Submission to the Inquiry into VicRoads’ Management of Country Roads 21/12/2017

Summary

This submission relates to the funds wasted in excessive building, poor placement and poor design of WRSB’s and other roadside barriers. The barriers have been built in very odd locations, sometimes only metres apart, they create a range of dangerous conditions that will with the utmost certainty result in death and serious injuries to road users, increase costs of roadside maintenance, reduce amenity and have a range of other negative impacts as specified below. The funds wasted on these barriers would be much better spent on roads nearby that are in terrible condition. An investigation into the funding arrangements for these barriers is warranted.

Submission

This submission relates to what amounts to a wilful and enormous misuse and waste of public funds on building excessive amounts of misplaced and dangerous wire rope safety barriers (WRSBs). This is at the cost of all road users and creates dangerous conditions on what were once safe roads.

My examples revolve largely around the Princes freeway between Geelong, Winchelsea and Colac, and Geelong to Melbourne, however the ideas discussed are applicable widely as it appears these barriers are being built everywhere.

Let me first state that I understand the requirement for a median strip barrier to prevent oncoming cars from crossing over and causing head-on collisions, this makes perfect sense. What doesn’t make any sense is having two of these barriers only two metres apart. What are these barriers preventing? It is simply a waste of resources, money and labour. It also requires more maintenance and more difficult weed control. On any level it does not make sense. There are many examples of WRSBs being only metres apart. To the everyday person it looks as if someone who builds these barriers has a ‘mate’ in VicRoads and they are intent on making as much money as is possible. There is simply no justification for these double barriers.

The other use of these barriers appears to be in long flat stretches of road often well cambered where there appears that the only way a car could come off the road is due to a deliberated attempt, catastrophic mechanical failure or an unconscious driver; it is almost certainly the latter. Either way these barriers are positioned so close to the road they actually create a dangerous condition in that where there once was no obstacle, there now is! A vehicle hitting them is most likely going to be propelled back into the path of oncoming traffic! This also means that if there is any emergency, such as a fire, or an emergency vehicle needing to access the other side of the road, the roadway has been so narrowed and reduced that a complete roadblock is likely, again another dangerous condition.

Further to this, the design of the barriers is such that a road that once was relatively free of hazards, now has hazards located closer to the road, particularly for our much-ignored motorcyclists. In the past if a motorcyclist had an accident and happened to slide along the road, they would most likely have been able to get up and walk away, now there are steel bars placed every few metres along the road for them to hit. This means that now, in the case of a minor incident, they are likely to have serious injuries. This again is creating a dangerous condition.
It also makes very little sense to effectively narrow a freeway on any level. The idea that narrowed roads in cities makes people slow down does make sense, this is not the case with 100km/h roads. When people have flat tyres or any other mechanical failure it now means that they are forced into a dangerous position positioned very close to the road as the road has been made so narrow and you can no longer access what was once a very wide verge. This is negligent in that it is knowingly creating a dangerous condition and I will absolutely guarantee that this condition will cause death and serious injuries.

Other aspects that make absolutely no sense are the position of these barriers in relation to lamp posts and other obstacles, bends and road camber. There are several examples of this between Geelong and Winchelsea, particularly at Mt Moriac where a WRSB has been built behind, not in front of but behind some large steel lamp posts! This is a ridiculous sight and it is hard to fathom the lack of thinking that can result in such an outcome. Thousands of dollars spent on WRSB for no reason when in fact correct placement would actually have been useful!

The other point I would like to make is that these barriers prevent a hazard to all road users. Proof of this is that a newly built steel barrier near Buckley on the Princes Freeway recently meant one person died and the other was in hospital with serious injuries. See Geelong Advertiser 24th of November 2017. The construction, poor design for end on impact and location of this barrier exacerbated what would otherwise have been perhaps a moment of inattention, or at worst an impact with a farm fence, or less likely and further away, a tree. I notice that this barrier has been rebuilt and remains a dangerous obstacle very close to the road.

The funds wasted on these barriers could much more wisely be spent on improving the surface condition of many of the roads in the region that would prevent accidents occurring rather than a misguided and poorly executed attempt at minimising damage from an accident, as they say prevention is better than cure. Furthermore, I would like to see an investigation into how the funding for these barriers has been managed as it appears that someone is miking VicRoads for money and in the process creating more dangerous roads.

Regards,

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