now over a year old, we can observe a full year's statistics to see how people are using it. Member Alerts continue to draw users to the website, and in this financial year we released seven of them. Overarching use of the website is as follows:

- Total users – 2,485
- Page views – 5,624

Top 5 most viewed pages

1. Home page – 2,739
2. Who we are – 217
3. Membership – 138
4. COVID-19 update on passenger numbers and seating – 120
5. Bus SA Member Alert July 2020 – 104

Bushfire Emergency Management Planning

After a member question at a Board meeting in 2019-20, we realised that operators had limited knowledge about what to do in case of bushfire, and few resources available to help them plan for bushfire season. So in collaboration with the CFS, we developed and released a comprehensive suite of Bushfire Emergency Management Planning documents and tools to help them ready their organisation and staff for bushfire season. We then ran an online information session with the CFS in late 2020, who provided much practical information about dealing with bushfire scenarios.

Children and school bus safety

Stemming from a couple of tragic and preventable accidents involving school buses, Bus SA successfully renewed its push for bus safety education with a newly receptive government. In early 2021, planning got underway for a children and school bus safety program in conjunction with the Department for Education.

The program will be based on an existing – very successful – Victorian one that has been running for some time, and our Victorian counterparts have been very generous with their time and resources for which we are very grateful. It is envisaged that planning and preparation to get the program ready to launch will be the main body of Bus SA work in the first half of the next financial year.

Bus SA Events

In previous years, the Bus SA conference has been held in May. Our plan was to move away from the conference model and towards networking dinners that gather us all together – politicians, partners and operators – for constructive, educational discussion. But due to the uncertainty of COVID-19 we were obliged to place these plans on hold, as we did in 2019.

We maintain a strong focus on ensuring that state and federal government understands and supports the essential nature of our industry, and the unique business issues we face.

Membership and partnerships

There were few membership changes during 2020-21. However Due to the pandemic, retaining partners is becoming difficult as more and more organisations tightened their belts to get through the downturn. At the end of the year we held three gold, two silver and eight bronze partnerships. Our challenge, as ever, remains finding ways to be relevant to operators and suppliers. We will continue to try new ways to engage over 2020.

QBIC Conference

One of the only conferences to go ahead this year was the Queensland Bus Industry Confederation (QBIC) Conference, held on April 09 and 10 on the Gold Coast. Held over two days, the conference was a textbook example of good management and diverse offerings. They ranged from a discussion about how managing one's health is one of the biggest assets you can offer your business to an overview from the NHVR on their ongoing work into fatigue management, with the usual smattering of technology, industrial relations, and government speakers in between.

The networking opportunities were fantastic also, with a dolphin show and fun fair-styled dinner in Seaworld on the Friday night, and a glitzy gala dinner on the Saturday.

Andrea Overall, July 2021

David Tape from QBIC opening the Queensland Conference, 2021.

Opening night festivities at the QBIC Conference in Seaworld.

Vale Michael Apps.

Lauran Heufner and Wayne Patch, networking.

Bus SA's 2025 Agenda

The Bus SA 2025 Agenda articulates specific policy positions that – we believe – members of parliament should take to improve the day-to-day lives of South Australians over the next five years. It sets out practical and achievable actions for the development and improvement of public transportation, that support existing government goals.

We believe our 2025 Agenda proposes great opportunities for all politicians, regardless of political persuasion.

We can, and must, do better. Through our work we aim to show parliament solutions to regional and metropolitan mobility, safety and procedural problems. Our proposals tackle structural, economic, social and productivity issues. They address the inherent challenges in delivering improved mobility for all South Australians. They are divided into 3 streams: Regional, City, Standards and safety.

Regional

Investment in a regional mobility network

Regional residents have poor service access. We can and should do better. Our 2016 research showed regional South Australians have limited options when travelling between regions or within their own region.

By benchmarking the investment made in other states, we conclude that $70 per regional resident is an achievable target for SA. This investment should focus on network development and integration to provide services for a decent span of hours at a reasonable frequency.

Regional Accessibility Committees (RACs) across the state

Our 2016 research also found there is a need to coordinate mobility access for people in regional towns by providing practical ground level support.

