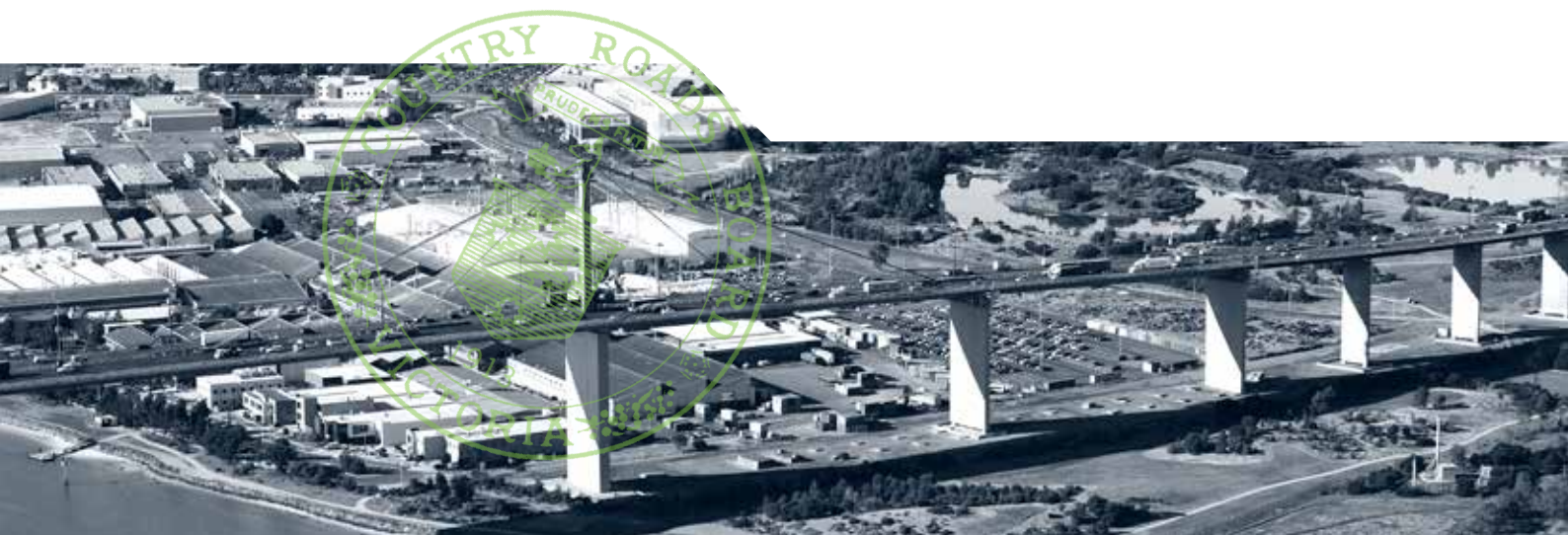


# VicRoads Association

## Newsletter No 194



Membership of the Association is available to all who have been members of VicRoads or forerunner organisations or the spouse of deceased members and bestows on them all the rights of the Rules of Association. Current cost of membership is a once only fee of \$30 plus a joining fee of \$5. Enquiries about membership or receipt of the Newsletter by e-mail should be directed to the Secretary at 60 Denmark Street Kew 3101 or by phone or e-mail as shown in the footer below. An application for membership of the Association can be found at the end of the Newsletter.

Dear Members,

I started to prepare this newsletter in November 2016 under a fair amount of pain. You see I am due for hip replacement surgery on 15th December. I have been having trouble with my hips – on and off – for the last eight years. Pain would develop and then inexplicably disappear after four or five weeks. I remember during one of these episodes I could not sleep lying down. I used to sit up in a chair and sleep with a blanket over me. During one of these episodes we went down to Saltwater Creek on a camping holiday and I slept sitting up in the passenger seat of the car.



However, last August the pain started to flare again and after a new round of x-rays and scans I was diagnosed with arthritis in both hips. I agreed a strategy with my GP that we would undertake a regime of anti-inflammatory medication to control the pain but it increasingly became apparent that none of this was effective. In September, I was referred to a surgeon and after looking at the x-ray he declared I would have to have a hip replacement. He was surprised to learn that the pain was in the left hip because he thought that the right hip looked the worst. To relieve the pain until the scheduled operation I had an x-ray guided cortisone injection in the left hip. It initially reduced the level of pain but after a few days its effect wore off.

The pain continued to grow and I soon became aware of my limitations such as walking, getting in and out of the car, cooking, putting on and taking off my shoes, negotiating stairs, sitting on hard surfaces, using public transport, and trying not to think about it. I have become very dependent on a stout walking stick – which not only props me up to aid my mobility but also enables me to reach for anything on the floor that I need to drag towards me such as articles as newspapers, pens, underpants, socks, remote control devices, tissues, coins, and invoices so large that one's immediate reaction is to drop them on the floor in horror. I am also aware that I make grunting noises getting out a chair or walking up steps and the like.

The medication has become stronger and more lethal with the passage of time but I am happy to report that today (30th November) I have been prescribed an opiate that knocked me out and somewhat reduced the pain. I am not allowed to drive while I am taking it – but it is only for a few weeks.

And I thought of my parents – especially my Mum. She had arthritis and had nothing like the relief I can expect from surgery, available to her. She always seemed happy and energetic except when she compared aches and pains with my aunts and uncles. How dare I complain of my condition!

I know that many of you will have already had similar surgery but I thought it might be interesting to share my experience. So I will finish this introduction now and tell you the rest of the story after the operation. Don't go away!



I am resuming this story on 10 January – nearly four weeks after the operation. I am walking around with the aid of one crutch but the physiotherapists are happy for me to walk unaided at home. I undertake exercises each day and attend two physiotherapy sessions each week as an outpatient. In hospital and rehabilitation I was drugged up with all sorts of painkillers but I have completely thrown them away now. I had a dull pain caused mainly by the exercise regime – probably as a result of being out of condition more than anything. It was trivial compared to the pain I had before the operation and each day I make noticeable improvements. The physios are very positive and think I am a bit of a pin up boy with my recovery – but they probably say that to everyone.

I had what is termed Superpath surgery. This technique minimizes damage to muscles and tissue, does not require dislocation of the joint, and has a quicker recovery time. I was semi-conscious throughout the operation but felt no pain. I will describe the technique in a later newsletter.

There are two other points to mention. The first is the kindness of family and friends. I had messages, visits, cards and assistance from many people. I was so grateful for this support. The kindness of people can never be measured but it is a great treasure when received. I also had first class attention from everyone in the health system. And I mean everyone. I was proud of Australia's health system and the people who make it all happen.

And the other joy was meeting my latest grandson, Jack Edmund Jellie, four days after the operation. He was called Edmund because his mother, Zoe, realized she was pregnant when she and Hugh, reached the base camp at Mount Everest. He is named after Sir Edmund Hillary. Zoe and I left hospital on the same day but we managed to hook up before I went into rehab. I was tempted to include a photograph of Jack but then I thought I would set an uncontrollable precedent for all our members who are grandparents.

Enjoy the read.

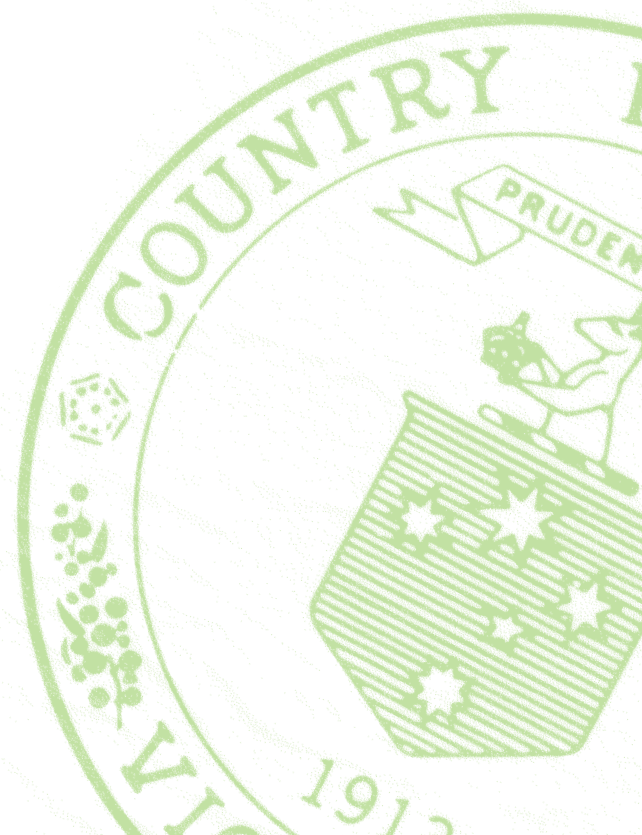
David Jellie - Editor

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## Ian Gardiner

Ian rang me to chew the fat over a few things and he told me that he had had an operation on the base of the spine to relieve pain he had been experiencing for some time. He said how pleased and proud he was of the medical and nursing staff who attended to him were, and the high regard he has for our medical system. He said the word "outstanding" quite a few times. He had only one complaint. As he was being transported by ambulance from hospital to the rehabilitation centre, he wanted to have the driver to put the siren on as they were entering an intersection – just to experience the sensation from within the ambulance. The driver refused outright – which goes to show how good the ambos are.

Ian contacted me to get John Bethune's contact details. John has recently shifted into a new housing complex which Ian thought had been built by J G King Building Group. Ian remembered John King as a very promising BS Engineer in Ballarat before he left the Country Roads Board to form the very successful business that he runs today.



## What's coming up

### Occasional Lunches – Shoppingtown Hotel – Monday 13th February 2017

Bookings are not essential, but it would help with arrangements if you can let Kelvin York know on 9438 1028 if you can attend. We hope to see you there. Incidentally we had a record attendance for our luncheon in February.

### Annual Golf Day – Friday 24 February 2017

Our fourth annual golf day will be at Green Acres Golf Club in Kew starting at 12 noon. Please contact Jim Webber on 9817 4182 or 0412 064 527 or jimwebber@optusnet.com.au if you want to participate. Partners and friends are very welcome.

## Dates for your diary

Our program this year is as follows:





DATE	TIME	EVENT	
February	Monday 6	12 noon	Occasional lunch, Shoppingtown Hotel
	Friday 24	12 noon	VicRoads Association Golf Day
March	Thursday 2	6.00 pm	Drinks and dinner at Waverley RSL
	Monday 20	11.00 am	AGM in the Theatrette followed by buffet lunch in the Cafeteria at 12.00 noon
	Monday 27	TBA	Visit to the Western Distributor Authority
April	Monday 10	12 noon	Occasional lunch, Shoppingtown Hotel
May	Monday 1	TBA	Visit to Melbourne Level Crossing Removal Authority
June	Monday 5	12 noon	Occasional lunch, Shoppingtown Hotel
	Monday 19	TBA	Visit to Infrastructure Victoria
July	Monday 31	TBA	Visit to Melbourne Metro Rail Authority
August	Monday 14	12 noon	Occasional lunch, Shoppingtown Hotel
September	13 and 14	TBA	Visit to VicRoads Regional Office in Traralgon and local attractions
October	Monday 9	12 noon	Occasional lunch, Shoppingtown Hotel
	Thursday 12	6.00 pm	Drinks and dinner at Waverley RSL
	Monday 30	TBA	Visit to VicRoads South Eastern Projects
November	Monday 27	12 noon	Occasional lunch, Shoppingtown Hotel
December	Monday 4	12 noon	Christmas lunch at Kew HO

