Dear Committee

RE: ENQUIRY INTO VICROADS’ MANAGEMENT OF COUNTRY ROADS

Thank you for providing Indigo Shire Council the opportunity to make a submission into your enquiry into VicRoads management of country roads.

As a rural Council, we have many Arterial Roads passing through and interacting with our Local Roads Network. In our North East Region, we find that VicRoads is responsive, cooperative and has a strong focus on effectively managing their roads and improving safety on country roads to the extent that their budget allows. Council representatives regularly meet with VicRoads staff at a variety of levels and find that they are both under resourced and in need of an increased reserve of technically experienced staff.

There are many capital or road safety improvements that could be made, in particular from Council’s perspective on intersections between local and arterial roads, which we understand could be possible if funding to the region for these improvements was increased. In particular safety improvements are important as the people driving on the arterial roads are our communities and our visitors, and we strongly feel any road trauma as a community. Council is always interested in advocating for preventative work to addresses known problems before the community experiences a tragedy that could have been averted.

In addition to the safety aspect, Indigo Shire Council points out that country roads provide freight pathways to Melbourne and other large cities, and this transport network facilitates economic benefit beyond the boundaries of rural shires. It is often felt that funding does not reflect the significance of these roads to the state-wide economy.

The impression in the North East Region in relation to VicRoads’ consultation with its community has been one of significant and noticeable improvement, particularly over the last 2-3 years. One particular example is the safety improvements on Beechworth-Wodonga Road, which have been widely praised as being very inclusive of community input. In addition, Council was able to work closely with local VicRoads staff on a roundabout/underpass project that allowed both organisations to achieve their goals in an efficient and effective way.

It is felt that the proposal of a specific Country Roads Organisation may indeed provide additional focus on country roads and that this may result in better outcomes for rural areas, however some caveats to that statement are warranted:

- No specific detail is known about what the proposed organisation may look like, what its operating instructions might be or how wide its span of influence may reach.
Without these details it is rather difficult to provide any meaningful comment on the merits of this suggestion.

- The formation of two organisations from one has the potential to add a significant amount of administrative and operational costs that do not currently exist. If the organisational structure is simply duplicated then the added inefficiency would draw money away from road funding and result in a worse result for all.
- The question of whether a new organisation would improve outcomes is considered to be secondary in comparison to the impact that increased (or refocussed) funding would have on country roads. Indigo Shire Council suggests that the best return on investment is found in physical works on known problems.

We thank you once again for providing the opportunity to submit feedback in relation to VicRoads management of country roads and would be happy to provide further comment if requested.

Yours sincerely

Greg Pinkerton
INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER