Please Quote: GN99207.5

The Hon Damian Drum MLC
Chair Rural and Regional Committee
Parliament House
Spring Street
MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Dear Mr Drum

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO RURAL AND REGIONAL TOURISM

I refer to your letter dated 19 April 2007, inviting VicRoads to make a submission for the Parliamentary Inquiry into Rural and Regional Tourism.

A copy of VicRoads submission is attached.

Should you require any further information, Ms Alicia Grogan-Jones, Manager Regional Services Support, (Tel: 9854 253) would be pleased to assist.

Yours sincerely

GARY LIDDLE
CHIEF EXECUTIVE
28/5/2007

ENCL.
VicRoads
Submission into the
Parliamentary Inquiry into Rural and Regional Tourism

1. Introduction

This submission is provided in response to the Rural and Regional Committee Inquiry into Rural and Regional Tourism.

Tourism to regional Victoria relies heavily on the roads network. Sixty percent of all visits to regional Victoria are daytrips and the majority of these visits are by car. Domestic overnight tourist visitation makes up 30% of the total, 93% of which are self drive, with only 3% by bus and 2% by rail.¹

Tourist traffic is a major component of travel on the rural arterial road network.

VicRoads has investigated tourism activity in regional Victoria as part of its requirements to take a whole of government approach to transport infrastructure development. The study involved discussions with representatives of a wide cross-section of the industry, covering broad policy, professional development, specific industry advocates and local industry organisations. Published documents were also reviewed and used as the basis for VicRoads draft transport plan for tourism in regional Victoria which was developed as part of a suite of industry based transport plans. The Plan identifies a number of tourism issues and actions for investigation by VicRoads.

In addition to the Transport Plan for Tourism currently being developed, VicRoads Corridor/Highway Management Strategies give consideration to the tourism function of the particular route. Much of the work arising from these strategies support tourism.

The key issues in relation the Terms of Reference of the Parliamentary Inquiry into rural and regional tourism relevant to VicRoads are detailed below.

2. Issues

2.1 Economic benefits of tourism in regional areas

There is a range of broad economic data that shows the benefits of tourism in regional areas. VicRoads relies on Tourism Victoria and Tourism Research Australia data; this data has not been included in VicRoads submission as it is assumed that the most recent data will be provided to the Inquiry from other sources.

Suffice to say that the key premises upon which VicRoads transport plan for tourism in regional Victoria is based is that tourism is vital for regional Victoria, as it serves as a replacement for other industries which are either consolidating or withdrawing all together, and tourism to regional Victoria relies heavily on the road network.

¹ Tourism Research Australia, NVS Data
2.2 Potential impediments to the sustained growth of regional tourism

In terms of sustained growth of tourism, VicRoads has identified the following potential impediments in relation to road infrastructure, some of which are issues for VicRoads in its management and development of the road network:

Traffic and Vehicles
- Traffic congestion and delays on arterial tourist routes
- Slow moving larger tourist vehicles which delay and block the sight distance of other traffic on arterial roads, causing stress to tourists and delays to other drivers
- Handling problems of larger vehicles for non-professional drivers
- Intermixing of large freight vehicles and large tourist vehicles (such as logging trucks, milk tankers and coaches) with tourism traffic on local roads and the associated issues arising from these conflicts of use

Facilities
- Limited touring Support Facilities i.e. petrol, food, toilets, etc.
- Inadequate parking facilities at destinations
- Interstate travellers using rest areas for overnight stays
- Difficult egress/ingress at rest areas for larger vehicles
- Poor inter-modal connections at regional stations to access tourist destinations
- Sub-standard entry/exit facilities at destinations
- Limited pedestrian access across major tourism routes
- Lack of bicycle touring routes off the arterial road network and general lack of facilities (and associated protection) for the bicycle tourist
- Inconsistent minimum standard of road and roadside furniture, particularly to ensure continuity of sealed pavement

Information
- Limited access to destination location information
- Quality and availability of service and timetable information for trains and other modes of public transport
- International drivers not being accustomed to Victorian road rules
- Unawareness of variations in road conditions on touring loops
- Lack of clear delineation of touring loops

Industry Support
- Lack of VicRoads awareness or input into proposed tourism developments
- Lack of VicRoads representation on Regional Tourism Organisations
- Lack of industry support for the enforcement of the tourism signing guidelines.

Overall the tourism industry considers the road network to be quite good, with projects currently on the VicRoads works program (such as the bypasses at Pakenham and Geelong) making destinations in regional Victoria much easier to access. However, traffic congestion, signage and the lack of knowledge and awareness of international tourists regarding Victoria’s road rules and driving conditions remain areas of particular concern.

