

Our 5 year
engagement
strategy

Engage VicRoads

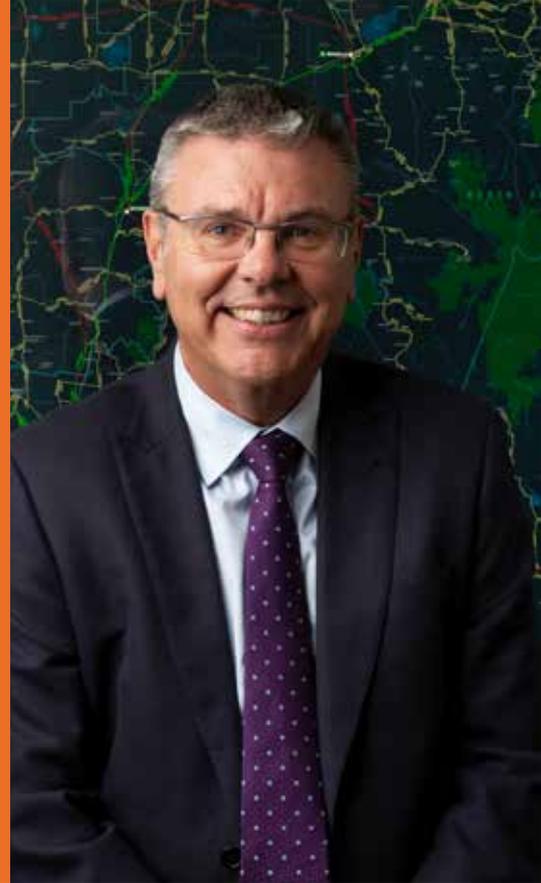


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Message from the Chief Executive

Engage VicRoads is our vision to drive an internal culture of engagement that respects and welcomes community involvement because we know it leads to better decisions, projects, policies and outcomes.



We have a lot of passion and enormous expertise and knowledge of the transport network to help inform good decisions, but we can't pretend to know all the problems and have all the answers.

Communities are best placed to understand the transport challenges they face, and to help us design and implement solutions to make Victoria work even better.

With a million more people set to call Victoria home over the next 10 years, we need honest and respectful two-way conversations to meet our transport challenges together.

Engage VicRoads is our five year strategy to continually improve the way we engage with a broader public about our state's future, so we build the right projects at the right place and time, and help make it easier and safer to drive less.

We will encourage wider public discussion on transport and liveability issues with people directly affected by a potential project or policy, and with those who have a personal or professional interest.

We also want to reach people beyond the 'usual suspects', and engage young people about their vision and hopes for the future.

This strategy is the start of building an engagement culture that puts the customer and community at the heart of everything we do.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'John Merritt'.

John Merritt
Chief Executive

Why engage?

Honest and respectful conversations are needed to debate and decide the best responses for Victoria as we grow to a state of eight million people.

There are inherent conflicts playing out across the state where the importance of commuters and freight to move around in reasonable time come up against the values of local neighbourhoods, and the importance of safety and a sustainable environment.

The road network is for everyone, and we need to make the smartest use of it. Whether you live in the growing outer suburbs, small rural towns or in the centre of Melbourne, we believe communities and stakeholders are best placed to identify and understand the challenges, and co-design and implement solutions.

Engage VicRoads is the start of a continuing conversation with citizens and communities to drive a culture of high-quality engagement at VicRoads to get better outcomes for people.

More community engagement is needed to influence decisions that will shape our future transport choices. Factors like growth in Melbourne's outer suburbs, an aging population and emerging technology reinforce why we believe a culture of engagement is needed to identify challenges and design solutions together.

Learning from others

In developing our engagement plan, VicRoads wish to acknowledge the generous support we have received from leaders in the field, including the City of Melbourne who shared their organisational journey with our Engagement Governance Committee. The Transport Integration Act 2010 establishes the principle of community participation in decision making and the Victorian Auditor-General's Office Better practice guide for public participation in government decision making has been adopted by VicRoads as the basis of our Engagement Standards.

We have also drawn heavily on the New Zealand Transport Agency's Public Engagement Manual, the South Australian Government's engagement principles, Better Together and the Environment Protection Authority Victoria. As a corporate member of the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), we will continue to share and learn from others to advance the practice of public participation.

Our Vision

Engage with Victorians early and often to achieve outcomes that are community driven and make our cities, towns and regions work better.