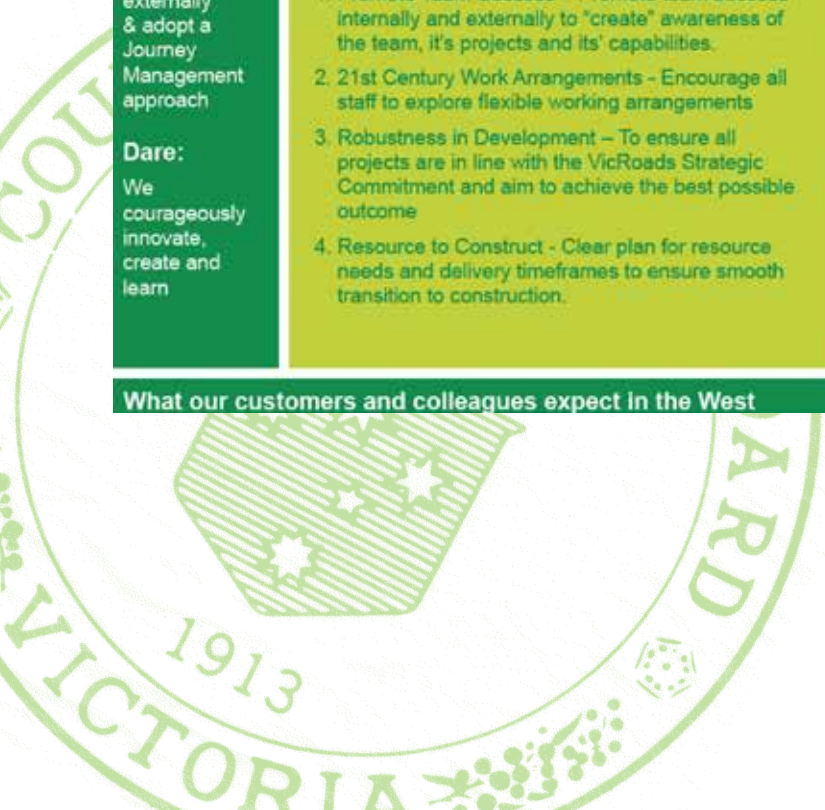


# WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING

## Visit to VicRoads Metropolitan Projects Western – October 27 2016

We had a good attendance of over 20 members to VicRoads Western project office in Footscray. We were welcomed by the Project Director, Damien Afxentis, who described the philosophy and mission of the Western Project team. Their team mission is summarised in the table below.

<b>License to Deliver</b> Our Vision – "Creating smartly for the growing west to get our community home safer and sooner" Our Mission – "Western Prosperity, Victorian Connectivity"			
Above Excellent Customer Service: INTENT = IMPACT			
<b>Care:</b> We Listen first then act safely and smartly  <b>Share:</b> We work collaboratively internally and externally & adopt a Journey Management approach  <b>Dare:</b> We courageously innovate, create and learn	<b>Journeys</b>	<b>Wellbeing</b>	<b>Productivity</b>
	<b>GROW</b> <b>Governance</b> Delivering on Commitments <b>Relationships</b> Partner of choice <b>Opportunities</b> Optimising performance <b>Works</b> Highest quality, on time and budget		
	<b>Key Project Priorities</b> 1. Promote Team Success – Promote team success internally and externally to "create" awareness of the team, it's projects and its' capabilities. 2. 21st Century Work Arrangements – Encourage all staff to explore flexible working arrangements 3. Robustness in Development – To ensure all projects are in line with the VicRoads Strategic Commitment and aim to achieve the best possible outcome 4. Resource to Construct - Clear plan for resource needs and delivery timeframes to ensure smooth transition to construction.		
	<b>Our BUILDING THE BLUE tool kit</b> Aiming for: Achievement, Affiliation, Encouragement and Self Actualisation		
	 <b>Self Awareness</b> Internal Voice Positive Assumptions Vision driven		
	 <b>Choosing Direction</b> Strategic, Tactical Operational Interests, Rights Power		
	 <b>Communicating and Achieving</b> Intention= Impact 5P Planning Appreciation		
	 <b>Decision making and time management</b> Command, consult, consensus, or vote Urgent? Important?		
<b>SMART - Safe   Meaningful   Accountable   Relevant   Team</b>			
<b>What our customers and colleagues expect in the West</b>			



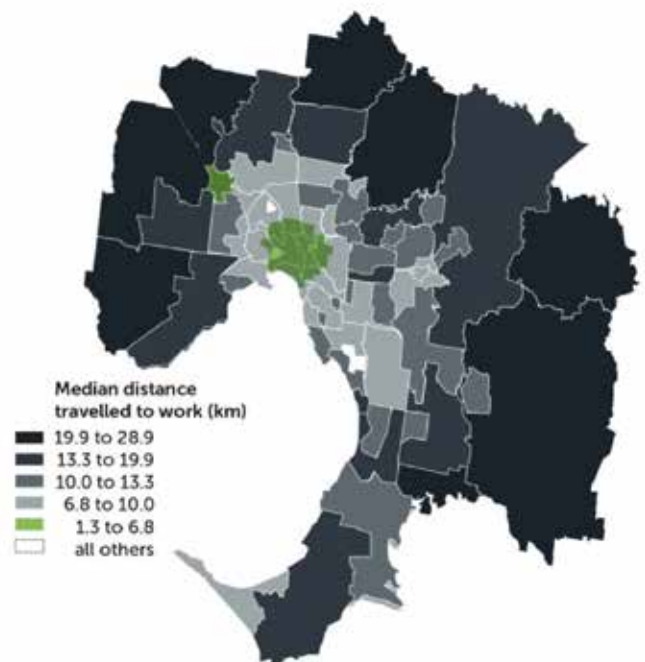


The office is a prominent VicRoads presence in the western suburbs responding to the growth in the western and northern suburbs, and the increase in traffic and job opportunities in the region. The office was established to address outer suburban priorities and network needs.

