

REGIONAL CITIES VICTORIA

Inquiry into VicRoads' Management of Country Roads

Submission to the Law Reform, Road and Community
Safety Committee

February 2018



RCV
REGIONAL
CITIES
VICTORIA

Geoff Howard MP
Chair
Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee

Via email: lrrcsc@parliament.vic.gov.au

5 February 2018

Dear Chair,

Re: Submission to the Inquiry into VicRoads' Management of Country Roads

About Regional Cities Victoria (RCV)

Regional Cities Victoria (RCV) is a regional leadership group dedicated to building a sustainable Victoria by providing strategic advice, coordination and advocacy to State and Federal Governments to support policies which enable Victoria's regional centres to grow and develop.

Comprising Mayors and CEOs of the 10 largest cities in regional Victoria – Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong, Horsham, Latrobe, Mildura, Shepparton, Wangaratta, Warrnambool and Wodonga - RCV is focused on achieving real change in regional Victoria through policy development and active implementation of those policies.

RCV is widely recognised as a pre-eminent advocacy organisation for regional Victoria. It works closely with both the Minister and Shadow Minister for Regional Development, with various arms of government including Local Government Victoria and Regional Development Victoria, and with other bodies such as Rural Councils Victoria, the Municipal Association of Victoria, RACV, the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Victorian Farmers Federation.

As regional hubs, these cities support surrounding towns and districts through the provision of education, health, financial, transport and social services, as well as retail, sport and recreation, cultural and tourism amenities and activities.

A well-maintained road network is critical to economic growth and social connectivity in regional Victoria. RCV welcomes the opportunity to provide input to this Inquiry.

Safety and Liveability

A key objective of any roads management reform is to improve safety. Regional Victoria remains over-represented in the number of lives lost on Victorian roads. The number of people killed on rural roads increased by five in 2017, from 150 to 155, while Victoria's overall lives lost figure dipped from 290 in 2016 to 257 last year¹. Road maintenance is critical to reducing road fatalities and road-related injuries. Well maintained roads also improve travel times, and reduce fuel usage and vehicle maintenance costs.

¹ <https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/run-off-road-crashes-the-biggest-killer-on-country-roads/>

The June 2017 report, *Maintaining State-Controlled Roadways*, by the Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO)², noted that total funding for VicRoads' decreased from 2010-11 to 2015-16 by 16 per cent, and maintenance funding decreased by 41 per cent. This has led to a "worst first" approach to maintenance, focusing only on roads that are in critical need of repair and precluding any preventative works. Limiting targeted early prevention works on road pavements has resulted in an increasing maintenance backlog, and lower service levels for road users.

The VAGO report also found that VicRoads does not make full use of available data to inform its road maintenance program. RCV member councils advise that they collect extensive road usage data which is made available to, but not used by, VicRoads for road maintenance planning. In short, funding shortfalls, combined with poor use of data, has led to deterioration in the state's road maintenance program.

Transport and Connectivity

One of RCV's highest priorities is the need for improvements to transport corridors and connection within, to and between regional cities and Greater Melbourne. A renewed approach to regional transport and connectivity has the capacity to deliver commercial, economic and social benefits to the state of Victoria.

Improving the regional road network will enhance regional connectivity. It will also reduce pressure on Greater Melbourne by providing better access to jobs and housing in regional localities. Improvements to transport infrastructure will support the role of regional cities in facilitating population growth, and increase liveability through the provision of greater transportation options for those living in regional and rural communities.

Over the past 12 months there has been a lot of focus on, and investment in, the rail infrastructure projects, with announcements about the Melbourne Airport Rail Link and the Regional Rail Revival project, and of course the commencement of the Melbourne Metro Rail Tunnel project. However, this must not come at the expense of the state's road network, which is essential to the successful completion of these major rail infrastructure projects.

Regional Victorian businesses generate a \$72 billion regional economy that contributes almost 20 per cent of the state's overall economy and is responsible for a third of Victoria's total exports produces.³ It is therefore critical that Government facilitates the development of, and equitable investment in, road infrastructure that will help support the growth and competitiveness of regional industries, and their access to markets.

There are many vital projects which can begin now that will enable regional Victoria to fulfil its potential, including but not limited to:

- Goulburn Valley Highway Shepparton Bypass
- Completion of the Western Highway Duplication, from Ararat to Stawell
- Ballarat Western Link Road – Stage 2

² Victorian Auditor-General's Office. 2017. *Maintaining State-Controlled Roadways*. Available at <https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/20170622-Maintaining-Roadways.pdf> [Accessed 31 January 2018]

³ https://www.rdv.vic.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0005/1557590/RDV_Annual_Report_2017.pdf [Accessed 31 January 2018]

- Mildura Truck Bypass – Benetook Ave
- Completion of the North-West freight route that links the Yarrawonga Road with Wangaratta’s industrial areas
- Princes Highway West - 2+1 configuration, overtaking lanes and bridge strengthening - Colac to S.A, Border

By investing in these projects, many of which were supported by Infrastructure Victoria⁴ in its 30-year infrastructure strategy, the Government will facilitate increased productivity and place regional Victoria in a strong position for jobs growth.

Summary

RCV supports the recommendations of the 2017 VAGO report and calls for:

- a more strategic approach by VicRoads to country road maintenance;
- increased and sustained funding for VicRoads; and
- greater collaboration with regional local governments for planning maintenance of regional roads,

which, in combination, will significantly improve road quality and road safety.

Making road travel in regional Victoria safer will vastly improve the liveability of regional cities, by improving connectivity between regional towns and cities, and enhancing their attractiveness as destinations to live, work, and visit.

Thank you for receiving this submission. Should you have any queries, or require further information, please contact the Regional Cities Victoria Secretariat on 03 9654 4799 or via email: rcv@cprcomm.com.au

Yours sincerely,



Cr Margaret O’Rourke
Chair
Regional Cities Victoria

⁴ Infrastructure Victoria. 2017. *Infrastructure Victoria 30-year strategy*. Available at <http://yoursay.infrastructurevictoria.com.au/30-year-strategy/>. [Accessed 31 January 2018].