Our Goals

- To increase community participation in important decisions that impact on the liveability and social and economic connectedness of Victoria
- To involve communities and stakeholders early to define problems and create options together
- To build healthy and enduring stakeholder relationships in a culture of continual improvement
- To be Australia's leading government agency for community engagement exploring new ways to engage people in the decisions that affect how we will move around and connect in the future

Our Seven Guiding Principles

Each engagement will have a different purpose, be at a different time and place, with different people, with different interests. The aim is not for a 'tick a box' engagement, but to encourage genuine two-way engagement with a clear purpose.

The guiding principles to our engagement approach are:

- **We know why we are engaging and we communicate this clearly**
- **We deliberately include as many people as we can**
- **We are sensitive to the history and know the context**
- **We engage early on the challenges and not the solutions**
- **We listen at every stage and we keep coming back**
- **We are genuine**
- **We are relevant and purposeful**

1. We know why we are engaging and we communicate this clearly

Genuine, authentic and innovative engagement with communities and stakeholders will help make one of the best places in the world continue to function well under sustained population pressure.

Engagement is an integral part of all of VicRoads' work. We will be very clear with ourselves, our stakeholders and communities about why we are engaging, what we want to achieve and how people can get involved.

We will be very clear about to what extent customers and communities can influence outcomes and what we will do with their feedback and ideas.

2. We deliberately include as many people as we can

Showing respect to and knowing the community we want to engage is essential to quality outcomes. Our aim is to hear the views and ideas of the quiet majority, not only the noisy minority.

This requires extra effort to build good relationships on the ground using the right language for the right audience.

As well as identifying affected communities – people living near a proposed freeway for example and freight carriers whose journey times will be improved – we will make efforts to engage with people with a personal or professional interest, and community leaders who may be less obvious.

Interested stakeholders may include non-government organisations, advocacy groups, universities and think tanks, whose insights can add to the firsthand experience of people directly affected.

3. We are sensitive to history and context

History over many years and the current context can often influence the quality of community engagement. It's important to understand what has happened in the past at all government levels, to avoid any obvious pitfalls and to build trust. Knowing the history and background to previous engagements will also prevent going over old territory, while being aware of any future community events could help people save time and energy, and throw up opportunities for collaboration.

4. We engage early and often

Early engagement is essential for better outcomes, because it brings more voices to the table to identify issues and ideas before options for solutions are developed. Engaging early on the challenges and not the solutions represents a big step forward for VicRoads as we shift from an 'Announce and Defend' culture to a culture of 'Discuss, Debate and Decide'.

While we may not always be able to engage as early we would like, we can make it clear when there will be opportunities to have a say and what the state of play really is. We will make every effort to hear from a broader population instead of the same few voices, and take on board what they think.

5. We listen at every stage and we keep coming back

Genuine engagement requires active listening. Listening in order to understand the community and stakeholders means seeing the world from other people's viewpoints. This will improve the way we interact with communities and stakeholders, and help us co-design solutions to what communities are experiencing, instead of what we think are the problems. More staff will be mobilised throughout regions to keep talking to communities and keep people engaged in the big issues affecting the liveability of their towns, suburbs and regions.

6. We are genuine

If we are just ticking a box, we will lose any goodwill or opportunity for a better outcome, and destroy community trust. Only communities who feel they have been genuinely listened to will be meaningfully involved. One of the most important elements of listening is considering what is said and responding in an appropriate and timely way by explaining what has happened as a result. This doesn't mean always agreeing but showing people how their experiences and ideas have influenced outcomes. VicRoads will also be genuine in acknowledging where we have made mistakes, and work with communities to make good.

7. We are relevant and purposeful

We realise that not everyone has the time to attend public meetings and write submissions, so if we want people to take part in online discussions through our online consultation hub, engagevicroads or through our Facebook page, we need to capture their imagination and be relevant.

Whether it's a carefully constructed policy discussion on road safety or a traffic update on social media, we want our engagements to have a clear purpose and to reach the broadest number of interested people. We will explore new ways to engage a diversity of views, and to explore difficult and entrenched problems to reach people in the most engaging ways.

Engagement is a two way process

Putting the customer and community at the heart of everything we do

What you can expect from us

- A real say in how your region, city and state functions
- To see our policy thinking on roads and transport projects early in the pipeline
- Honesty around what is and isn't negotiable
- To be listened to, heard and to influence decisions that affect you
- To have mistakes acknowledged and addressed
- To be engaged on problems as well as solutions

Every day, hundreds of thousands of travellers tell us about their journeys because they are as passionate as we are about wanting to make Victoria a fantastic place.

We believe that communities are best placed to understand the transport challenges they face, and to help us design and implement solutions to make Victoria work even better.

Our promise to Victorians is this: whether you live in a growing suburb or regional town, on a farm or a city apartment – we want to team up with you so we make the best collective decisions on how to get you safely to where you need to be.



Engagement is a two way process which ranges from consulting with, involving, collaborating with and empowering the community.

Instead of a 'one size fits all approach', VicRoads uses the IAP2 Spectrum to help identify the appropriate level of engagement depending on the goals, time frames, resources and levels of concern in the decision to be made.

While different types of problems or projects will require different public participation approaches, it is vital to engage with the community early in the process. By identifying community interests, issues and concerns from the outset, we can optimise the benefits and minimise impacts.

Different stakeholder groups will be engaged at different levels of the spectrum depending on their level of interest in a particular issue, problem or project. Some people and organisations will want to work in partnership to develop solutions, while others may only want to be kept informed of developments.

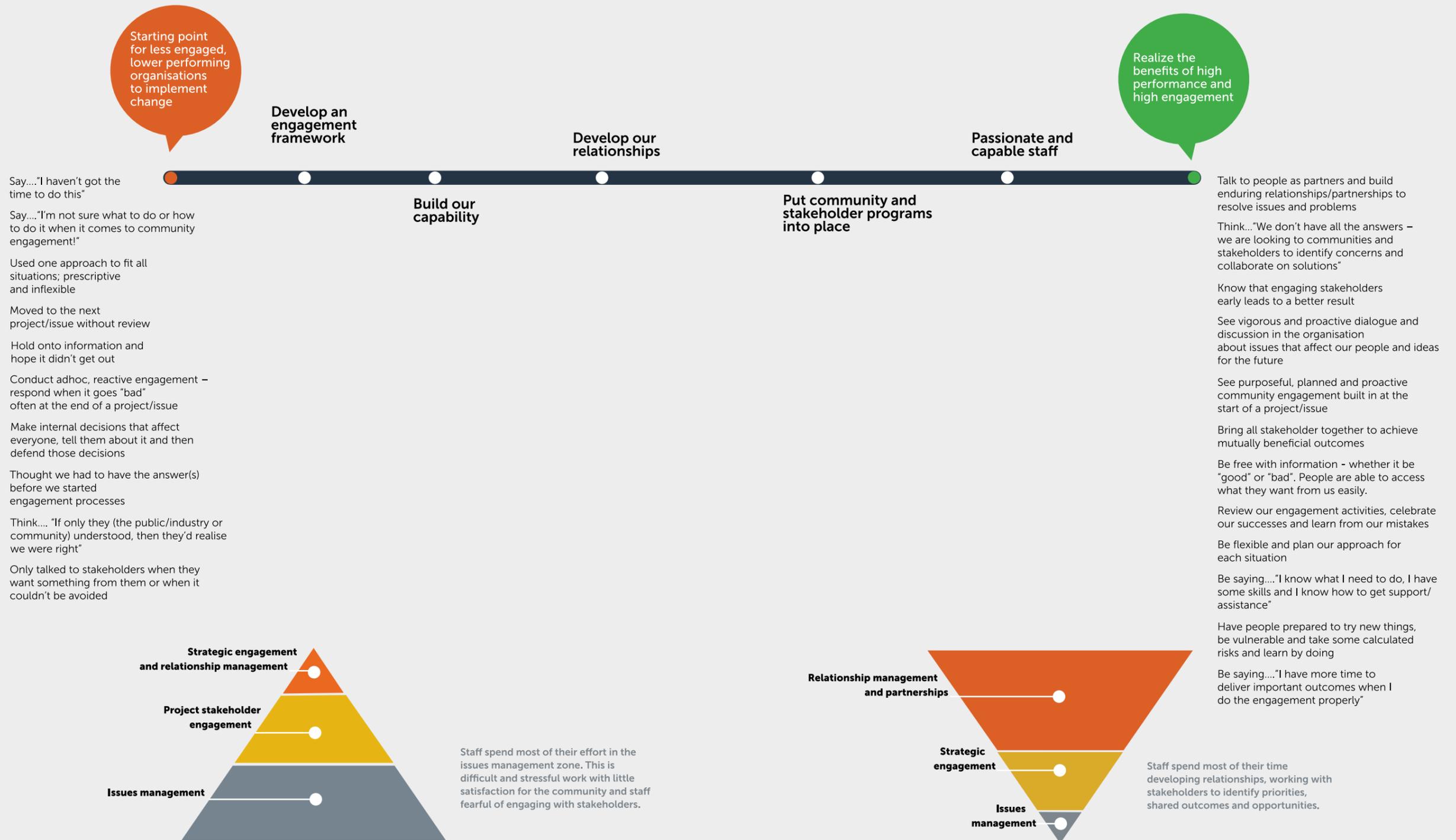
What is vitally important is to determine what aspects of the project the public can influence and to ensure the various stakeholder groups are clear about their role in the decision-making process.

Ideally, the community and stakeholders should have an opportunity to create the shape and direction of the project within the engagement process. This is the type of engagement that we aspire to and our goal is to increase the level of public participation from the 'inform' end of the spectrum to the 'empower' end.

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Levels					
Objective	To provide balanced and objective information to support understanding by the public.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work with the public to ensure concerns and aspirations are understood and considered.	To engage with the public on each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives and a preferred solution.	To create governance structures to delegate decision-making and/or work directly with the public.
Commitment	To keep the public informed.	To listen to and acknowledge the public's concerns.	To work with the public to exchange information, ideas and concerns.	To seek advice and innovations from and amongst various public parties.	To work with the public to implement agreed-upon decisions.
Description	<p>Participation</p> <p>The first two public participation levels– Inform and Consult– typically occur when a decision has been made, and government wants to either communicate that decision to the public, or seek opinions on the decision.</p>		<p>Engagement</p> <p>The third and fourth public participation levels– Involve and Collaborate– have two way information flows, and include sharing information within and across stakeholder communities during the decision-making process.</p> <p>When undertaking engagement, decision makers commit to using stakeholder feedback to inform the decision and shape the outcome.</p> <p>Activity that occurs at the Collaboration level is also sometimes referred to as partnering.</p>		<p>Empowerment</p> <p>The fifth public participation level– Empower– is also often referred to as co production, where decisions are made jointly between government and the community.</p> <p>This is typically when decision-making authority has been delegated to a group including members from both the government and the community/Industry.</p>

Tracking our engagement journey

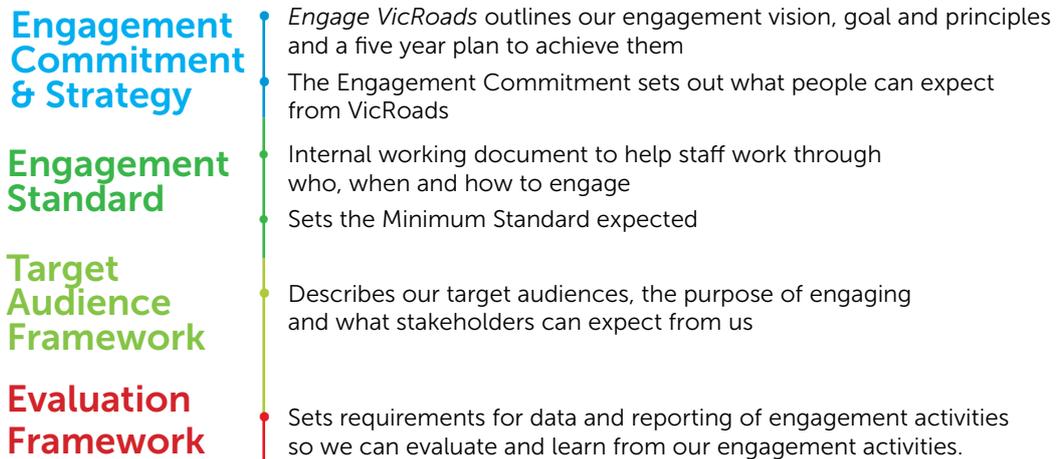
Consistent and sustained effort will be needed to transition to a high performing organisation able to engage communities early and often.



Building an engagement culture

An Engagement Framework has been developed to help VicRoads build organisational understanding of policy, audiences, evaluation, tools, systems, processes and capability development for a consistently higher level of engagement with communities.

