I have lived in Warrnambool (30,000+ people) for approximately 15 years and the standard of roads in this area has long been a concern to my family and myself. I would like to focus my submission on two areas of country Victoria. I believe that these two areas are systematic of the whole problem with country roads in Victoria. My wife and I travel to Adelaide and Melbourne on a semi regular basis. We are very familiar with these roads.

Heywood to SA Border - Princes Highway A1

Yes Princes Highway A1. One of the premier roads in Australia and this section is bordering on a disgrace because of its state of disrepair. A standing joke in our car is that you do not need border signs as you can tell when you cross from Victoria to South Australia as the roads improve. It has been speculated in our car that rather than something like “The Big Banana” or “The Big Thong” we should have a monument to the “The Big Pot Hole”. This is rather sad for a Victorian to say this. This road has been improved in some small areas but the vast distance is still “ordinary” at best – surprising given the quantity as well as the type of traffic (Milk Trucks, Logging Trucks, Petrol Tankers, Buses as well as normal cars). Major repairs to this road are taking far too long. Comparatively recently, probably the worst section of the road was completely renewed and to date it appears to be holding up well. However it took so long to be repaired that now what was the second worst section is much worse that the section that has been repaired. Temporary repairs (patches) also appear to be a problem. Where a pothole appears or a section of the road subsides and breaks up, it takes a long time to repair and any repair carried out just does not last. It could be washed away in the next rain shower, torn up by trucks or “swallowed” by a roadside subsidence. Nothing looks sadder (and a waste of money) than a pothole that has been repaired but has been “swallowed” by a roadside subsidence. Why is this so – quality control, substandard materials, skill set of the engineers and workers repairing the roads, lack of money to do the job properly, patch it up quick mentality – I do not know but this is something the committee should be examining.
There has been a lot of talk in this area about making the road from Colac to the SA border a “2+1”. Currently (short term) I would be very happy with a good quality 1+1 road.

Various main roads between Warrnambool and Colac, again considering the quantity and type of traffic, remain in my view sub standard and they are not improving with age.

Cobden – Stoneyford Road C149

Warrnambool to Colac via Cobden has become a very accepted route by people who live in Warrnambool because of the state of the main route between Warrnambool and Colac – Princes Highway A1
The Warrnambool – Cobden road C164 needs some serious money spent on it.
However the Cobden – Stoneyford Road C149 is even worse.
This road has always suffered from potholes and side of road subsidence. You get the impression that repairs are not high a priority, to discourage people from using it. However recent rains have exacerbated this problem. Who would have thought – it rains in South West Victoria!
So what is the current solution? Repair the potholes quickly, do nothing in the short term (if ever) about the roadside subsidence, and the best repair ever – reduce the 100 kph signage speed to 60 kph (or less) and add a few more “rough surface” signs. Not really good enough!

We have some very good country roads in Victoria; this shows we can build them. It is not beyond our technical capacity. However for some reason we are missing out on these good roads in South West Victoria.

To address some of the committee’s agenda, VicRoads do not appear to be “winning” with roads in South West Victoria. For every “good” major road they build and/or maintain two more “bad” major roads appear (faster than they can repair or renew).
I’m sure VicRoads funding is at record levels and I’m sure they have repaired or renewed more roads this year than ever before but they are not “winning”. Maybe going back to a specific Country Roads organisation (some of us remember the Country Roads Board) would improve country roads - it certainly could not make them worse.
Funding is always going to be a problem so we must make sure we get maximum value for money. Begs the question - how much money do we waste on road repairs. Fixing a pothole on a road for $1000 (a guess) if it lasts a week, a day or even hours is not good value for money. If we repair it once a week there is $52,000 spent. Perhaps we should have spent $2000 (again a guess) or even $5000 and fixed it properly to a robust “Country Roads” standard so it lasts years.
I have to question what standard we use to build roads in Victoria and in particular South West Victoria. Although Victoria is a small state it is very diverse in its weather conditions and its topography. Do our (VicRoads) standards reflect this? Is a road built in South West Victoria with its high rainfall and many forests built to the same standard as one around say Mildura where all conditions are different? We need value for money!

For the future – My wife and I are big fans of the road between Keith and Tailem Bend (Dukes Highway) – this is a variation of a 2+1 road. Passing lanes on a regular basis with signage to say that the next passing lane is in 5 kilometres (in most cases). This style of road should be seriously looked at for the South-West Victoria.
Considering the amount of commercial, industrial and agricultural traffic in this area, as well as the tourists travelling, the quality of the roads does not reflect this.
Regards
Paul Hanlon