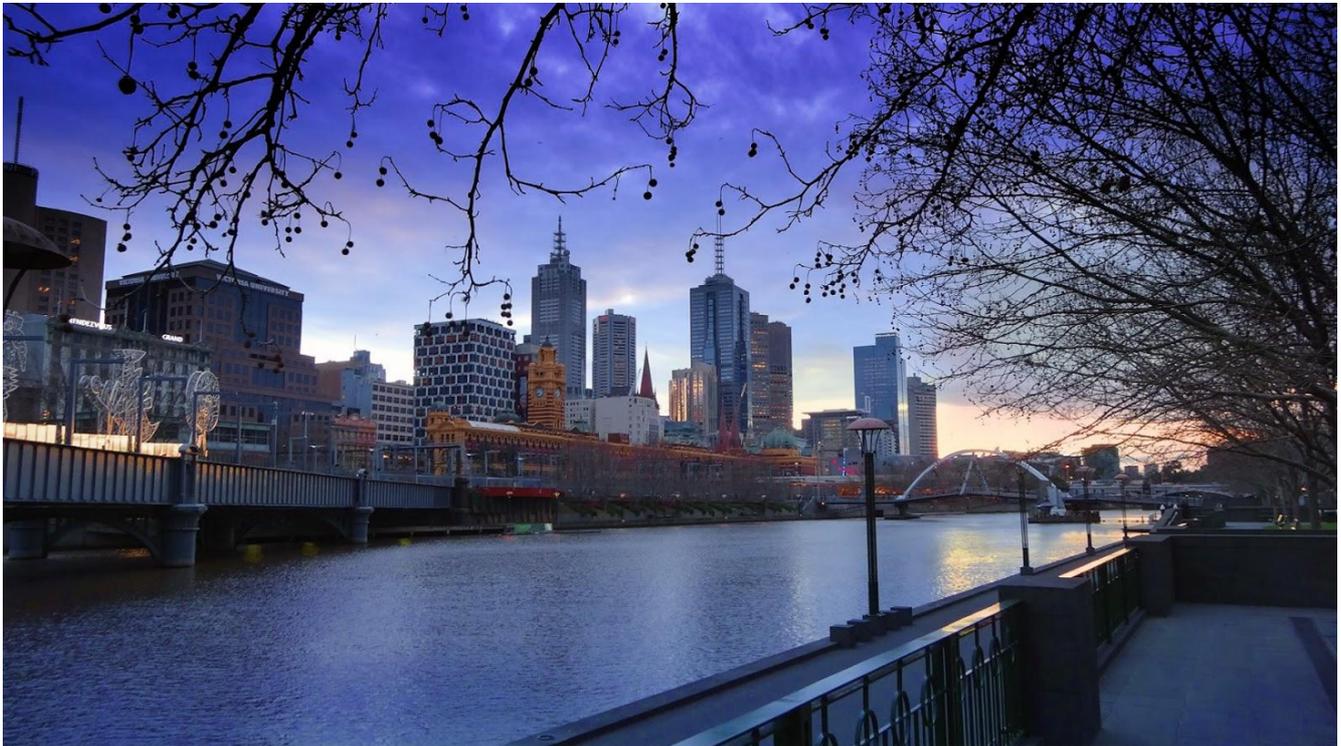


President & Editor: John Wright – Mob: 0408 593 570 ananasw@gmail.com
Secretary: Jill Earnshaw – Mob: 0438 777 352 jillmearnshaw@gmail.com

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. Cost of membership is a once only fee of \$50. Enquiries about membership or receipt of the Newsletter by e-mail should be directed to the Secretary, VicRoads Association, by phone or e-mail as shown above. Visit our website at <https://vicroadsassociation.org>



Dear Members

No need to remind anybody that it is mid-winter. We have just passed the winter solstice and the days will be getting longer again. One of our members declared that winter was the best time of the year. I am sure there are many skiers who would heartily agree with him.

Something that continues to impress me is the level of camaraderie and the desire to maintain connectedness that persists amongst retirees. My wife and I recently attended Buoy Pizza¹ in Kew to meet former workmates in a small group managed by Sandra Torpey. Arriving early, we saw only one person at our usual table and sat down to chat. He looked familiar, and he thought I did, too. But when I asked him which part of VicRoads he came from, he told me he was from another retired government group and was waiting for his former workmates.

While the VicRoads Association (VRA) now has 314 members, it is dwarfed by at least two Facebook Groups of former CRB/RCA/MRB/VicRoads employees that collectively number 3,450 members. To be fair, some members belong to multiple groups, including the VRA. The Facebook groups, which host wonderful collections of photographs and stories, are open to all ex-employees. They are:

- *Country Roads Board (CRB) / RCA /VicRoads History.* This group, which was originally started by Jim Gascoigne and is now administered by Nathan Salter, Bill Atkinson and Thomas James, has 2,909 members.

¹ Formerly La Porchetta in Walpole Street. Venue of many enjoyable VicRoads lunches.

- *VicRoads/RTA/MRB*. This group is administered by VRA Committee Member Allison Pinto and has 471 members. Like the VRA, Allison's group has regular luncheons and dinners.
- *Jim the Road Worker CRB Bairnsdale Division*. This group is administered by Jim Gascoigne and has 52 members. It is Jim's history from when he started working on roads in far east Gippsland in 1960 and also contains comments, stories and photos from other road workers.
- *CRB/RCA/VicRoads Former Workers*. This group is administered by Darren Cooper and had 28 members. It is for former employees and contractors who wish to keep in contact and share memories.

While I appreciate that some retirees have reservations about using Facebook, it does provide access to an amazing range of special interest areas, such as local community news, town and regional histories (including *I grew up in ...*), old railways and mines, prospecting, and so on.

In this edition we report on our mid-year luncheon and the outstanding 14 July visit to the TAC Road to Zero facility at the Melbourne Museum. We salute Nick Szwed's efforts in creating and maintaining the VRA's website; tell another vehicle theft story – this one about cars stolen for scrap metal; and present David Jellie's story of his early days in Dandenong Division and his efforts to prepare cover designs for the CRB magazine RoadLines. Lastly, there is a further episode of my work odyssey – this one describing the CRB's desperate efforts to secure land for the construction of the Hampton Park Project, over 50 years ago.

WHAT'S COMING UP?

Our 2025 event calendar

Date	Event	Contact Person
Monday 4 August	From 12 noon. Occasional Lunch, Doncaster Shoppingtown Hotel	Just turn up
Monday 25 August	Guided tour of the Hellenic Museum at 280 William Street in the city followed by lunch at the Mint Hotel	Patsy Kennedy Kennedp54@hotmail.com
Monday 15 September	French Impressionism Exhibition at NGV, 180 St Kilda Road, Melbourne, followed by lunch at Young and Jacksons Hotel.	Jim Webber. jameswebber1717@gmail.com
Monday 6 October	12 noon. Occasional Lunch, Doncaster Shoppingtown Hotel	Just turn up
Thursday 9 October - Friday 10 October	Regional Visit to Ballarat with a roads presentation on Thursday afternoon followed by dinner at the Ballarat Leagues Club. Friday presentation and tour of Alstom Train factory in Ballarat followed by dinner at the Ballarat Golf Club.	Jill Earnshaw jillmearnshaw@gmail.com
Friday 31 October	Annual Golf Day Green Acres Golf Club, East Kew	Jim Webber jameswebber1717@gmail.com
Monday 3 November	From 12 noon. Occasional Lunch, Doncaster Shoppingtown Hotel	Just turn up
Thursday 11 December	From 12 noon. Christmas lunch at Waverley RSL	Ken Vickery kenvickery@tpg.com.au

Guided tour of the Hellenic Museum. Monday 25 August

The Hellenic Museum is an art and history museum celebrating ancient and contemporary Greece. Housed in the former Royal Mint building at 280 William Street, Melbourne, it is one you may not have visited before and perfect for a short, guided tour. You will enjoy a bit of exploration and culture before a friendly lunch gathering.

Members and friends wishing to join the tour should gather at 11.15 am before an 11.30 am start

As this will involve 1-2 small group guided tours, I suggest registering early. The tour runs for one hour and costs \$15 (GST inclusive) per person (concession). The ticket entry also covers entry to the Museum's exhibitions which can be explored independently either before or following the conclusion of the tour.

The collection is well presented, with a mixture of old and more modern items, including photography, Olympic torches with their stories and sculptures.

The museum is located directly opposite the Flagstaff Railway Station and is easily accessible. The Route 58 tram stops directly outside the museum on William Street and the number 30 and 35 tram stops are at the corner of La Trobe and William streets. Paid parking is available next to the Hellenic Museum in the Mint car park. Taxi and Uber drop-off points are located right out the front of the museum on William Street.

Our guided tour will be followed by lunch at the nearby Mint Hotel, 318 William Street, Melbourne

Please register with: Patsy Kennedy, kennedp54@hotmail.com and also advise whether you will be joining us for lunch.

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING?

Tour of TAC Road to Zero Facility at the Melbourne Museum – 14 July – by Jill Earnshaw

Well, it might have been a winter's day but the sun shone and a fun and informative time was shared by those who attended our July visit to the Traffic Accident Commission's (TAC) Road to Zero facility at the Melbourne Museum.



Road To Zero coordinator Eva Jaworski welcoming our group in the TAC Learning Studio



The facility was established as part of a package of TAC funding provided over seven years ago when it was identified that young risk takers, in particular, were no longer responding to the TAC's trauma advertising methods. The facility focuses on educating Year 9-12 students about all aspects of the safe system approach to road safety. It brings to life the physics of road safety and the principles of effective public health campaigns, highlighting our physical vulnerability as humans and exploring the impact of safe speeds, road design, vehicle choices and road user behaviours. It features the latest visual and digital technology and everyone certainly got involved in trying out all the interactive exhibits.

In addition to visitors to the facility the TAC also runs a Year 6 program, based on students being safe, independent journey planners ahead of starting secondary school, school holiday

programs onsite and Road Smart Interactive, an immersive road safety education program that goes out to Victorian schools. In total the facility and its associated programs have benefitted around 500,000 students and visitors since opening in 2018.

The facility also gets lots of interest from interstate and overseas visitors. Part of the space is open to the public and is well worth a visit when you, family or friends are next at the Melbourne Museum. For further information visit www.roadtozero.vic.gov.au

The visit was followed by a convivial lunch in nearby Lygon Street, Carlton.



Lunch at La Spaghetтата in Lygon Street, Carlton. From L to R. Irene Moser, Joan Gilmer, Patsy Kennedy, Martin Habgood, Iris Whittaker, Ross Paul, Claire Flowers, John Wright, Rosslyn Wright, Greg Kemp, David Jellie, John Scully, Ian Theile, Jill Earnshaw. Photographer Nick Szwed.

Ps. For those who remember working in the Exhibition Building, the main Road to Zero exhibition space is housed in what used to be a large storage area for the museum and a very old, partly completed tunnel between the museum and the Exhibition Building (apparently the tunnellers struck very hard rock).

Mid-Year Luncheon

On 30 June, 27 members and partners attended our mid-year luncheon at the Waverley RSL Club.



From L to R. John Lidell, Gerry Turner, David Jellie, Howard Hughes, Gary House, Graham Gilpin, Jim Webber, Gernot Schubert, Robin Schubert, Iris Whittaker.



From L to R. Rosslyn Wright, John Wright, Graeme Stone, Ken Sinclair, Jenny Stone, Jan Brown, Frank Brown



From L to R. Richard Bortko, Bruce Thompson, David Williamson, Kevin Mintern-Lane, Linda Vickery, Ken Vickery, Raj Ramalingam, Allison Pinto, Doug Thompson (obscured)



From L to R. Nick Szwed, Raj Ramalingam, Allison Pinto, Doug Thompson, Richard Bortko, Bruce Thompson, David Williamson, Kevin Mintern-Lane

MEMBER COMMENT AND NEWS

From Ray Nicholas

Hi John

I have just turned 92 years old and I'm fine and well, thank you.

Congratulations on being President of VicRoads Association. I very much enjoy getting emails of the Association and especially news of the old members of VicRoads.

I started work with the Country Roads Board in February 1959. At that time two sections of the CRB -Plans and Survey and the Bridge Design sections operated in the 'tin sheds' behind the Royal Exhibition Building in Carlton. I worked in both. In Plans and Surveys, Mac Wilkinson and Noel Anderson were my mentors.



Ray. About 5 years ago.

Around 1994 VicRoads offered a package of early retirement to its employees, and as I was 61 years old, I took the opportunity to retire. Roger Thorp took over my position and I briefly worked as a consultant to him after Dandenong Division moved to Lakeside Drive in Burwood.

In 2002 my wife Shirley died of cancer. Shirley and I raised four children, three daughters and a son. I did not remarry but I have eight grandchildren and five great grandchildren and a dog to enjoy. I also play golf and squash once a week and enjoy my garden.

In 1961, when the CRB moved to 60 Denmark Street Kew I was appointed Engineer class 2 on road construction works located at Kinglake, Yea, Whittlesea and later for a short time at the start of the freeway section at Dromana.

During my time in Dandenong Division, I reported to Howard Ellis and Merv Williams, who was a very good squash player. I was also interested in squash at that time and joined a team comprising Merv, Bill Peyton and David Rowland.

I found daily travel to the Dromana Project was too much for me, and in June 1973 I applied for and was appointed to the position of Engineer Class 3 under Ian Rennick at Head Office, which was much closer to my home in Mitcham. I continued in this position when Noel McFadyen became Right of Way Engineer after Ian retired. Trevor Moore and Roger Thorp were assisting me at the time.

The VicRoads Association Website – by Jill Earnshaw

Nearly 10 years ago, before Nick Szwed joined the VRA Committee, he decided that it would be worthwhile to have a VicRoads Retirees website. He already had some initial material to share as he had always kept various documents throughout his career and, as we know, to this day, he always carries a camera with him. As we record every year in our President's Annual Report, we are very grateful to Nick for his visual recording of people and gatherings over the years.

Nick knew that Eddie Schubert, another of our members, had access to a lot of the old records, so after talking to him, they spent many hours searching through the archives online. Eddie saved many, many photos and documents and sent them to Nick who then set up the website and started to post the material.



<https://vicroadsassociation.org/>

Gradually, people became aware of the site and gave Nick additional material to scan and post. That's when the VRA Committee asked Nick to join the Committee.

Nick has spent an incredible amount of time on the website and it is all his own work. The only assistance he has had is from Eddie and the various people who have lent him documents to scan or, in more recent times, written their stories. Nick has scanned thousands of documents.

He has two scanners including one that can scan A3 documents (essential to scan the large magazines). More recently he has had some assistance from Patsy Kennedy, another of our Committee Members.

The website gets thousands of views every year and has a regular stream of hits from all over the world.

Our People

A few years ago, Nick thought it would be good idea to document people's personal stories, which is oral history, an initiative Nick and a historian colleague had already got involved in for their High School website.

Nick has put together most of the stories on the Our People page of the website. We are extremely grateful to Nick and those that have contributed their stories to date. If you haven't been on to the Association's website, www.vicroadsassociation.org before or not for a while please do so. It is an amazing collection of material and sure to bring back lots of memories of people and events.

Have a particular look at the Our People page. Whilst a few people have recorded their story in a lot of depth, why not even send us a couple of paragraphs about yourself and what you were

involved in and remember during your time with VicRoads and its predecessor organisations. A great winter project for us all.

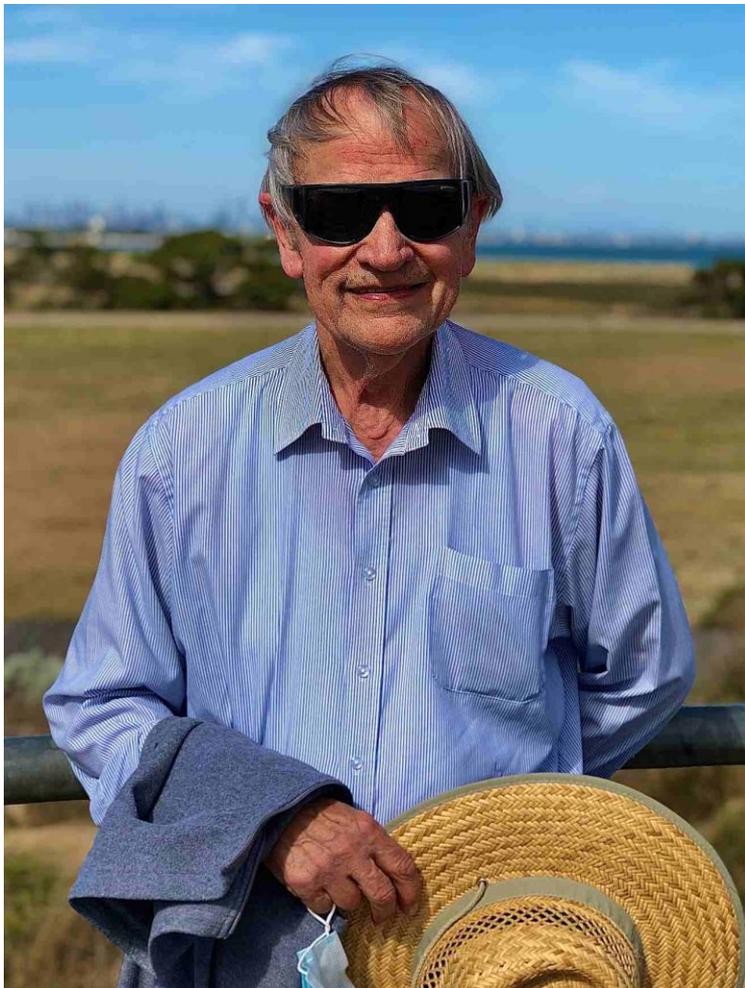
All members are encouraged to get involved.

Anyone interested in contributing their personal stories to the website (and/or the Newsletter), or helping out by volunteering a few hours to work Nick and assist with scanning, collating material, gathering personal stories, etc. please contact Committee members Patsy Kennedy on kennedyp54@hotmail.com or Allison Pinto on allison.pinto@hotmail.com

Vale Bob Ungers

We have been advised of the recent death of Bob Ungers, who would have been well known to our members who worked in Road Safety in VicRoads and for the Road Safety and Traffic Authority.

Bob Ungers was appointed as Executive Officer in the newly established Road Safety Research Section, Commonwealth Department of Shipping and Transport, in February 1971.



That Section commissioned, analysed and summarised 25 literature reviews on various areas of road safety, on behalf of the Expert Group on Road Safety.

The Expert Group reported to the Minister in October 1972, on Road Safety in Australia, a National Review which was the first comprehensive review of its type. Bob was a major contributor to the drafting of that report.

At the end of the 1970s the Department was shifting to Canberra. Bob was appointed Secretary, Victorian Road Safety and Traffic Authority (RoSTA) where Peter Vulcan had been Chairman, since 1976. They were joined by Peter Milne, as Manager Road User Division, in 1980.

All three were appointed to the Road Traffic Authority when it was formed in 1983. Bob Ungers and Peter Milne became part of VicRoads in about 1989, while Peter Vulcan became founding Director, Monash University Accident Research Centre, in 1987.

Over the last two decades Bob and Peter have been editing research reports for the Australian Road Research Board. Bob was a much liked and highly competent administrator, and an excellent wordsmith. He will be greatly missed by all.

With thanks to Dr Peter Vulcan and Peter Milne for their contribution to this article.

End of Life Vehicles – Theft for Scrap - by John Wright

In Newsletter 265 I described the largely successful national efforts to curtail the ‘rebirthing’ of stolen cars in the late 1990s. In this Newsletter I would like to talk about a different but widespread form of car theft that subsequently became a national problem between 2003 and 2010.

When the Beijing National Stadium was being constructed in preparation for the 2008 Summer Olympics, its design, inspired by Chinese ceramics, used steel beams to hide supports for its retractable roof: giving the stadium the appearance of a bird's nest and its unofficial title.



About 120,000 tonnes of steel were used in its construction, and while official sources claim it all came from China, there was a belief in some circles that much of the steel originated in Australia and that part of it was melted-down motor vehicles that had been stolen and sold for their scrap metal value². Some Australian viewers of the 2008 Games could well have been looking at the last resting place of their missing vehicles.

What was happening in the early to late 2000s was that thousands of older vehicles were being stolen off the street and sold to parts dismantlers and scrap metal dealers who were paying cash with no questions asked³. At the same time, professional thieves who were mining stolen cars for their parts, were safely disposing of the stripped body shells via friendly parts dismantlers who were happy to convert them into anonymous metal bales for collection by major metal recyclers.

In 2010 the National Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council (NMVTRC) engaged me to conduct interviews and prepare a report on the vehicle recycling industry.

The study was an eye-opener. I discovered that vehicle recycling was a huge national business, with an estimated 608,000 ELVs being recycled in 2008-2009. My brief required me to interview police, registration authorities, parts dismantlers and metal recyclers across Eastern Australia. I heard some fascinating stories.

There are three distinct tiers of vehicle recyclers. Tier 3 is comprised of smaller parts dismantlers who buy and strip vehicles and on-sell the shells to Tier 2 recyclers. Tier 2 recyclers are usually larger companies that collect all scrap metal, including vehicle shells from Tier 3 dismantlers, and on-sell it in bins or bales to Tier 1 recyclers. The small number of Tier 1 recyclers operate capital intensive metal shredding equipment and on-sell much of their end product to metal suppliers.

² These thieves were possibly motivated by scrap steel prices that were as high as \$400/tonne in 2005.

³ In 2005, the National Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council (NMVTRC) estimated that 3,500 cars were lost to ‘theft for scrap’ rackets, with some stakeholders suggesting twice that number.

