



Its aim is to deliver and grow a sustainable bus and coach industry.

As executive director Lauran Huefner tweeted live from the Adelaide Convention Centre-held event in May - aptly themed *Moving People Integration: What do we need in SA?* - "Where are the opportunities for transport in regional areas? Automated vehicles, on demand responsiveness, data/consumer driven business decisions #accessibility #regionaltransport #movingpeople #2019BusSAConf".

INSIGHTFUL TOPICS

The conference attracted a range of erudite speakers, many of whom brought a wealth of knowledge to the figurative table, shared openly with discerning South Australian bus operators in attendance.

Kicking things off was a keynote address from Dr Kristine Peters, an Adjunct Research Fellow at the University of South Australia, who gave a snapshot of the state of SA before discussing what the future holds.

With industry IR guru Ian MacDonald away, the industrial relations update was done by Peter Dwyer of Piper Alderman who discussed the state of

industry in South Australia. Bus SA represents the interests of members in their relationship with Government, it states. These members range from small, single-bus operators through to large, urban operators that operate the majority of route services, school bus services, trunk routes, community services, tours and charters across South Australia.

It unequivocally states its aim is to deliver and grow a sustainable bus and coach industry for all South Australians, and it seeks to achieve this, "through building a strong and trusting relationship with government, stakeholders and industry. We will advocate policies that support operators and encourage patronage within the bus industry."

Above: The Shadow Minister made a show.

Right: Keolis' Wiblin made some great points.

Below: The conference got underway with a frank conversation about the need for more government support in regional SA.

Support operators... Encourage patronage... And with those clear edicts the 2019 Bus SA Conference got underway for a refreshingly frank conversation about how urgently it needs government support to do those things because, quite frankly - excusing the pun - the bus situation in regional South Oz is dire! In fact, another word begging with 's' also got a good run, so dire is the dire situation.



BUS SA CONFERENCE, 2019

A call to arms of sorts has been made and the South Australian bus soldiers are all ears. South Australia's regional bus services need solid government financial support *now* - and there's no other way to put it.

WORDS & IMAGES FABIAN COTTER

Personal relationships, business dealings, or extra-terrestrial connections with unknown beings from some inter-planetary world far away... Regardless of the type of link, such a machination is only as strong as

the truth that binds it and the ability of each party to speak it. Sometimes it's just the one party, though - but as long as they feel they can say what they want and need to say, that's no bad thing. And sometimes, of course, yes ... the truth hurts.

Yet it is this very characteristic that highlights the real value and strength of any deal or agreement and the ability to speak frankly is an absolute and highly coveted boon for those that can and do have it.

As the voice of the bus and coach



Transport and Infrastructure CEO Tony Braxton-Smith, who outlined – in the opinion of the government – the massive advancement of the South Australian bus industry over the past 20 years.

The fact one of the stills on the big screen titled ‘Adelaide bus network: past & present’ showed two buses, one for the year 1999 and the other 2019, but with neither having a tap-on/tap-off card system installed – as has been de rigeur for a while in most of the country, it may have raised more questions than answers about just how much, or how little, has been advanced.

The opposition minister, though, Tom Koutsantonis MP, was present and ready to discuss how best the South Australian bus industry could and should

move forward.

Yet with attendee questions raising the issue that on average per capita the state government spends about \$20 per person in regional areas per year, whereas comparatively in, say, NSW it was more like \$200 per person, there was no clear directive from anyone representing government level really about how to best address this disparity. And for a tourism-ripe state like South Australia, that perhaps needs to be addressed a lot sooner rather than later.

THERE'S HOPE

With the afternoon session in full stride, some amazingly positive and encouraging points of discussion were raised.

Keolis Downer's Sue Wiblin gave attendees some really

thought-proving information, drawing on the company's European experience and local trials when discussing ‘Technology driving mobility in SA, Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) in practice’ – examining case studies here and in NSW.

Of particular note was the fact its own data involving customer satisfaction stemmed from interaction and approval of the driver, and thus their own autonomous vehicle exploits will centre around keeping that driver-like human customer service in the mix, and needing to reintegrate their staff into suitable roles.