The framework is built on these key elements:



Toolkit → Capability Plan → Systems and Processes

Our 5 year priorities, 2016-2020



Our aspiration is to invest more of our time building strong relationships in the community and less time managing issues.

We have defined our five year engagement priorities to make firm progress towards achieving our vision.

Sustained, consistent effort is required by all staff across VicRoads to take responsibility for improving their relationships.

Our experience from looking at other like organisations indicates that we are in for a 5 year period of change to embed engagement culture and practice across the organisation.

Recent engagement experiences across VicRoads are helping us learn from our mistakes and successes as we build a culture of consistent, clear and high quality engagement.



Case study 1: Western Highway duplication

Engagement Principle:

We are genuine. We listen at every stage.

Background to the project

As the main road linking Melbourne and Adelaide, the Western Highway is one of Victoria's busiest rural highways. The Australian and Victorian governments have committed over half a billion dollars to progressively duplicate the highway from Ballarat to Stawell to provide a safer and more efficient four-lane divided route.

To date, 55 kilometres of highway has been duplicated, but the loss of a significant number of trees along the route has caused major community upset.

Why did we need outrage management?

"The community was deeply upset at the number of trees being cut down," said Steve Pattinson, VicRoads' manager of project delivery.

"We couldn't adequately explain the scale of the impacts, or what particular trees would go, or the discrepancy in the number of trees cut down. The original estimate was 221 large old trees when the reality was 1,600. There was a lot of anger at how we could get an estimate so wrong."

VicRoads was also criticised for a lack of community consultation. Affected landowners were consulted during the Environmental Effects Statement process, but there was a long gap between the planning stage and construction. "People didn't know what was going on and when we were hammered for not consulting enough, we became defensive. Clearly we had missed a large part of the community. We weren't good at identifying stakeholders from further afield," Steve said.

What did we learn?

The importance of acknowledging our mistakes. By taking responsibility for those mistakes, we are now getting help from the people we initially upset.

"Now we are starting to engage upfront ahead of funding for the next section of the highway duplication between Ararat and Stawell, so we will have a good handle of the issues before construction begins. We have invested in video and visual tools to help people see the scale of the impacts of the project, and we are developing solutions together," Steve said.

The need to get better at identifying and engaging a broader range of stakeholders – including the travelling public, not only the people who live along the route of a major project, is another learning. "We've now formed a local environmental consultation group and we're having regular community sessions with the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning and local councils to keep communications open and explain the Environmental Effects Statement process," Steve said.

Engagement has begun on the next stage of the highway duplication, ahead of any funding approval. Some great community outcomes are being achieved, from a BMX bike track and bores for community use, to wildlife and native vegetation protection.

Case study 2: Streamlining Hoddle Street

Engagement Principle:

We engage early.

Background to the project

Improving traffic flow through some of our city's busiest intersections is essential in a growing city, as VicRoads tries to squeeze greater productivity out of the existing road network. Throughout 2015, VicRoads asked Victorians to share their travel experiences along one of our busiest corridors: Hoddle Street and Punt Road, where everyday some 130,000 people journey along the north-south axis, and an even higher number of people – 200,000 – cross it (half using public transport).

Community feedback informed the development of a business case for Streamlining Hoddle Street and the successful implementation of 24/7 clearways along Punt Road.

In April 2016, the State Government committed \$60 million to fund the first stage of the Streamlining Hoddle Street project, to upgrade four key intersections between the Eastern and Monash freeways:

- Swan Street (gateway to Victoria's premier sporting and entertainment precinct)
- Brunton Avenue (currently gets flooded with people during event times for the MCG, moving to and from Richmond Station and surrounding nightlife)
- Johnston Street (right hand turns in peak periods are difficult and public transport and pedestrians need greater priority)
- Eastern Freeway (high demand during peak periods for all road users, and limited cycling connections).

What were the aims of the engagement process?

"We wanted to involve the community to identify and explore ideas to create a safer and more reliable experience for everyone using this important inner-Melbourne road and provide better amenity for those living or visiting the area," explained Brendan Pauwel.

Innovative draft concept designs for the four key intersections were shared after wide community input, both online and offline.

"It became clear though that a key challenge was explaining how some of the complex technical solutions – including 'continuous flow' intersection designs – would work for people in practice," Brendan said.

