

INQUIRY INTO RURAL ROAD SAFETY & INFRASTRUCTURE

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Recommendation 1. That accurate data on the current condition and rate of change of rural road and bridge networks, particularly for local roads, be regularly collected and published in a common format every three years.

This recommendation is supported in principle

The Government supports the recommendation on the basis that a structured sample of data be collected in a consistent and cost-effective way that provides an accurate indication of trends in the condition of road and bridge networks.

The condition of all rural arterial roads and bridges is measured on a 2 year cycle by VicRoads and is publicly reported. All municipalities report an annual assessment of infrastructure asset values, based upon condition, in annual Balance Sheet reports. However there is some inconsistency in condition assessment and valuation methodologies used by different municipalities. The Government will consult with local government regarding annual reporting by councils to their local communities in a consistent manner.

The Review of Regional Strategic Transport Planning Arrangements currently being undertaken by the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV), the Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA) the Department of Infrastructure (DOI) and VicRoads, is investigating this issue. The Government supports and funds the review.

It is noted that the scope of the Inquiry has not touched upon safety performance of public roads on Crown land managed by the Department of Natural Resources and Environment (DNRE) or Parks Victoria, which are funded by these departments through State appropriations. DNRE and Parks Victoria have indicated willingness to participate in the reporting of condition trends on such roads and to be involved in the design of a common reporting format relevant to roads on public land. It is appropriate that all State Government assessments of rural road performance include input by DNRE and Parks Victoria on the performance of public access roads on Crown land managed by them. This applies in particular to Recommendations 1, 2, 5, 9, 10, 11, 18, 21, 29, 30, 34, 35, 36, 44, 46 and 49.

Recommendation 2. That the Government review all the methods currently used to fund roads in Victoria and develop more appropriate methods.

This recommendation is supported in part

The Government reviews funding methods where necessary, in accordance with any changes in State and Federal Government strategic directions. Although a number of different road funding sources have existed at various times in the past, there is currently a limited number of sources of road funding.

The allocation of Commonwealth Government-provided local roads funding to Victorian councils is the responsibility of the Victorian Grants Commission, which is an independent statutory authority. The Commission undertook a comprehensive review of the methodology used to

allocate these funds in 1998/99 in close consultation with councils. A new funding formula was introduced in 2001/02, which has been designed to better reflect the relative funding needs of Councils. While a further review of this methodology at this time is not considered necessary, there may be merit in assessing options with part of this funding to address financial difficulty for local government associated with major bridge replacement (refer to Recommendation 34).

Identification of road funding sources in State Budget Papers and VicRoads Annual Reports for adequate public transparency and accountability could be provided without a major review of funding sources – refer to Recommendation 12.

Current funding arrangements are considered to provide effective development and implementation of road management programs in accordance with State and Federal Government strategies. The Commonwealth has recently announced a proposal, AUSLINK, which has the potential to change infrastructure funding arranged throughout Australia. The Victorian government may need to review its funding arrangements depending on the final details of the new Federal arrangements.

Recommendation 3. That the sections of the Transport Act 1983 relating to State legal classifications be reviewed.

This recommendation is supported

The need to align the statutory and functional road classifications is recognised. The Government is considering a review of the classifications of the Transport Act to align the statutory classifications defined in the Act with the functional classification (M,A,B and C road) system used for the management of the arterial road system. This action was identified in a recent review of arterial road management arrangements conducted by the MAV, LGPro and VicRoads.

Recommendation 4. That the Department of Infrastructure ensure all municipalities report projections of future road conditions and funding requirements using a common reporting format.

This recommendation is supported

Whilst recognising that local road management is a local government responsibility, the Government supports state-wide consistency and cost-effectiveness in the measurement and monitoring of local road bridge and pavement conditions. The Government also supports the Review of Regional Strategic Transport Planning Arrangements currently being undertaken by the MAV, VLGA and VicRoads, which would assist in the determination of road network needs and priorities (refer to Recommendation 1).

Recommendation 5. That the Government investigate, quantify and publish the overall road funding needs for rural arterial and rural local roads. The results should be used to influence the level and direction of future Federal road funding.

This recommendation is supported in principle

Refer also to response to Recommendation 1.

The Government is aware of concerns about the adequacy of rural road funding, and is working with the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) and the Victorian Local Governance

Association (VLGA) to assist local government to articulate and quantify rural road funding needs. The need for Federal funding through the Roads to Recovery Program or the recently announced AusLink Program will be advocated by the Government.

The level of need for rural road funding is a function of perceived performance standards across all classes of the road system. These performance standards need to be universally agreed before the total funding needs can be quantified in a meaningful way.

The Government is aware of the potential to make cost-effective investments, totalling several billion dollars, in improvements to the condition, capacity and safety of the road system. Such investments are considered in the allocation of budgets alongside competing projects in other government portfolios.

