Greetings in making this submission I draw on 20 years experience as a local government councillor an mayor travelling the whole G21 and Central Highlands Region and large parts of rural Victoria. I have fielded complain after complain from angry ratepayers who did not understand the difference between a Vic Roads Road and a shire road and who could not comprehend the difficulty managing within limited funding resources. I live in a region that does not expect miracles but they do expect good management, that they will be listened to and heard and that timely action will be taken to complaints. They expect a strong and well resourced strategic plan that will maintain the existing and build the necessary main road infrastructure that will enable the maintenance and development of a viable and socially well connected region. So whilst my comments may sound harsh at times they are simply a reflection of the 20 years of frustration at an organisation that is in need of a restructure and better funding.

1. the effectiveness of VicRoads in managing country roads;

Given the diversity of pavement construction, pavement width and sustained lack of appropriate investment over generations one could be forgiven for thinking it hasn't done a bad job. Unfortunately the change in farming practices, the growth in very big trucks, the long drought, & ever increasing volumes of traffic in rural areas have meant that country roads are at best poor and at worst extremely dangerous for the travelling public. We are now experiencing large sections of local highways and lower grade roads speeds being reduced to 80k due to poor road maintenance that especially on narrow sealed section such as those at Murgheboluc on the Hamilton Highway - this results in driver fatigue, frustration and poor travel times. Narrow highways such as these need to be regulated so that at peak travel times such as public holidays and harvest time push bikes are not able to access them. The narrow pavements make it extremely dangerous for both the riders but also drivers - I have seen several traffic jams on the Hamilton Highway as vehicles must give way to riders who expect to have right of way but have little understanding of the road condition or their personal safety. I have no issue with push bikes on safe roads but this road is barely safe for truck and cars let alone push bikes.

We hear regularly that accidents on country roads are increasing - no wonder poor seals, lack of appropriate road widths - on parts of the Hamilton Highway B Doubles need the whole seal plus the shoulder in order to pass each other safely - this needs to be addressed it is now a major highway carrying a vastly increased volume of traffic especially B
doubles. The road edges are frequently so poorly maintained that they are dangerous - I had to get off the main seal at Teesdale several years ago and instantly had a blow out due to the large jagged pothole on the road edge and I wasn't the only person to do that and unfortunately nothing has changed the potholes are still evident. Flo Com trucks maintaining edges are a rare and endangered species on our local highways as is the pothole truck - a sign saying road hazard is the norm - this would be unacceptable in central Melbourne.

At the same time travelling on the Bannockburn Skipton Road was more than a challenge to actually find the road as it was in parts one continuous pothole and my small car struggled to get over 70k due to the road conditions - it was far easier to travel the Shires well maintained gravel roads even at, or especially at night. I always made sure my phone was well charged due to the poor state of the roads. Recently I have almost ceased travelling at night due to the poor state of the Highways in the vicinity of our home which is really sad as this prevents people from partaking in social activities such as at the theatre or simply going out for an evening - country people have just as much right to a passable road - everyone needs a farmer - we don't choose to live in the country, we live here so that we can provide food and fibre for others to consume.

The local gravel roads are mostly far better than the Vic Roads seals and far safer as a result apart from the increasing kangaroo problem and this first mile last mile road condition must be maintained in order to get produce to market. Then let me get to major roundabouts - I could tell you of some of well documented issues - especially the intersection of the Midland Highway and the road to Bannockburn where so many accidents happened - truck roll overs happened - impacting on business and livelihoods - with complaint after complaint being made with little or no action to rectify the situation until finally someone understood the danger we were all in & finally fixed the camber. A very similar situation has happened with the roundabout at Gheringhap although thankfully action was taken more quickly.

What is so hard about building a roundabout that works? They both now seem to be functioning but why couldn't they have been right first up? How much have these problems in design cost the system?

2. the existing funding model and its lack of effectiveness for country Victoria;
Whilst not understanding the existing funding model it is obviously not keeping pace with the rapid growth in peri urban areas & and in rural areas in general has not kept up with the change in agriculture from livestock production to grain and thus the huge increase in B Double movements. We need a better model.

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

As the Mayor of my shire I was able to attend Vic Roads consultations - but as a women I may as well stayed at home as despite taking the large list of complaints that I received on an hourly basis, little was ever gained from this process - but to be honest if you haven't got the funding, you cannot build or maintain roads. The only positive note I would comment is that currently there is a sign alerting motorists that harvest is in place on the outskirts of Inverleigh - it may have been better placed at Fyansford where it would have captured not only the Hamilton Highway traffic but also much of the Midland Highway and Bannockburn Skipton Road traffic all in one go - but well done to whoever got it there.

4. the option of dismantling VicRoads and creating a specific Country Roads organisation and separate Metropolitan Roads body.
Yes do it now and have practical people as well and professionals - have farmers, business, bus drivers and few women to boot as well as roads people so you get a balanced view. Metro has metro needs and they also need to be met but it appears that currently country and rural remote are a lesser creature. In order to function well our State roads need well
funded, well constructed and in parts well regulated roads - i.e limits that can be imposed from time to time to ensure safety for all but not just because the maintenance is so poor that the road is unsafe.

One other point that I wish to make is that bike races should not be allowed to block roads in rural areas either local or Vic Roads roads. At times I & others have been prevented going to carry out essential business whilst a bike race passed - a whole morning in my case - I had no alternate route - this is an impediment to business - a better solution must be found - what if I had been having an asthma attack as I do regularly? It is simply not fair that in harvest time farmers are asked to take alternate often far longer routes for a sporting event to be allowed.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission and I trust that a much better outcome will be achieved for those living and travelling in country areas. I would be happy to make a submission in person as this is all I currently have time for

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File1:

File2:

File3: