VicRoads Management of Country Roads

**My thoughts on VicRoads after forty years of commercial road use.**

I have watched the transition from the Country Roads Board method of operation in rural Victoria to the existing mega government monopoly.

VicRoads is an organisation that is totally out of touch with country road users without accountability for decisions made or any follow up to see if those decisions were in fact correct.

**I’ll use my region as an example.**

The Omeo Region is part of East Gippsland with very defined geographical boundaries. To the south access is fine but to the North we are cut off by heavy snowfalls in winter on the Great Alpine Road at Mt Hotham, as well as on the Omeo Highway.

The CRB years ago identified Omeo as a natural hub for roads management in the region and with that it had a depot with crews that patrolled and maintained roads out to our geographical boundaries. There were other smaller depots at Ensay and Glen Wills but as roads became sealed they closed.

The Omeo Crews had the ability to report and manage snow conditions from Omeo.

The Gippsland Division maintained our roads and if we needed a chain fitting bay or other works we could talk to people in our own region. However, in the late 90’s without any community consultation our boundaries were changed. This meant that instead of local crews managing local roads to their natural boundaries this responsibility was given to the North East Division. The communication channels between regions or road condition reporting to our region doesn’t exist.

We as a community have shown time and time again that this situation does not work, that to send crews over the highest roads in Australia into East Gippsland was and still is, a mistake. VicRoads do not listen to our concerns because they don’t make mistakes with their decisions.

What the CRB did extremely well for many years was changed without consultation or accountability and the sad part is that VicRoads think they are doing a good job.

The Omeo Highway should be kept open all the time, it used to be when the Omeo Depot patrolled it but now it can remain shut for days on end. When the Great Alpine Road at Mt Hotham closes as it does frequently on the Harrietville approach there is no access to the North from Gippsland.

The crews from the North East do not and cannot come over the Great Divide and maintain our roads the same as it was done by local crews.

**On a broader note.**

One of the fundamentals of prolonging the life of any road is to ensure that road side table drains are properly maintained. There is growing neglect of road side drains with the result that blocked
drains are more common and we see more evidence of road surfaces deteriorating as a result of waterlogging.

Some newly constructed sealed sections of roads in East Gippsland have failed in only a short period of time following their completion. There are many reasons why this might occur, however the fact remains that overstretched maintenance budgets are being depleted by what, in some cases, is an avoidable expense. Road construction contractors could be made to guarantee their work against poor workmanship or substandard materials at their own cost for a reasonable period after handover of the project.

The current project to install centre of the road wire rope barriers along the Princess Highway between Sale and Bairnsdale is a further example of Vic Roads’ lack of community consultation. The project was first announced in May 2016. An online survey was conducted in October 2017 to obtain community input. Vic Roads has adopted a messaging or communications strategy to promote this project. It has already decided the project is going ahead and we are now being told it is a good idea. At no time has Vic Roads engaged road users in a genuine consultation about what is a needed and road users and emergency services personnel still have unresolved concerns about this project.

Under its charter, the TAC is able to fund extensive road safety initiatives, such as the wire rope barriers project referred to above, but is not able to fund road maintenance works. At the same time Vic Roads is unable to keep up with routine road maintenance which places the safety of road users at risk. It is contrary to common sense that the TAC is not able to fund road maintenance initiatives that would have a strong road safety outcome.

These examples illustrate the deficiencies in VicRoads management of country roads and my recommendations are as follows:

- That a separate Country Roads Board be established so that the core business is rural roads and not metropolitan roads and all the other peripheral roles such as registration and licensing.
- That we define our road management boundaries to align with all other boundaries such as local government, Police and CFA so that good communication exists between all agencies.
- That a new CRB would restore existing depots and employ local crews and utilise contractors where necessary. This would give much needed long term employment tenure instead of 5 year contract employment with the possibly different contractors. This would give consistent local knowledge and pride in works achieved plus the ability to purchase homes and be member of local communities.
- That all Engineering staff be allocated work in the field on a regular basis because VicRoads decision makers now come from university and not through the ranks. We see the stupid mistakes made because there is no practical ability left. That future staff are encouraged to work through the ranks from basic road maintenance operation.
- That maintenance specifications provide for an increase the frequency of roadside drains inspections.
- That road construction contractors be required to provide a three year maintenance guarantee against faulty workmanship and or substandard / inferior materials for period of three years after handover of the project.
• That regular and genuine community consultation occur in regional towns and that future project proposals provide, at their inception, for the community to have face to face conversations with the planners, decision makers and the people who will do the work.

• Than the TAC’s charter be amended to permit the use of TAC funds for a broader range of road safety initiatives, including road maintenance.

Yours Sincerely

Rodney O’Connell