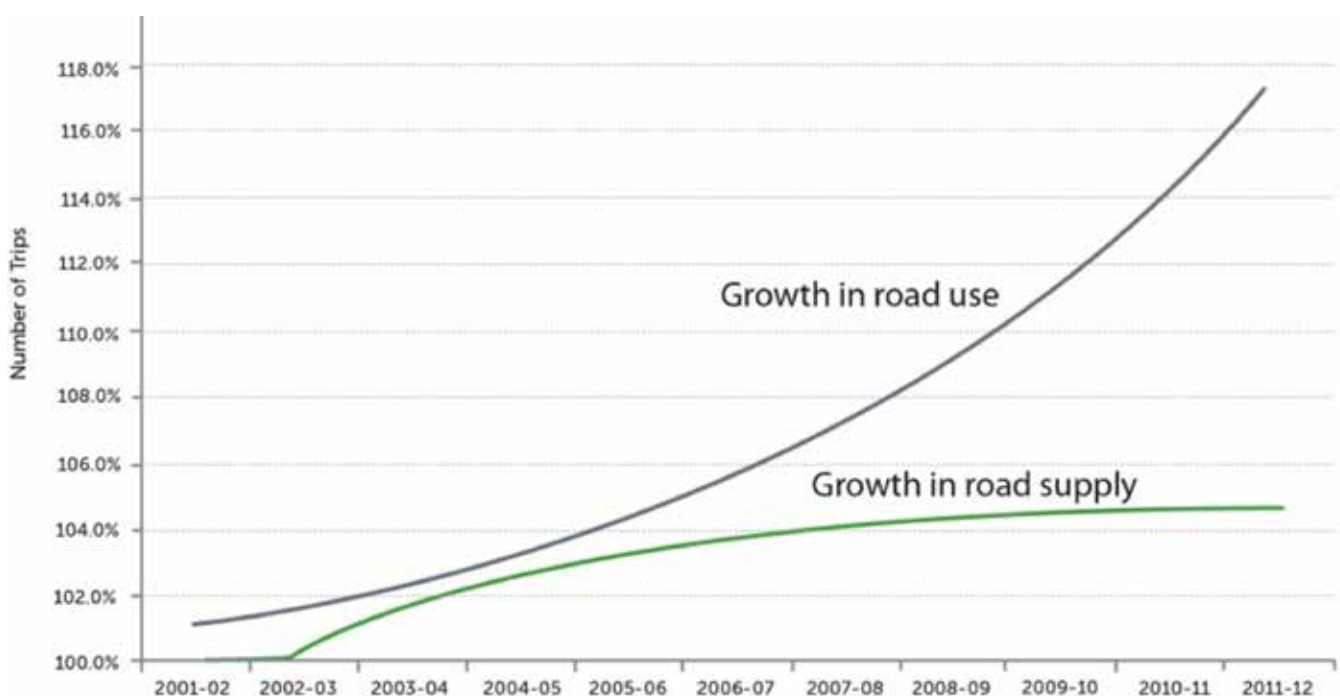
The arterial road network in outer Melbourne provides a lower level of accessibility than other parts of established Melbourne. In these growing areas, the types of investments needed are:

Projects that address suburb level deficiencies in arterial road network, where country roads are carrying city traffic and people experience long delays getting out of subdivisions and onto the trunk network where safety issues emerge;

- Projects that address bottlenecks in the existing network, opening up capacity either side of the bottleneck and improving accessibility;
  - Projects that stimulate growth by opening up access to new areas to both employment and residential development; and
  - Projects that support existing industrial centres, providing freight and employment accessibility.
- Melbourne's outer suburb travel needs are shown on the map below. The darker areas clearly show that people living in the growth zones of Melbourne, that is, in the outer areas of the city, have to travel longer distances for employment.



The graph below shows the backlog in road supply over the last 10 years or so.





Damian Van Dyke, Delivery Manager, and Jay Caliskan, Senior Engineer then briefed us on their current portfolio of projects. These include the West Gate Distributor Stage 1, the Chandler Highway Upgrade, widening of the Swan Street Bridge, Yan Yean Road duplication, O'Herns Road/Hume Freeway Interchange, Dohertys Road duplication and Plenty Road Duplication. These are described in more detail below.

### West Gate Distributor Stage 1

The first section of the West Gate Distributor in Footscray, is to provide better travel for local traffic, pedestrians and cyclists and improve freight access to and from the Port of Melbourne by:

- widening Moreland Street to a four lane divided road, with an upgraded connection to Footscray Road
- new signalised intersections in Moreland Street at Footscray Road, Parker Street and Whitehall Street
- strengthening and widening Shepherd Bridge over the Maribyrnong River by removing the pedestrian and cycling paths
- a new bridge over the Maribyrnong River next to Shepherd Bridge for pedestrians and cyclists.

The widening and strengthening works on Shepherd Bridge, Footscray between Simms Street and Whitehall Street are complete. Additional lanes have been added to the bridge, to help ease congestion and improve safety. The whole project is expected to be completed by mid 2017.







### Chandler Highway Upgrade

- Widening of Chandler Highway from Yarra Boulevard to Heidelberg Road
- New six-lane bridge to the west of the existing bridge
- Intersection upgrades at Heidelberg Road and Yarra Boulevard
- Improved pedestrian cyclist facilities including use of the existing bridge as a shared facility
- Total estimated investment of \$110 million
- Contract award early 2017 and completion in the latter half of 2018.

### Swan Street Bridge Widening

- Provision of an additional eastbound lane
- Widening of four metres on both sides for pedestrians and cyclists
- Total estimated investment \$30 million
- Construction commenced and completion expected by the end of 2017





### Yan Yean Road Duplication

- Duplication of Yan Yean Road between Diamond Creek Road and Kurrak Road
- Realignment of River Avenue
- Signalisation of the Kurrak Road intersection
- Narrow median treatment
- Bus priority at Diamond Creek Road
- Call for EOI/tenders early 2017, contract award mid 2017, commence construction late 2017 and completion late 2019.



### O'Herns Road/Hume Freeway Interchange

- New diamond interchange
- 1.4 km duplication of O'Herns Road auxiliary lanes between Cooper Street and O'Herns Road
- Signalisation of Epping/Findon/High/O'Herns roundabout
- Three new roundabouts Total estimated investment of \$81 million
- State Government has committed 50% and seeking remaining 50% through Commonwealth funding.



### Doherty's Road Duplication

- Upgrade from two lanes to four lane divided carriageway for 3.6 km between Fitzgerald Road and Grieve Parade
- New bridge over Princes Freeway
- Two new signalised intersections
- Three new roundabouts
- 2.3 km shared use path along Doherty's Road
- Total estimated investment of \$52 million
- A potential Public Private Partnership (PPP) will be considered for this project as part of a broader PPP package
- Once funding approved, procurement will take 8 months, detailed design 12 months and construction 36 - 42 months.





### Plenty Road Duplication

- Widening from four lanes to six lanes between McKimmies Road and Bush Boulevard
- New signals at Mayfield Drive and upgrades to four signalised intersections
- Installation of safety barriers
- Improved bicycle facilities
- Total estimated investment of \$25.2 million
- A potential Public Private Partnership (PPP) will be considered for this project as part of a broader PPP package
- Once funding approved, procurement will take 12 months, detailed design 6 months and construction 18 months.