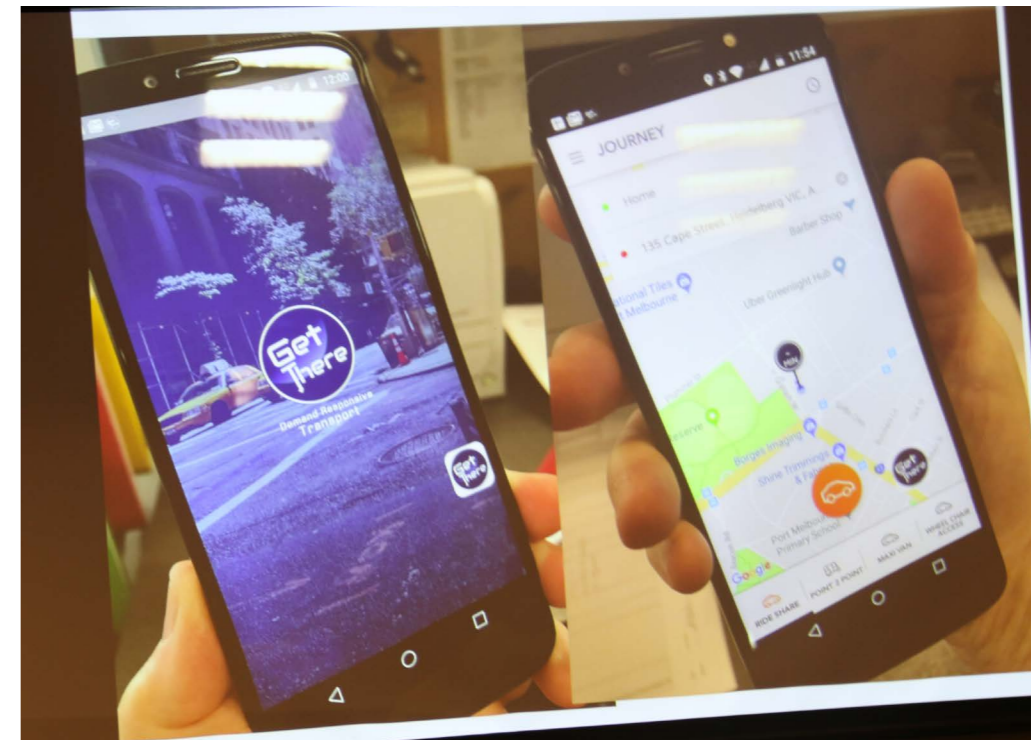
Even better, in addressing the impact of on-demand services and the bus industry needing to get onto it more before they become irrelevant because of it, visiting speaker Chris Lowe, BusVic's executive director, talked about their new app called *Get There*.

Basically a true ride-hailing service for buses, the idea is to better equip its regional members to compete in the ride-sharing space using bus or minibus vehicles, but ultimately for profits to be kept in Australia rather than being syphoned off overseas. And fair play to that.

With a professional marketing company employed to spruik its benefits it will be interesting to see how it all turns out for BusVic, like whether the members will be quick to take it up or wait for a travelling customer base to be established first via the number of app downloads before any operator chooses to join up.

THE STATE OF PLAY

In the last stages, the question of ‘Why improve regional public transport?’ was asked and explained by John Devney, of GTA Consultants. Outlining how advanced other states were comparatively from ticketing systems to the mere integration of transport websites so people get their travel information from



Above and Below, L-R clockwise: Huefner on the attack; Denvey pleads his case; Lowe ready to discuss *Get There*. An SA bus in action.

Opposite, L-R, clockwise: The new BusVic app; QBIC's Tape gets fired up about bus driver safety; An operator airs his concerns.

industrial relations and the problem of Skene. Pitcher Partners' Matt Wilson followed with his ‘*There is no future in predicting the future: practical tools to guide your business now*’ chat in session 3.

The National Heavy Vehicle Regulator was in welcome attendance, too, with spokesperson Brett Staker giving a Chain of Responsibility update.

ELECTION FEVER

Well, May 18 was Federal election D-day for those involved, and while at the time – if the polls were to be believed (does anyone anyway?) – it seemed no-one saw the Labor-party shellacking that was coming its way, so it stood to reason that State Transport and Infrastructure Minister The Hon Stephan Knoll MP still might have shown up. Unfortunately, he had to send his apologies, with his slot suitably filled by Planning,



one place and not three, just further illustrated the lack of vision from a state and arguably federal government point of view in terms of getting such a fundamental public transport service sorted.

Following was a panel discussion consisting of Wiblin, Lowe, Devney, Huefner and QBIC's David Tape. The latter would eventually chat about school bus contracts – and how changing dedicated school services to also pick up regular passengers could jeopardise insurance cover, etc – and driver safety in Queensland, from an advanced and worst-case scenario angle in that state a few years ago given the burning death of a bus driver. Yet that would not be before the more

It will be interesting to see what changes before the 2020 SA event.

positive story from Huefner discussing the success story of ‘*Moving people in [Port] Pirie*’.

Huefner gave an impromptu overview of the BIC *Long Distance Tour & Charter* policy – in the absence of Mr Apps – and did a conference wrap-up.

With pre-dinner drinks later that evening, a fine dinner function at the nearby The Gallery would soon get underway.

The election result sorted it will be interesting to see any changes before next year's event.