Inquiry Name: Inquiry into VicRoads' Management of Country Roads

Mr Kel York

SUBMISSION CONTENT:

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Item 1.
I believe that the poor state of many rural roads under the control of VicRoads is a result of the decision some years ago to carry out routine maintenance by contract rather than by the long-standing practice of using direct labour. In the latter case, patrol depots were strategically placed around the State, and the patrolmen resided in the local community. The patrolmen took great pride in maintaining their sections of road, and any deficiencies would be brought quickly to their notice by the community. Maintenance by contractors is ineffective and inefficient. The contractor's motivation is maximising profits, as it should.

It is very difficult to specify intervention levels for maintenance, e.g. how wide and long must a crack be, how deep must a pothole be, how much damage to roadsign is acceptable. It is even more difficult to monitor that the specified levels are being observed. It is said that a stitch in time saves nine, but in the case of road maintenance it saves many times nine. A small crack in the pavement surfacing is of no consequence if it is promptly sealed. If, however, it is allowed to remain, water will enter the pavement, and weaken the pavement material and the subgrade, leading to pavement distress, which will require costly remediation. The latter situation will result in much greater payment (and profit) to the contractor.

Item 4
Separation of responsibility for metropolitan and rural roads has been tried, and was a failure.
The responsibility for the construction and maintenance of metropolitan highways and bridges was vested in the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works by an amending Act in 1956, causing a great deal of conflict with the Country Roads Board, until all road responsibilities were passed to the CRB in 1974.
If there is to be any reorganisation, it should be to set up a separate authority to handle registration and licencing. VicRoads should return to being a civil engineering authority. Handling the administration of registration and licencing has distracted VicRoads from its real core business. Victoria was once renowned for the high standard of its rural roads.

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