Following the presentation by Damian and Jay, the project office staff joined us for a very enjoyable lunch. The team spirit of the group was palpable and we were very impressed with the skills and creative approaches they were adopting in their works. I was also impressed by the fact that I met three engineers who were women – a far cry from my own experiences working in the CRB in the 1960s.

After lunch, we boarded a bus provided by the project to view the road network, development and proposed projects in outer western Melbourne. The map below shows the region of the tour and all I can say is that it was a complete surprise to me to see the extent of development in suburbs such as Truganina, Tarneit and Hopper's Crossing. There are serious transport issues for people living in these suburbs in gaining access to public transport. The main roads in these areas have insufficient capacity to accommodate peak hour traffic wishing to park at commuter train stations – and we were told that many of these stations cannot cope with parking demand. VicRoads is working with these communities in playing catch-up to reduce these bottle necks.

This was a wonderful visit, full of interest and hosted by dedicated people and I wish to acknowledge our appreciation to Damien Axentis and his team for giving us a day of their precious time. We propose to have a similar day as this one on Monday 30 October 2017 to VicRoads Metropolitan Projects Eastern. I urge you to come as I am sure you will find it equally as interesting as this one.



The group inspecting Shepherd Bridge works with Damian Van Dyke – fifth from the left.





# CHRISTMAS PARTY

**Monday 5th December 2016.**

This was another great success – great food and great company. I think the pictures speak for themselves.



Chris and Noel Osborne



Jan and Laurie Cahill



Ros Lowe, Ron Muller and Peter Lowe



Lyn and Jeff Briggs



John Ford and Warwick Bull



Bill Brake and Gerry Sharkey





David Dix, Bob Body and Richard Williams



Nick Szwed, Kay and Jim Webber



Peter Lowe, David Rolland and Frank Kwong



Frank and Jan Brown



Howard Hughes, Geoff Symons and Jim Winnett



Ann Green and Annette Willis



# VALE

## Ted Vincent

It is with sadness that I advise you of the passing of one of our members, Ted Vincent.

Ted retired from VicRoads at the end of 2008 as Executive Director of Regional Services and a member of VicRoads' Corporate Management Group, following a career of 40 years with the organisation. Prior to this he had held a number of other senior roles across the organisation including General Manager - Traffic and Transport Integration (and its predecessor Transport and Road Use Management), Project Manager - Eastern Freeway and Regional Manager - Western Victoria. Ted had a strong commitment to always employing the best person for the role and he actively supported women in joining his teams. He was also known for his commitment to mentoring and developing all VicRoads staff through new opportunities.

Ted was a true leader and was respected by everyone with whom he had dealings – both at work and in his other pursuits.

I know many of you will have worked with Ted during his career and I'm sure will share the sentiments of those who have described Ted as someone who was kind, compassionate and humble - one of life's true gentlemen.

I saw Ted fairly regularly as we were both members of a luncheon group. In fact Ted was responsible for sending out the invitations each month and making the bookings with the restaurant. Even though he was severely debilitated he continued with this task and attended the lunch only a few weeks prior to his death. He came along with his carer and although he could not participate in the discussion, it was obvious that he knew what was being discussed and enjoyed the camaraderie right to the last.

It was thought that Ted had Parkinson's Disease but in fact he suffered from a far more severe condition called Multiple System Atrophy (MSA). MSA presents with some of the same symptoms as Parkinson's but its onset is quicker and more severe. Ted had been diagnosed eight years ago and this time span is about the maximum life span. There is no known cure for MSA and management is primarily supportive.

Ted bore his condition stoically and without complaint and he will be greatly missed.

## Sven Eriksson

Sven died on 1 December – a few weeks short of his 80th birthday - after a long illness. Sven was a quietly deliberate man with a gentle sense of humour. He was born in South Africa.

Sven's mother was born in South Africa in the early 1900s. She was a journalist and somehow travelled out here to Australia where she was writing an article about the large sailing boats that traded around the world. Sven's father was the captain of one of these and she prevailed on him to take her on a voyage. According to Sven, one thing led to another and on either this or a subsequent voyage, he was conceived when they were in the Doldrums! His mother wrote a book about her experiences. Ultimately the ship was wrecked on the British Coast around the time of the outbreak of the World War 2. There was quite a scandal about it because the British were so focused on the war effort that little was done to aid this amazing ship - one of the last of this type of trading vessel. After that the family went to live in South Africa. Sven's father died a long time ago but his mother visited Australia often.

Sven was a leader in the CRB's Road Planning Department involved in road and freeway design. He had oversight of a great deal of metropolitan and rural freeway location and design, including the routing of the Western Freeway through the Pentland Hills and through to Ballarat. Tributes from Sven's colleagues refer to his professionalism, ethical behaviour, gentleness and conscientiousness.



## CENTENARY STORIES

I was invited to write the following two stories for Frog and Toad.

### Occupational Health and Safety of a Country Roads Board Stock Inspector

The Country Roads Board employed stock inspectors to ensure that road traffic was not threatened by wandering stock. One of these was Harry Hardingham and this is his story of an incident on 30 July 1969 at 2.45 pm on the Hamilton Highway, three and a half miles east of Mortlake.

He found a three-year-old Hereford heifer on the road and after checking nearby farms he decided to drive her to the pound in Mortlake. She turned into a side lane and he sent his two dogs after her. She returned to the highway but horned both the dogs who took refuge on the back of Harry's utility. It then charged the ute and damaged it at the back. Harry then decided to drive the heifer with his stock whip but she turned and charged him. He took cover behind a cypress and "eventually turned her off with a few good belts over the head with the whip".

