Brian Patten

Contact via email is preferred.

Submission for the Inquiry into VicRoads’ Management of Country Roads

Key Points Summary:-

- I believe that VicRoads are currently not effectively managing country roads. I believe that VicRoads is not given the adequate funding required to manage country roads. Funding cuts have reduced VicRoads’ capacity to adequately manage country roads.

- The existing funding model is flawed.

- Consultation with regional communities is lacking.

- VicRoads should not be dismantled. VicRoads should be expanded in order to manage every aspect of the entire Victorian Road network including metropolitan roads. All management duties of roads, including signage, maintenance, planning and the setting of speed limits should be removed from local Councils and local Shires within Victoria. All responsibilities should be handed over to VicRoads as the sole authority.
The contents of my submission are a catalogue of my experiences when contacting VicRoads, as well as when contacting my local Shire to report road maintenance and road safety issues. Also mentioned are my observations as a driver on the Victorian Road Network. My wish in submitting is to contribute to the improved management of the Victorian Road network. I am not politically motivated nor hold any allegiance to VicRoads nor The Mitchell Shire Council.

The Effectiveness of VicRoads in managing country roads.

My experience of the effectiveness of VicRoads in managing country roads involves interaction with VicRoads and observations on road repair, roadside verge grass reduction and roadside verge litter collection.

I am a regular road user.

I believe that VicRoads could better manage country roads and their current poor management is the result of insufficient funding.

I use The Wallan/Whittlesea Road regularly. When contacting VicRoads I discovered that:-

- The VicRoads data base did not recognize “C727”. C727 is the number on all of the roadside signage that identifies The Wallan/Whittlesea Road.
- A regional manager for VicRoads in correspondence mentioned that The Wallan/Whittlesea Road through Upper Plenty is patrolled once each 2 weeks. The Wallan/Whittlesea Road is a major route for those from the east heading north and vice versa. I challenge anybody to find a more littered roadside verge than on The Wallan/Whittlesea Road through Upper Plenty. The roadside verge has traditionally been mowed once annually. I am unable to provide copies of the correspondence stating this. I have lived at the same location for 34 years.

My personal experiences of VicRoads’ management of country roads whilst driving:-
• At the boundary of where The Wallan/Whittlesea Road leaves The Mitchell Shire (where I live) and enters The City of Whittlesea, management of The Wallan/Whittlesea Road transfers to the Whittlesea Shire. This boundary also marks a stark contrast between the cleanliness of the roadside verges and the condition of the road surface. It improves once entering where The Whittlesea Shire are responsible for this road. I invite an inspection of The Wallan/Whittlesea Road in this location. In the Bushfires Royal Commission Final Report Summary, the Commission noted: “in the case of bushfires, roads and road-sides can be important fuel breaks, so road managers need to reduce the fuel levels in preparation for the fire season”. VicRoads needs to be given the adequate funding to properly implement vegetation reduction along country roads.

• On Saturday January the 6th 2018, the CFA App. warned of a fire on The Wallan/Whittlesea Road at Mahady’s Road in Upper Plenty. Six CFA trucks attended. A motorist had pulled off the sealed road surface to safely deal with a flat tyre. The vegetation on the verge had not been reduced by VicRoads. The vehicle’s exhaust contacted the vegetation and sparked the fire. A local resident extinguished the fire with a knapsack. The area of the fire was small, but the verge surrounding the burned area contains high vegetation that should have been reduced. If the vegetation on the verge had been properly reduced, then the fire would not have happened. If this motorist had pulled over in The Whittlesea Shire section (where the roadside verges are better maintained), then the fire would not have started at all. What is the cost to the community of having six CFA trucks dispatched to a small grass fire that could have easily have been avoided? Photos of the area are attached and labeled as “Fire 1, 2, 3 and 4”. I have also attached a screen shot of the Incident Report in MS Word format. In the Bushfires Royal Commission Final Report Summary, the Commission noted: “in the case of bushfires, roads and road-sides can be important fuel breaks, so road managers need to reduce the fuel levels in preparation for the fire season”. VicRoads needs to be given the adequate funding to properly implement vegetation reduction along country roads.

• I see roadside verge and road surface management inspections being conducted when I enter The Whittlesea Shire on The Wallan/Whittlesea Road as a daily occurrence. I have noticed
patrols even being conducted twice daily. In complete contrast, VicRoads have told me that they patrol their portion of this road once each two weeks. I cannot supply a copy of the correspondence where this is stated.

