Submission to Inquiry into VicRoads Management of Country Roads

The dangerous condition of country roads under VicRoads management in western Victoria provides clear evidence that VicRoads are not effectively managing country roads. In most cases local Shires are doing no better but their roads carry far less traffic.

Whether the funding model fails to provide sufficient funds to build the roads properly or too much is spent on ineffective repairs is hard for the average person to know. It is obvious however when travelling on country highways in South Australia and Western Australia that their road construction authorities are doing a better job at both maintaining and constructing their road networks.

As soon as we travel across the border into South Australia at Naracoorte on the way to Adelaide the road improves markedly. Many years ago it was the reverse, particularly on the way to Mt Gambier. In Western Australia on a recent trip from Perth to Port Hedland, up the coast and down the inland over 6500 kilometres, my wife and I were surprised to find only one rough surface sign, lots of new construction and clear wide spaces either side of the road. Not trees growing in the table drains or on the edge of the road seal like there are in the area from Cavendish, Coleraine to the South Australian border at Naracoorte.

Having trees back behind the far edge of the table drain is not only for safety of motorists but also wildlife like kangaroos. The structure of the road is improved with less tree roots encroaching on road foundations and less damage from flooding caused by blocked table drains. Gravel on road edges would also improve road surface drainage instead of the current grass edge and slashing late in spring.

VicRoads latest safety measure, wire rope barriers of which there are few in western Victoria would be better spent on removing trees to make roads safer.

As a farmer in the Lowan electorate I am well aware of the poor condition of roads west of Ballarat, Geelong and Bendigo. I regularly travel these roads in a car or ute but also in a truck delivering sheep, wool or grain to Stawell, Geelong, Hamilton, Kyneton, Bordertown and Portland.

The list of roads which need urgent and major repairs are;

Henty Highway - Portland to Horsham
Glenelg Highway – S. A. border to Ballarat
Western Highway – Horsham to Stawell
Wimmera Highway – S.A. border to Horsham
Hamilton Highway – Geelong to Hamilton
Natimuk Hamilton road
Balmoral Edenhope road
Coleraine Edenhope road
Cavendish Dunkeld road
Glenthompson Ararat road
Coleraine Cavendish road
Coleraine Balmoral road
Myamyn Macarthur road
Hamilton Port Fairy road
Skipton Geelong road

The highways listed above although wider in sealed section than the other roads listed below are all decorated with numerous rough surface signs which only indicate a small fraction of the actual number of rough and dangerous surfaces along the length of all the above roads. Travelling over a
rough surface in a car is often a minor inconvenience but in a truck with a high load it is often, can the driver maintain control of the vehicle. Maybe VicRoads inspectors need to travel these roads more in a heavy truck.

Are rough surface signs a temporary indicator of a problem or if left for too long as many are, should they be regarded legally as an admission of liability?

There has been neglect by a number of Governments in regard to Victorian country road maintenance and construction to the point that now there is a crisis which will require significantly more funds than have been allocated.
The South Australian and Western Australian funding models appear to be working with lower population bases to support the funds required.

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