During the study, reputable Tier 3 parts dismantlers told me they adhered to strict recycling protocols for decommissioning End-of-Life Vehicles (ELV's). They remove saleable, non-ferrous scrap metal including catalytic converters; LPG cylinders and batteries (which are an explosion hazard to Tier 1 scrap metal recyclers), drain fuel tanks, engines, gearboxes, brake and cooling systems, and capture air conditioning gases using specialist decommissioning equipment.

Competing against the reputable Tier 3 dismantlers were 'cowboy' dismantlers, who Police told me would enter Australia on short term visas to operate clandestine dismantling businesses on rented industrial land to process mainly stolen vehicles. Ignoring environmental concerns and keeping no records, their main business was packing outbound (and supposedly empty) shipping containers⁴ with engines, transmissions, and sometimes entire high-end vehicles that often ended up in Africa or the Middle East, where they were always in high demand⁵.

Tier 1 metal recyclers eventually refused to accept crushed car bodies from dodgy Tier 3 operators, after major explosions from uninstalled gas tanks in baled car bodies caused serious damage to their shredding machinery.



Baled car bodies arriving at a Tier 1 metal recycler in Blacktown NSW in 2010

Victoria Police (VicPol) told me about a western suburbs Lexus owner who was in serious financial difficulties and decided to make a bogus insurance claim on his car. He found a car thief who promised to make his car disappear but urged him to delay notifying the Police until he had dismantled the car and sold the parts.

Not satisfied with selling the expensive parts, the thief also decided to collect on the scrap value of the stripped car body. When it turned up in a wrecker's yard, the proprietor noticed that all the car's identifiers had been removed and contacted the Police, who took it away to conduct forensic tests. Identifying the vehicle about two weeks later, the Police were curious that the vehicle had not been reported as stolen and were pondering this fact when its owner telephoned in a state of agitation to say that it had been stolen from him on the previous night.... (Oops).

⁴ Port authorities did not routinely x-ray outgoing containers.

⁵ VicPol told me that some of these operators were processing up to 200 vehicles per week to fill 2 to 3 containers worth \$17,000 apiece in a week. Police told me they had arranged for the interception of a ship bound for Lebanon. It was loaded with containers full of stolen engines and other parts.

Both VicPol and municipalities in Melbourne and Sydney told me that scrap metal thieves' were mainly targeting abandoned vehicles. Councils, usually acting on householder complaints, would affix coloured stickers to abandoned vehicles before identifying them and contacting their owners.

ABANDONED VEHICLE NOTICE
IF THIS VEHICLE IS NOT REMOVED IT WILL BE DEEMED ABANDONED AND TAKEN INTO CUSTODY.

Year: _____ Make: _____ Color: _____ Model: _____
License No.: _____ VIN: _____

This Notice Affixed on: _____ 20 _____ at _____ AM
PM
This vehicle may be taken into custody and stored at the owners expense or scrapped if not removed by: _____ 20 _____ at _____ AM
PM

This vehicle is located on **PRIVATE PROPERTY**. If the vehicle is not removed or repaired by the date and time specified above, it shall be impounded. You may be billed a service fee and charged for storage.

This vehicle is located on **PUBLIC PROPERTY**. If the vehicle is not removed from public property by the date and time specified above it shall be impounded.

Inspector: _____ Phone: _____ Complaint #: _____
Officer: _____ #: _____ Phone: _____ Incident #: _____

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THIS MATTER, CALL THE NUMBER NOTED ABOVE

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It turned out that the brightly coloured stickers were a valuable aid for scrap metal thieves, who would cruise the streets in broad daylight in flatbed trucks, looking for vehicles bearing them.

Nobody noticed the removals. Householders believed the vehicles had been towed away by the councils, and the councils believed they had been reclaimed by their owners, which was after all, the intention of the sticker. These

vehicles were therefore often stolen twice - firstly by a joy rider and then by a scrap metal thief. Because they were quickly baled and shredded, they remained forever on the unrecovered lists.

Some thieves were very brazen. NSW Police told me about an expensive truck and dog combination that was stolen while its operators were having lunch in a café. The thieves immediately drove the combination to a nearby metal recycler, where they were paid in cash (with no details being asked or given) by an unbelievably credulous receiving clerk. The plant manager saw the combination and immediately called the Police, who had only just spoken to the vehicle's worried owners.

Queensland Transport told me that scrap thieves were also targeting Random Breath Testing sites at night, stealing vehicles left behind by intoxicated drivers after the testing unit had moved on. After several complaints, Police set up a hidden camera and recorded a local operator removing the vehicles with a tow truck.

In the early 2000s all States and Territories had introduced laws requiring parts dismantlers acquiring vehicles aged 15 years or less to record and submit their details to the road transport authority. Part of my brief was to see if it was feasible to extend these laws to cover *all* vehicles received by parts dismantlers.

My interviews revealed that these laws were being largely ignored by parts dismantlers in NSW and Victoria – where the bulk of the thefts were occurring, for the simple reason they were costly for recyclers to administer, and more importantly for them – neither State was enforcing the notification laws applying to them.

My report, which the NMVTRC agreed with in 2010, concluded that extending the notification requirements would not be viable, as the costs would probably exceed the benefits and criminals could easily bypass it. Since that time, new Fair-Trading legislation in all jurisdictions has imposed stricter controls on metal recyclers, banning cash payments⁶ for buyers and sellers, and requiring proof of ID and address. In addition, the price for scrap steel has plummeted since 2005 to such an extent that much of the incentive for theft for scrap has gone.

⁶ All scrap metal dealers in Victoria are prohibited from paying or receiving cash when they buy or sell scrap metal. They can only buy or sell scrap with a non-transferable cheque or an electronic funds transfer, excluding e-currency. When buying scrap metal, a dealer is required to record several details, including the name, address and identification of the seller.

Drawing adventures in 1968 - by David Jellie

In 1968, I was barely back from two and a half years living in England. We had just bought a run-down Victorian house in Canterbury and every weekend I spent up a ladder – inside and out – repairing, renovating and extending it. It was to continue into the next millennium as our family grew. I have told my children never to repeat my experience. Weekends are for recreation, not working, especially when you are not skilled in any of the sciences of carpentry, electricity, roofing and plumbing. At the time, I thought I had done a reasonable job.

I was working in Dandenong Division then, duplicating the Burwood Highway at Ferntree Gully and upgrading the Dandenong Tourist Road. I enjoyed the work and learnt a lot especially from my overseer, George Strug. I also accumulated a lot of rhododendron, azalea and camellia plants from the nurseries in the area and these were planted in our garden in Canterbury with great success. Many of them were mature plants that were displaced from the nurseries affected by the new road alignment on the tourist road, and the nursey men were great advisers on how they should be managed.

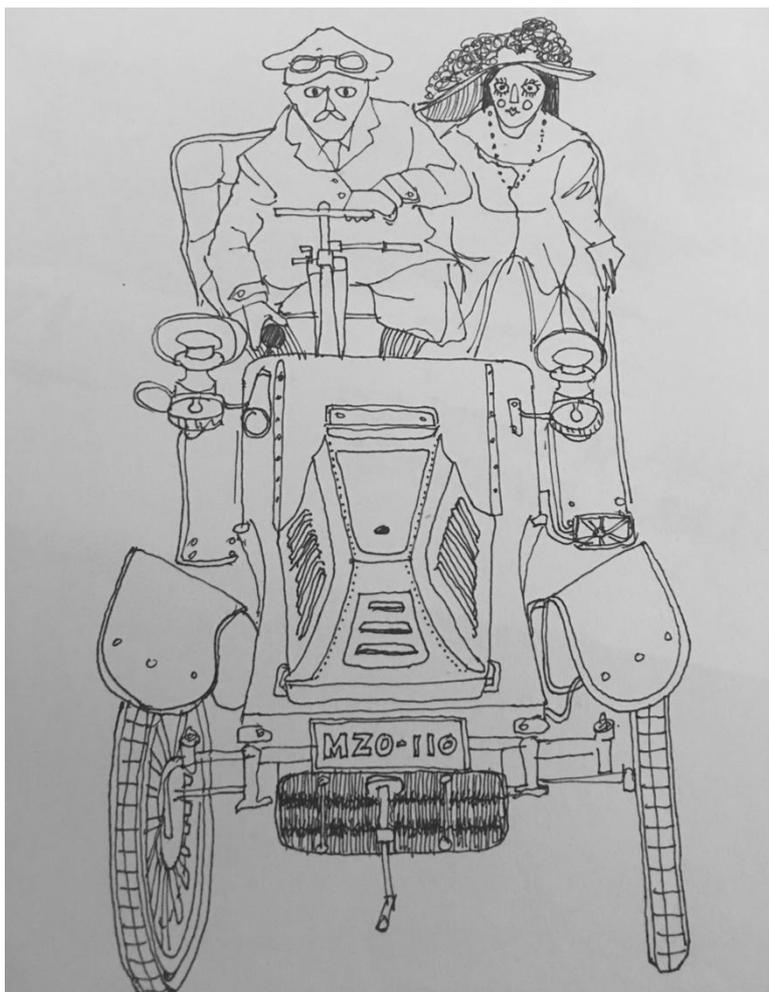
I was provided with a CRB car to assist me in this work. I drove out to the sites each day and occasionally I would call in to the Nunawading office to attend a meeting or to prepare reports.

Now, it is no secret that I enjoyed drawing then – more than I do now. This is not due to a lack of

desire. Rather, it is more because of my shaking hands and poor eyesight. But in those days, I spent three or four nights a week drawing, just for fun. Friends would ask me to draw invitations and cards for them which I did willingly.

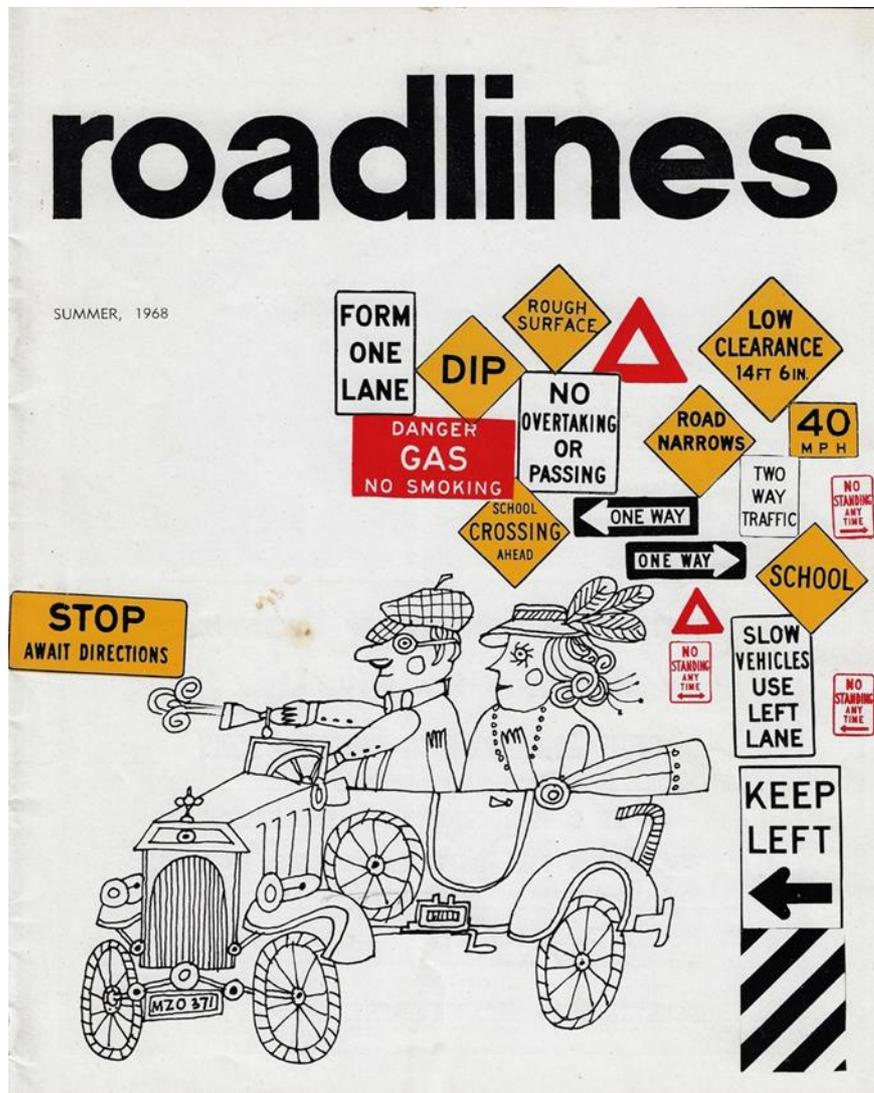
In fact, it did lead to a commission 20 years later when I illustrated a book for a Norwegian friend. It was about Australia but it was written in Norwegian. I still have a copy of it. I did not charge Elsa for my drawings but she said Norwegian law dictated that artists had to be paid for their work and I was fairly handsomely paid by the publishing firm.

Roadlines was the CRB's in-house magazine at that time and one of the editing team asked me if I would like to illustrate a cover for it – and I said I would give it a go. I looked at the covers of earlier editions and they were pretty conservative and colourless, so I thought I would do something bright and quirky. I wanted to shake the old girl up a bit. I have always loved the romance and nostalgia of veteran cars so I thought I would make that my theme.



My first cover for Roadlines - drawn in ink from a photograph.

I did an ink drawing copied from a photograph of a veteran car shown on the previous page. The car's number plate was the same as the one I drove at work – very subtle! However, I wanted a coloured cover and didn't like the prospect of colouring in the drawing, so drew another one. This was far more stylised and I surrounded the car with the small adhesive road sign stickers used at work on engineering drawings to indicate where the road signs had to be located. It was certainly more colourful.