- The traffic signal sequence at the corner of Watson Street and Windham Street in Wallan was recently altered by VicRoads. This was acknowledged to me by VicRoads and is not in dispute. Watson Street is the priority road. If a pedestrian pushes the button to cross Windham Street at Watson Street, the pedestrian’s “Walk Light” to cross Windham Street will immediately change to green. Normally a pedestrian would get a green “Walk Light” at the next cycle of lights. As a motorist, this is what I expect. I have witnessed three incidents where cars traveling west have commenced a right hand turn into Windham Street from Watson Street just as a pedestrian has pushed the button to cross. The pedestrian’s “Walk Light” changed immediately to green so the pedestrian walked straight in front of the car that had commenced the turn to enter Windham Street. In another two instances cars turning right have been left stranded in front of oncoming traffic. They had commenced their right hand turn and been left stranded by a pedestrian who had pushed the cross button and the “Walk Light” had changed immediately to green catching the drivers off guard. VicRoads told me that this is their new policy with traffic signals and this is a “time saving measure”. There is a school adjacent to these lights. I have found no notifications or heard of any consultation regarding this traffic signals sequence change, and I consider this certainly the most mind numbingly irresponsible action on behalf of VicRoads. I also contacted the school regarding this. I received neither an acknowledgement nor a reply from the school. If VicRoads chooses to cycle traffic signals in this manner, then the pedestrians and the motorists must be protected by green or red turn arrows. I’ve been fortunate enough to travel internationally, and I have never witnessed traffic signals being sequenced in this manner in any country that I have been fortunate enough to visit. If you are a pedestrian and you push the button to cross, you are always given the green signal on the next cycle of lights. This is what pedestrians expect to happen. This is what motorists expect to happen. I am unable to provide copies of any correspondence regarding this.

- Wire rope barriers have recently been installed on Mickleham Road at Yuroke near the intersection of Donnybrook Road. This
road is controlled by VicRoads. I travel this road regularly. In 20 years I have not seen an accident on this stretch of road that warrants the installation of wire rope barriers. I challenge anybody to prove me wrong. There is significant new housing development along Donnybrook Road. Traffic numbers are significant along Mickleham Road. Consequently, Mickleham Road should be widened from 2 lanes to 4 lanes in order to handle the additional traffic. This widening will have to happen sooner rather than later, but for it to eventuate all of this wire rope barrier that has just been erected will have to be removed. This represents extremely poor management and represents a waste of money.

- The roadside verge adjacent to The Wallan/Whittlesea Road through Upper Plenty is disgraceful. The litter is in abundance. I would be happy to show any interested parties the litter that has been discarded over the verge. VicRoads Northern Regional managers have admitted to me that they do not have the budget to thoroughly clean the area. I cannot supply a copy of the correspondence stating this.

- The Wallan/Whittlesea Road intersects with The Epping/Kilmore Road. This is a “T” intersection. Traditionally a motorist could spot traffic approaching from the right whilst at the Give way sign. There is a slight bend in the Epping/Kilmore Road approaching this intersection. The scrub on the roadside verge of The Epping/Kilmore Road is now so thick that vision of any vehicles on your right and approaching around the bend is obscured. This verge has never been maintained. It has now also become a fire risk.

- On Friday January 5th the weather was warm. At my location the temperature reached 32 degrees. On this day travelers were warned not to use the Hume Freeway at Broadford because the road surface had melted. Having the surface of a major highway in Victoria actually melt and fail on a day that was pleasant and not overly hot is a disgrace. There is no accountability. VicRoads should be called to account as the Hume Freeway is their responsibility. If it can be proven that this failure was due to the lack of a suitable budget for VicRoads then the appropriate government department responsible for allocating this budget should be reviewed.

My experiences when visiting a VicRoads office:-
In the past few years I have had reason to visit the VicRoads’ offices in both Seymour as well as University Hill. I have found this to be an enlightening experience. The “Meet and Greet” door staff were pleasant and in most instances there was little waiting. The staff are also very knowledgeable and helpful.

My experiences with VicRoads’ staff:

- I once had reason to report a hazardous situation with a heavy vehicle. A mobile staff member from VicRoads contacted me by phone with an update. This person offered his mobile number to me should I have any other issues. The officer admitted that he had a huge area to patrol, but I concluded from his demeanor that he was a proactive person willing to help despite not being fully supported.

