28 February 2018

Ms Yuki Simmonds
Executive Officer
Law Reform Road and Community Safety Committee
Parliament House
Spring Street
MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Dear Ms Simmonds,

Inquiry into VicRoads’ Management of Country Roads

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the 'Inquiry into VicRoads Management of Country Roads'.

Please find below Mornington Peninsula Shire Council's submission for your attention. As you would be aware, a submission was made in January 2018 by Council officers but it did not include council endorsement due to the availability of council meetings before the original submission date.

Mornington Peninsula Shire Council Submission

There are a number of key issues relating to VicRoads management of the arterial road network. Whilst many of the roads on the Mornington Peninsula might not be Country Roads by definition, they are alike to country roads. These comments have been compiled by officers of Mornington Peninsula Shire’s Traffic and Transport Team, Economic Development and Tourism team and the Infrastructure Services (Maintenance) unit, and have been endorsed by Council at the ordinary meeting of 27th February 2018.

Whilst there is detail below about the key issues, it is believed that the primary issue is VicRoads receives insufficient funding to properly function and maintain the existing road network. This in turn impacts resourcing levels, responsiveness, coordination with local road authorities, the ability for VicRoads to adequately consult, the overall condition and safety of the road network as well as strategic planning for future network needs.

As a result, a definitive answer has not been included about the option of dismantling VicRoads and creating a specific Country Roads organisation and separate Metropolitan Roads body.
1. Maintenance

- Insufficient funding levels allocated to maintain and upgrade the arterial road network to acceptable standards.
- Increased resources required to support the delivery of road maintenance and upgrades.
- Financial pressure evidenced by:
  - Poor culture of responsiveness and cooperation from VicRoads.
  - Excessive response times to customer requests e.g. trees falling on roads; litter dumping; vegetation trimming for sight lines, weed control, graffiti.
  - Steady decline over recent years in VicRoads delivery of road maintenance services e.g. shoulder sealing for cycle lanes and road drainage.
  - Inadequate weed management on road sides e.g. blackberries.
  - Increasing extent of poor road conditions including faded linemarking, large edge breaks, poorly maintained shoulders and excessive roughness.
  - Many examples of poor road conditions in sections across the Arterial road network including:
    - Mornington-Flinders Rd
    - Boneo Rd
    - Bittern-Dromana Rd
    - Frankston-Flinders Rd
    - MP Freeway M11
    - Mornington-Tyabb Rd (Main St)
- The lack of effective asset management will result in more extensive road pavement failures.
- VicRoads officers expressing frustration with ability to effectively deliver suitable maintenance programs.
- Maintenance service levels are not complied with but also the levels are not set high or frequent enough to match community expectations and be consistent with MPS service levels e.g. litter collection, grass mowing and pavement condition on the key gateways and tourism corridors controlled by VicRoads.
- Poor quality control and work practices with road maintenance works that reflects a need for improved Quality Assurance process e.g. In 2016, a number of arterial road reseals stripped and failed within weeks of being implemented. We estimate that the rectification works cost in excess of $500,000. The failed reseals include
sections of the Mornington Peninsula Freeway, Mornington-Tyabb Road and Frankston-Flinders Road. It is understood that temperature and moisture played a part in the failures.

- Inconsistent practises when implementing traffic management plans e.g. occasionally inadequate period for notification of plan prior to works.
- Discussions about maintenance responsibilities potentially being driven by financial stress to undertake necessary works across the arterial network.

2. Communication

- Ongoing reduction in engagement and collaboration from VicRoads at both an officer and councillor level to discuss issues across the entire road network. In the past, Victoria Police and the Shire have met periodically with VicRoads officers to discuss operational issues but due to resourcing, VicRoads are no longer able to attend. A higher level annual meeting between VicRoads and Councillors has also been cancelled.
- Poor communication and collaboration on proposed maintenance work e.g. road closures, and mowing at intersections where both Local and VicRoads roads intersect.
- Poor community perceptions about the general state of Arterial roads that also regularly reflects on Council as having poor performance due to the community’s lack of understanding that VicRoads is responsible for the Arterial road network.
- Lack of available scheduled maintenance programs to assist Council with coordinating programs and keeping customer service updated.
- Need for closer collaboration and information sharing with Councils customer service teams to assist in resolving VicRoads customer service issues.
- Need for increased awareness for the integration and coordination of nearby separate major works to avoid impact on the operation of the broader network.
- Poor consultation and coordination for planning appropriate stack sites for maintenance works.

3. Road safety

- Approach of our VicRoads region is heavily reactive and primarily focuses on crash statistics for justifying position to not make improvements i.e. higher priorities across the region. This means
that proactive safety treatments/measures to address high risk road safety issues are rarely implemented or driven by strategy.

- Need for regional safety plans for the entire Mornington Peninsula including the rural road network. These plans could be developed by VicRoads in conjunction with Victoria Police, local government and other relevant authorities.

- Inability to effectively implement road safety treatments efficiently to address high levels of road trauma on particularly rural roads through utilising proven cost-effective risk management measures. One option suggested has been the consideration of more appropriate speed limits on rural roads ie 80 km/h instead of the 100 km/h default.

- Inefficient management of changes to major traffic control items on Council controlled local roads e.g. speed limit changes.

- Inadequate consideration and programs to improve safety for the growing number of cyclists on rural roads.

- Very difficult to see minor road safety improvements made to the arterial road network without Council offering to provide financial support.

- Cost share arrangements for minor infrastructure improvements between Shire and VicRoads occur infrequently but have resulted in good outcomes for both parties and the community.

- Inconsistencies in the process for speed limit changes have led to frustration for Council given continuous changes in requirements for community engagement and level of technical analysis. Also see variance in VicRoads practise and the methodology being specified for local road speed limit changes.

- Reduction in the roadworthiness and standard of vehicles over time noted by one councillor.

4. Transport

- Need for a more equitable and effective transport planning to address high traffic demands and backlog of more localised road infrastructure improvements. Current funding allocations are distributed based on the highest priorities across the region therefore continually missing local congestion and transport priorities. For example, a holistic plan for the road network to provide better access to the Southern Peninsula is needed but doesn’t currently exist.

5. Economic Factors

- The current funding models for rural road improvements do not provide sufficient weighting for benefitting economic outcomes.
The funding models should provide equitable weighting not only to growth areas in outer metro Melbourne and regional centres based on population growth but also to the significant growing tourism and visitation demand on the Mornington Peninsula like other high tourism areas including the Surf Coast and Phillip Island.

The high demands on the existing Arterial road network on the Mornington Peninsula are often causing unacceptable congestion which will lead to detrimental effects on businesses, tourism and agricultural industries.

Inadequate funding allocations for road upgrade to address road freight transport issues with key business not able to be serviced by larger trucks due to inadequate intersections.

Upgrades to important regional transport facilities like ferry terminals and associated road infrastructure improvements need adequate funding programs.

VicRoads needs to provide greater support for the implementation of more effective destination and route signage. This would assist especially visitors and tourists to encourage improved accessibility and encourage greater dispersal throughout the region in conjunction with utilising technology to provide real time travel times and parking availability.

Changes to the process and ongoing turnover of staff at a regional level of VicRoads impacts the efficiency of processing and installing tourism and directional signage. This leads to frustration from applicants on a regular basis about processing times and progress towards both Council and VicRoads.

If you have any queries or would like to discuss our submission, please contact Mr Davey Smith, Manager Infrastructure Strategy on [contact information].

Yours faithfully

Councillor Bryan A Payne
Mayor
Mornington Peninsula Shire