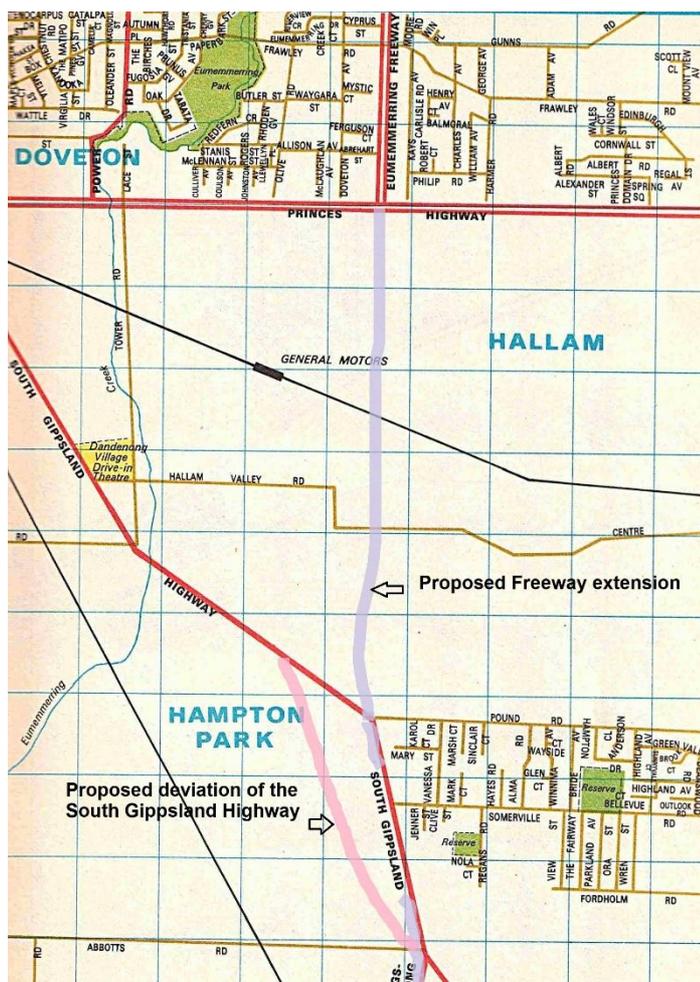
My second cover - drawn in ink.

Observant readers will notice that the registration number on the car has changed but that was because I was allocated a new car during this process.

Initially, I submitted the drawing without the title, but I was asked if I would also do the title. It turned out to be the hardest task of all. It is drawn in freehand but it took a lot of planning to make sure it was centred on the page with the right proportions. Nowadays, I could push the font button on my computer and it would come up perfectly.

I was a bit miffed that there was no acknowledgement of the cover in the magazine, but I am over it now. The registration of the car is my proof of authorship!

John Wright's work odyssey continued... The Hampton Park Project.



Hampton Park in 1973 – mostly empty fields

In 1973 the Eumemmerring Freeway⁷, as the eastern end of the Mulgrave Freeway was then known, ended at the Princes Highway in Doveton. As part of its 1967 plan to develop Westernport, the Hamer government decided to extend it south to Hampton Park as the first stage of a freeway link to Hastings.

At Hampton Park the freeway would occupy a short length of the existing South Gippsland Highway reserve, requiring the highway to be deviated a short distance to the west. The construction of this deviation and the adjacent section of freeway would become known as the Hampton Park Project.

John Glenn, the Division's Major Projects Engineer, asked me to start pre-planning work. My job was to define the project's land requirements in concert with Road Design and Right-of Way and liaise with planning bodies and service authorities.

At that time Don Peckham, along with David Anderson and Alan Hamley, were supervising the construction of a duplicate highway carriageway between Hampton Park and Cranbourne. Following its completion, Don, as Project Manager, assisted by David and I would become the project team for constructing the Hampton Park Project.

At Nunawading we worked in an ancient weatherboard and fibro building known as *The Rear Town Hall*, which we shared with Don Houston, the Division's Asphalt Engineer. Gloomy, mostly empty and with high ceilings, its sole source of heating was a huge, high-mounted electric cone radiator that David Anderson christened 'Ra' after the Egyptian sun god.

All activities and costs on the highway duplication project were recorded by two cost clerks, Bruno Prugar and Tad Kischack. They worked in a small cabin within a fenced-off construction compound north of Thompsons Road (It is all established housing now, but at that time it was in the middle of vast, open fields).

Bruno Prugar

Bruno, the senior cost clerk on the Hampton Park project, was an older Polish man who spoke clipped but very precise English and seemed anxious to please. His favourite expression, usually while rearranging the objects on his desk, was: "*Dis is dis and dat is dat*".

We didn't know it then, but Bruno was a closet perfectionist who went to great lengths to please his supervising engineers. He did this by secretly and skilfully 'cooking' his costings to make the engineer's individual item cost estimates look very accurate – when in fact they weren't. While reading his regular cost reports made us feel very good, it began to dawn on us that something was not quite right with his figures.

⁷ It is now known as the South Gippsland Freeway

During the subsequent Hampton Park Project, we discovered that Bruno had been obtaining copies of engineer's estimates (which he wasn't supposed to have), and when he saw the actual cost of an item was trending higher than the estimate, say on subsoil drains per metre, he would transfer the excess costs to another item, such as pipe bedding, which was coming in below the engineer's estimate, to make everything look better. Unfortunately, by doing this, he partly rendered his job useless because his cost records bore no resemblance to the true item cost situation and could not be used to reliably estimate the cost of future works.

However, Bruno was a delightful man and we all loved him. One evening after work, Don Peckham and I visited Bruno at his Doveton house because he had been off work due to illness. Bruno seemed much better and was so pleased to see us that he insisted that we taste his excellent cherry brandy that he and his wife had made. Don and I got completely pie-eyed and I am still amazed that he managed to drive me home to Donvale and pour me through the front door and then make it safely home to his wife Edith in Fountain gate.

George Strug



George Strug. Late 1980s

George was the overseer on both the highway duplication and the Hampton Park Project. Like Bruno, who was his close friend, George came from Poland. He had a strong accent and some wonderful sayings. He always called me "*Jorn*," referred to vibrating rollers as "*villabrating rollers*" and strongly disliked people "*friggiling about*".

When I first met him, George loved apples and could usually be tracked down on the job by following the trail of apple cores. However, the apples almost proved to be his undoing at one stage, causing him to be hospitalised with a major gastric complaint – after which he gave them up and resumed smoking, which he thought was far safer.

The Cranbourne cakeshop

One of the highlights of the frequent trips Don, David and I made to Cranbourne was the cake shop in the main street, which made the most enormous and unbelievably delicious apple turnovers that were liberally dusted with icing sugar.

Over a period of several years we would buy these treasures at lunch time or after work and eat them outside the shop while holding them with both hands, with our legs spread apart and bodies leaning forward to avoid getting ourselves covered in icing sugar.