I believe that VicRoads have the staff and the experience in order to properly manage the Victorian Road Network. I believe that VicRoads do not receive enough funding to properly complete the job.

The existing funding model and its lack of effectiveness for country roads.

This point is of utmost importance for this inquiry. The funding model, the source of the funding and the amount of funding is critical to whatever institution will manage and maintain our road network.

I want to see the taxes that I pay used efficiently and effectively.

Regardless of the organization whose responsibility it will be to manage country roads (or of the entire road network), the organization will remain ineffective without a suitable budget.

I pay registration fees for two tractors and three motor vehicles. We are a family of four, with all family members having Victorian Driver’s Licenses.

There is also the matter of fuel taxes and how these taxes are used once collected. All fuel taxes should be reinvested back into the road network.

I would like to see all of the fees collected from vehicle registration, permits and licensing, as well as the funds collected from infringement
notices and fuel taxes legislated so that they must be reinvested in road maintenance, road management and road planning.

Push bikes use and take advantage of the Victorian Road network. A further source of funding would involve registering push bikes and also licensing the riders who use them on the Victorian Road network.

Another additional source of funding would be through further license testing for licensed drivers once exceeding 60 years of age.

On Tuesday the 9th of January I had a discussion with a friend who is a retired professional driver. The discussion started because my friend was commenting on the number of heavy vehicles he had just encountered whilst using the Hume Freeway. Considering that this is the Xmas period, the heavy vehicle movements were staggering. My friend commented further, saying that when he was regularly running in between Melbourne and Sydney, that “my annual fuel usage totaled 77,000 litres of diesel fuel”. This amount of fuel was for just one heavy vehicle. The amount of state and federal revenues being collected from taxes/duties/excise on fuel must be astronomical.

These fees (all fees) should be reinvested into the road network, and not allowed to be removed for use in unrelated government Expenditure.

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

If I choose to contact VicRoads I do so on-line.

I am unable to locate a direct phone number so that I can talk to Regional office. I would expect a Regional Office to have a better understanding of my locality. Regional Office numbers were once provided to customers. They are no longer provided.

As stated above, VicRoads has a policy of altering traffic signal sequences. There was no consultation regarding, this nor a public awareness campaign.

I would like to have input especially regarding the installation of wire rope barriers in my locality. As stated previously, I have traveled internationally and I am yet to find another country where wire rope
barriers are installed as done so in Victoria. On the contrary, I see “Armco Barriers” still installed everywhere. The installation of wire rope barriers is causing fire hazards in my locality, because contractors can no longer gain access where previously they could reduce roadside vegetation. This matter has been raised in the media.

Consultation should also be available regarding the collection of litter, road signage, the setting of speed limits and black spot identification.

I would also invite consultation from both The Mitchell Shire as well as VicRoads and other Shires and Councils regarding policies on sealing unsealed roads throughout the network. I am only 45 minutes drive from the Melbourne CBD yet I live on an unsealed road.

On January 5th 2018, a fatality occurred on Bindts Road in the outer Melbourne suburb of Wollert. Bindts Road is adjacent to new housing estates, and is even closer to the Melbourne CBD than where I live. A vehicle lost control on an unsealed section of Bindts Road and collided with a tree. The policy for both VicRoads as well as for local Shires and Councils should be for the total elimination of unsealed roads anywhere near build up areas. This should be a priority.

If you contact VicRoads on-line and receive an email reply from a VicRoad’s representative, you cannot reply via email. Effectively there is only a “one way” line of communication. I have included an email I received from VicRoads in MS Word format and you will see where it clearly states to: “not to reply as the mailbox is unattended”.

I believe that VicRoads could better consult with local residents regarding the management of roads.

**The option of dismantling Vic Roads and create a specific Country Roads organization and separate Metropolitan Roads Body.**

I wish to object to any notion of dismantling VicRoads.

I also object to any restructuring that would hand any additional road maintenance or planning obligations over to Local Councils or Shires.

On the contrary, I would urge that any responsibilities regarding road maintenance, road planning, signage and the setting of speed limits be totally removed from local Councils or Shires.
It is VicRoads that has the experience, the engineers and the expertise in managing Victorian roads. VicRoads should be given total jurisdiction over Victorian Roads and of the whole network with a budget that will allow VicRoads to get on with it.

I have no faith in the ability of local Shires or Councils to suitably manage roads. I have little faith in the ability of local Shires or Councils to be entrusted to do anything properly.

