Thankyou for the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry into Vic Roads’ Management of Country Roads.

I am both a motorist and tram driver in Bendigo, and my submission relates to Vic Roads’ management of the roadway in Bendigo known as High Street and McCrae Street, where motor traffic and trams share the road. The tram track in Bendigo is predominately single track laid at the centre of the road with passing loops. Trams operate all day, every day usually from about 9.30am until 5.00pm.

I make this submission on my own behalf and is it not to be taken as necessarily the views of Bendigo Tramways.

At several locations along the single track tram line, Vic Roads has placed designated turning lanes for motorists on the actual tram line, inviting motorists to execute a right hand turn into the path of oncoming trams. These locations are (a) Cnr McCrae & Chapel Sts; (b) Cnr High & Short Sts; (c) Cnr High & Wattle Sts; (d) Cnr High & Vine Sts and (e) Cnr High and Don Sts.

The Victorian road rules make it crystal clear how these intersections are to be managed, that is Road Rule 131 prohibits a motorist from turning right into the path of an oncoming vehicle unless the oncoming vehicle is also turning right, and naturally in the case of a motor vehicle being directed into the path of an oncoming tram, the tram is not turning right but is proceeding straight ahead. Further, Road Rule 187(2) prohibits a motorist from stopping on tram tracks.

The attached copy “Letters to the Editor” of the Bendigo Advertiser by several members of the public give examples of how motorists fare at these intersections.

From my experience (40 years) as a tram driver in Bendigo, the confusion caused to motorists and their subsequent reactions in their driving is a daily and constant occurrence when they are confronted with oncoming trams at these locations. I see motorists swing into a turning lane thinking they are safe, see the oncoming tram bearing down on them and then, either swing back into the lane from which they came, causing them to nearly sideswipe, or actually sideswipe traffic already travelling in that lane, or they swing their car to the right, onto the wrong side of the road, into the path of oncoming cars and trucks.

To confound motorists even further, at one particular intersection (High Street & Don Street), Vic Roads has installed a “T” light authorizing trams to cross this intersection. However a “T” light is only in situ for north bound trams; there is no “T” light in situ facing motorists travelling south. As a result, these motorists do not have the slightest idea that the oncoming tram will get its own light. All these motorists see is a normal traffic control signal displaying a red light and they enter the
turning lane into the path of the oncoming tram which appears to them to be traveling through a red light. It is just as confusing at the other side of the intersection, because as there is only a “T” light for north bound trams, on the return journey (ie travelling south) the tram relies on the same traffic control signals applicable to all other traffic, but the motorists travelling north can still see the “T” light for north bound trams which shows red, and they assume incorrectly that the tram approaching them is also facing a red “T” light and they turn onto the tram line into the path of the oncoming tram.

Apart from the confusion caused to motorists as the how to manage their vehicles at these intersections, there is the matter of real danger caused to them and indeed, to the tram driver and passengers where the rule of law and the intention of the law is not given effect to by Vic Roads. Further, there is the matter of congestion at these intersections when a tram frequently gets stuck in the middle of these intersections when vehicles swinging into the path of the oncoming tram whilst the tram is crossing the intersection. I am aware that the Bendigo Tramways possess a plethora of Special Day Reports giving examples of the types of incidents which occur at these intersections.

For years, members of the public and the Bendigo Tramways have approached Vic Roads about these problems, and not one change has been implemented by Vic Roads to alleviate the problems.

I know of no other corporation, business or individual who can seemingly pick and choose which law they will comply with, and give effect to, and which law they will ignore. As a result, when the rule of law is not followed, confusion and mayhem occur and that is what occurs on this section of the roadway.

Another effect of this failure by Vic Roads to give effect to the law is that motorists do not realize that they are prima facie breaching Road Rules 131 and 187(2) because they are simply doing what Vic Roads is inviting them to do and the result is that the Bendigo Tramways constantly receive complaints from motorists alleging that the tram driver has infringed their rights, and therefore the Bendigo Tramways suffer reputational damage, when the complaints should be directed to Vic Roads with that organisation being held accountable instead of the Tramways.

In conclusion, it is my submission that Vic Roads’ management of this country road (High Street and McCrae Street, Bendigo) is appalling. It is prima facie unlawful and it is certainly not within the intention of the law and it causes confusion, it is manifestly and wickedly dangerous.

If ever an inquiry was needed into Vic Roads’ management of country roads, then it is my submission that the examples briefly outlined above justify such an inquiry.

I am happy to provide further details upon request. Please feel free to contact me 0424910652.

STEPHEN J KIRKPATRICK
WAITING FOR A SOLUTION

I am pleased to read in the Bendigo Advertiser that finally VicRoads is planning an upgrade to key High Street intersections including Dun and Myrtle streets, Short Street and at the McCrae Street and Chapel Street intersection.

Your newspaper article mentions that trains are regularly stranded at the lights because the train tracks are shared with a right hand turn lane, but it is important to note that not only are the trains stranded, but motorists behind the train, wishing to execute a right hand turn are also stranded.

I have, myself, been stranded behind a train for about 10 minutes at Chapel Street, and at Short Street, because the train was unable to proceed due to the traffic lined up on the train line on the opposite side of the intersection, wishing to turn right.

High and McCrae streets have been a nightmare for all road users for too long and given that Bendigo streets are only going to get busier, VicRoads must finally get it right with this proposed upgrade.

In a recent WNTV news report about these issues, a spokesman for VicRoads mentioned simply that we all have to share the road, but there is far more to it than just that.

