

SUBMISSION TO THE FEDERAL STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRANSPORT

Submitted by Gary Mawby



I write in relation to your inquiry into the state of Australia's national and regional roads network.

By way of background, I am a retired Civil/Municipal Engineer with 38 years' experience working for a number of regional municipalities across Victoria.

Since retiring I've been fortunate to travel across our nation's extensive road network on a number of occasions and this has allowed me to get a good appreciation of the state of our country's roads.

Even before this recent prolonged and extremely wet period our regional and local road network was in a very poor condition.

A number of factors contributed to this; increased traffic volumes, heavier vehicles and aging infrastructure to name a few but the main reason for the deteriorated condition of our roads prior to the recent rain events has been a lack of periodic and preventative maintenance by both state and local road authorities.

The two most basic and important of these activities are table drain and gravel shoulder maintenance.

The function of a table drain (the open earth drain parallel to and adjacent to the road shoulder) is to divert water away from the road pavement (the gravel road base that supports traffic on both sealed and unsealed roads). Failure to maintain these drains allows water to infiltrate the gravel road base which eventually leads to failures in the form of potholes, usually in the outer wheel path of passing vehicles.

Maintenance activities over the recent decade or two have focussed on repairing the potholes without reinstating the table drains with the result that the "repair" will fail in the ensuing months only to be "repaired" and fail, again.

Similarly, failure to maintain gravel road shoulders (that section of compacted gravel adjacent to and protecting the edge of the road seal) causes the edge of the seal to weaken and brake away. Road authorities now typically patch these edge breaks with bitumen material without reinstating the gravel shoulder with the result that these "repairs" continue to fail.

The trend away from preventative road maintenance practices to reacting once a (preventable) problem arises has its origins, at least in Victoria in the Kennett era of council amalgamations and contracting out of services which saw in-house crews with a commitment to and local knowledge of their communities replaced by private often remotely based contractors with little or no commitment to these communities and a commercial focus on doing no more than what their maintenance contract stipulated.

Obviously our road networks are now in a dire state following the prolonged wet weather and disastrous floods and road authorities are doing their best to make the roads safe again by affecting temporary repairs but these must be followed up with regular maintenance activities of the sort described above to protect the road asset, as far as practicable from early and unnecessary deterioration.

Thank you for considering my submission, I wish you all the very best in your deliberations.



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