Victorian Transport Association

Submission to

Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee

Inquiry into

Vicroads’ Management of Country Roads

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Submission From:
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BACKGROUND

The Victorian Transport Association (VTA) is the peak representative industry group for Victorian freight and logistics operators, primarily from the road, rail and sea sectors. Our membership includes over 800 privately-owned and publicly-listed organisations that have a direct interest in transporting freight throughout Victoria, and across national and international borders.

The VTA has, for over 100 years, worked with member organisations, local, state and national governments, other industry groups, employer and employee groups and industry, to generate policy, legislation and outcomes that benefit members and, by default, the industry. Creating conditions that improve productivity and safety for our members and their employees is a key objective of the VTA; we seek to achieve this by lobbying for legislation, regulation and infrastructure that complements the needs of our members and the interests of our industry.

PREFACE

The effectiveness of the structure of VicRoads managing the country roads has certainly come under focus from many stakeholders over recent times. The issues that bring this matter to the attention of others is borne by the variety of perspectives and expectations that have emerged on the condition and effectiveness of rural roads in Victoria.

The Victorian Transport Association is deeply supportive of the work that VicRoads is able to engage and complete. With over 65 x projects currently underway in regional areas that have a cross-section of size and effectiveness, the volume of work is significant.

The value of these works, when completed are just not to the surrounding local community but also the other communities that are connected by the road system and the volume and type of vehicles that it carries.

It is the demand by so many different road user stakeholders that creates confusion and isolationist perspectives when determining that specific projects should be engaged ahead of others.

The Victorian Transport Association will put forward a number of perspectives that we trust will assist the Committee in determining its recommendations.
EFFECTIVENESS

The basis of the success and effectiveness of VicRoads lies with its ability to capture the needs of the community as a whole and in specific communities. Its ability to communicate and manage public perceptions is vital in ensuring that the work that is being done is relevant and productive and not just reactive to community needs.

The change in Government policy towards the development of infrastructure in Victoria has seen a great deal of pressure put onto government organisations such as VicRoads. Increased funding, more community engagement and recovery from a period of low activity has seen the resources at VicRoads become stretched. This has led to identify many other issues that the VTA will highlight in this submission.

The basis of any evaluation should start with the Organisational structure and the quality of the individuals that have been placed in positions of great responsibility. The current Organisational Structure as attached does not clearly defined role, overlaps in responsibilities and has confusing geographical references.

An example of this is the fact that North Western Projects is responsible to the Major Projects Executive Director while the Metro North West is responsible to the Regional Services Executive Director. Having this cross over gives each department an ability to not take full accountability for work that may be undertaken in the north west regions of Victoria.

Recommendation: Realign the Organisational structure and align to simpler concepts and area of responsibility.

TYPES OF ROADS

There are a variety of roads types and demands on country roads in Victoria. Freeways, arterials, main roads, land local sealed and unsealed roads all have a variety of usage and demands by road users.

The type of road work required to maintain a freeway is different than that of a local sealed road. It is important to note that the volume and type of vehicle using a road is vital data required before any roadwork is carried out. VicRoads as a road agency struggles to collect this type of data as a basic requirement of project development and then communicate and pass on this data to other agencies and reports that can then be publicised.

Local Councils and Shires have a role that is restricted by access to funds and data that would enhance and improve more rapidly the review of critical roads within the state.
THERE ARE A VARIETY OF ROAD USERS

The demands on VicRoads to maintain and build safe and productive roads by the variety of road users can be very complex. Pedestrians, Cyclists, Cars and trucks all have a variety of subsets and demands on the how they want to use the roads.

Also roads are used in regional areas for different reasons such as: goods to market, tourism, local connectivity and broader connections are all important reasons why there is a variety of road use.

Regional Communities do not want big trucks driving down their main streets and cyclists in the country demand to be able to use the road to the same levels as in the city. Cars drivers want a free flowing road network that is not encumbered for extended periods of repair.

The Victorian Transport Association represents the commercial transport industry with a strong focus on heavy vehicle road users. Light and Heavy commercial vehicles have the same basic demands of safety and productivity, as other road users, however, the demands are at time in conflict with local communities.