Traffic Congestion
Traffic congestion is an issue during high visitation periods in popular areas such as along the Great Ocean Road. Options being considered include alternative relief access routes, traffic management measures and the provision of advisory traffic congestion information.
Signage
Tourist and service signing is one of the more significant issues within Victoria’s tourism industry, especially for small to medium businesses located in regional Victoria.

VicRoads and Tourism Victoria have developed the Tourist Signing Guidelines over many years. The guidelines have led to major improvements in the quality of tourist signing and contributes to the promotion of the tourism industry.

The objective of the Guidelines is to achieve an integrated information system, in which tourist and services signs are provided in conjunction with road and tourist maps and other material from visitor information centres. However, over time, inappropriate signs have found their way onto the declared road network, as a result of a misunderstanding of the intent of the Guidelines. There is also a common misconception, particularly amongst tourist operators, that the purpose of tourist signage is to promote individual business rather than for directional purposes.

VicRoads, in conjunction with Tourism Victoria, is currently reviewing the signing guidelines. The aim of the review is to facilitate the rationalisation of signs by providing clearer examples of the signs which should be permitted on the declared network. The new revised guidelines should be distributed within the next six months. VicRoads and Tourism Victoria plan to take a lead role in the education of the wider industry in the proper application of the tourism signing guidelines, with a view to reducing any uncertainty and concern for tourist operators.

It has recently been agreed that applications for tourist signing should be lodged with the relevant municipal councils in the first instance rather than VicRoads. VicRoads will no longer charge a fee for tourist signing applications that are subsequently referred to it for approval.

International Tourists
There is a significant issue with international visitors from right hand drive countries (both drivers and pedestrians) forgetting to drive on the left or to look the correct way before stepping off the kerb, is a major concern. This is particularly the case for drivers on lesser trafficked two-lane two-way roads where traffic flow is insufficient to ensure driving on the left.

2.3 Effectiveness of current programs to promote and enhance tourism in regional Victoria

VicRoads role in the tourism industry is to develop and maintain road infrastructure to improve access to tourism assets, maintain touring routes, provide signage and traffic management for major events and to liaise with tourism organisations, especially Regional Tourism Organisations (RTOs), and other road user groups to determine ongoing tourism related needs.

The development of road infrastructure includes bicycle and pedestrian facilities, rest areas, as well as contributing to local “gateway” initiatives designed to enhance entrances to rural towns. Increasingly too, the emphasis on the aesthetic aspects of projects are turning infrastructure components into design features that add to the tourist experience.
Meeting our Transport Challenges – Connecting Victorian Communities
Since 1999, the Victorian Government has spent almost $2 billion to build and upgrade regional roads, including arterial road projects, arterial bridge replacements, rural road reconstruction and other road improvements. Under Meeting our Transport Challenges – Connecting Victorian Communities, the Government will invest a further $690 million over 10 years in a program of new projects to upgrade regional arterial roads and bridges across provincial Victoria. In addition to this, the Victorian Government has worked with the Commonwealth Government to upgrade the corridors linking Melbourne and the major regional centres of Ballarat, Geelong, Bendigo, Shepparton and Traralgon. This program is well advanced with works already underway on the Pakenham Bypass, the Geelong Ring Road, and the Calder Highway duplication.

The rural arterial road investment program will facilitate economic growth and regional development by reducing industry transport costs, improving community amenity and improving access to key tourist areas.

Victoria’s strategy for managing the performance of bridges on arterial roads also focuses on protecting Victoria’s heritage bridges. It aims to retain the best examples of historic bridges on the road network, by managing all heritage bridges in accordance with conservation plans and heritage legislation under VicRoads “Management of Heritage Bridges” policy. Many of these bridges are either tourist attractions in themselves or add to the tourist experience.

Bicycle Program
VicRoads is responsible for upgrading and completing strategic sections of the Priority Bicycle Routes in regional cities and towns. Bicycle facilities are also provided as part of major road projects, where appropriate.

Contributing to tourism-related developments
VicRoads is monitoring a number of tourism related developments that are either underway or being considered by VicRoads or Government more broadly, that will have potential impacts on the road network. These include:

- Queenscliff Harbour Redevelopment
- Greater Otways National Park (works on Turton’s Track)
- Bogong High Plains Road construction
- Mt Baw Baw- South Face Road construction
- Murray Flood plain conversion to National Park
- Dispersion strategy within Port Campbell National Park
- Grampians Ring Road
- Bunyip State Park
- Licensed Tour Operator Reform
- Increased visitation to Tasmania through Station Pier.
- Stony-Point to Cowes Car Ferry
- Push to increase holiday infrastructure in the eastern part of the state.