THE HAMPTON PARK PROJECT

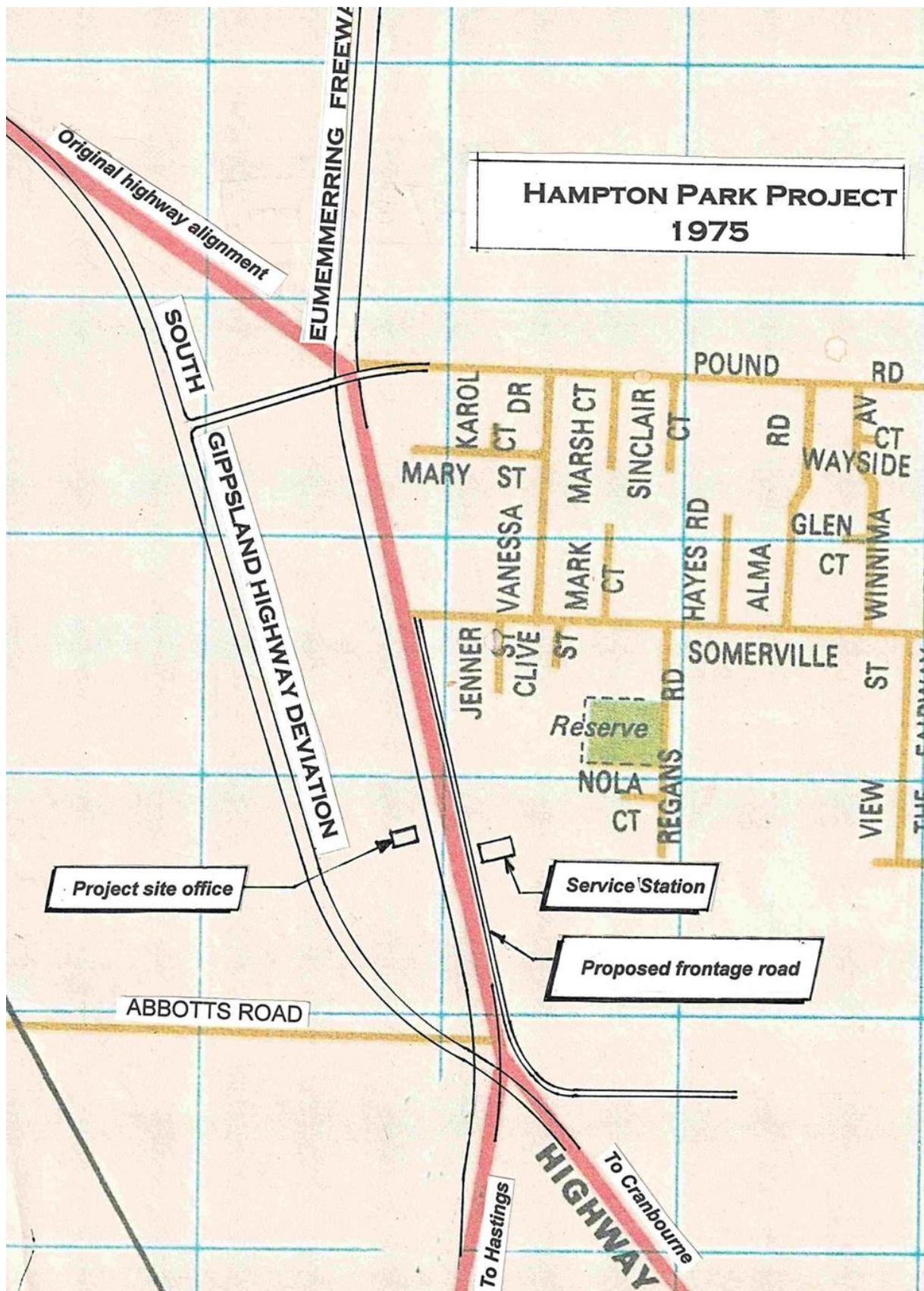
The frontage road

Converting the old highway reserve through Hampton Park into a freeway meant that some abutting properties would lose their direct access to what had been the highway. A separate, indirect frontage road along its eastern side would be required to reinstate access to those properties. The diagram on the following page shows the details of the project.

With the preliminary design indicating that the freeway would be in a cutting at this location, there would be no room left within the highway reserve to construct a new frontage road. As no buildings would be affected, it was decided that a 40-ft. wide strip of land would be acquired from the front of these properties to construct the access road.

All the landowners I spoke to accepted that the acquisition was necessary, although none of them were very happy. One of these was a man I will call Mr D, who owned a very run-down service station with an attached residence. He told me he had recently received an offer from a cut-price fuel operator to lease his business with expected high trade volumes from the South Gippsland Highway. He said that losing access to the South Gippsland Highway traffic would kill his

business, and that he expected to be compensated for this loss of income. When my Deviation Report reached Ian Rennick⁸, the Right of Way Engineer, the penny dropped with him that the likely enormous cost of compensating Mr D for the loss of highway trade could not be justified for the sake of creating a low-volume access road.



⁸ As far back as I could remember, Ian had an absolute phobia about interactions with service station owners.

After a hurried conference with the Senior Road Design Engineer, a decision was made to move the freeway carriageways in this area westerly by about 35 feet to allow the frontage road to be built on the old highway reserve and thus avoid acquiring Mr D's land. As I understood Ian's logic, the issue of business loss from the cessation of highway trade would only arise if land was acquired from the property. Without acquisition there could be no compensation.

None of the thousands of motorists using the freeway today would notice the slight wiggle in the freeway alignment, just north of the highway interchange – much less realise what its true purpose was.

Accordingly, I was directed to return and tell the landowners that the CRB would no longer be acquiring land from them. With the singular exception of Mr D, all were delighted⁹. Mr D looked dreadful, and I discovered from his wife that he had advanced cancer and did not have long to live.

Under the original plan, Mr D could have disposed of his business at market valuation and died in peace, knowing his family would be financially secure. Now, with no direct access to the highway trade, and my news that the Notice of Acquisition was to be withdrawn, both he and his wife could see that their business would be both unviable and unsaleable. They stared at me in disbelief, and then I had to wear their considerable and very understandable anger, with no meaningful response available.

In the early 1980's, the late Mr D's family launched Supreme Court action seeking compensation for their loss of trade. My Deviation Report was subpoenaed and I, along with Don Peckham and Peter Ransom¹⁰ were twice summonsed by Mr D's family to appear in Court as CRB witnesses. Both hearings were cancelled while we were waiting to be called. Presumably, the case lapsed because there is no legislated or common law right to highway trade. They had been poorly advised legally and must have spent a great deal of money on legal costs. We all felt very sorry for them.

With the land requirements defined and the road and bridge designs finalised, the race was on to get the deviation up and running. Because it would take a long time to legally acquire the balance of the necessary land, every effort was to be made to gain the owners' permission to enter prior to the formal serving of Notices of Acquisition. Landowners who agreed to do this were then entitled to claim 5% interest on their eventual settlement amount.

Early entry to the land would be vital because the deep, local topsoil had a unique and treacherous quality. Mostly composed of very fine sand with a surprisingly uniform grain size, it could be as hard as concrete¹¹ in summer and as soft as chocolate mousse in winter. It was therefore vital to get in early, strip the topsoil and replace it with decent filling material before winter set in.

The Sydney crew

Late in 1974 I received a telephone call from a man I will call Mr F, a Director of a Sydney-based land development company, which had recently bought a large, triangular area of vacant, flood-prone industrial-zoned land that would be severed by the highway deviation. Mr F said he and his accountant were down from Sydney for the day and wondered if we might chat with them over lunch. Don Peckham, who simply hated a good feed, tasked me with finding a suitably swank venue. As it turned out, Mr F had already selected a restaurant - on the top floor of the Westfield Tower at Doncaster Shopping Town, because he and his accountant were inspecting an office development just down the road from it.

Thrilled at the prospect of a free, posh lunch, Don, David Anderson and I set off to meet our hosts. Mr F and his accountant were both well-dressed, youngish guys who ordered the most expensive

⁹ One property was occupied by an elderly brother and sister, the Robjants, whose parents had originally built the house. After the frontage road was constructed, the Council named it Robjant Road.

¹⁰ Late in 1974, Don Peckham was promoted to the position of Assistant Divisional Engineer, Bendigo. Peter Ransom, a New Zealand engineer from the MMBW, took over the management of the project.

¹¹ Our fencing contractors complained that the ground was almost too hard for their fence-hole boring augers

wines and food and encouraged us to do likewise. As landowners, they seemed surprisingly disinterested in their property and instead regaled us with stories of being big-time business globetrotters, commuting on US and European inter-city airlines and cutting major deals. Mr F lived in Point Piper and drove a Jensen Interceptor. His accountant was refurbishing an ocean-going yacht in one of Sydney's many coves – as a hobby, of course. In fact, they talked about everything but the land acquisition.