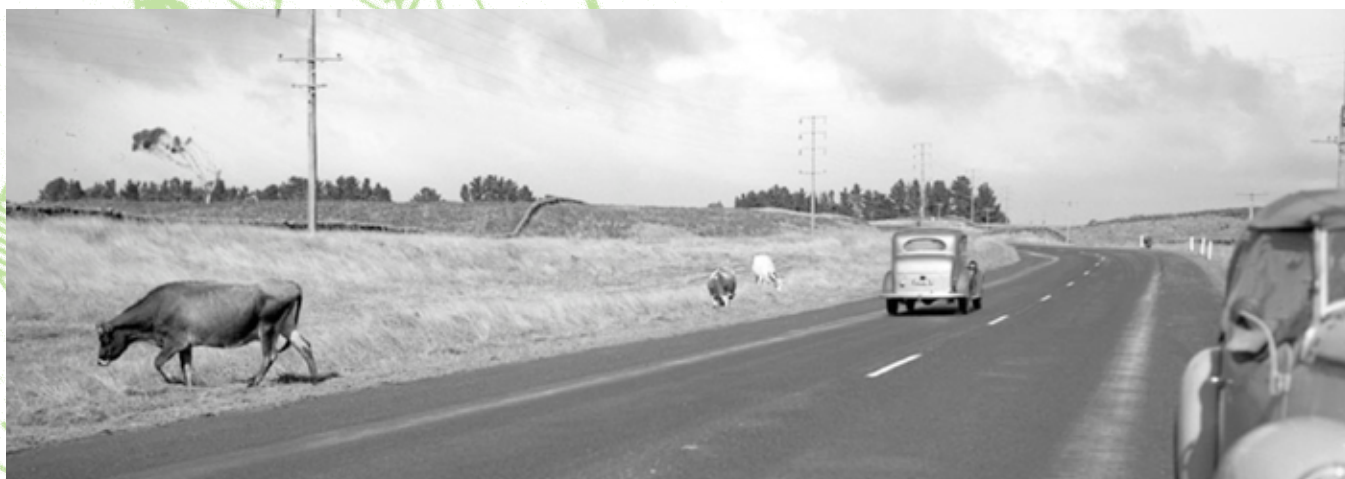
Harry then drove back down the highway to Darlington where he found a Road Patrol gang and they agreed to help Harry – with long handled shovels as protection. When he returned to the scene he found the heifer charging down the hill. She jumped a fence and with three other cattle they stampeded around the paddock like wild things. Harry and Neil McKenzie (one of the patrolmen) entered the paddock on foot to draft the heifer away from the others. Harry told Neil not to be frightened – just hit her on the head with your shovel if he gets too near was the advice given. The heifer charged Neil and as he stepped back, her horn caught the trouser leg and ripped off his trousers. Harry reported: "He suffered no injury to the body but was slightly shocked".

After Neil had got over his fright they decided to try again. Harry nudged the heifer round toward the pound but she charged him again. He said he had to run for his life. "I could feel that she was very close to my back and I took a sudden jump to the left and she cleared me by about two feet." He made it to another tree and the heifer ran off to join other cattle in the field.

Harry then went off to Mortlake Police to see if they would shoot the heifer as a dangerous animal. They consulted with the Terang Police who said that they could not kill the heifer because she was not a bull or a stag under the Permits Act and that it was a matter for the Shire of Mortlake, unless the heifer was injured, diseased, abandoned or decrepit.

Harry left her in the paddock with the other cattle and made further attempts to find the owner of the heifer. He failed but the following morning the heifer had been taken from the paddock by persons unknown. He replaced Neil McKenzie's trousers (for a sum of \$6.50).

Incidentally, on the day before this incident, the Mortlake Shire had to call the police deal with a ferocious bull after it had horned a car into the gutter at the side of a main road in the shire.



1952 – Stray cows on the Princes Highway at Pomboineit



## West Gate Bridge – A Personal Memoir

A crossing of the Yarra River to the west of the city was first considered in 1929. I recall when I was a child, probably in the late forties, coming to Melbourne (from Colac) with my father and we crossed the river on a punt. From memory, this punt plied between Newport and Port Melbourne - guided across the river by a huge chain.

Later studies concluded that a crossing was viable and indeed highly desirable to relieve congestion on the Princes Highway through Footscray. A special authority was formed to supervise the design and construction of the West Gate Bridge and construction started in 1968. The Country Roads Board was responsible for the design and construction of the approach roads on both sides of the bridge. In the 1960s I was a supervising engineer on the bridges on the Tullamarine Freeway and I was then directed to relocate to the Lower Yarra Freeway to commence the construction of the bridges between Williamstown Road and Grieve Parade. I watched West Gate Bridge grow and occasionally I visited the site to chat with a few people I knew working on the project.

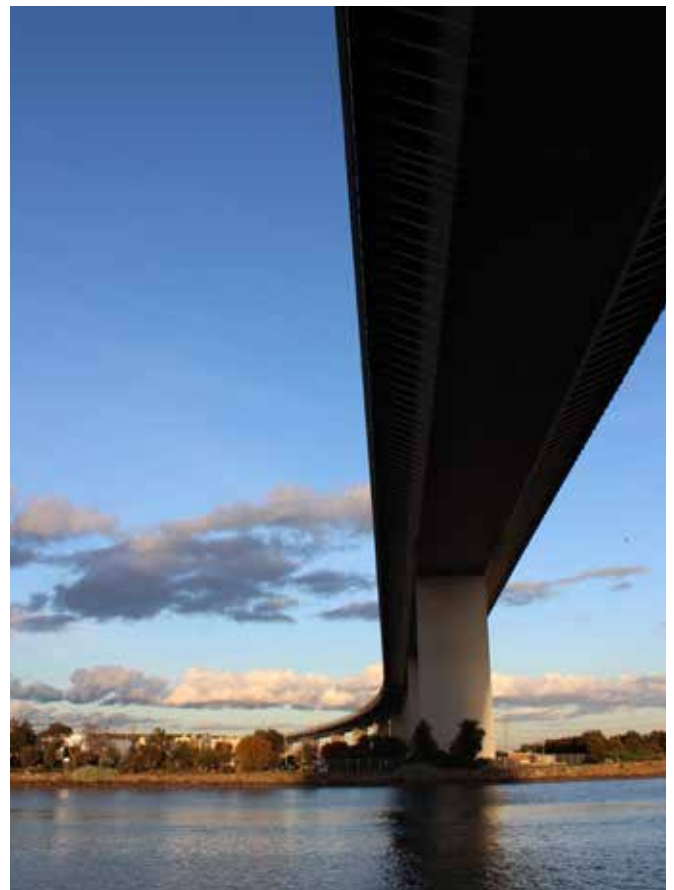
In about June 1970 I was transferred back to Head Office in Kew to manage a bridge design group. I will always remember the day in October 1970, when we were first informed of the collapse of the bridge during construction. I, and all my colleagues, were dumbstruck and a terrible gloom descended on the office. Thirty five men were killed and most times when I cross the bridge – Melbourne's most famous piece of infrastructure – I think of this terrible sacrifice of life. The Royal Commission found that the design (by the English consultants, Freeman Fox) was inadequate and the construction method adopted by the builders was also deficient – both contributing to the collapse.