While the 'face to face' engagement was working to help people grasp the complex concepts, it was harder to reach a wider, geographically dispersed audience, who were still really interested in what could happen along Hoddle Street.

That's when a team member suggested trying something that VicRoads had never done before: holding a live, online community event with the project team on hand in real time, to explain our thinking.

A key aim was to replicate the 'face-to-face' engagement experience for a much wider audience, using visual aids to help people absorb the complexities, and to ask questions and clarify their understanding.

"We found that during our face-to-face sessions, the community was far more easily able to absorb the complexities, and we wanted more people to have this two-way exchange."

What happened in the engagement process?

A live, online community event on the design of the Swan Street intersection was held on 6 September 2016. More than 400 people visited the broadcast page, and 173 people tuned into the live stream – listening, watching, providing feedback and asking questions for 45 minutes.

The session received extremely positive feedback from members of the community and key stakeholders,

with colloquial descriptions of the "glorified u-turns" and pen markings on maps giving people a much better sense of what is being proposed.

"For VicRoads, we also heard loud and clearly from people who walk, cycle and use public transport along the route of the importance of where bus stops and cycling paths are located for safety and better connectivity, and that will inform our final stage of design," Brendan said.

The informal and authentic nature of Brendan Pauwel's presentation style was appreciated by participants, as was the response rate to almost every question posted within the 40 minute session. We achieved a fully web accessible event, in line with Victorian Government Web Accessibility Standards, with wider reach than face to face sessions.

What worked, and what would we do differently next time?

A key part of the success was due to the existing high levels of public interest in the project, so this would need to be considered in future. The live chat component was essential to the success of the event, and involved coaching and practicing sessions to make sure the language used was relatable, casual and informal. It was important in responding to be confident with our information and work, but not to preach from a place of authority.

Future announcements or projects could explore a 'panel' format, where subject matter experts are called on for different elements.

Future live sessions should explore alternative timings and the length of the session, such as an evening session to see whether this would reach more people.

More resources are needed after the session to upload the live event (people expect instantaneous uploads).

Case study 3: Chandler Highway

Engagement Principle:

We listen at every stage and keep coming back.

Background to the project

The Chandler Highway Bridge has been a long-time RACV number one traffic hotspot. Early in 2016, the Victorian Government announced plans to widen Chandler Highway to six lanes and build a new bridge over the Yarra River. While residents supported something being done to ease congestion, there has been confusion and opposition to the western alignment and the six-lane design.

VicRoads has been working with individuals, families and community stakeholders to refine the design for the \$110 million upgrade, and understand firsthand the concerns and impacts to lessen the impacts from the major project.

What were the aims of the engagement process?

VicRoads Chief Executive John Merritt said it was important to go door-to-door to understand the impacts from people's living rooms.

"What we are trying to do is to listen and find out what is really going on at the family level, and what matters most to people. When we know exactly what you are worried about, there are things we can do to reduce the consequences. We just have to get into these conversations and get the solutions to the problems that people have – not the problems we think they have," he said.

What happened in the engagement process? What worked, and what would we do differently next time?

The engagement is ongoing, and has included a number of face-to-face community events, door-knocking of affected residents, and an online engagement hub at engage VicRoads.

An independent research company was engaged to visit local residents over five weeks, collect and share feedback and make public the key data behind key decisions. Many residents said they appreciated the opportunity to have their say and provide input, and 87% of households in the area were reached, with 59% participating in the survey.

John Merritt, who joined the door-knocking team, said the experience was fantastic. "Understandably, people get teary when they get a knock on their door from VicRoads. But in daring to give the community the hard numbers, and by going door to door, we understand the impacts from people's living rooms, and we know we can make things better for people, not worse."

The engagement focus is now on supporting the best local design solutions to on-road cycling lanes on both sides of the highway, separating the shared user paths and celebrating local heritage and the environment through the public open space designs.