Local Shires and Councils are too politically motivated. Local Councils and Shires do not have the expertise or the engineering ability enabling them to adequately manage a road network.

Clarification is required if a boundary is established if responsibility is divided between country and metropolitan roads.

Who will define this boundary?

What happens to this boundary as metropolitan areas increase because the expansion certainly won’t decrease?
What happens with issues that spread across the boundary?

If one body (VicRoads) is in control of the Victorian Road network, there would be uniformity across the whole state - and one point of contact. There would also be accountability.

The current system where VicRoads controls some roads and local Shires and Councils control others is failing miserably.

My understanding is that The Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee may continue with this system albeit under a different name with VicRoads having less authority.

I don’t want this to happen.

My experiences in dealing with The Mitchell Shire and VicRoads in relation to road related matters:-

- I live on an unsealed road. The road is graded by The Mitchell Shire three times annually. This is totally inadequate.
- Several complaints have been made to The Mitchell Shire regarding the drainage on North Cleves Road. The road has been
known to wash away. The solution was to sandbag the entrance to the drain where it will suffer from the most erosion. However, on the downstream side of the same drain where there will be little erosion, The Mitchell Shire elected to construct a magnificent concrete base with sidewalls. This will work really well once the water starts running uphill. I’d invite an inspection of this work of art. I object to any restructure that would give The Mitchell Shire more of the Victorian road network to manage.

- In similar circumstances, the solution to another drainage problem in North Cleves Road would be to simply clean the growth from the roadside drain so that the water can run in the drain. In this instance The Mitchell Shire elected to run another pipe under the road, just several feet away from the pipe running under the road that was working effectively before they tampered with it – yet clearing the growth out of the roadside drain so that the water would remain off the road was never completed. I would invite an inspection of this failed repair too. I object to any restructure that would give The Mitchell Shire more of the Victorian road network to manage.

- Station Street is in Wallan East. Station Street runs off Watson Street and is used to access The Wallan East Railway Station. The Car Park at the station has recently been doubled in size. I have included emails I have sent to The Mitchell Shire regarding a pothole that has developed in Station Street. No less than four times I have contacted The Mitchell Shire requesting that this pothole be repaired. Each time a repair was attempted on this pothole. Each time the repair failed. That is four times that a repair has been attempted on the same pothole. Actually there was a fifth attempt at a repair (which is the current repair). The fourth repair also failed but the fifth and current attempt was made prior to me being able to contact The Mitchell Shire. The fifth repair is now also failing. There would be more than 800 traffic movements in Station Street Wallan East daily. Station Street is currently totally inadequate in being able to handle the traffic volumes. Buses and Coaches (servicing the Railway Station) can only enter and exit Station Street and the car park of the Wallan Railway Station by crossing onto the wrong side of the road. Rather than repairing potholes in Station Street, The Mitchell Shire should be undertaking a total realignment and restructure of Station Street in line with the amount and type of traffic that uses it. What is the cost to the rate payers in The Mitchell Shire when a single pot hole has to be repeatedly repaired five times? There is no accountability. This is a mismanagement of the Mitchell Shire’s budget. A road
surface failure should be repaired just once. Copies of emails have been included in an MS Word document format. I object to any restructure that would give The Mitchell Shire more of the Victorian road network to manage.

- There is a service lane adjacent to The Northern Highway in Wallan. This service lane is also adjacent to The Wellington Square Shopping Centre in Wallan. The white lines that mark the parking spaces in this service lane are badly worn. They are now very difficult to see. Consequently there is no order in how vehicles park in this service lane. This service lane is a very busy road. Consequently the number of cars that can effectively park along this service road is substantially reduced. There are 19 car parking spaces that can be suitably marked by a clear white painted line on the road’s surface. I contacted The Mitchell Shire asking if these white lines could be repainted. The Mitchell Shire said that this task is the responsibility of VicRoads. I contacted VicRoads. VicRoads maintained that this was the responsibility of The Mitchell Shire. VicRoads contacted The Mitchell Shire regarding this and reminded The Mitchell Shire that this maintenance was clearly their responsibility. After a month when nothing had happened, I asked VicRoads for feedback. The response was abrupt – talk to The Mitchell Shire. I emailed The Mitchell Shire several months ago asking for feedback. I haven’t heard from them and the white lines in the service road have still not been repainted. How I am expected to feel regarding this? There is no accountability. I am being given the “run around”. I invite an inspection of the white lines in the service road in Wallan. Repainting worn white lines on a road surface is basic road maintenance. A copy of an email to VicRoads is included in MS Word format. I object to any restructure that would give The Mitchell Shire more of the Victorian road network to manage. Where there should be parking for 19 vehicles in clearly defined parking spaces, sometimes there are only 11 vehicles parked there and no room for any more. This is an extremely ineffective use of the service lane.