This list is not exhaustive, but instead highlights the need for ongoing and regular liaison between VicRoads and the tourism industry.
Road Standards
To allow tourism needs to be reflected in related road standards, the following descriptors for the tourism functions of a road within the declared road network have been developed:

- Tourist access roads are generally the direct routes, effectively the freeways and state highways, which have little or no distinctive features and which (for tourist travel) are used primarily to arrive safely and efficiently at the desired destination (e.g. the Hume Highway).

- Tourist access/experience roads are secondary access roads with some distinctive features. These roads have a dual role of providing access and a level of driving enjoyment, due to the road environment (e.g. the Northern Grampians Road) and are a tourist attraction of themselves.

- Tourist experience roads are typically roads which are not direct, but offer the driver distinctive features with a high number of view points (e.g. the Great Ocean Road). These roads provide a high measure of driving enjoyment due to the road environment.

The purpose of these descriptor types is to provide a framework within which the needs of the particular road user and the major directions of the Tourism Industry can be accommodated.

Tourist access roads need to be able to cater for the needs of every vehicle type and be able to reduce the interaction or interference resulting from the presence of trucks, caravans, cars, motorcycles and bicycles. The road must satisfy the requirements to maintain speed and overtaking opportunities in a safe and efficient manner. Signing needs to accommodate freight and commuter requirements such as destination and reassurance signs.

At the other end of the spectrum, tourist experience roads need to accommodate the needs of the road user (typically a tourist) to enjoy the road setting and amenity. The road must cater for vehicles wishing to drive at a low speed to “take in” the surroundings. There must be sufficient provision for roadside stops to permit photo opportunities and outturns / overtaking lanes to allow other vehicles to pass slower vehicles. Signing is predominantly for the tourist.

The combined tourist access / experience road descriptor is a combination of the above two descriptors. In this case, the road must accommodate a mixture of road users - trucks and caravans, bicycles and commuters. Hence, there is a need for a lower speed and frequent overtaking opportunities, signing to provide reassurance and destination, as well as tourist signing and there needs to be rest stop / viewing areas.

A plan showing these routes is at (Attachment 1).

Great Ocean Road Region Strategy
VicRoads has been involved in the development and implementation of the Great Ocean Road Region Strategy, a land use and transport strategy developed by the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE).

Total road funding and commitments associated with the Great Ocean Road Region Strategy is in excess of $ 31.8 million for the period 2004 – 2007. To date, VicRoads has allocated a total of $19.3 million for road works and safety improvements within the Great Ocean Road Region, which includes the Great Ocean Road and the major north-south routes connecting the Princes Highway to the coast. Of this funding, over $10 million has been spent on improvements along the Great Ocean Road between Torquay and Apollo Bay, including shoulder sealing, guard rail, signing and linemarking. A further $ 3 million is being spent on similar improvements between Apollo Bay and Allansford.
A 'report card' on the achievements on the Great Ocean Road Region Strategy, was recently released by the Minister for Planning. A copy of the report card and the Great Ocean Road Region Strategy is available on the DSE website.

2.4 Initiatives to increase visitor nights in regional Victoria

Not applicable.

2.5 Mechanisms to address the impact on regional tourism of natural events such as bushfires, floods and drought, and measures to drive long term economic recovery

VicRoads has a fire management program which focuses on managing roadsides and provides for the construction of breaks which are aimed at minimizing the impact of bushfires in strategic locations.

In the event of natural disasters, VicRoads provides assistance to Victoria Police and Emergency Services by implementing traffic control at road closures, including the installation of warning signs, assisting the transport of heavy plant and supporting Municipal Emergency Control.

These events can cause the closure of various roads for prolonged periods due to damaged road infrastructure such as signs, guideposts, drains and culverts, and both sealed and unsealed road pavements. In particular, heavy rain can cause mud-slides and rock falls that cause damage to roads.

Once the affected areas are safe, VicRoads undertakes recovery works including tree clearing, safety barrier reinstatement and sign and guidepost replacement to provide safe and trafficable road conditions as soon as practicable.

2.6 Leverage private investment and commercial activity in regional tourism infrastructure

Not applicable.

3. Other Information

To assist it in its work, VicRoads found it useful to map the relationships of all the participants in the tourism industry. A copy of plan of the Tourism Industry Structure, which may be of assistance, is included at Attachment 2. A series of other figures developed from data obtained from other sources that may be of assistance are included at Attachments 3, 4 and 5.

GARY LIDDLE
CHIEF EXECUTIVE
VICROADS
/
/2007
Figure 4: Tourism Industry Structure