The Law Reform,

Road & Community Safety Committee.

The Enquiry into VicRoads Management of Country Roads,

Please accept my submission to this enquiry.

OVERVIEW.

I am very concerned regards the state of Victoria’s country roads and highways regards management, maintenance and safety, here are detailed concerns.

1. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF VICROADS MANAGING COUNTRY ROADS.

Over the last 12 months there has been media coverage on road accidents on Gippsland roads.

There have been reports, interviews and articles from VicRoads, the TAC, Police, and government directed at motorists to be responsible drivers in an effort to lower accidents and fatalities on Victoria’s roads.

It is acknowledged media promotions are needed, and motorists need to lift their game, especially regards driving under the influence of alcohol, and drugs, or talking on the phone. But there is only so much drivers can do to make Victoria’s road safer.

If all of the bad habits of drivers were eliminated there still would be road accidents.

It’s not good enough for Vicroads, TAC, Police, government and the various other organisations to point the finger at road users only.

These authorities need to take much more responsibility and be far more proactive in the prevention of road accidents.

It is not good enough for a spin doctor from Vicroads giving weekly reports over the radio telling motorist why there is a holdup on roadworks because of bad weather or some other trivial excuse.

The weekly police reports are fine they tell it as it is, but they need to be voicing concerns about the poor state our roads are in, voicing concerns about the road construction delays.

TAC should be doing the same prompting VicRoads to better maintain the road surface.

Each of the government departments are too cosy, and it would be understandable the officialdom in each department don’t want to rock the boat, but the boat needs to be rocked.

This cosy situation might be ok for the workforce of these government departments, but it is not ok for the road users of Victoria and other states.

This type of arrangement should not be tolerated.

The Princes Highway road construction operations through Gippsland over the years has presented itself poorly regards slow progress, quality of construction, planning and decision making, excessive spending pandering to poorly researched green ideology.

If we compare the construction performance on the Princes Highway (Highway 1) duplication and upgrade to the same type of duplications and upgrades on the Highway 1 in NSW and Queensland, it becomes very clear the road constructors for Victorians are amateurs.

Questions needed to be asked about Vicroads;

A. Do they have the skill base to properly plan and coordinate road construction?
B. Have they the skills and personnel to closely monitor, oversee and check the compaction test on the road base (when the top seal starts breaking up and depressions occur, poor compaction is the reason) Gippsland roads are plagued with roads breaking up soon after construction with potential to cause accidents.

C. Having different contractors responsible for different sections of construction can be the cause of poor road construction performance (in other states there seems to be one contractor responsible for all sections).

D. At Flynn why was there the need to shift the pipeline and powerlines at great expense. There was room on the existing road reserve for duplication, the road could have been made with minimal removal of the large red gums, the small red gums are not a natural environmental part of the area, neither are the pine tree, they could have been removed, And the eucalyptus trees closer to Traralgon are not native to the area, that’s the reason they are half dead and mangy looking, they should have been removed. Regards environmental issues Vicroads are receiving bad advice to the detriment of the motoring public as well as the flora and fauna. There was extra expense to move the powerlines on from Sale to the rail overpass section to save a patch of scrub, most of it is not indigenous to the area, some had been planted, and all has now become a fire hazard from lack of maintenance. Vicroads are engineering our roadsides to an un-natural scrubland on many of our natural open plain country areas resulting in the roadsides becoming a fuse for acute fire hazard to motorists and country residents. The scrub has grown now to attract native birds and animals un-naturally where they interact with the traffic to the detriment of safety to motorists and wildlife. Current roadside management ignores fire prevention as to the CFA Act.

E. When the cheap option is taken to install roundabouts at intersections on major highways, why does each roundabout have different angles of entries and exits, as well as different road cambers? If they were all constructed the same, and once a road user went through one the rest could be taken in the same manner, but from Sale to Traralgon they are all different and motorist have to use varying driving techniques for each one, this has potential for frequent accidents or near misses. Some can be driven through at a constant speed; some the corners tighten up halfway through, this is not good for trucks as each roundabout is an unknown. COMMENT. It has become evident over the last 10 years the expertise has deminished.

ROPE BARRIERS; The rope barriers used as a safety device are too easily comprised by a small impact. A rope barrier may be 200 metres long and once a car or truck deviates and bends or breaks several of the flimsy steel posts for say 6 to 10 metres, the whole 200 metres of safety barrier is not working as a safety tool for motorists; it may as well not be there. If it was 200 metres of the steel Armco barrier and 6 to 10 metres was impacted it probably still be intact but bent over, and the rest of the 200 metres would still be working as a safety barrier for the motorists.
3.
There has been some of these rope barriers on the Gippsland highway one with posts knocked out, ropes loose and hanging on the ground for over 6 months. Whoever is responsible for the maintenance needs a good shakeup.
Apparently the rope barriers are high tech when it comes to constructing and repairing them, as they need a machine to tension the ropes, and there are supposedly only 2 of these machines available in Victoria.
Also the rope barriers are being positioned too close to road verge leaving less room for motorists to deviate and prevent an accident if the need arises.
COMMENT. The expert trials on rope barriers as a means of a safety tool was proven to work, but the inexperience of Vicroads and TAC have used the rope barriers as “one fits all” in the roll out of Zero and safer roads, the easy way out was taken.