The transport industry demands that roads are maintained and improved and not neglected as slowly decaying infrastructure. Specific demands are placed on certain roads depending upon the local commercial opportunities and geographic assets. An example of this is in the south west of Victoria with the Export timber and woodchip industry. This area is a prized export region that has a dependence upon the efficiency of the road infrastructure to be able to meet overseas customers’ demands. This region has been neglected by successive governments and VicRoads administration for many years in terms of road repair and development and bridge upgrades.

COMMUNITY INPUT

The demands on the maintenance and development of roads is often reflected by the demands of local communities and local Councils. The disconnect with local councils and VicRoads is evident regularly and leads to inertia and inactivity by either entity.

Once again the communications plan that is structured within the organisational chart of VicRoads creates a differential between responsibilities and does not let the flow of information into a broader based perspective.

While social media and ‘pop-up’ information stations may work well for some road users in the city the more generic and structures communication that works better in the country.

An example of this was a call by VicRoads on the community to comment on the effectiveness of a specific arterial whereby the heavy vehicle sector was excluded from all results. The road, heavy used by trucks, did not record on the statistics of comment because all information was being gained on Facebook and tweets that traditional truck drivers do not access.
The ability to communicate with the community varies from regional to metropolitan regions and therefore should be empathetic to the local demands.

**FUNDING**

The ability to fund road projects has always been hidden from the public. The cost of major projects is rarely divulged and the overall cost is usually the only reference to the cost. Where the funds have come from and whether there has been an even distribution throughout all areas is never communicated publically.

This fact brings a level of cynicism towards VicRoads, our politicians and our local councils and shires. The lack of funding transparency is a negative that VicRoads has to endure.

What is also missing is the overall value any major road project may be bringing to the community in terms of economic value. When by passing a town with a freeway or sealing a well-used local road the overall value of both productivity within the community and the value of safety is a vital link in communicating and ensuring that all road users see the value for the money they know they are paying in taxes and excise.

**REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE**

Many major roads within country Victoria have been neglected to the point whereby speed limits have been reduced to ensure safety and the repair not being carried out for years. This is an indictment against the ability of VicRoads to respond and resolve specific road issues around repairs and maintenance. An example of this is the rail crossing 60 kilometres south of Hamilton that remained slowed to 80 kilometres per hour for many years.

Focussing on specific roads should not have to be subjected to a beaurucratic process that falls over shared responsibilities within the beauracracy and therefore never coming to the top of the priorities.

While there are over 65 x major country roads projects being acted upon by VicRoads it is important to note that that the competition between jurisdictions on attending to Highways vs arterial vs local roads could be better managed, more transparent and have faster return on productivity to the community and business should there be an Organisational restructure at VicRoads.
Dismantling VicRoads

The organisational restructure of VicRoads should be measured and considered in terms of changing a number of perspectives. Not only is there an issue with the inter-departmental disconnection but also the inherent culture and attitude that permeates through to the community from those that work within the VicRoads bureaucracy.

Splitting VicRoads into metro and regional sectors with overarching administration and communication support may not fulfil the outcomes that are expected by this review.

Additional frameworks would be of great assistance in ensuring that the funding and prioritisation of road repair and maintenance and the creation of new roads are needed.

The Victorian Transport Association believes that the creation of a Victorian Freight Authority when ensure that there is a specific point of reference in regards to the movement and value of road development to the freight industry and therefore the economic welfare of metro and regional communities.

This body would be the point of reference for Planning control and Community integration for the movement of goods and freight through the community.

It would also be a single point of data collection and have direct interface with all other agencies such as the Victorian Police, National Heavy Vehicle Regulator and Transport for Victoria.

Summary

The Victorian Transport Association believes that the current organisational structure of VicRoads is out of date, beaurocratic and does not adequately serve the needs of Victorian road users.

The creation of a new entity that has specific structure that serves specific road users would be able to manage more projects of varying scale and value.

The creation of a Victorian Freight Authority would enable the freight industry to be better served in information, communication and productivity.

We thank the Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee for the opportunity to make our submission and remain available to discuss at your convenience.

Yours Sincerely

Peter Anderson
Chief Executive Officer
Victorian Transport Association