

Road Classification Review Panel
Road Network Infrastructure Directorate
Roads and Traffic Authority
Box K198
HAYMARKET NSW 1238

19 August 2005

Dear Sir,

NSW Road Classification Review – Response to Interim Report

The Institute of Public Works Engineering Australia (IPWEA) is a not for profit membership based professional organisation representing engineers and others involved in the provision of public works and services predominantly in the local government sphere.

The Roads & Transport Directorate has been set up by IPWEA (NSW) in conjunction with the Local Government and Shires Associations to provide support to its members working in local government across the state.

Each Council which has made a submission to the review has done so on the basis of supporting or objecting to individual road classification changes within their council area. This submission does not seek to enter into these specific local issues. Details of issues arising in relation to individual roads are best supported by the technical staff of each council who have the knowledge and expertise to support a case for application of the classification criteria.

The basis of the Roads & Transport Directorate's submission is the recording of a number of principles underlying the submissions made by individual councils. These issues are summarised in the sections below.

Initial Assessment.

Sections 6.1 and 6.2 of the Interim Report show the implications of the Panel's initial assessment and the implications of accepting all submissions. The impact of the former assessment is a net reduction in state roads of about 500km and a net increase in local roads of 500km. Regional roads remain at about their current length.

The latter proposal results in an increase in Regional Roads of 1,600km with a reduction in state roads of 200km.

Based on an increasing population, an increasing number of registered vehicles and an increasing reliance in country areas on road transport, it is difficult to see how a decrease in the state road network can be justified.

It is also difficult to see how an increase in Regional Roads of 1,600km since the last review can be justified.

The solution to determining what the best outcome is for the community can only be determined by an objective and transparent application of the criteria to all proposals submitted. This aspect will be discussed in more detail below.

Cost Shifting

An outcome equivalent to the Panel's initial assessment would effectively result in cost shifting to local government. Acceptance of all submissions would result in cost shifting to the state government.

Again, the answer to what is appropriate will only result from a rigorous and transparent application of the criteria to all proposals.

Economic Evaluation

Section 10. of the Road Classification Review titled *Road Classification Criteria* states that:

“Interpretation of the criteria should recognise the wide variation in density of population and economic activity both across NSW and within the metropolitan area.”

This is a major issue in a considerable number of regional areas which are struggling to survive in the midst of drought, the closing of rail freight connections and increasing fuel prices.

Issues such as low volume / difficult terrain roads serving major tourist or other high economic value activities should also be dealt with under this provision.

The difficulty is to determine, on an objective basis, how these issues should be measured and evaluated. The existing assessment based on incomplete and subjective evaluation can only lead to claims on inequity at the end of the process. It would not be inappropriate to require a more detailed economic evaluation to be carried out prior to any change in status being recommended. This is not uncommon in making application for grant funding to other state government bodies.

Evaluation Process

A number of comments have been received pointing to a lack of transparency in the process being employed. This has been stated as – Councils were required to provide a considerable amount of information in support of their proposals but there was no indication that the RTA had to provide a comparable level of documentation in support of their proposals. This perception is widespread and does little to promote ownership of the process in councils across the state.

The process should be open and transparent with objective criteria being applied to each proposal and the rankings being available to all road authorities.

Consultation

The Interim Report (Section 7) discusses the approach taken by the panel to evaluating proposals. This provides valuable information to councils that was not available at the time submissions were made. Some of these issues would have benefited from consultation with councils prior to submissions being made or at the very least, a document similar to Section 7 of the Interim report being developed. Some of the approaches adopted should be reviewed e.g. reclassifications for roads crossing council boundaries submitted by only one council were rejected. This seems to be application of the lowest common denominator principle. A better approach may be to review such proposals on a regional basis to determine if a totally different solution is appropriate.

The perceived lack of transparency coupled with a minimum of consultation has created an overall perception of ad hoc decision making biased towards the RTA's view.

This situation can be rectified by publishing the data upon which evaluation has been carried out and consulting with Councils across the state to achieve a consensus outcome. Such consultation could easily be carried out using the existing ROC organisation of Councils or the IPWEA Regional Group structure.

Conclusion

In summary, the issues raised by IPWEA Roads & Transport Directorate members are:

1. The initial assessment shows a net reduction in State Roads of 500km and a net increase in Local Roads of 500km. In the absence of any supporting data it is difficult to see how this outcome has been arrived at.
2. There is concern that this process will simply result in another example of cost shifting to Local Government in NSW.
3. There has not been any attempt to quantify the full economic impact of reclassification particularly in relation to regional communities.
4. Data in support of RTA proposals has not been made available on the same basis that data was provided in support of Council based proposals.

5. The process has not been carried out in an objective and transparent manner and Councils do not feel that they have had adequate opportunity through the consultative process to properly support their positions.

IPWEA is anxious to assist in achieving a satisfactory outcome from this review. If further consultation is to be carried out IPWEA is happy to facilitate this through its group structure.

If you would like to discuss any of these matters further please do not hesitate to contact me, phone 8267 3000.

Yours faithfully,

Mick Savage
Manager Roads & Transport Directorate