We also need clarity about what to do in the presence of a train, and we certainly do not want to be directed into the path of oncoming trains or be delayed behind them for 10 minutes.

Nowhere in any of the road rules is a vehicle allowed to turn into the path of an oncoming vehicle, but that is what VicRoads is permitting motorists to do when a train is present at McCrae and Chapel streets intersection and at other locations.

Further, the road rules prohibit a motorist from stopping on train tracks, but VicRoads permits just this with their turning lanes on the train line.

If VicRoads can’t get it right this time, then the mayhem and uncertainty which occurs along Bendigo’s main thoroughfare should, and will, become an election issue.

It beggars belief that governments can construct projects such as the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme in the 1940s and 1950s and the Westgate Bridge in the 1970s, but in 2016 we have not got a clear, unambiguous, safe and show-off lawful road management system for motor traffic and tram traffic in Bendigo, over what is only about 3km of roadway.

In recent weeks we have seen our money spent on chauffeuring an MP’s dogs around the state, so VicRoads and our local members of parliament, take note – spend my money and every other taxpayer’s money well, and ensure that these key intersections are law compliant and unambiguous and that all road users can safely and efficiently travel along our main road for years to come.

Keith G Winsor, Spring Gully

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH: Letter writer Keith G Winsor says VicRoads must solve the congestion problem affecting Bendigo’s central business district.

VISIT/POST

67-71 Williamson St, Bendigo.
P.O. Box 81, Bendigo, 3550
VICROADS CAUSING CHAOS

I refer to the article "Intersection upgrades hinder trams" (Bendigo Advertiser, June 22). I want to point out that it is not only trams which are delayed, but so are motorists who when wishing to make a right-hand turn from, for example, McCrae Street into Chapel Street, can be delayed for over seven minutes behind a tram, when the tram could not proceed due to it being blocked by oncoming traffic turning right on the tramline ahead.

It is, of course, the road laws which govern how traffic is to be managed at these intersections and indeed for the entire length of a tramline, whether the tramline be in Bendigo or Melbourne.

Astonishingly, nowhere in the article is reference made to the road laws. The road rules applicable to these intersections, and for the entire length of the tramline, can be found in road rule 131 and road rule 187(2).

Road rule 131 provides that a driver can only turn right into the path of an oncoming vehicle, if the oncoming vehicle is also turning right. This rule applies to drivers anywhere on Victorian roads, not just a tramline. As the oncoming tram is certainly not turning right, every motorist, prima facie, commits a breach of that road rule when they turn into a turning lane facing an oncoming tram.

Road rule 187(2) provides that a motor vehicle must not stop on tram tracks. Again, it would appear that every motorist blocking the tram at, for example, the Chapel Street and McCrae Street intersection, commits a breach of that road rule as well if they stop on the tram track.

VICROADS is causing motorists to breach these road rules by placing turning lanes on the tramline without any system in place to warn motorists of an oncoming tram and to therefore direct motorists not to enter the turning lane until the tram passes.

These turning lanes are in situ at not only the major intersections controlled by traffic control signals; they are also at locations where there are no traffic control signals such as at High Street and Vine Street intersection and High and Wattle streets.

This is scandalous. How can VICROADS seemingly decide that two of our Victorian road rules don't apply to them or their road management? No wonder motorists get stranded for long periods behind a tram when streams of oncoming motorists are turning right into the path of the oncoming tram.

And what of the motorists who see only a turning lane and enter it, only to be confronted with an 18-ton tram bearing down on them? Surely, particularly someone standing in VICROADS shoes, should realise that there is a foreseable risk of accident or injury?

What is the City of Greater Bendigo doing about this? What is our local member doing about it?

I am sure most of us want our iconic trams to continue operating for decades to come - they are a priceless tourist attraction, providing employment and enjoyment for many people - but we also expect clear and lawful road management from our government authorities.

They do it in Melbourne, why is it not done here, along what amounts to only about 3km of roadway?

Keith G Winser, Spring Gully

WRONG TURN: Keith G Winser, of Spring Gully, says the failure to apply simple road rules at some of Bendigo's busiest intersections is causing chaos. Picture: NONI HYETT

VISIT/POST

69-71 Williamson St, Bendigo,
PO Box 61, Bendigo, 3552

GUIDELINES: Preference is given to letters of no more than 250 words, and a phone contact number for to be published, except at the discretion of the editor. The editor reserves the right to publish only letters deemed of a suitable standard and to sub-e
TRAM, TRAFFIC ISSUE NEEDS ANSWERS

If I understand the situation correctly, the article and online comments about the trams interacting with cars in Bendigo can be summarized this way:

The double tram tracks once in McCrae Street were replaced by a single tram line by Vic Roads, and that is why there is now so much trouble at the Chapel Street intersection.

Nowhere in any of the road rules is a vehicle allowed to turn into the path of an oncoming vehicle, but that is what Vic Roads is permitting motorists to do at McCrae Street and Chapel Street intersection and at other locations on the tram line. How dangerous is that?

Road Rule 167(2) prohibits motorists from stopping on tram tracks, but that is what Vic Roads is permitting with their running lanes.

The same laws apply to commuter trains in Melbourne as they do to their restaurant trains and the Bendigo trains.

Is it any wonder that motorists are confused and tram drivers are frustrated?

I expect Vic Roads to spend my taxes in designing clear, unambiguous and lawful road management systems.

I think that Vic Roads has some explaining to do.

Keith C. Wimmer, Spring Gully 27/4/16