TABLE DRAINS;
The drains are being constructed too close to the road edge and fall off steeply.
With water lying in the drains close to the road edge no matter how well the road is compacted water will seep in under the road with the vibration of the traffic.
This is easily noticeable when water lies in the drains and the bitumen adjacent can be seen breaking up.
On straight roads where no safety barriers are erected and there is no gradual slope out to the drain, the steep drop off creates a risk of a rollover if a vehicle is forced off the road or accidently veers off.
Where ever possible roadways need to have gradual sloping and clear verges.
This would also eliminate the need for barriers on many kilometres of roadways where barriers are erected for the sole purpose to stop vehicles from entering the steep and unnecessary ditch that has been created.
If the drain was at least 3 to 4 metres from the road edge that had a gradual slope to the middle of the drain, it creates 3 major advantages.
1. Water will not compromise the road foundation.
2. The safety barriers can be placed further from the road.
3. Gives motorists more room to pull off the road or take evasive steps if the need arises.
Vicroads have created these 3 safety advantages on earlier roadworks on the Princes Highway such as the Drouin by-pass with the addition of white posts to stop left hand passing.

OBSTACLES CLOSE TO ROADWAYS;
Over the past 20 years the road planners and construction teams have ignored the dangers of leaving large objects close to the roadway and as a consequence many fatalities may not have occurred if those objects had been removed.
These objects such as trees, power poles etc. constantly feature in road deaths on a weekly basis.
Road reserves were created for the sole purpose to transport people and goods from town to town and place to place.
Trying to change these road reserves to co-exist with nature reserves has not worked.
In some places this mis-guided theme promoted as saving the environment have become fire hazards, other places they create havens for fauna and flora, only to be run over by vehicles or burnt by bushfires.
4. It doesn’t save human life or the environment.
The lack of fuel reduction on many of the once fire safe roads has transformed them to
unsafe and hazardous roads especially now with the promotion from emergency authorities
to leave early or go to a safer place regarding the event or likely event of fire.
It may well be residents are leaving a safer place compared to traveling on some of these
hazardous roads.
Most of Victoria’s roads are the least safe place to be, in the event or likely event of fire.
This is one example of the lack of communicating skills between 2 authorities Vicroads and
CFA for the delivery of a safer place for residents and motorists.

ROADWORKS SIGNAGE;
The quality of signage is poor and confusing especially on new roadworks.
Speed restrictions are not consistent.
Sometimes 80km then 60km then 40km are displayed.
Other times from the 100 km it indicates a 40km is next.
Sometimes there is no sign indicating when to return to 100km.
Many of the permanent illuminating signs are not at the correct angle to disperse the car
headlights from bouncing back to the driver, this is a lack of maintenance problem as these
signs should be checked and position at the correct angle periodically.
There is a lack of skill or duty of care displayed regards roadworks signage.

ROAD SURFACE;
The black crushed rock being used now soaks up and deflects vehicle lights much more than
the old lighter grey/brown surface of earlier years.
Vision is greatly reduced in wet weather on the current black surface.
There is a big difference on a wet night when you travel on the lighter coloured surface.

2. THE EXISTING FUNDING MODEL & ITS LACK OF EFFECTIVENESS FOR COUNTRY VICTORIA;
If the funds are to continue being wasted by inexperience and poor workmanship there will
never be enough funds for country roads.
With a separate Country Vicroads and a complete new set of skills the existing funding
should be enough.

3. CONSULTATION TO THE PUBLIC & ROAD USERS;
Vicroads and TAC have very poor consultation skills the probable reason is the lack of skills
regards road making, traffic control, what is unsafe and what is safe etc.
Much of what is rolled out on our roads in the guise of safety has not been properly thought
through by TAC and Vicroads.
Many cases a singular safety treatment is implemented that impacts on safety in several
places elsewhere and during the consultation process when these impacts are pointed out
the public hits a brick wall.
Consultation needs to be the authorities start with a blank page and go to the road user and
public asking what they think is needed, then come back with a plan and answers.
This way the public and road user has some ownership.

4. THE OPTION of a COUNTRY ROADS & a METROPOLITAN ROADS 2 ORGANISATIONS;
5. This would be the best option, but only if it was a complete new team in the Country Roads. Creating 2 separate organisations with the same management personnel transferred would be fruitless.

COMMENTS ON PRINCES HIGHWAY THROUGH SALE; With poor planning Sale has been created as a major obstacle for motorists either passing through or going to shop there. Mostly caused by ribbon development. Motorists have been dodging passing through Sale for some time now as witnessed by the high amount of traffic bypassing through Maffra from Stratford as well as turning off at Myrtlebank road to Fulham, none suitable for these high traffic loads. The Stratford Maffra road is a disgrace and the unofficial Sale bypass to Fulham are an indictment on the planners for not having a proper bypass for Sale before the Princes Highway duplication was started between Sale and Rosedale. The federal and state governments and motorists are financing these road improvements and are not getting a fair result for the money being spent. The federal government puts a large amount of finance to these road constructions and needs to have more control on how and where the money is spent. It seems the Victorian government is issued the finance and they capture other state projects under the guise of “road construction”. If the purchase of land, shifting of power poles and sewage pipelines were not included, it would be fair to say at least double the length of road improvement could have been achieved in less time and with far less disruption to motorists. It is recognised maybe the private power pole owners and the Victorian sewerage authorities contributed finances but most of their structures would have been in want of replacement regardless. Maybe the federal government needs to make sure other authorities are not getting a free ride on the back of federal finance.

Maurie Killeen, 10-1-2018.