Submission to Inquiry into VicRoads Management of County Roads.

To the committee

I have been a Local Government Roading Civil Engineer for over 40 years – both as an employee and as a consultant.

A summary of my thoughts are as follows;

- Roads simply do not receive enough funding – ‘Rearranging the deck chairs did not stop the Titanic sinking.’
- There is a very serious lack of technically competent engineers within both VicRoads and Local Government.
- The emphasis on controlling expenditure rather than providing a service has led to a great reduction in Professional Engineers within VicRoads. Accountants were seen as more important than the engineers who spent the money. This exacerbates the loss of skills for the on-ground provision of efficient and appropriate services.
- There is too great an emphasis on systems and reporting as compared with achieving outcomes on the road network.
- This heavy emphasis on expensive business and OH&S systems precludes small consultants from providing services to VicRoads, due to the very high relative cost of preparing the required systems.
- I have found that often the requirements for very extensive documented systems by Authorities reflects their lack of knowledge and ability to manage projects.
- Fundamental maintenance is not being cared out – particularly in relation to drainage and bridge maintenance. Lots of reports but no action.
- Maintenance of our road networks is not attractive to our politicians as it is not seen as winning them any votes. As road funding has become very politicised this has led to a severe reduction in road maintenance funding.
- A lack of appropriate maintenance is leading to excessive requirements for road rehabilitation.
- Overall our road infrastructure is being run down. This has been highlighted by Engineers Australia on many occasions.
- There is a large proportion of our country roads at or beyond their design life and need significant rehabilitation, replacement and or upgrading.
- VicRoads is risk adverse. Placing all the risk on contractors comes at a very high cost. Where the client – VicRoads accepts some risk, considerable savings can be made.
- There appears to be no long term planning for our road infrastructure. It is very much at the mercy of the political climate of the day. This is leading to significant inefficiencies and losses.
- Most of the above is not new. However if we do not learn from history we are doomed to make the same mistakes time and time again.

I am happy to present further details in person if requested.
John Dunn
Director
Rural Works Pty Ltd