The effectiveness of VicRoads management of country roads

ROADS NOT FIT FOR PURPOSE

Western Victorian roads are not fit for the purpose they are designed for. The standard does not match the communities safety or commercial needs to deliver people, livestock and goods in a manner consistent with expectations of a developed society. The peoples of Western Victoria have known this for years, suffering years of neglect, and now the Auditor Generals Report "Maintaining State Controlled Roadways" PP 258 June 2017 confirms the public safety risk and financial cost to Western Victorian communities.

FIX THE ROADS has been the mantra for successive election campaigns for decades without any sign of success. In fact the problem has worsened. Compounded by State and Federal Government unconditional support for uncontrolled blue gum plantations driven by the now failed Managed Investment Scheme companies. The opportunity lost on providing appropriate road infrastructure to support this land use change during the establishment stage by investing the windfall in increased stamp duty from inflated land values or requiring the cash rich MIS investment companies to contribute up front to necessary infrastructure has produced generation lowered standard of living for those remaining living and working in Western Victoria.

REMOVING ANY PLANNING PROVISIONS has allowed local and State roads to disintegrate and pavements to be destroyed. The haphazard Harvesting Permits being the only control after plantations are already established is a failed policy. This system places responsibility on local councils to seek reimbursement on repairs to local roads rather than ensuring roads were fit for the purpose of heavy timber haulage. Post damage repairs being reactive, more expensive, prolonged, not guaranteed and ensuring local farmers and communities suffer whist "Rome Burns". And the VicRoads controlled State roads suffer the same consequences of poor planning and inappropriate investment.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT GETS BLAMED FOR STATE OF ALL ROADS IN THE SHIRE. This submission
is based on Local Government becoming partners in the Reinstatement of "Fit for Purpose" Road Pavements developing local, regional and State plans for our road network. Instead of dodging the responsibility Local Government should step up to the plate and be part of the solution to achieve all the recommendations of the Victorian Auditor Generals report.

LOCAL INVOLVEMENT IN ROADS WILL MEAN MORE LOCAL JOBS

This current Vicroads model is neither Fair or Getting Things Done for Western Victoria. My submission focuses on Western Victoria as through my extensive work throughout Victoria and from feedback from road professionals, we do have the worst roads in Victoria for the longest period and least likelihood of reinstating safe and reliable road network due to generational political neglect.

2. the existing funding model and its lack of effectiveness in country Victoria

SAFETY LOTTO
Relying on VicRoads making "bids" to the State Government to make roads safe in Western Victoria is inappropriate when providing an essential service and safety management.

When a balcony is found unsafe for occupation and order to repair is delivered to owner. A decaying verandah on public thoroughfare is fenced off. When the risk of injury from diving boards in public pools was considered unacceptable, local councils had to remove diving platforms from pools. When 4 wheel motor bikes caused death and injury on farms, laws prevent the continued use without investment in roll bars where mandated.

SAFETY AND ELECTIVE
Why is the provision of safe roads an elective service which it comes to the State Government?

WHERE DOES THE MONEY GO?
There is a lack of transparency in funds collected from any taxes and excises relating to road use and the expenditure of those funds.

The people don't care whose problem it is and who fixes it. They just want the roads fixed. But we need to analyse where the money has been going? Our task in Local Government is to convince the State Government that we are the best long term partners and partners in contract management that know first hand which road and bridge work is dodgy and short term. The five year contract to finish finishes in 2020 and we need to see this new model with increased local involvement by the time this current model of out sourced service delivery expires. We could also see an increase in local employment in the continued investment in our road infrastructure.

We continue to witness major repair work breaking down soon after the job is finished. Examples on the Heywood Mount Gambier highway. Henty Highway in Heywood, Hamilton highway to Dunkeld , Glenelg Highway to Coleraine and Casterton. The Five ways Intersection on Chatsworth Road , the site of a major multiple fatality accident , the rework and resurface costing $1million in 2017 was breaking up with bitumen lifting within months. Where is a warrantee on these failed projects or the re scoping with appropriate specifications to ensure repairs last decades not weeks?

Travelling up to 60,000 kms a year as a vet in Western Victoria and South East South Australia over the last 40 years and now including Locums in the Wimmera, Mallee, Grampians, Central Highlands, Riverine, Victorian Alps, Dandenongs, Yarra Valley, Gippsland, Tasmania South Australia and Queensland I have first hand experience that the roads in Western Victoria qualify as the worst in the country considering the closer settlement profile.

