Inquiry Name: Inquiry into VicRoads' Management of Country Roads

Mr Lindsay Griffin

SUBMISSION CONTENT:

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Attached as a Word document.

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File1: 5a5b318959f1f-The Law Reform.docx

File2:

File3:
I am 66 years old, male, live in East Gippsland and have held a licence since turning 18. My driving experience is extensive covering local, interstate and overseas and have driven cars, four wheel drives, buses, small and large trucks.
I was a member of Victoria Police for thirty-nine years before retiring and working in Local Government as the Municipal Recovery Manager for the past eight and a half years. I retired December 2017.

I would like to provide the following information and observations for consideration by your committee.

1. The effectiveness of VicRoads in managing country roads;

Country motorists deserve and have a right to safe and well-maintained roads, as do metropolitan motorists. The difference is that there are many alternate routes for metropolitan motorists; we usually have only one road to use.
I have observed the decline in road maintenance and the general standard of road surfaces that VicRoads expects us to accept as normal.
Our roads are extremely rough and tiring to drive on, the edges are broken and many have potholes and / or a drop from the bitumen to the gravel surface.
I recently drove from Melbourne to Shepparton along the Hume Freeway and the Goulburn Valley highway; the speed limit on the Goulburn Valley is 110 kph. The speed limit on the newly completed sections of the Princes Highway East of Traralgon is 100 kph. The Princes Highway is considerably better than the Goulburn Valley Highway and yet has a lower speed limit. This is but one of many differences in the way that VicRoads manages our country roads, or should that be mismanages.
I find it difficult to understand the reasoning behind VicRoads penchant for placing ‘Rough Surface / Area’ signs on our roads and what the ‘rough’ criteria is, as many of our roads are just as rough before and after these signs.
Road maintenance appears to be of poor quality and shoddy, indicated by the number of times that the same faults with the road surface are repaired. There does not appear to be a schedule of replacing and upgrading roads, just repeated repairs.
The only money that is being spent is to install wire rope barriers and the new type of armco railing, on new sections of highways /freeways. When applied to lower category country roads, work is completed on the edges of the road in preparation for the installation of the barriers but nothing is done to improve the existing poor quality road surface.
2. The existing funding model and its lack of effectiveness for country Victoria;

The current funding model is flawed. The VicRoads funding model must be at a level that provides for the maintenance of existing roads and the replacement of roads as they come to the end of their life (asset management).

I have also noticed that the standard of service provided by VicRoads staff and the condition of roads vary across areas of the state. Either funding allocation and its use would appear to depend on the commitment of local staff or some areas receive more funding than others.

I believe that it is a good idea that excess funds generated by the Traffic Accident Commission (TAC) be provided to VicRoads, however, I don’t believe that TAC should be able to direct where and how the funds are to be used. They should be applied to the programs developed with community input (see Terms of Reference 3).

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

From my experience, VicRoads does not do community consultation, at best they inform.

Effective community consultation is based on the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) and their Public Participation Spectrum which is designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public’s role in any community engagement program. The Spectrum shows that differing levels of participation are legitimate depending on the goals, time frames, resources and levels of concern in the decision to be made. However, and most importantly, the Spectrum sets out the promise being made to the public at each participation level (https://www.iap2.org.au/About-Us/About-IAP2-Australasia-/Spectrum).

There is understandable anger in communities when, at the last minute, a community consultation meeting is called at a time with little or no regard to community members being able to participate and then the community is informed of what VicRoads proposes to deliver.

Communities need to be involved in the early stages of the process of deciding on what is to be done, where and when the project is to be completed and given a legitimate opportunity to inform the process and its outcomes.

VicRoads projects are not developed at short notice and there is ample opportunity to engage effectively with communities, which will provide enhanced outcomes. Project funding must be tied to demonstrated effective community engagement. It is not difficult and there are ample opportunities to partner with local government to achieve better outcomes for both VicRoads and communities.

Whether we have a separate country roads organisation or we continue with VicRoads, Public community meetings need to be held at times to enable genuine involvement and discussion of projected repair,
maintenance and renewal of roads. They should be held in multiple areas within each local government area and the resultant program published on VicRoads and Local Government web sites with quarterly updates on progress. There will always be unforeseen issues, delays, etc. which would trigger additional community meetings. This may seem difficult and hard to implement, however, Forest Fire Management already have a similar program in place for their Fire Operations Plan which has community engagement as a key input.

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

If guaranteed dedicated funding for country roads cannot be guaranteed, then I think the only option is to create a separate Country Roads organisation. Funding needs to be further broken down to VicRoads areas and published on their web site to provide openness and accountability.