The focus of efforts should be on the benefits of road investments to ensure efficient targeting of available funds, rather than concentrating purely on the total funding requirements.

Recommendation 6. That the road management guidelines for category C roads be reviewed to give a greater emphasis to road safety concerns

This recommendation is supported

Recommendation 25. That VicRoads give a higher priority to widening narrow and heavily used category C roads

This recommendation is supported in principle and will be considered in a review of road management guidelines for category C roads.

The Government will review the road management guidelines for category C roads, taking into account the safety returns on investment compared to other projects. The above recommendations of the Inquiry Committee will be considered in the review. The review will also give due regard to the Government's policy "Victoria's Native Vegetation Management – A Framework for Action".

The Rural Arterial Road Network Strategy identifies functional classifications (M,A,B & C) and specifies performance standards for rural arterial roads.

The functional classifications specified in this strategy take into account economic, social, safety and environmental factors. The classifications are based on the premise that drivers should be able to anticipate the driving conditions that they are likely to encounter and to expect better driving conditions on busier more significant roads.

In general, it would be expected that safety deficiencies on heavily used C roads would be reflected in crash records and therefore consideration would be given to appropriate upgrading. Where this is not the case, the inclusion of a risk assessment framework into the road management guidelines would provide scope to consider the need and priorities of any upgrading proposals for C roads. At the same time, it would be appropriate to review the classification of heavily used C roads, on a case-by-case basis, to determine whether upgrading to B road classification would be appropriate.

Recommendation 7. That the Government review the responsibility for operational management of Main Roads to achieve economies of scale, provide more uniform road management practices and potentially improve road safety.

This recommendation is supported

This action was identified in the review of arterial road management arrangements conducted by the MAV, LGPro and VicRoads.

Revised Main Road management arrangements are currently being considered.

Recommendation 8. That the Government review the funding of rural roads, including consideration of possible changes to organisational responsibilities and funding arrangements, to ensure a balance in the development and on-going care between the arterial and local road networks.

This recommendation is not supported

The 1991 Special Premiers' Conference established the road management and funding responsibilities for each tier of government as follows: Federal Government – National roads, State Government – State arterial roads, Local Government – local roads.

Existing responsibilities and funding arrangements reflect the strategic importance and level of use of different road classes. However, the Review of Arterial Road Management Arrangements includes a proposal to review arterial road classifications every five years.

The Federal Roads to Recovery Program is supported, as are additional Federal funds for local roads.

The Federal Government has announced AusLink as the new Federal Government plan for developing Australia's future infrastructure network. The plan will involve the replacement of the 1991 Inter-Government Road Funding Agreement with a broader agreement covering road, rail, intermodal and non-engineering solutions. Road and rail investments are to be prioritized, planned and funded in a cross-modal context.

The Commonwealth aims to issue a comprehensive Discussion or Green Paper in November 2002 in regard to AusLink after an initial round of consultation with the States and key parties. Following a further round of consultations, the Commonwealth will develop a White Paper representing a formal statement of the Plan with a target date for delivery of March 2003.

The Federal Government assessment of road funding issues is likely to have an impact on Recommendations 8, 9 and 14 as they relate to the future Federal funding outlook and will influence the future State Government funding of rural roads.

Recommendation 9. That strong representations be made to the Federal Government for more realistic financial contributions to upgrade bridges on local roads for the new mass limits of vehicles fitted with road friendly suspension systems.

This recommendation is supported.

Refer also to the response to Recommendation 8.

The State Government will continue to advocate greater Federal contributions to the upgrading of bridges on local roads, including some roads in parks and forests.

The National Road Transport Commission (NRTC) Review of Mass Limits identified that the benefits of increased vehicle mass limits would substantially flow to the national economy. The NRTC recommended that the cost of upgrading local road bridges should be borne by the Federal Government. The review estimated the cost of local bridge upgrading in Victoria to be of the order of \$150 million.

The Federal Government has announced a 4 year program totalling \$30 million nationally to contribute to the upgrading of bridges on declared and local roads.

In response to the initial candidate local road project applications of \$5.8 million from Victoria, the Federal Government has offered \$1.9 million based on a proposal that costs be shared equally between Federal, State and local government.

The Federal Government has been asked to review this proposal as it fails to recognise the substantial upgrade of Victoria's state arterial road network which is being fully funded by the Victorian Government, or the recommendations of the NRTC in respect of local roads.

Recommendation 10. That the concepts of regionally significant local roads and regional decision making to determine priorities be supported by the Government to improve the asset management of the most important rural local roads.

This recommendation is supported.

