The Executive Officer  
Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee  
Parliament House  
Spring Street  
MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Dear Sir / Madam

RE: INQUIRY INTO VICROADS’ MANAGEMENT OF COUNTRY ROADS

Pyrenees Shire Council welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee’s Inquiry into VicRoads’ Management of Country Roads (the Inquiry). Pyrenees Shire Council is a small rural council that represents a community that is reliant on a well-managed state road network to provide key links to regional centres for economic, health, education and social connectedness.

As the inquiry is to report on the four issues listed below, Pyrenees Shire Council will respond to each of the points in this submission.

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 which roads 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.

The effectiveness of VicRoads in managing country roads

VicRoads, as the state road authority, has a very large network to manage and maintain. The road hierarchy adopted by VicRoads is clear with M, A, B and C routes. Remedial and renewal works do occur on all levels within the hierarchy but, anecdotally, do not seem to keep up with what the public would consider a useable and reasonably maintained road network. This appears to be both an asset management issue and a funding level issue. The percentage of the network outside what the community would consider an acceptable level is high. The road management plan intervention levels should be reviewed with an emphasis on what is acceptable to road users not one that appears to be in response to poor funding levels.

It is the view of Pyrenees Shire Council that the two most important recommendations from the Victorian Auditor General (VAGO) report into Maintaining State Controlled Roadways in June 2017, is the introduction of a pavement management system for pavement modelling and developing measures to more transparently show the state of the road network.
The existing funding model and its lack of effectiveness for country Victoria

It is understood that VicRoads currently operates by allocating funding to its regional offices, which have the autonomy to allocate funding based on the priorities within the region. It is Pyrenees Shire Council's view that the VicRoads' Western Region has done a reasonable job in allocating funding to the highest need areas, with a fair distribution across the region. This however, does not mean that funding is adequate.

The other major concern is that many of VicRoads' 'C' classification roads are the lowest priority for VicRoads, however they provide a function for our communities of a key link to townships and are most frequently accessed from roads under local government control. Therefore there is a community expectation that when travelling from a local road onto a VicRoads road that the standard should be at least the same or better than Council's road network. Unfortunately, this is more often not the case.

Council appreciates the increased effort and expenditure in recent years on road safety treatments in an attempt to reduce the road toll. Evidence suggests that treatments such as wire rope installations are effective in reducing road fatalities on rural and regional roads. There is a perception however that there has been a declining level of funding in real terms allocated to the preservation and renewal of the road asset; in particular more timely and cost effective pavement rehabilitation and reseal treatments are badly needed. This long term investment in the road asset is critical, and failure to do so will see an ever increasing level of pavement failures. This in turn will increase road maintenance costs, and adversely impact on service standards.

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

Pyrenees Shire Council has a very good working relationship with VicRoads, specifically VicRoads Western Region. We have regular meetings to discuss both strategic and maintenance issues. This allows council representatives to forward any issues that the community have raised.

Additionally to these regular meetings are two strategic working groups that Pyrenees Shire Council is a member of that has high level VicRoads representatives as attendees. These groups are the Western Highway Action Committee and the Sunraysia Highway Improvement Committee.

VicRoads have also undertaken community consultation sessions in regards to strategic projects such as the Western Highway Duplication and the proposed Beaufort Bypass. These sessions have allowed the community to have a direct and open say to VicRoads representatives.

The option of dismantling VicRoads and creating a specific Country Roads organisation and separate Metropolitan Roads body

It is the view of Pyrenees Shire Council that the option of dismantling VicRoads and creating a specific Country Roads organisation will not address the lack of funding currently invested in arterial roads in Victoria by the State Government.

It is understood that VicRoads operates in a financially constrained environment which is largely outside their control.

The concern with a separation of state road authorities into metro and regional is that it would create a further competition between these areas for the same pool of roads funding. The state road network needs to link both regional and metro areas with a singular approach to road management.
Conclusion

Although Pyrenees Shire Council recognises that there is always room for improvement in how VicRoads operates, the major concern that needs addressing by the State is the need for increased funding for road maintenance and renewal.

We appreciate the opportunity to put forward Pyrenees Shire Council's response to the Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee's Inquiry into VicRoads' Management of Country Roads.

For any enquires, please contact Douglas Gowans, Director Assets and Development Services on [redacted] or [redacted].

Yours sincerely

Jim Nolan
Chief Executive Officer