Law Reform, Road and Community
Safety Committee
Inquiry into Vic Roads’ Management of
Country Roads

Submission by:
Laurie Park

Terms of reference:

1. The Effectiveness of Vic Roads in managing country roads

Vic Roads have demonstrated that managing country roads is outside of their skill set. This can be observed by travelling on country roads in many regions. The western section of the Western highway is a prime example with roads in many regions of a substandard with poor maintenance or poor construction resulting in broken edges and pot holes. A further major example is the current Wire Road Barrier and Armco Railing (WRB) being installed across the state. These Barriers are position without thought of “is there a need” for WRB for this location. For example, the Maffra to Sale road, twenty kilometres of straight road on flat farm land. This road has been given Armco railing all the way. This is a dangerous situation as there is no longer room to pull off the road if a motorist has a puncture. There is no room to swerve to avoid an accident. On this road Armco railing is protecting flat paddocks. It is also preventing emergency service vehicles from attending such emergencies as fire or road accidents where the victim has come to rest on the “off road” side of the WRB. In this instance it appears that Vic Roads have ignored their own guide lines where WRB must be 4 metres from the carriage way but have placed these WRB at distances considerably less than 4 metres.

On the Omeo Highway north of Bruthen there are numerous road sections where if a driver deviates one metre off the sealed section of the road a greater than 100 metres drop into the river exists. Yet here Vic Road have not provided any safety barrier at all.

VicRoads is totally out of contact with the safety needs of regional road users.
2. **The existing funding model and its lack of effectiveness for country roads.**

I do not understand the current funding model. However, it appears the funding is one silo of money for all roads in Victoria. When governments decide to pay one billion dollars of roads money not to build a major infrastructure road in Melbourne then it appears that this shortfall was subtracted from country road projects. Budgets for country roads should not be disadvantaged because of politics within metropolitan Melbourne.

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

The actions of VicRoads indicate that they do not consider the views of country people regarding repairs needed or projects undertaken by Vic Roads. Again, this is demonstrated the current WRB project covering 2000 kilometres of regional roads. Many people have protest to Vic Roads about this WRB rollout. Local members of parliament have protested to Vic Roads, Emergency services have protested as the WRB cause accidents and hinder emergency services. School bus owners have protested as the WRB prevent the school busses from moving off the carriage way to pick up or drop off school children.

The WRB prevent road side maintenance such as cutting grass for fire prevention

Motorcycle rider groups have protested as when a rider hits a WRB, the effect on the ride is like the rider encountering a meat slicer. This causes serious injury and death. This happened in regional Victoria when a rider swerved to miss a dead Kangaroo, came off his bike and slid into the WRB which caused injuries that led to his death.

Animal Behaviour in relation to WRB. VicRoads have demonstrated a lack of understanding of animal behaviour in relation to WRB. Most animal strikes happen at night. The animals (Kangaroo, Deer, Wombat etc) often cross the country roads, they do this without planning for traffic. The animal comes onto the road and if a car, motorcycle, truck is approaching the animal will be dazzled and panicked by the headlight and run or hop along the road in the beam of light. The animal will continue along the road until it can escape the roadway or gets hit by the motor vehicle. With the installation of WRB, the animals is now “fenced” onto the road, with no escape route. For animals to jump a barrier it is usually completed from a “straight on” position. When trapped by the WRB and fleeing from a motor vehicle, the animal has trouble positioning themselves to jump the WRB and will go from side to side of the road until it is often hit by a vehicle.

VicRoads have chosen to ignore such a tidal wave of concerns and complaints from the community and are progressing without consideration rolling out the Wire Rope Barriers.
It is my view that VicRoads have demonstrated that they are not fit to manage country roads.

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

It is my opinion that VicRoads have become an arrogant autocratic regime, they do not consider the opinions or experience and qualifications of their customers. These customers include Emergency Service, the Trucking industry, Grey Nomads, Motorcyclists, Motorists, local members of parliament and others.

For regional Victoria a Road Construction and Safety Authority maybe appropriate. Where the charter must consider road safety and community opinion when road construction and maintenance is undertaking. The new organisation should be overseen by a board that consists of representatives from road user groups on an equal basis. The board members must be Victorian driver licence holders who use the roads on a daily or very regular basis and live in regional Victoria.

Signed:

Laurie Park