The State Government fully supports the development of a strategic approach to the management of local roads, including roads in parks and forests and roads servicing specific industries, recognising the need for strong co-ordination between councils, peak bodies and Government departments. Studies such as the North West Freight Study and Portland Access Study have started the process of regional transport strategies which will set road priorities.

The Government will continue to work with local government to develop regional transport strategies. Training programs in strategic planning will be implemented and specific joint regional strategies will be encouraged where common interests exist, to improve the budgeting and project approval process.

As with the hierarchy of arterial roads, identification of the more important and heavily trafficked local roads will assist in the identification of needs and priorities, setting of appropriate standards and the targeting of available funds.

Recommendation 11. That to enable forward planning and effective use of funds the Government consider the introduction of rolling multi-year roadwork programs.

This recommendation is supported in principle

The State Government will continue to manage the development and use of the arterial road system within a strategic framework of identified needs and priorities presented in the Multi Year Strategy, regional transport strategies, road system management strategies, and network and corridor strategies in support of regional development, economic growth, and social and environmental objectives.

New project proposals, developed within the context of such strategies, are considered in conjunction with proposals from all government portfolios, as part of the State Government's annual budget process. The level of funding and location of funded projects accordingly varies from year to year, but within the priority framework established through the Multi Year Strategy.

Recommendation 12. That the Government make public the information on the State's contribution to roads and the distribution of those funds to rural and metropolitan roads.

This recommendation is supported

Improved information to address these concerns will be included in VicRoads' 2001/02 Annual Report. The Victorian Grants Commission publishes information regarding the distribution of Federal funds for local roads.

Recommendation 13. That information on the travel patterns of rural residents and information on travel on the rural road network be gathered by VicRoads to better assess crash risk and target safety treatments.

This recommendation is supported in part

VicRoads carries out traffic surveys on a system-wide basis to target its resources, and where an area of special need is identified, additional data can be gathered. Information currently collected includes traffic and vehicle characteristics. The costs involved in the collection of information or establishment of databases needs to be justified in terms of benefits to the community. The collection of information should be carried out by the road authority responsible for the management of those roads.

Additional data on travel patterns of road user groups may assist in obtaining road safety outcomes. VicRoads and local government work together in conducting localised surveys in areas where crash problems have been identified. Information gained from such surveys can be of value in assessing crash risk and targeting publicity and treatments.

Recommendation 14. That State and Federal blackspot programs be continued and expanded

This recommendation is addressed under the response to Recommendation 17.

Recommendation 17. That the 'potential' blackspot category be evaluated and the proportion of blackspot program funding allocated to the category be kept under review.

This recommendation is supported in principle

arrive alive! Victoria's Road Safety Strategy 2002-2007 recognises the importance of blackspot programs and indicates an ongoing commitment. The current Statewide Blackspot Program, which commenced early in 2000, involves the expenditure of \$240 million over a period of four years. However, the current program will be substantially completed by the end of 2002/03. The future need for the Statewide Blackspot Program will be determined by future Government deliberations. Support of Recommendation 14 would be dependent on the outcome of this decision process.

The effectiveness of the Statewide Blackspot Program is being evaluated. The future level of investment in blackspot programs will be influenced by this evaluation, together with their relative priority compared with other road initiatives, in achieving the aims of the *arrive alive!* strategy.

The Government recognizes the importance of road safety authorities continuing to develop effective means of identifying high-risk sites and areas, as it may become increasingly difficult to identify areas or sites that meet existing blackspot criteria.

The Federal Government has announced a four-year National Blackspot Programme, which will commence in 2002/03. Approximately \$10.4 million per year will be allocated for Victorian roads, compared with \$9.5 million in 2001/02. 50% of funds will be available for rural blackspots. Refer to the response to Recommendation 8.

It is planned to evaluate the potential blackspots category as part of the overall assessment of the Statewide Blackspot Program. Blackspots are evaluated on the basis of "before & after" analysis of reported casualty crashes. As potential blackspots cannot be evaluated in the same way as blackspots, a new approach is under development.

A study of run-off-road crashes being conducted by VicRoads (refer also to response to Recommendations 29, 30 and 32) is examining the extent and nature of crashes and injuries involving vehicles running off the road, for lengths of several major rural Victorian highways. The project will recommend a strategic approach for comprehensively addressing collective crash problems, or potential crash problems, on lengths of roads throughout Victoria, through the use of a full range of appropriate treatments. This approach would recognise areas or lengths of rural roads where crashes are dispersed in a manner that indicates high risk to road users.

Recommendation 15. That VicRoads seek administrative efficiencies by better co-ordination of the three blackspot programs.

This recommendation is supported

VicRoads will continue to work closely with the Federal Department of Transport and Regional Planning to identify areas where efficiencies can be gained and better co-ordination achieved between the State and Federally funded blackspot programs.

