12 January 2017

The Executive Officer
Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee
Parliament House
Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Dear Executive Officer

INQUIRY INTO VICROADS’ MANAGEMENT OF COUNTRY ROADS

Regional Development Australia Barwon South West (RDA BSW) welcomes the opportunity to submit to the Inquiry into VicRoads’ Management of Country Roads in Victoria.

Introduction

RDA BSW is part of a national network of committees made up of local leaders who work with all levels of government, business and community groups to support and broker economic development opportunities for their regions.

The RDA BSW region is made up of the area from Queenscliff to the South Australian border and includes two state regions (Barwon and Great South Coast) and nine local government areas, as shown below:

RDA BSW has an active and facilitative role in their regions and a clear focus on growing strong and confident regional economies that harness their competitive advantages, seize on economic opportunity and attract investment.

RDA BSW executes its core responsibilities by:

1. Enabling and encouraging regional prosperity, monitoring progress in key areas
2. Leveraging regional advantages and build sector strengths
3. Promote regional capabilities/investment opportunities
4. Support increase in exports/greater Asian presence
5. Reduce barriers to job/economic growth i.e. infrastructure development, policy alignment
Background

The Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee have provided notice of an Inquiry into VicRoads’ Management of Country Roads.

RDA BSW wishes to provide the following responses to the two of the four issues outlined in the Inquiry’s Terms of Reference:

1. The existing funding model and its lack of effectiveness for Country Victoria
2. The lack of consultation with regional communities and their subsequent lack of input into prioritising roads which are in dire need of repair; and

RDA BSW does not have a formal position on the effectiveness of VicRoads’ management of country roads or on the option of dismantling VicRoads as it is believed that a commitment to optimise collaborations across all levels of government, government portfolios, business, individuals and community groups to work towards achieving shared objectives in an efficient, effective and engaging way is what is required.

Response

- **The existing funding model and its lack of effectiveness for country Victoria**

  A quality, safe road network is a key enabler to the future economic and social prosperity of the region.

  The existing funding model for country roads does not adequately maintain roads to a reasonable standard and this is demonstrated by the deteriorating and distressed state of a large proportion of the arterial network, particularly in the South West of the region.

  This has been reiterated through consultation with regional stakeholders such as the Barwon and Great South Coast Regional Partnerships and Barwon South West Local Government Authorities and via feedback from recent regional community engagement activities.

  A safe and efficient transport network is vital for the competitiveness of regional/country Victoria. Well maintained, fit for purpose road infrastructure and linkages are needed to maximise economic growth and prosperity.

  It is suggested that a minimum standard should be established for roads and funding be equitably invested across regions and across the state to deliver a more consistent Road standard.

  Furthermore, the existing funding model should be critically assessed against best practice models from across Australia and internationally to identify how the funding model can respond to the differing environmental conditions and usage patterns of the road network areas across different areas in country Victoria.

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

  Road maintenance and improvements should be founded on a robust evidence base and as a part of a comprehensive and integrated transport networking planning and asset management approach.

  Engagement with regional communities is genuine and meaningful when underpinned by evidence.

  Furthermore, drawing on existing and partnering in the co-design of community engagement activities, particularly with local governments agencies, is an efficient way of understanding community views, which then allows targeted stakeholder engagement be undertaken and the development of appropriate and tailored communication activities and avoids “community consultation fatigue”.

An Australian Government Initiative
Conclusion

The RDA BSW Committee thanks the Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee for an opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry and trust that the process will lead to increased funding and improved asset management practices for the Victorian rural/country roads network.

Please do not hesitate to contact the RDA BSW via email [contact information redacted] should you wish to meet with RDA BSW or require further clarification regarding this submission.

Yours sincerely

Bruce Anson
Chair
Regional Development Australia Barwon South West