We recommend a mobility solution for locals by locals, integrating all transport modes for travellers within specific geographic areas. RACs are cheap and efficient ways to help people move around.

Privatise Department for Education (DE) yellow fleet

The current yellow fleet is and run by time-poor school principals and managers. The increased burden of the 2018 Chain of Responsibility (CoR) obligations make managing a school bus run even more onerous. Using skills and expertise available in the private sector to deliver professional school bus services would be of considerable benefit for Government and communities alike.

It is our view that the cost of complying with CoR laws would be much higher than engaging the private sector to either manage the existing fleet or deliver services outright.

Allow children inside 5km zone to travel on school buses

We believe that school transport policy should allow children within the 5km zone to travel on school buses. This should be cost neutral – making use of existing vacant/unused seats.

The School Card could be used as the determinant of who can travel inside the zone. There is no need for school buses to travel with empty seats – they should be used as a community resource.

City

Network optimisation plan

We support the development of a clearly identifiable public transport interchange in the heart of the city, including:

- Develop Currie and Grenfell streets (between Hindmarsh and Light squares) as a bus transit street.
- Redesign King William Street between Victoria Square and North Terrace to prioritise trams and buses.
- Improve pedestrian connections to and within the interchange.

First and last mile

The first and last mile problem is a tough one to resolve. Solving it could boost bus usage and improve community access.

A **bikes on buses** trial would allow Adelaide Metro buses to better integrate with other public transport modes (such as trains).

An **on-demand trial** for morning and afternoon peak services could provide door-to-door connectivity to the existing trunk networks. Options could include small buses in specific suburbs bringing patrons to and from super stops or train stations. This has been trialled successfully overseas.

Standards and safety

Establish Minister's Passenger Transport Forum

There is no forum for those in the business of moving people to directly and regularly engage with their Minister. We propose an annual forum that brings together taxi, chauffeured vehicle, community transport and bus organisations to raise specific issues.

Bus SA is willing to convene and administer this activity in collaboration with the government sector.

Operator accreditation regime

We promote operator accreditation in the form of a safety management system that covers business operation, vehicle maintenance and driver management.

Bus SA has long advocated for the establishment of an operator accreditation regime that sets minimum standards for bus operators, whether they are government contractors, private operators or in the community sector. It is our view that all bus passengers should expect the same level of safe operation, regardless of how their ride is funded.

With the current Chain of Responsibility Laws in place, an operator accreditation regime is of greater importance than ever before.

With changes to the regulatory environment this program could be at minimal cost to government. Our industry has the expertise to lead the process and administer the regime.

Privatise bus inspections

Government has privatised heavy vehicle inspections, but the scheme excludes buses.

Bus SA calls for the opportunity to offer private bus inspections through a road safety inspection scheme along the same lines as the existing system in Victoria.

Again, our industry has the expertise to lead the process and administer the regime. It would lift standards and support our views on operator accreditation at no direct cost to government.

Bus Safety Week

A Bus Safety Week initiative would promote the good safety record of the bus industry and at the same time promote the 'shared responsibility' of bus safety. The initiative would focus on:

- shared roads (giving way to buses, school bus stop safety)
- the differences between accredited and registered operators
- correct safety behaviours on and around buses (respect for staff, wearing seat belts, the ramifications of anti-social behaviour).

Bus Safety Week could also be the flagship for a further program of school safety seminars whereby every public school could access an education program for students. This could occur every 2 -3 years. We believe would be a very worthwhile government investment.

Bus SA partners 2020-21

Gold partners

BusFinance Australia

SURA AUSTRALIAN BUS AND COACH

CUSTOM DENNING
we're part of dunngroup

Silver partners

distinctive systems

SCANIA

Bronze partners

BCI
THE DIFFERENCE IS IN THE DETAIL

MULTISPARES

HINO

iTMS
Independent Tyre Monitoring Solution

IVECO BUS

Mercedes-Benz

McConnell
reputation built on safety & comfort

UNITED SAFETY & SURVIVABILITY CORPORATION™

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