In Victoria, the development and administration of all blackspot programs are co-ordinated centrally within VicRoads. VicRoads will continue to work with the Federal Government to streamline approval procedures and align the eligibility criteria for the State and Federal programs. The evaluation and ranking processes for individual projects are the same under all blackspot programs. Consequently, any project proposals can generally be considered for both State and Federal programs.

Recommendation 16. That blackspot identification criteria for low volume rural roads be established.

This recommendation is supported in part

Blackspot programs by definition are intended to address sites or lengths of road at which casualty crashes are concentrated. This approach ensures that overall community benefits are maximised. High risk locations on low volume roads that do not have a history of reported casualty crashes will continue to be considered for funding as potential blackspots. Potential safety problems on low volume rural roads may also be addressed through other road improvement programs which include works such as bridge replacement / upgrades, road realignment and sealing of gravel roads.

Recommendation 18. That an independent review be undertaken of the costs and benefits of using property damage crash information, including insurance records, to identify locations where repeated crashes are occurring.

This recommendation is supported

The Government supports an independent review, to be undertaken through a research and development project, into the costs and benefits of using property damage crash data for potential blackspot analysis.

Recommendation 19. That studies of the effectiveness of crash reduction measures be continued, to maintain the accuracy of the factors used to predict the outcome of treatments.

This recommendation is supported

The Government considers that evaluation should be an intrinsic step in all major road safety and road infrastructure programs, and that the results of evaluations should be communicated widely to assist in making future road safety programs more effective and innovative.

The Government supports the continuation of national and state road crash research carried out by organisations such as Austroads, the Bureau of Transport Economics, Monash University

Accident Research Centre and ARRB Transport Research, that contributes to improving the accuracy of the predicted crash reduction outcomes of various types of countermeasure treatments.

The effectiveness of blackspot countermeasure treatments is periodically reviewed, generally as an integral part of the evaluation of blackspot programs. These evaluations have resulted in more strategic and sharply focused blackspot programs. The Statewide Blackspot Program, which involves a large range of different treatments, provides a unique opportunity to review and update estimated crash reduction factors to ensure that the most cost effective treatments are utilised in future programs.

Recommendation 20. That, if requested by the local municipality, VicRoads should reduce speed limits on Main Roads in areas of pedestrian activity in rural townships.

This recommendation is supported in part

The Government has asked VicRoads to review its policy for speed limits in rural townships and metropolitan strip shopping centres. A review is being carried out in consultation with local government and Victoria Police.

Local needs and issues are taken into account when municipalities request any speed limit changes on Main Roads. However, VicRoads has a responsibility to ensure that any changes to speed limit policy will be applied uniformly across the State in order to ensure consistency in road user expectations.

Recommendation 21. That VicRoads and municipalities undertake reviews of the speed management of arterial and local roads with poor alignments and road surfaces.

This recommendation is supported

The Government will undertake literature research into the relationships between road surface, road alignment and crash rates, to assist in determining the appropriate approach for the management of roads with poor alignment and road surfaces.

Recommendation 22. That school zones of 40 km/h in urban areas and 60km/h in rural 100 km/h speed zones be implemented at appropriate times at all schools.

This recommendation is supported in principle

The Government's strategy is to invest in road safety initiatives, including the implementation of lower speed zones, where they will have the greatest effect on reducing road trauma. Time based school speed limits that operate when children are travelling to and from school are an important part of that strategy. The speed limit adopted in each case will be determined through reference to VicRoads guidelines.

The Government supports the use of time based lower speed zones at schools, which are areas with high pedestrian activity. Availability of this treatment is subject to priorities being determined on the basis of road safety risk. 50% of the funding for installation of the speed zones is made available by the road authority and 50% by the proponent of the speed zone. Schools and school communities are consulted regarding the implementation of new time based speed zones at schools.

Recommendation 23. That the ‘rail versus road’ issue for freight be reviewed by a Parliamentary Inquiry.

This recommendation is not supported

As noted by the Committee, the ‘road versus rail’ issue is part of a much more complex system of freight and logistics.

The State Government has recognised the importance of optimising the freight and logistics systems in Victoria and has implemented an objective as part of Growing Victoria to increase the proportion of freight transported to ports by rail from 10 per cent to 30 per cent.

It is anticipated that issues of concern to the Inquiry will be largely reviewed in the Victorian Freight and Logistics Strategy (VFLS) currently being developed by the Department of Infrastructure. Development of the VFLS has included substantial consultation with industry and the wider community. It examines all facets of freight movement and logistics in Victoria (including infrastructure, legislative framework, pricing, commodity characteristics etc) across all modes. Improvements to rail infrastructure can also have ongoing beneficial effects on the availability, cost and accessibility of personal rail transport, and can contribute to positive environmental outcomes.

A draft Strategy is expected to be considered by the Government in the near future. The VFLS will be significant in addressing road and rail freight issues in rural and regional Victoria.

The Department of Infrastructure and VicRoads in association with local government will continue and expand a program of regional integrated transport studies. These will provide an integrated multi-modal framework for management and investments.

Recommendation 24. That VicRoads and the Victoria Police expand the enforcement of heavy vehicle speed, load limits and route restrictions to stop vehicles using inappropriate routes.

This recommendation is supported

The Government supports improvements in the amenity of local community areas that result in improvements in the safety of other road users and overall community safety.

The Government believes that the general compliance and enforcement approach of VicRoads and the Victoria Police is appropriate. However, the Government recognises that improvements in heavy vehicle compliance are required, and is supporting a number of state and national initiatives to address this.

arrive alive! Victoria’s Road Safety Strategy 2002-2007 identifies a number of initiatives to reduce the number of speeding vehicles. These include the introduction of new detection and enforcement technologies, and consultation with local Safety Committees when allocating traffic enforcement resources.

Proposed national compliance and enforcement legislation will include the introduction of the ‘chain of responsibility’ principle across a range of road transport laws, and a new hierarchy of sanctions and penalties. An objective of the legislation is for everyone who uses or is involved in road transport to take responsibility for ensuring safety on the road.

Austrroads is currently investigating the development of electronic compliance systems that would enable monitoring and reporting of mass, registration, speed, and route access compliance. During 2002, the State Government will be further investigating other intelligent transport system solutions, capable of monitoring heavy vehicle compliance and influencing driver and operator behaviour. Examples of these initiatives are 'point to point' safety cameras and the use of culway data to better target enforcement.

VicRoads is currently preparing a Victorian strategy to address heavy vehicle compliance. The strategy will identify initiatives and actions aimed at improving heavy vehicle compliance, including those mentioned above.

Recommendation 26. That the current restriction of shoulder sealing on category B and C roads to locations 'where warranted by accident records' should be reviewed

This recommendation is supported in part – refer to Recommendation 6.

Recommendation 27. A proactive approach to shoulder sealing on isolated curves and at other identified hazardous locations on category B and C roads should commence.

This recommendation is supported in principle.

Shoulder sealing is recognised as a cost-effective road safety treatment, and is being progressively introduced in accordance with Victoria's rural arterial road network strategy.

The above issues will be included in the review of guidelines for category C roads mentioned in the response to Recommendations 6 and 25. The guidelines for Category B roads will also be reviewed.

Recommendation 28. That further investigation is undertaken of techniques for cost effectively sealing pavement edges to improve safety and assist in preserving pavements.

This recommendation is supported.

State and local government will continue to work with road construction and maintenance contractors to improve the cost-effectiveness of pavement edge sealing practice. A review will be undertaken of treatment types, materials, equipment used and scale of works. The review will be completed by June 2003.

Recommendation 29. That VicRoads and municipalities develop and implement roadside management policies and strategies to improve road safety.

Recommendation 30. That projects be trialled by VicRoads to show the effectiveness of using the best roadside safety management practices.

Recommendation 32. That VicRoads and municipalities increase the use of guardrails and other forms of barriers as a means to providing a safer roadside for travellers.

These recommendations are supported

On 28 November 2001 the Legislative Assembly referred the matter of roadside hazard management to the Parliamentary Road Safety Committee. The Committee will soon be conducting an inquiry into roadside hazards.

arrive alive! Victoria's Road Safety Strategy 2002-2007 recognises the road environment as an important factor in contributing to up to 30 per cent of crashes. An initiative of *arrive alive!* is to develop a comprehensive set of risk management guidelines for roadside management, in consultation with local government.

VicRoads is developing a Roadside Management Strategy that will guide the overall management of the roadside and the range of issues and uses associated with roadside safety and risk management. Roadside management plans have been developed for many of the arterial roads. One of the key considerations for rural roads is the management of existing and future vegetation on the roadside and in medians. The strategy will give due regard to the Government's policy "Victoria's Native Vegetation Management – A Framework for Action". Consideration will be given to effects on existing native vegetation and wildlife habitat in the development of the strategy, with the involvement of the Department of Natural Resources and Environment (DNRE).

Local government, developers, planners, landscape designers and service authorities will be encouraged to adopt the framework and principles of the Roadside Management Strategy.

The Government supports the development of demonstration projects designed to address major crash problems along sections of Victoria's high volume rural roads. VicRoads is currently undertaking a study of run-off-road crashes on high-speed roads, with the aim of developing a method for reducing the number and severity of such crashes in a systematic way (refer to response to Recommendations 14 and 17). A number of countermeasures, including the use of barrier systems, will be considered and trials undertaken to determine their effectiveness in addressing targeted crash types in different road environments in Victoria.

