SUBMISSION TO THE LAW REFORM, ROAD AND COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE.

On

THE MANAGEMENT OF COUNTRY ROADS

Written: 3rd January 2018

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To: The select Committee Members:

As residents of Victoria, and in particular Nelson, we wish to make the following comments.

We travel widely in the state and have long been aghast at the state of a majority of the major Highways, including, but not restricted to, the Murray Valley Highway (B400), the Princes Highway (A1, most sections) and the Nelson Portland Road (C192). Travelling on any of these is often terrifying and we are all aware of the number of fatalities that occur.

It would seem that the entire country road network is collapsing for want of forward planning and efficient and effective quality maintenance programmes.

Our comments are mostly specific to the Nelson Portland Road which passes through my town and on which I travel up to four days a week. Its deterioration has been marked for many years and we have contacted both Vic Roads and our local and Federal members on numerous occasions to voice concerns that we will put before your committee.

This road is the site of numerous rollovers by transports who use it as a short cut to the port of Portland. In addition, tourists not used to the poor road conditions have been killed. Whilst many residents would have the semis not use the road, it is clear that they are a vital part of the national supply chain given the loss of the rail system. However, it is also obvious that they have added to the issue of road deterioration as the rigs become larger and time lines tighter as owners fight for profit.
The deterioration of our road system has been to the serious detriment of rural dwellers such as myself. Not only can travel across the state be frightening, at times I am frankly terrified to travel with my grandchild on board. Most residents of Nelson could relate terrifying, near miss experiences with trucks. Most of these occur on a three kilometre section of the road from the town to the border with South Australia. It is a section of road like no other I have experienced and history would support the theory that the road was made over the original wagon track, without engineering changes and includes an S bend of perilous construction.

The road now deteriorates into huge potholes, in some cases overnight. These are filled in and the filling then is forced out immediately by the continuous, heavy traffic, forming yet further hazards. Where Vic Roads have then finally completely remade short stretches of road this has led to changes in road surface, often every few meters. These remade areas still fall apart and are needed to be redone sometimes within months. Some years ago there was a sign displayed bragging about the 1.3 million upgrade to the road. I would like to suggest this was a massive waste of public funds and would have gone a way to remaking the road in a condition that would last. I have personally made many comments to Vic Roads, politicians and other involved groups, who agree with comments but there is never action, of course.

If the numbers of local residents/voters are not worthy of safe travel then surely the issue of Tourism must hit an economic chord. The Portland/Nelson Road is a major tourist route and the conditions of the road would hardly be good publicity for the area. Similarly the number of truck rollovers on this road and especially in the short section from Nelson to the Border is increasing. One wonders what will happen when/if the bridge is the scene of an accident.

Some weeks ago we travelled to and from Melbourne via the Princes Highway (Colac to Geelong). To say we were stunned by the scope of roadworks on this section was no exaggeration. That is not to say it is not needed but it brings to mind several issues. Only a small section less could free up enough funding to replace the road I have previously discussed. Cities mean votes and its obvious when we travel from remote areas to major population centres where the funding goes. One can hardly be surprised when rural Victorians are angered when billions are spent so that “residents of XYZ” can cut minutes off their trip to work in the metropolitan areas!

We also want to mention that some years ago we brought a new car and within months had to change tyres due to damage caused by the potholes (the cause confirmed by expert opinion, not just ours), at a not insignificant cost. We approached Vic Roads regarding a claim with the response being a threatening letter in relation to pursuing the claim.

In closing, we wish to list the following for the committee’s consideration. These points pertain specifically to our local road. However the issues can apply equally across all rural roadways:

- The quality of any roadworks needs close scrutiny. Repairs should last but that is not the experience in our area. New roads need to be constructed to bear the expected users, including bulk heavy vehicles.
• Signing: Sometimes is poor and outdated, and hidden by vegetation but at other times is overkill which is then ignored by users.

• The clarification and monitoring of which departments own/manage specific roadways. This issue is not always clearly enunciated and could lead to occasions of inter departmental buck passing.

• Maintenance: the clearing of road verges both of grass and encroaching vegetation to allow water runoff and better visibility of the road ahead. This is poorly applied in the local situation. In fact Agapanthus have been allowed to grow ON THE NELSON BRIDGE itself! The verges on the bridge are seemingly unattended.

• The lack of management of roadside vegetation has allowed the proliferation of weeds and invading species (Blue bell Creeper, Polygala, Coastal Wattle, Bridal Creeper, European Buckthorn, Cotoneaster and various garden escapees). This significant problem is evident all across the state.

• Policing of the use of rural roads by heavy transport needs more attention. Speeding, overtaking, dangerous loading, poorly maintained trucks and lately the use of unexperienced drivers, leads to accidents and further road deterioration. Please note this is not all drivers and, most are very responsible. As well, major fires have been attributed to trucks on this Nelson Portland Road and the proximity of vegetation is an issue for fire control/management.

• The concept of a “Futures Fund” for road maintenance and Building.

We accept these issues might be simplistic but it seems that they have been ignored and that this has contributed to a serious issue for both Victorian and Federal governments alike. However we commend them for your attention and thank you for your consideration.

Trena and Allan Mullan
Agapanthus growing on Nelson Bridge, pretty..........................poor maintenance!

Still the same or worse in 2018.