Then in 1978 I was transferred from the Hume Freeway Project in Seymour to the West Gate Freeway Project to construct test piles for the elevated section of the freeway. I eventually became the Project Manager and had the best office in VicRoads. In 1982, the project team occupied the original West Gate Bridge Authority office for the operation of the bridge and the collection of tolls. As Project Manager, I occupied the General Manager's office, complete with bar, private toilet, and boardroom. Ian Stoney was the CEO of VicRoads at the time and he threatened to kick me out. My office was twice as big as his and more attractively decorated with prints on the walls and a magnificent view overlooking West Gate Bridge. Happily for me, he seemed to forget his threat and I survived there until the end of the project.

West Gate Bridge was finally opened on 15 November 1978. From 16 November 1978 until 29 November 1985 the bridge was operated as a toll facility, with toll booths located near the existing service centres at Todd Road. Between November 1978 and November 1979, 7.5 million vehicles crossed the bridge. The toll for light vehicles was 60c, and slightly higher for heavy/commercial vehicles. It was thought that the income would assist to pay off the bridge within 40 years. However the traffic volume was less than expected and in order to attract more vehicles, the toll was reduced by 10c in early 1979 for regular motorists who bought pre-paid toll vouchers. The toll was further reduced to 45c in October 1979.

The management of the bridge, as well as the financial responsibilities, was transferred to the Country Roads Board in 1982, thus ending the operations of the West Gate Bridge Authority. On 15 November 1985, tolls were abolished and the remaining costs were covered directly by the State Government. If I recall correctly, the abolition of the tolls was mainly a social equity issue as they had a more detrimental effect on users living in the western suburbs – as well as the high cost of collecting the cash tolls. In any case the abolition had a remarkable effect on traffic using the bridge. There was an immediate increase in the order of 30 to 40 per cent and it was sustained.

Could you imagine what Melbourne would be like today if the West Gate Bridge had not been built?







## Bairnsdale Division 1936

The picture below was taken in front of the old 'Tin Shed' on the site of the current office in Bairnsdale.



From left to right are:

McKerral Oxendale – Divisional Engineer's Clerk

Jim Gibbs – Divisional Storeman

Edna Howlett (later Evatt) – Senior Typist

Mavis Williams – Junior Typist

W.H. (Bill) Dolamore – Assistant Divisional Engineer

Frank Jackson – Junior Draughtsman.

Absent were: L.H. Archibald – Divisional Engineer

L.J. Starling – Surveyor, J. Calder – Surveyor

H. Baggs – Chainman and R.E. Baade – Driver.

Bill Dolamore and Frank Jackson served during the Second World War and were captured by the Japanese and survived the horrors of prisoners of war in Changi.



## NEWS FROM OUR MEMBERS

### Peter McCullough

I was interested to read the account by Kerras Burke of his father's experience in Mesopotamia (now Iraq) in World War One. As Kerras says, it is a little known theatre of what was known as The Great War.

My father (John McCullough) enlisted in the British army at 18 and became a member of "257c Siege Battery of the Royal Garrison of Artillery." After a short time at Dulally in India to acclimatise, he was posted away to Mesopotamia.



Acclimatising in India – John McCullough on the right

The Arabs have a saying about Mesopotamia: "When Allah made Hell, he did not find it bad enough, so he made Mesopotamia as well." Few among the thousands of British and Indian troops who had the misfortune to serve there between 1914 and 1918 would disagree with that sentiment. "Mespot", as it was known, quickly became a byword for misery and mismanagement on a scale not seen since the Crimean War. The pendulum campaign, born out of a need to protect Britain's oil supply through the Persian Gulf, began well with the capture of Basra in November 1914, and the defeat of the Turkish counter offensive in the following spring. But within months an over-ambitious British force, led by the incompetent Sir Charles Townshend, had fallen victim to "mission creep" culminating in a humiliating surrender at Kut-al-Amara on 29 April 1916. Over 13,000 troops were taken prisoner. While Townshend himself was treated by his Turkish captors with lavish hospitality, his troops were subjected to barbaric treatment; a remarkable two thirds of this group died while being marched into captivity.

It took nine months and a large number of reinforcements for the British to recover sufficiently to renew their offensive. Under the far more competent Sir Frederick Maude, the British successfully fought the second battle of Kut-al-Amara on 22-23 February and on 11 March 1917, they entered Baghdad. This opened the way for the oilfields at Mosul.

Conditions for the troops in Mesopotamia were terrible with the extreme heat -120F degrees was common together with hordes of flies and mosquitoes. The food was poor - generally rice and prunes with a little bit of jam on the rice. A consequence of this was that I grew up in a home where rice was never served.

The conditions notwithstanding, the British troops (unless circumstances intervened) were issued with two bottles of beer a week. As my father was a teetotaler he found that he always had plenty of friends when the beer ration was coming around.

From Baghdad the troops moved to Samarra, 80 miles to the north, where they dug in and fought both the Turks and the Germans. It was a very mixed group and included the Blackwatch and Seaforth Highlanders, Northumberland Fusiliers and Gurkhas. Centered on the east bank of the Tigris River, traces of settlement at Samarra date back to around 5,500 B.C. The valley between the Tigris and the Euphrates is sometimes referred to as "the cradle of civilization"; it was the first region to establish a form of writing and coinage. It gave us mathematics and geometry and, perhaps most important of all, it was where the wheel was invented.