Rocks piercing tyres, Potholes bending wheel rims, caravans and trailers stranded from incidents on rough roads, truck wheels breaking off causing fatal accidents, $20,000 in resale value wiped off any trucks worked the south west of Victoria....the list goes on documenting the human cost and financial burden placed on travellers in Western Victoria. The first time a Government started listening was a bus companies video of their previous cargo of school children within the Glenelg Shire.

I am making this submission as I am extremely concerned about our local roads in the Southern Grampians. Having received complaints for years from residents and ratepayers around Macarthur, Breraxholme, Coleraine and Nareen, it is now Cavendish's turn to see the deterioration in the road network as the blu gum harvest rolls
into our region. It took just 5 days of loaded wood chip trucks to break through the bitumen of our local Bulart roads. Rains stopped the harvest due to bogging in the paddocks. When harvesting recommenced a 10 kms section of local bitumen road between our two farms at Bulart had 30 potholes, some full width and as deep as a speed bump is high. The whole 10 km section has gravel bare patches. For this local Southern Grampians Shire Council road to be "made good" post harvest the whole section will need to be resurfaced, not just patched in 30 places.

The connecting Vicroads road has been reduced to gravel in several sections. Its the weight of these loads trucks with the logs or chips that is damaging the roads. The left side on the outbound is worn and rutted then potholed and impassable. There is a direct link to the increased damage to the roads and the increase in timber harvesting trucks. Where there are major wind farm developments like Macarthur there is also a crisis in the road structure during the construction phase.

The State Government removed any planning controls from local government on these developments which predictable would incur extra infrastructure costs to local communities.

DISASTER RECOVERY FUNDING REQUIRED URGENTLY

Now we have a real crisis. Man made policy disaster instead of climatic disaster. We need a recovery package. Something like disaster recovery funding post fire flood or landslide to reinstate these essential roadways to a safe and traversable condition. A huge injection of funding to catch up from years of neglect and mis planning.

3. the lack of consultation with regional communities and their subsequent lack of input into prioritising which roads are in the need of repair

Local Governments are required by the State Government to develop Council Plans for their communities. Country councils with invariably have a high priority of providing safe roads and improved public transport for their communities. Detailed Road Management Plans are developed.

There was no consultation with local communities on the unleashing of the blue gum plantation tax driven industry on food and cropping rural communities. There has not been any intervention in the ongoing land use for plantation purposed to ensure that the road infrastructure is fit for harvesting purposes. And the non timber roads have been neglected whilst only Timber roads received Federal and State Government attention and intervention.

The lack of use of rail freight where possible, including the timber industry, where a local industry for the South West is now having timber transported back across to the East and North to feed their mills rather than the South West where the industry footprint was promoted as a local South West and South of SA Industry.

The current regional partnerships public consultation introduced by the current State Government from my first had observations and from participation, draws a whole new lot of people together in such a short space of time the ability to get up to speed with the current state of play, the selective summary of the consulted priorities which does not match the voices and writing form the assembly, and the sidelining of local councillors, engineers and directors.... leaves me greatly concerned that the hard tasks will be addressed whilst the low hanging fruit it harvested.

Will the State Government be Fairer and Fix Things and Tack Action in Western Victoria?

4. the option of dismantling VicRoads and creating a specific Country Roads organisation and separate Metropolitan Roads body

This splitting of Vicroads would not go far enough. Local Government has well developed regional networks and track record of working cooperatively with neighbouring councils on common interests including maintaining linking roads and bridges.

The combination of local representatives working with engineers and directors to understand the road network

Alternative model which focuses on planning better contract management evaluation compliance and local consultation and representation and also delivering local employment and economic development to regions suffering from the disintegration of road network.
LOCAL GOVERNMENT  COUNTRYROADS VICROADS PARTNERSHIP

Local Government should be at the table of all planning, prioritisation and working on contract management and contract compliance and quality of work control.

New tools need to be developed including Local Road Standards for all roads in local councils geographical area Local and what are currently termed Vicroads roads

We need Mandatory Masterplans of road networks local, regional and State roads bridges and culverts.

Mandatory evaluation of budget requirements to fulfill road plan standards.

Annual Audits of road conditions and progress reports on working towards achieving minimum road standards.


In summary I think a young woman moving to Hamilton to work for local livestock contracting business and travelling extensively across western Victoria asked
" Why are your roads so bad?"

Another telling statement was meeting up with a director who had moved from Western Victoria to the Victorian Alpine region.

" We don't talk about bad roads all the time......... "

Dr Katrina Rainsford

Sent from my iPad