Submission

Parliamentary Inquiry into VicRoads Management of Country Roads

Executive Officer
Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee
Parliament House
Spring St.,
East Melbourne Vic. 3002

Background
I am a 71-year-old, tertiary qualified, married woman who has lived in the Western District for the past twenty years. Until retirement, I worked as a senior staff member within the public sector originally in Geelong, Victoria and then in Mount Gambier, S.A. and in Hamilton, Victoria. Over the time that I have lived in Heywood, Victoria I have watched the roads in the whole region deteriorate until at times they resemble the goat tracks of some isolated third world country. During the past 15 years, virtually no public monies were expended on roads by either side of Government when in power, neither Liberal nor Labour. Following massive outcries by the community, the current Labour Government promised that regional roads would be repaired. Whilst this repair work has been initiated in some parts, the result has been deplorable and if anything has made the situation worse.

Issues
1. It has become increasingly clear that the current Minister for Roads and Road Safety is either unaware of the crisis situation on country Victorian roads or is not across his portfolio enough to be considered qualified to hold his current position. Similarly, the current CEO of VicRoads appears unable to put together a coherent resurfacing plan and to have ensured that adequate roads surfaces, to suit current transport conditions are applied.

2. Currently the roads from: -

- Hamilton to Portland
- Mt. Gambier to Portland and Hamilton (on the Victorian side of the State border)
- Warrnambool to Portland
- Casterton (and beyond) to Portland

are all in a state of disrepair and are dangerous in many places.

At this time, all the above-mentioned roads carry far more traffic than ten years ago. The additional traffic is, in the main, made up of extended B-Double trucks. These trucks, which are going about their daily business carry vast loads. In an average 24 hours some 80+ such trucks per hour pass through the township of Heywood. Such weight and frequency has broken up most of the roads mentioned above, to a dangerous degree. It means that cars and light trucks must swerve continually or hit pot holes constantly. The sides of the roads have been squashed up and
The material that is currently being used to resurface areas of the local roads is clearly not adequate and unfit for purpose. Some examples

- A major repair project undertaken and still in progress after 5 months at the corner of Henty Highway and Mt Gambier turn-off, Heywood. Immediately after putting down a stretch of “tarmac” the surface began peeling and was acknowledged to have been the wrong material. This has meant that the stretch of road has had to be completely re-laid presumably at the tax payers expense and has lengthened the job and disturbed traffic patterns for months. Around the corner from this fiasco the road has 6-inch pot holes just where trucks start braking to come into Heywood.
- A similar issue occurred at Coleraine and the road surface had to be immediately redone.
- A stretch of highway coming out of Portland toward Heywood was completely resurfaced in 2016. That surface has now eroded and is breaking up again- more wasted public monies and a surface put down that is unfit for purpose.
- The road from Hamilton to Portland in that direction is littered with large and deep potholes. Driving from Hamilton has become a nightmare particularly at night when deep holes cannot always be seen. The same can be said of the Casterton Portland road.
- The road on the outskirts of Heywood toward Portland is a disgrace with the edges potholed and pushed up in waves of tarmac. For safety, trucks and cars go out to the middle of the road which is now also breaking up badly.

For many months now, one solution dreamed up by Vic. Roads to “assist” with potholes is to have two workers driving a small tarmac laden truck, stop every few metres when they see a hole, dash out into the road and place a shovel of hot tar into the hole. The truck moves on to the next hole and transport trucks going passed immediately fling the unsolidified tarmac out of the hole. I decided to watch this useless, dangerous and time-wasting practice for a while to make sure I was seeing this exercise in futility correctly. I followed the repair truck and, as I have stated, each hole was filled and within minutes had had the contents of the fill removed by the next heavy truck. An exercise in wasted public money, whilst not completing the desired result. I cannot imagine how the workers must feel, wasting their time continually. It must be mind-numbing and is a dangerous practice putting their lives at risk from traffic. I have been told by authorities that this practice is happening all over the region.

Our roads are literally littered with “Rough Surface” signs. It would appear that VicRoads and the Minister believe that such signage every few metres along a road, absolves them of actually doing anything constructive to fix the problem or that it absolves them of any responsibility if such surfaces cause an accident.
Suggested Options

a. That the current CEO of Vic Roads be replaced on an immediate basis by somebody with superior knowledge of the subject matter.

b. That the current Minister be placed into another portfolio more suited to his field of expertise.

c. Separation of VicRoads into Metropolitan and Country Authorities with each having a massive increase in funding.

d. That experts in modern road construction be employed from a country which actually knows how to put down roads that last. A suggestion would be to request assistance from Germany.

e. That a longer-term future option be immediately considered I.E. that adequate freight rail services be built to reduce the number of heavy trucks on roads that were never designed to take the load. One train could carry the load that requires hundreds of trucks.

f. That an integrated road/rail system for the whole of Victoria to be planned for and conducted with adequate funding to complete the task. This should be guided by a task force that includes all stake holders and regional advocates, and should not be solely Melbourne-centric.

g. That current public money wasting practices such as described under “issues” to be stopped on an immediate basis and a comprehensive short-term solution put into practice.

Conclusion

Currently our Victorian rural road system is in chaos, is in a dangerous state and is being inadequately handled, underfunded and not being seen as a Government priority. This is the legacy of years of ignoring the problem by all sides of State Government. It deserves to be addressed on an immediate basis commencing in February 2018.

Thank you for allowing me to have my say in what has become a very difficult situation that is clearly not being attended to appropriately at this time. I do not require confidentiality as I am quite willing to put my name to this submission. I am also quite willing to become involved in showing the members of the inquiry examples of what is happening to our roads,

Evelyn Jack