Troops on the move in Mesopotamia



In view of the circumstances of his "visit" and his age (20 by now) I doubt whether my father was able to absorb much of the culture Samarra had to offer. However, always a keen swimmer, he never missed an opportunity to have a swim in the Tigris. Although he found this refreshing the number of dead horses floating down from further upstream was a little off-putting. Most of the troops were not impressed with the idea and referred to the Tigris as "typhoid soup." A spell or two in hospital with fever notwithstanding, my father's only long-term legacy from a couple of years in Mesopotamia was deafness; perhaps an inevitable legacy if your name was preceded by "Gunner."

As a footnote, Samarra was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 2007. Although often referred to as the largest archaeological site in the world, it has suffered considerable destruction in the past decade due to the hostility between Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims. Even the Golden Mosque of Samarra was badly damaged. To make matters worse the city was attacked by ISIL forces in June 2014; this was repulsed but not without further destruction. Samarra has much to offer for tourism - but not just for the moment.



The Mosque in Bagdad 1917

After the occupation of Bagdad, the Mesopotamian campaign dragged on for another 19 months until Turkey's surrender in October 1918. In the meantime the Germans had broken through at Cambrai and it was panic stations on the Western Front. Large numbers of soldiers were placed in the French Draft and departed Mesopotamia. En route they stopped at the Suez Canal camp at Kintarra where my father noticed a soldier wearing the soldier patch of the Royal Irish Fusiliers. This was his brother's regiment and led to an unlikely reunion of the two brothers when the British army had millions of men in uniform.





# TRIVIA AND DIDACTIC WHIMSIES

## The Portraitist

Murphy was a gifted artist specializing in portraiture. His fame spread and he was widely known for his skill in capturing not only the likeness, but also the essence, of the people he painted. He was used to people approaching him to commission a portrait.

A young, attractive woman arrived at his house recently and requested him to paint her in the nude. Murphy was slightly non-plussed because he had never had such a request before. However the woman suggested a payment of \$20,000 – which was about four times his usual fee. So Murphy, not wanting to cause any marital strife, thought he should consult with his wife, and so he asked the young lady to wait a while so that he could confer with his wife.

After a few minutes he returned. "It would be a great pleasure to paint your portrait," he said. "My wife thinks it is in order to paint you in the nude, but she has asked me to keep my socks on so that I have somewhere to wipe my brushes."

## English Fuel Consumption

### A friend from England sent me these facts.

If you had purchased £1,000 of shares in Delta Airlines one year ago, you would have £49.00 today. If you had purchased £1,000 of shares in AIG insurance company five years ago, you would have £33.00 today. If you had purchased £1,000 of shares in Lehman Brothers nine years ago, you would have nothing today. If you had purchased £1,000 of shares in Northern Rock seven years ago, you would have nothing today.

But, if you had purchased £1,000 worth of beer five years ago, drunk all the beer, then taken the aluminium cans to the scrap metal dealer, you would have received £214.00.

Based on the above, the best current investment plan is to drink heavily & recycle.

A recent study found that the average Briton walks about 900 miles a year. Another study found that Britons drink, on average, 22 gallons of alcohol a year. That means that, on average, Britons get about 41 miles to the gallon!

Makes you proud to be British!





## The Fukuoka Sinkhole

A giant sinkhole suddenly opened up outside the Fukuoka Railway station in Southern Japan, cutting off power, water and gas supply to the area. Reconstructing the road was no easy feat — the massive cave-in near the city's busy Hakata station, had muddy underground water flowing into the hole. The cause of the collapse has been linked to ongoing subway construction nearby. Work on repairing the hole commenced immediately and the road was reopened within a week..



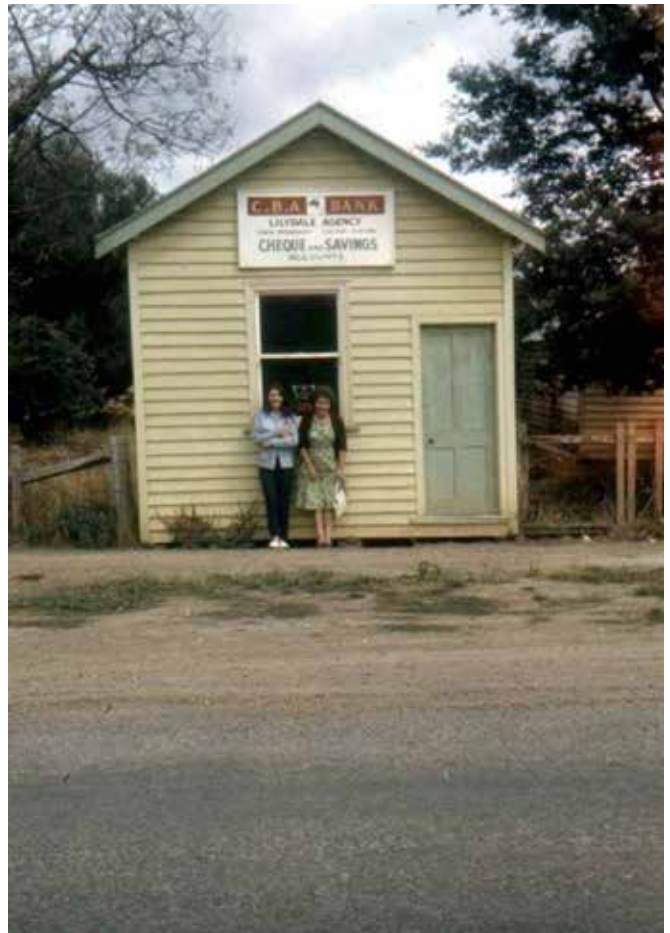




## Blast from the Past



Brunswick Street, Fitzroy North - 1944



The Commonwealth Bank at Lilydale in the late 1960s



Service we don't see today

## Shingles

I am making the (perhaps) cheeky assumption that many of you are over 70. I have just had a shingles vaccine shot and discovered that it is free if you are between the ages of 70 - 79. You may be aware of this. Otherwise, it will cost you \$255. It is still possible to catch shingles after the injection, although the symptoms will be much less severe.

Our secretary Jim Webber recently suspected he had shingles and went along to his GP. Even though he had the condition he had the injection and he said that it cleared up within a week.

So if you are eligible, think seriously about it. Keep well!

STU00584 09.16 Authorised and published by VicRoads, 60 Denmark Street, Kew, Victoria, 3101.