The Government supports the trialling of roadside barrier systems, is reviewing policies for installation of barriers on all new high-speed roads, and is developing a number of programs utilizing barrier systems.

In general, priorities for expenditure on new road safety initiatives and programs need to take into consideration the relative cost-effectiveness in comparison to other projects.

Recommendation 31. That VicRoads initiate a specific curve treatment safety program as a matter of urgency.

This recommendation is supported in principle

The proposed research and development project mentioned in the response to Recommendation 21 will investigate the relationship between road alignment and crash rates. The need for a specific curve treatment program will be considered following completion of the research and development project. The relative road safety benefits compared to other programs will be taken into account.

The most problematical run-off-road crashes are those involving vehicles running off on curves. Dangerous curves are currently treated through the blackspot program and road network upgrades will eliminate some others. *arrive alive!* Victoria's Road Safety Strategy 2002-2007 indicates that blackspot treatments are to include pavement widening on crests and curves on rural 'B' and 'C' category roads at high-risk locations.

Recommendation 33. That a detailed investigation be undertaken by VicRoads of safety barriers to separate traffic streams on single carriageway roads and implemented where appropriate.

This recommendation is supported

This type of treatment has been implemented successfully in other parts of the world, such as Sweden. The Government will investigate this use of barriers and conduct a trial of such a treatment. The effectiveness of the treatment where it has been used in other places will continue to be monitored. The extent of implementation will be dependent on the outcome of the trial and priorities will be determined in comparison with other road safety countermeasures.

Recommendation 34. That the Government financially assist rural municipalities to upgrade bridges on rural local roads.

This recommendation is supported in part

As stated in the Committee's report and in the response to Recommendation 8, all three levels of government currently provide funding for Victoria's road network, as agreed at a Special Premiers' Conference held in 1991.

Some funding assistance is provided through the Better Roads Victoria program to assist municipalities to carry out works where the nature and level of use of the road has been impacted by a State Government initiative. Funding is also provided to assist councils with the management of local roads impacted by the cartage of timber. Local roads are otherwise funded by councils using rate revenues and Commonwealth Government Grants.

With the introduction of increased mass limits for heavy vehicles, the National Road Transport Commission recommended that, in recognition of the national benefits, the Federal Government should fully fund the upgrading of bridges on local roads. The State Government has sought to negotiate such funding, however the Federal Government has to date declined to provide funding approaching this level.

Prior to 1991, 85% of Federal Local Roads Grants was distributed to municipalities as entitlements using a formula based on population and local road length. The remaining 15% was distributed in accordance with statewide priorities to assist municipalities with the funding of major local road infrastructure improvements, primarily bridge replacements. Such projects were commonly beyond the normal budget capability of a municipality in any one year. This practice was discontinued with the untying of local road grants. The Government will examine, in consultation with local government, options to address the financing difficulties experienced by local government with the upgrading of local road bridges, including a return to a similar practice. This would require the agreement of the Commonwealth Government as the Local Government (Financial Assistance) Act 1995 currently provides that local roads grants cannot be tied.

Federal funding arrangements for local roads are currently the subject of a review being undertaken by the Federal Department of Transport and Regional Services as part of the Auslink Program (refer to response to Recommendation 8).

The Government will maintain funding support for local road bridges through the programs outlined above, and pursue appropriate Federal support. The programs take into account economic and road safety returns on investment compared to other projects.

Recommendation 35. That increased attention be given to improving bridge visibility and protection, including signing, lighting, guardrails and end posts.

This recommendation is supported

Improvement to bridge visibility and protection, including signing, lighting and guardrails, are specified in the Austroads Road Safety Audit guidelines, Second Edition, and will be considered in future safety reviews of existing bridges.

The abolition of the defence of nonfeasance for road authorities heightens the need for this issue to be addressed. A risk management approach will continue to be used to assess the need for bridge end protection. A review will be undertaken by June 2003 to determine if this approach could be used to identify the need for bridge visibility, signing and lighting improvements. Implementation priorities for any improvements will have to be considered on a safety cost-effectiveness basis in comparison with other safety initiatives.

The Government has given a high priority to bridge safety improvements in the Statewide Blackspot Program, with funding being provided to treat over 500 sites.

Recommendation 36. That a 'network' approach to the treatment of country intersections, irrigation channels and other locations by signing and other inexpensive measures to raise hazard awareness be trialled to determine its effectiveness.

This recommendation is supported

A systematic approach is currently used in the Statewide component of the Potential Blackspot Program for mass treatments of high risk locations or hazards. This includes treatments of 'Y' junctions on high speed roads and bridge end protections including guard rail at some irrigation channels. This network approach to hazard treatment will continue.

Recommendation 37. That VicRoads develop guidelines for the sealing of unsealed sections of road that approach intersections with sealed roads to improve safety and reduce maintenance costs and dust.

