Inquiry into Vicroads’ Management of Country Roads

Submission from the Moyne Shire Council

Introduction

The Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee have provided notice of an Inquiry into Vicroads’ Management of Country Roads.

Submissions are invited in response to the following 4 topics:

1. The effectiveness of Vicroads in managing country roads
2. The existing funding model and its lack of effectiveness for Country Victoria
3. The lack of consultation with regional communities and their subsequent lack of input into prioritising roads which are in dire need of repair; and
4. The option of dismantling Vicroads and creating a specific Country Roads organisation and separate Metropolitan Roads Body.

Moyne Shire thanks the Committee for the invitation to inform the Inquiry and offers the following response.

The Response

In response to the 4 topics proposed by the Inquiry, Moyne Shire responds as follows:

1. The effectiveness of Vicroads in managing country roads

There are three key issues in relation to the management of country roads.

The first issue is the supervision of construction works. A lot of work has been undertaken in the Great South Coast Region over the past 12-18 months only to see elements of these works fail soon after project completion. Not only does this represent a waste of money, it can also lead to embarrassment and reputational impact on Vicroads. Moyne Shire believes that these issues could be mitigated by:

- Preparation of detailed project specifications
- Appropriate preparation for construction including tree works and drainage
- Adequate supervision of the contractors by Vicroads staff to check hold points and ensure the requirements of the specification are met
- Ensure sign off of the project at project completion before the contractors leave the site
- Ensure adequate post care of the site including signage and removal of speed restrictions as appropriate.

It is acknowledged that this most likely occurs in regular instances but there is evidence that such processes are not applied in all instances (e.g. Macarthur – Myamyn Road).

The second issue is regarding the maintenance of roads. It is clear from the current condition of the roads that the arterial road asset is not being managed in accordance with an appropriate asset management model.
An appropriate asset management model would include:

- Regular condition assessments
- Setting of road rehabilitation priorities to reduce the asset renewal gap,
- Reseals at appropriate intervals,
- Shoulder maintenance
- Tree maintenance and
- Drainage maintenance.

While all of these processes may be occurring it is clear that the Great South Coast arterial network is not adequately resourced to maintain and renew the assets as required.

The third issue is ensuring roads are fit for purpose. In the Great South Coast Region there are numerous examples of arterial roads that are not fit for purpose (e.g. Heywood – Woolsthorpe Road, Macarthur – Penshurst Road). As an example it is expected that all arterial roads are at least 5.5m in width to allow for two vehicle lanes with a centre line. This is far from reality in the Great South Coast Region.

2. The existing funding model and its lack of effectiveness for Country Victoria

It is clear that the major issue that currently exists with the Great South Coast arterial network has been and continues to be, a lack of adequate funding. The Great South Coast region carries almost 30% of the State’s truck freight and is a key producer of milk and timber for the Australian market. This level of activity and the importance of the region to the State and the Country should be reflected in the investment in Great South Coast roads.

Instead, the Great South Coast Region estimates that an additional $50m per annum for a minimum of 4 years needs to be invested in the network to bring the region up to at least a State average.

In relation to improvements, the $40m road widening program that was announced last year is a step in the right direction but this needs to be increased and combined with a long term commitment until the roads in the region can be considered fit for purpose.

3. The lack of consultation with regional communities and their subsequent lack of input into prioritising roads which are in dire need of repair.

It is the opinion of Moyne Shire that if the roads in the region were adequately funded, maintained and managed then there would be no need for consultation with the community as they would be happy with the condition of the network.

Road maintenance and improvements should be based on road condition and principles such as traffic volumes, traffic type and strategic importance. Decisions regarding the management of the road network should be made by appropriate
professionals with expertise and not left up to an advocacy competition between communities.

4. The option of dismantling Vicroads and creating a specific Country Roads organisation and separate Metropolitan Roads Body.

The model of how the roads are managed is irrelevant. Roads should be managed and funded in accordance with asset management principles as discussed above whether they be located in the Metropolitan or Rural areas.

It is feared that if a Country Roads organisation was established it would then only be competing for funds with the Metropolitan Regions and could lose out further based on a population/voter basis.

The focus needs to shift away from merely a population basis but also consider the value of regional roads to the economy through inputs such as agriculture and tourism.

Conclusion

Moyne Shire thanks the Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee for an opportunity to have input into the inquiry and trust that the process will lead to increased funding and improved asset management practices for the Victorian Rural Roads network.

Please do not hesitate to contact Mr Trevor Greenberger, Director of Physical Services on [redacted] or via email [redacted] should you require further clarification regarding any element of this submission.