- Several years ago there was a serious accident involving multiple fatalities on Plenty Road in Mill Park, just north of Childs Road. A vehicle was speeding. The vehicle left the road colliding with a tree. After the event, wire rope barriers were installed where this accident happened. However, on the opposite side of Plenty Road, it’s the same topography together with the same vegetation and the same large trees and the same speed limit. A vehicle leaving the road could hit the adjacent trees causing fatalities, yet there is no wire rope barriers installed there. The erection of the wire rope
barriers adjacent to the accident scene was just a knee jerk reaction. If the people responsible for erecting the barriers were passionate regarding road safety, then wire rope barriers would have been erected along both sides of Plenty Road so that it can’t happen again. I invite an inspection of this area. I object to any restructure that would give any local Council or Shire more of the Victorian road network to manage.

- I was contacted by Mr Steven Burton of National Park Road in Kinglake. Email:-  Phone:- . Steve emailed me the picture of the roadside verge in National Park Road. I have attached this picture. If you look closely you can see the top of a white post amongst the high grass. At the time this picture was taken, the local Shire was sending out notices informing land owners that if they did not mow a fire break along their fence lines according to regulations, then the Shire would issue infringement notices. This is a fantastic example of double standards. It’s quite hypocritical that the Shire would warn and threaten to penalise property owners when they themselves cannot manage the roadside verge and reduce the vegetation. I object to any restructure that would give any local Council or Shire more of the Victorian road network to manage. I have attached photos of this area labelled “National Park Road 1 and 2”.

- In Craigieburn, Hothlyn Drive runs adjacent to The Craigieburn Railway Station. Hothlyn Drive is quite wide where it runs adjacent to the railway station. There is plenty of room for vehicles to park on Hothlyn Drive near the Railway Station. Vehicles can park safely there. No residents would be inconvenienced if vehicles parked in this area. After all – the residents have all chosen to live near the railway station. It was their decision alone. The Hume Shire has elected to place “Permit Zone” parking signs along Hothlyn Drive where any overflow parking from the railway station may occur. This is the perfect example of how local Councils make political decisions on road management thus ineffectively managing the road network. There is usually a huge vacant area along Hothlyn Drive where the Permit Parking area is. There are rarely any cars parked there. This is a perfect waste of available space.

- In Craigieburn, Potter Street runs along the eastern side of the Craigieburn Railway Station (effectively behind the railway station). For patrons exiting the rail network at Craigieburn Railway Station, suitable pedestrian railway track crossing paths allow patrons to exit at Potter Street. Many rail network patrons used Potter Street to park their cars. The area in Potter Street
adjacent to Craigieburn Railway Station where cars could be parked is now a designated no parking zone in what I consider to be yet another political decision and the reason why local Councils and Shires should be excluded from decision making regarding the Victorian Road Network..

The Country Roads Board was abolished and became The Road Construction Authority in 1983. The Road Construction Authority was later merged with the Road Traffic Authority in 1989 to form the Roads Corporation. The Roads Corporation is now VicRoads.

VicRoads have the expertise. VicRoads will be able to properly manage all aspects of the Victorian Road network. VicRoads just requires the budget to do so.

If my local Shire is given any more of The Victorian road network to manage then my rates will certainly increase substantially, and I am certain that the levels of service will not improve in line with the rate increase.

Give VicRoads the whole of the Victorian Road network to manage, which includes all metropolitan roads along with the suitable budget.

My name is Brian Patten.

I was a professional driver for 22 years. I operated heavy vehicles both inter and intra-state. I have transported perishable goods, general freight, livestock and piloted wide loads.

I held a CAMS Competition Licence for 13 years (no longer current).

For the past 20 years I have been employed in the aviation industry. My roles included the towing, relocation and pushing of large aircraft often in excess of 400 tonne in gross weight and often holding over 400 passengers.

At the time of submission I have no demerit points accrued on my Victorian Driver’s Licence and nor have I accrued any demerit points in last 25 years.