Mr Geoff Howard MP  
Chair  
Parliament of Victoria  
Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee  
Parliament House  
Spring Street  
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Dear Mr Howard

INQUIRY INTO VICROADS’ MANAGEMENT OF COUNTRY ROADS

I write further to correspondence of 11 December 2017 acknowledging the Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee’s Inquiry into VicRoads’ Management of Country Roads, and the offer to provide input into the draft Terms of Reference.

In response to your offer, please see below consolidated feedback on behalf of the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP).

I note the first Term of Reference for the Inquiry is to ‘...inquire into, consider and report (on)…the effectiveness of VicRoads in managing country roads’. I would welcome your further advice on what the intended scope of the Inquiry is in terms of other entities such as DELWP and municipal councils who have responsibility for managing ‘country roads’.

1. The effectiveness of VicRoads in managing country roads.

While the Road Management Act 2004 is largely successful in allocating responsibility for the management and co-ordination of country roads across a range of entities (e.g. VicRoads, municipal councils, DELWP and other Crown land managers), on occasion there may be instances where responsibility for management and co-ordination of ‘orphaned’ country roads is not resolved in a timely manner. This may lead to confusion or uncertainty amongst entities as to who is responsible for maintaining the road in a safe and serviceable condition which, in addition to adversely affecting road users, may in turn expose those entities to unnecessary financial or legal risk.

This may be an area where VicRoads, which is the agency responsible for administering the Road Management Act 2004, could lead improved collaboration with other entities to more quickly resolve questions relating to responsibility for ‘orphaned’ country roads.

As responsible entity for co-ordination and management of certain country roads under the Road Management Act 2004, DELWP staff often seek out input and advice from VicRoads policy and technical staff on how to best manage those country roads in accordance with the required standards. DELWP believes that any increase in the priority and focus afforded to managing country roads should also provide increased opportunity to share expertise across the relevant agencies and to undertake joint research and development into the operation and management of country roads.

The resulting increase in capability across entities with responsibility for country roads, which includes local government, will help to prioritise and address any perceived or actual deficiencies in the management of country roads which may currently be of concern.
2. **The existing funding model and its lack of effectiveness for country Victoria.** 

DELWP is aware the Victorian Government regularly allocates funds to VicRoads for major roadwork projects, including those in country Victoria. DELWP is aware that $556.4 million was specifically provided by the Andrews Labor Government in the 2017-18 State Budget to improve roads in Victoria’s regional areas.

Where funding is provided to VicRoads for regional projects, DELWP believes there is an opportunity to work more collaboratively with VicRoads to improve priority setting and outcomes. For example, the benefits of the current program of rolling-out continuous barrier ropes along highways across the state could be further improved by integrating these works with the active management of vegetation which can further improve visibility and sight lines for drivers.

3. **The lack of consultation with Regional communities and their subsequent lack of input into prioritising which roads are in dire need of repair.**

DELWP understands the importance of consulting with regional communities in relation to the programs and projects it undertakes, including those relating to road management. For example, DELWP has been undertaking hazardous tree removal projects along roadsides it manages across the state for several years now, including trees burnt or damaged by fire, for which informing and engaging with local residents and communities has been a key element of our approach.


To support its work, DELWP has established dedicated communications and engagement teams within each of its major regional offices. DELWP is happy to work with VicRoads to find ways of jointly improving our collaborative expertise in communicating and engaging with regional communities about the management of country roads.

4. **The option of dismantling VicRoads and creating a specific Country Roads organisation and separate Metropolitan Roads Body**

While not specifically advocating for any change to the current arrangements, the option of possibly dismantling (or disaggregating) VicRoads into two separate entities could be aligned with the State Planning Policy Framework where there are the designated areas of Metropolitan Melbourne and eight Regional areas - Central Highlands; Geelong; Gippsland; Great South Coast; Hume; Loddon Mallee North; Loddon Mallee South; and Wimmera and South Mallee.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into the draft Terms of Reference. If you have any questions, or if you would like to discuss these comments further, please contact Mr Tony Dowler, Manager Roads and Fixed Assets on (03) 9227 2955 or tony.dowler@delwp.vic.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

Christine Wyatt
Acting Secretary

12/1/18