This recommendation is supported.

Guidelines for the arterial road network covering the extent of sealing along the unsealed road at the approach to the intersection and the prioritisation of locations across the State will be prepared.

Recommendation 38. That VicRoads and municipalities review edgelineing and other delineation practices, particularly for the more narrow roads in fog-prone areas.

This recommendation is supported

The Government supports a review of delineation practices as recommended. Such a review would take into account the relative cost-effectiveness of various practices.

Recommendation 39. That attention be given to better maintaining roads, in particular, measures that improve surface grip in wet weather conditions.

This recommendation is supported

The Government considers that an active risk management approach to this issue is appropriate (refer to Recommendation 35).

The State Government's annual periodic and rehabilitation pavement maintenance program, funded through VicRoads, provides improved surfacing across the rural arterial road network, with treatment locations identified through the VicRoads Pavement Management System. Surface grip has recently been included as one of the factors considered in the development of this program. Additional guidelines are being developed to assist in the prioritising, selecting and targeting of treatments. Surface grip improvements are also carried out under the blackspot programs.

VicRoads developed an Interim Skid Resistance Policy which was adopted in October 2001. The policy has a reactive element which targets sites with a history of reported casualty crashes, and a proactive element where there is concern about the road surface at a site but there are no reported crashes. VicRoads will further develop this policy.

VicRoads will continue to develop road maintenance optimisation techniques to maximise the cost-effectiveness of treatments.

Recommendation 40. That VicRoads review rest area guidelines, improve the consistency of signing and develop a specific program of resting places to combat driver fatigue throughout the rural road network.

This recommendation is supported

The provision of adequate roadside stopping places at regular intervals on all highways is identified as a major priority in *arrive alive!* Victoria's Road Safety Strategy 2002-2007.

The VicRoads guidelines for rest areas on freeways were reviewed recently. This included provision for rest area reassurance direction signs displaying information about the next three rest

areas so that drivers can plan their breaks. Signing according to these standards will be progressively implemented on rural freeways.

“Powernap” areas are being implemented on highways and in townships throughout Victoria. It is proposed to incorporate guidelines for “Powernap” areas into the guidelines for rest areas.

The Government has an ongoing program to develop rest areas on State highways. Expansion of such a program will depend on its cost-effectiveness when compared to other works. In the development of rest area strategies for highways and other roads, consideration will be given to providing:

- advance signage to subsequent rest areas or townships on highways and other roads; and
- signing of rest areas in townships to ensure they are incorporated into the system and are clearly indicated.

Recommendation 41. That VicRoads give consideration to including footpath provision and improvement in the list of treatments eligible for road safety funding.

This recommendation is not supported

As mentioned in the response to Recommendation 8, responsibility for road funding is determined by the 1991 Special Premiers’ Conference agreement, and the current review of arterial road management responsibilities. The provision of footpaths is a matter for local government and, apart from the circumstances described below, VicRoads would not provide funding for footpaths.

Treatments to improve pedestrian safety can be included in blackspot programs if crash history or crash risk indicates a deficiency in this area. Local roads, although the responsibility of local government, may be considered for blackspot funding. Similarly, under exceptional circumstances, footpaths might be considered as blackspot treatments where they would address crash problems involving pedestrians walking on roads. Treatments other than footpaths, for example making road shoulders or verges safer for pedestrians, might be appropriate in rural or urban fringe areas.

The Government also provides funding for footpath facilities to assist those road users with various forms of disabilities.

Recommendation 42. That VicRoads and municipalities give more attention to reducing night-time rural crashes by improving lighting and road delineation.

This recommendation is supported in principle

The Government provides funding to implement delineation and lighting treatments on roads where such improvements are shown to be cost-effective. More extensive implementation of these treatments will depend on their cost-effectiveness when compared to other safety improvements.

Improved lighting to improve safety is incorporated into many blackspot treatments, particularly at intersections where night-time crashes are occurring.

Recommendation 43. That there be a specific concentrated focus on reducing road trauma on rural Main Roads and local roads.

This recommendation is supported

This broad area of concern has been addressed in responses to related recommendations, for example Recommendations 6, 16, 25, 26 and 27. Refer also to the response to Recommendation 8 regarding the need for road funding responsibilities to align with road management responsibilities.

Blackspot Programs will continue to focus on rural roads (including those in provincial cities and towns) through the lower blackspot threshold for rural roads and the split of overall funding between rural roads and those in the Melbourne Statistical Division (MSD). These provisions together ensure that rural blackspots and blacklengths have a strong emphasis in the program.

Recommendation 44. That all rural municipalities develop and implement road safety strategic plans

This recommendation is supported

Recommendation 45. That road safety officer positions be created at a local government level to promote road safety both within the council and in the wider community, with substantial financial assistance from VicRoads.

