Great South Coast Regional Partnership

SUBMISSION TO
INQUIRY INTO VICROADS’ MANAGEMENT OF COUNTRY ROADS

18 JANUARY 2018

1. WHO WE ARE

The Great South Coast Regional Partnership (GSC RP) is one of nine Partnerships across the State, established by the Victorian Government, recognising that local communities are in the best position to understand the challenges and opportunities faced by their region.

Our region in south west Victoria extends from Shipwreck Coast to the South Australian border, and each year attracts thousands of visitors who come to enjoy its coastline and natural scenery. It is also home to internationally recognised areas of indigenous significance, and is underpinned by agricultural and fishing sectors. The Partnership ensures regional communities have a greater say in the development of their region.

2. OUR COMMUNITY’S VIEWS REGARDING THE REGION’S ROADS

At the heart of our role is engagement with our community and listening to the community’s views on what matters to them most. In 18 months since the formation of the Great South Coast Regional Partnership, our community engagement activities included two large scale regional community gatherings - 2016 and 2017 GSC Regional Assemblies attended by close to 500 people in total, as well as online community surveys, social media communications, workshops and focus groups with young people of the region and meetings with representatives of key projects and programs addressing current regional priorities.

Our community engagement informed us of the importance of an efficient and reliable road network. We have received a very strong message from the community advocating the need for better management of country roads in the Great South Coast as well as in Victoria in general.

We enclose as Appendix A unedited comments made during our Partnership’s engagement events and activities. These community views in relation to our region’s roads can be summarised as follows:

- **In relation to the need to upgrade GSC Region road network:**
  
  Our road network is rapidly deteriorating with most of our arterial network in a poor or distressed state.

  The network cannot handle the projected growth in the regional economy.

  A quality, safe road network will support the economy, social connectivity and community well-being.
Great South Coast Regional Partnership

Our regional road network is an enabler for quality of life and living in the Great South Coast.

Our all other regional priorities are reliant on movement and access via this essential network.

- **In relation to infrastructure as an enabler of regional economic growth:**
  Safe, efficient and cost effective transport is vital for competitiveness in the market.

  Core infrastructure and linkages are needed to maximise economic growth and prosperity.

  Infrastructure supports all our other priorities.

The submissions being made to this Inquiry by Great South Coast Group and Local Government authorities (Shires of Corangamite, Moyne, Southern Grampians, Glenelg and Warrnambool City Council) further confirm the views expressed by the community during our consultative process.

**3. GSC REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP’S VIEW**

From the Partnership’s perspective that has been extensively informed by community and stakeholder feedback the poor conditions of the roads in the Great South Coast region is a major regional issue.

We note the VAGO report of 2017 addresses some of the issues being looked at by this Inquiry. One of the GSC Regional Partnership’s 2017 priorities is the need for Government to commence implementation of VAGO recommendations to improve maintenance and safety on the region’s roads.

In relation to the Terms of Inquiry, the Great South Coast Regional Partnership would like to submit the following:

1. There are a lot of bodies responsible for parts of the road network management and planning process - VicRoads, Local Government authorities, Transport for Victoria and others. But the question is whether the work done by these multiple agencies is co-ordinated or effective. Changes are needed to achieve a whole of network approach to road network management and planning.

2. There is merit in exploring international best practice examples of how other countries or other states of Australia, comparable in their profile and characteristics to Victoria, manage and plan for their road network. These international or national examples of asset management systems can inform us what is possible and what works well.

3. Some characteristics of a desirable asset management system that can be applied to the road network management and planning in Victoria, could include:
   - State-wide scope;
Great South Coast Regional Partnership

- Encompassing all roads regardless of their present status as State managed or Local Government managed etc;
- The asset management process to begin with an audit of existing road conditions and whether each road is fit for purpose. Local Government will be ideally placed to provide feedback on the condition of the roads;
- Prioritised planning of repair or reconstruction of all roads over an extended timeline – immediate, short term, medium term, long term.

4. It has been suggested that road reconstruction is a more cost effective solution than continual repair of failing roads.

5. We believe that the choice of a body or bodies to manage this system should remain with Government. The road network management system’s design should allow for management of the road network at a variety of scales – from a local government authority boundary level or at a designated regional level or up to the State-wide level. It is a State Government prerogative to decide the bodies and their level of responsibility.

6. It is apparent that current funding arrangements are inadequate, seem ad hoc and are not able to be understood by the public. Any new system should ensure transparency and accountability regarding funding and performance, as well as stating who is responsible for the performance of the system and ideally be able to inform road users about plans and work undertaken for maintenance and rehabilitation of their roads.

7. The current condition of GSC roads indicates that a larger budgetary allocation will be required regardless of the efficiency of any new system. We note that forward estimates of the Federal Fuel Excise indicate a substantial decline in receipts. This means that budgetary reform is going to be a critical part of a sustainable road network. Are road user charges a more equitable and effective way to pay for our road network?

The Great South Coast Regional Partnership will welcome an opportunity to meet with the members of the Inquiry for a further conversation. Please contact Mr Stephen Lucas, GSC Regional Partnership Member on telephone [redacted] or email greatsouthcoast.partnership@rdv.vic.gov.au to arrange time for a further presentation.