02 January 2018

The Executive Officer
Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee
Parliament House
Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

By email: lrrsc@parliament.vic.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Inquiry into VicRoads' Management of Country Roads

Warrnambool City Council would like to thank The Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee for the opportunity to provide a submission on the very important issue of the Management by VicRoads of Country Roads.

1. The effectiveness of VicRoads in managing country roads

Warrnambool City Council is very concerned about the condition of arterial roads in the South West of Victoria and hold very real fears that the effectiveness of renewal works are diminished by a lack of routine maintenance activities and early intervention.

This concern further extends to the asset management practices being observed on vast sections of our arterial road networks, a significant state asset; which is seeing them deteriorate at accelerated rates due to insufficient maintenance activity.

Such was our concern that in November 2017 we had an independent consultant undertake a photographic survey of the condition of arterial roads in the municipality.

This survey showed that even with only a small arterial road network in our LGA (Local Government Area) the Visual Road Condition Survey identified approximately 1,500 defects ranging in condition from minor to severe. A material number of these were also then further classified as hazardous to particular groups of road users.

This simple survey has shown the degree to which regional road users are being put at risk. This is even more concerning for residents of regional areas whose safety is being compromised for simply residing in a rural or regional location.

It is clearly evident that deficiencies exist in the management of rural roads and whilst the causation of this is perhaps complex, it is clearly evident that the regional road network is not meeting community expectations.
2. **The existing funding model and its lack of effectiveness for country Victoria**

Whilst funding for road projects across the state will continue to be competitive, it is acutely evident that there are inconsistencies with the ‘level of service’ provided in many areas.

The current condition of the arterial road network in the Great South Coast Region provides the best evidence that there is no longer a clear minimum standard to which, arterial country roads must perform.

This is demonstrated most notably on a number of arterial links which have had speed limits lowered from 100km to 40km/h, 60km/h or 80km/h over indefinite periods due to the poor condition of roads. This practice has been evidenced on both the Hopkins Highway and Foxhow Road (C164) over several years.

The review must address the ‘management practice’ that results in poor quality roads being treated with speed limit amendments rather than being prioritised for rehabilitation in the current funding model.

What the current funding model fails to recognise is these ‘management treatments’ incrementally add to the trip time of motorists undertaking already lengthy trips, and often result in increased fatigue and risky road behaviours.

3. **The lack of consultation with regional communities and their subsequent lack of input into prioritising which roads are in dire need of repair.**

Warrnambool City Council believes that it is inappropriate for communities to prioritise roads that are ‘in dire need of repair’; rather VicRoads and the State Government should be compelled to meet a minimum level of service with regard to the condition, safety and operation of their roads.

It is not reasonable for communities to trade off the condition of key network linkages and for them to prioritise which roads should meet a serviceable standard. It is more reasonable for these communities to prioritise which of the regions roads should be upgrade to standards higher than the agreed minimum level of service.

4. **The option of dismantling VicRoads and creating a specific Country Roads organisation and separate Metropolitan Roads body.**

It is extremely difficult for Warrnambool City Council to comment on this aspect of the inquiry as it lacks sufficient detail for us to adequately assess whether this would see a material improvement in the regional arterial road network.

At a high level we reiterate our concern that under the current structure VicRoads appears unable to adequately fund and resource road maintenance and renewal works to a minimum serviceable level.

Our broader concern with this aspect of the inquiry is that the dismantling of VicRoads could result in regional areas receiving less road maintenance and renewal funding.
We would much rather see that VicRoads were compelled to clearly detail the condition (asset) information of their network and that this information was validated by an independent committee consisting of Local Government and industry asset management specialists.

Warrnambool City Council would like to thank the Law Reform and Community Safety Committee for being provided with the opportunity to make a submission on the Inquiry into VicRoads Management of Country Roads.

With over 1500 defects present on the arterial road network in the Warrnambool area alone, 1200 of which have been photographed, we hold real concern for all motorists who utilise this network.

All communities within Victoria should be provided with an arterial road network that meets a minimum safety, operational, and condition standards; and this is simply not occurring under the current structure.

Please do not hesitate to contact Council’s Director City Infrastructure Mr Scott Cavanagh on [phone number] or via email at [email address] should you like to discuss this submission further.

Yours sincerely

SCOTT CAVANAGH
Director City Infrastructure