This recommendation is not supported

The Government strongly supports the treatment of road safety as a strategic issue.

Of 43 rural Victorian councils, 38 have developed, or are currently developing, local road safety strategies, with State Government support through provision of advice from road and traffic safety education officers, funding and support materials. It is anticipated that four more rural councils will develop strategies during 2002/2003.

arrive alive! recognises that substantial benefits can be gained by involving the community in road safety activities as much as possible. Local government will be encouraged to strengthen links and develop partnerships with other community groups involved in road safety, such as schools, bicycle and motorcycle groups and senior citizens.

The Government also supports the application by local government of an integrated planning approach which links road safety strategies to other plans such as municipal public health plans and the local drug strategy, and encourages such an approach to be adopted within municipal corporate plans.

The local government Saferoads strategy, launched in 1999, relies on increased use of local government networks and increased road safety awareness and resourcing at the local level, including the use of Community Road Safety Councils, to implement road safety programs.

Four municipalities have appointed and funded road safety officers. The State Government provides resources to enable municipal road safety officers to manage their own road safety programs. The engagement of staff by municipalities, and their functions, are matters for local government.

Recommendation 46. That road safety audits be mandatory on any road project having a State Government funding contribution.

This recommendation is supported

Guidelines will be developed for cost-effective road safety auditing of State-funded road projects. Consideration will be given to providing separate guidelines for low volume roads such as roads in public parks and forests.

Current practice for State-funded road projects (excluding blackspot projects and specific roads in parks and forests) is that road safety audits be carried out at all stages (feasibility, design, construction and pre-opening stages) for all projects with an estimated construction cost exceeding \$5 million, and that a random selection of other projects be reviewed such that at least 20% of jobs are audited.

Under the Statewide Blackspot Program, there are more stringent mandatory requirements for safety audits. Audit of all stages must be carried out for all projects with an estimated cost of more than \$2 million. One or two stages must be audited for other projects, except for those of a minor nature, and 20% of shoulder sealing projects must be audited.

Recommendation 47. That safety reviews of existing roads be undertaken on a regular basis to improve road safety and satisfy potential legal liability requirements.

This recommendation is supported

The Government supports the use of regular safety reviews of existing roads by road authorities.

The Austroads Road Safety Audit guidelines, Second Edition, acknowledge that, while some road authorities seek to conduct safety reviews of their whole road network on a regular basis, others select a random sample of roads, while still others target roads regarded as being the greatest potential hazard to road users. The guidelines recommend that, whichever method is chosen, the effort spent on reviews should be kept in proportion to the problem.

A road authority may carry out a regular program of road safety reviews using any of the above approaches. This can be achieved by:

- carrying out reviews of locations, routes or road networks in a manner consistent with the road authority's strategies;
- responding to changes in operational safety of existing roads over time due to changes in traffic volumes, types of users or nearby land uses; and
- carrying out road safety reviews following receipt of complaints.

Recommendation 48. That, to provide a more consistent and hence safer local road network, there should be a more uniform approach to the management of local roads across municipalities.

This recommendation is supported

The Local Government Division of DOI will continue to work with Austroads, the MAV and ALGA on several projects to assist the development and implementation of improved and consistent road asset management practices by local government. Refer to recommendation 10.

Recommendation 49. That municipalities establish rural local road hierarchy plans using common categories.

This recommendation is supported in principle

The Local Government Division of the DOI recognises that each council should be given the opportunity to review such use to ensure that it is appropriate for the management of its network. Industry best practice guidelines should be used as a basis for road asset management. As noted in recommendations 10 and 48, strong co-ordination is needed between councils, peak bodies and government departments in developing a strategic approach to the management of local roads.

The Department of Natural Resources and Environment has established a road hierarchy scheme for roads under their control. Such a model may have application to rural local road hierarchies.

Recommendation 50. That increased consideration be given to road safety issues in the land use development process through inclusion of specific requirements in relevant planning codes.

This recommendation is supported

The Government will address this issue and consider how the draft Safer Urban Environments guide can be integrated into the land use planning process. The final guidelines will be distributed to a wide range of decision makers involved in road safety and land use planning.

Planning of schools to assist in meeting the road safety needs of children, is an important consideration.

As the population ages, planning for road and community infrastructure will need to take into account the interests and needs of larger numbers of older road users. Planning for road safety will consider how people best want to enjoy the amenity of their own residential locality.

arrive alive! Victoria's Road Safety Strategy 2002-2007 provides for road safety to be promoted to local government, developers and the planning community as a prime consideration in significant land use planning and development decisions.

The Government will develop guidelines for the design of new subdivisions and guidelines for the transport assessment of new developments which will address this issue.