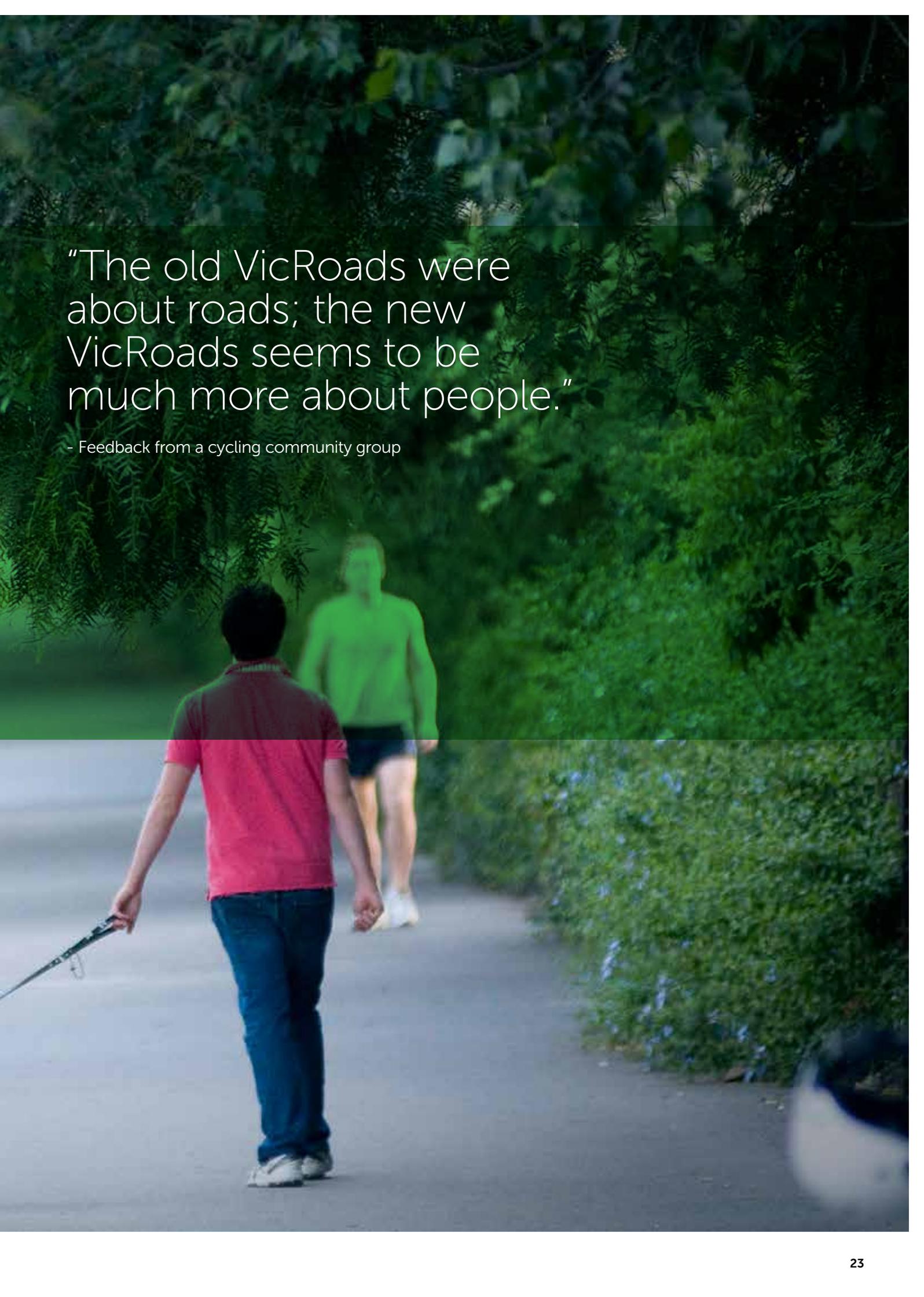
In a sign that the community values the personal approach, we received great feedback from a cycling group after Tessa Salmon from Metro Projects joined in a morning ride to understand the group's views and concerns.

They wrote, "The old VicRoads were about roads; the new VicRoads seems to be much more about people... Your willingness to see things from other perspectives and listen to a variety of views makes you a great ambassador for the organisation."

Engage with us now

Our online engagement hub is where you can get involved and influence any number of live projects, learn about project updates and provide feedback on policies we are developing. There are online forums, interactive maps and surveys on key projects across the state.

You can help shape the future with us now at engage.vicroads.vic.gov.au

A photograph of a person in a red shirt and blue jeans walking away from the camera on a paved path. They are holding a fishing rod in their right hand. In the background, another person is walking towards them. The path is surrounded by lush green trees and bushes. The top half of the image has a semi-transparent dark green overlay with white text.

“The old VicRoads were about roads; the new VicRoads seems to be much more about people.”

- Feedback from a cycling community group