It was all designed to impress us and to bond us to them. After lunch, Mr F pulled out a leather-bound concertina card holder containing a bewildering number of high-entry credit cards from all over the world, and staged a game with his accountant, as to which one to use.

Our job was simply to keep them happy so they would sign the form allowing the CRB early access to their land. We all realised from the start that we were being 'duchessed' for some future purpose. We just weren't quite sure what it was – given that none of us were in any position to influence the ultimate amount of compensation. That would be the responsibility of independent valuers and the Board's Estates Branch. However, our hosts could not have been more cooperative and readily agreed to sign the property entry form.

Over the following months, we met Mr F and his accountant several more times for lunch at Doncaster – ostensibly to enquire of us as to the current progress of the acquisition process. This was always going to take quite a long time, as it necessitated a major title survey plus the preparation of Survey Plans and Notices of Acquisition.

At a luncheon just before Christmas 1974, I mentioned that I would be taking my family to Narrabeen, NSW on a camping holiday, and Mr F gave me his phone number to use in case we needed any assistance. As it turned out, my wife Sylvia had developed a minor medical problem and I phoned Mr F to ask if he could recommend a good local doctor near Narrabeen.

One of Mr F's project managers lived near Narrabeen, and he soon turned up at the camping ground in an expensive car and ferried Sylvia to and from his family doctor. Later, he invited us all to dinner at his house, where we met his wife and young family and were treated like visiting royalty. Mr F turned up in his immaculate blue Jensen Interceptor. It was all very friendly, but I felt I was skating at the very edge of appropriate behaviour.

Later, upon hearing that the service of Notices of Acquisition was imminent, Mr F asked if we could deliver them in person to him and his accountant at Lazar's Restaurant in the City. The Estates Officer reluctantly agreed to furnish us with the necessary documents. Lazar's was one of the most expensive restaurants in Melbourne at the time, and as Peter Ransom, David Anderson and I made our way to Neil's table, clutching the documents, we spotted the Member for Flinders, Sir Phillip Lynch talking to another person at a nearby table. Once seated, we were surrounded by waiters, one of whom carefully draped a quality napkin onto my lap while another was pouring what would now be \$100 a bottle Cab Sav into my glass.

We handed over the documents and we were savouring the superb entrée dish when Mr F asked us what value had been placed on their land. I replied that compensation would be determined by independent valuers, but he politely insisted on knowing what our estimated figure was.

When I told him that we had tentatively priced their flood-prone land at \$1,500 per acre using figures supplied by the Shire of Cranbourne, his reaction was one of shock and disbelief. *"Well, that can't be right, we have land sale records showing that land is worth \$6,000 an acre!"* We shrugged and said that 'land values were right out of our bailiwick'. However, the mood of the lunch took somewhat of a downturn after that, and after we departed we never saw or heard from them again.

Curious about the land sales Mr F had referred to, I phoned the Cranbourne Shire Rates Officer. He said Council had no record of any recent or impending sales, and their records still showed the current owner as Mr F's company.

Several months later, solicitors representing a new company submitted a claim for compensation for the land formerly owned by Mr F's company. They stated that their client had paid a market price of \$6,000 per acre for the land in question.

Intrigued by this sudden, dramatic increase in value from \$1,500 per acre, the Estates Officer ordered a search of both the sales and the companies involved. He discovered that the original owner had sold the land to another company, which I will call Company B for \$2,500 per acre. Company B had then on-sold the land to Company C for \$4,500 per acre and, shortly afterwards, Company C had sold it to the present owner, for \$6,000 per acre.

Curiously, all the companies were based in the same North Sydney office and all of them had the same directors – including Mr F. The sales were clearly paper transfers in some sort of ‘round robin’ scheme, and obviously no money had changed hands. Neither the CRB nor its valuers accepted these ‘sales’ as genuine, arms-length transactions for the purpose of setting a market value. I believe that in the end, Mr F’s company received little more than its initial investment by way of compensation – and we had some wonderful memories of fine meals.

Peter Ransom

Peter was a tall, well-spoken and good-looking engineer from Taranaki, New Zealand, who came to the CRB from the MMBW, late in 1974. He replaced Don Peckham, who had moved to Bendigo to take up the position of Assistant Divisional Engineer there.

Shortly after he arrived, David Anderson and I took Peter down to Hampton Park to give him a walk-through of the highway deviation centreline. It was all open paddocks, and the grass was about a metre high. Coming from snakeless New Zealand, Peter was petrified of being fatally bitten by a tiger snake and insisted that we walk in front and behind him.

The Collins Street specialist

The largest area of industrial zoned land affected by the highway deviation was owned by the companies of a Collins Street heart specialist, whom I will call Dr K. Two of his properties would be severed by the relocated highway.

Getting Dr K’s permission to enter his land was vital to the work progressing before the winter months, because all the filling for the low-lying land on the highway deviation would be coming out of a road cutting on the high ground of his properties. By this stage, all the other landowners had given us permission to enter. Without Dr K’s permission, the entire project would be delayed for 12 months, because summer was nearly over and the highway deviation had to be completed before work on the freeway extension could begin.

I had one initial meeting with Dr K and his accountant in the Estates Department at Head Office. Unlike his neighbour from Point Piper, Dr K was keenly interested in the design detail, especially the locations of the cuts and fills and major drainage structures.

My next meeting with Dr K was at his surgery at the Paris end of Collins Street. I briefly sat in his waiting room with his patients. Across his desk, I could see colourful models of hearts with removable sections as Dr K asked me how much compensation the CRB would pay for material removed from a landowner’s property. It was a curious question but I promised to find out.

Back at Nunawading, I found that the compensation per cubic metre was fixed by State legislation for quarries and that this information was therefore available in the public domain. However, given that keeping Dr K happy was all-important to the project, Don Peckham agreed that there would be no danger in me handing him a copy of the payment table from the legislation as it appeared in the CRB Policy manual.

Both Don and I were puzzled as to why Dr K wanted this information. Payment for excavated material would only apply if the CRB was going to operate a quarry on his land, using specific legislation for Government quarries. The information we would be giving him contained a clear reference to the applicable quarry legislation¹².

I rang Dr K to tell him I had his information and he invited me to meet him at lunch that day in the Society Restaurant, which was even more exclusive than Lazars. He glanced at the figures and

¹² Because the CRB would be *acquiring* part of his property to construct a road under a different Act, the issue of compensation for any removed material would not arise because the acquired land would no longer be his.

then quickly tucked them away. He insisted I try the Beef Wellington, which was not only his favourite, but apparently the Chef's signature dish. While not being a great fan of goose liver pate, however nicely packaged in pastry and covered by a great sauce, I didn't wish to offend him, so I struggled to eat what must have been a very expensive dish.

As the wine took hold, Dr K, who lived in Toorak, told me about his recent travails in buying a new car. He said his main priority in choosing a suitable limo was being able to seat his guests comfortably in the back seat. Neither the Lamborghini nor the top-of-the-line Jaguar he test-drove came close to satisfying those criteria. I decided not to mention my own issues with our ageing Holden station wagon.

The Hampton Park site office saga

As preparations for the Project progressed, consideration was given to locating a site office and construction compound on private property close to the proposed works. A suitably located property with an unoccupied brick veneer farmhouse was located on what would become remnant farmland between the new freeway and the deviated highway.

The property was one of several adjoining titles owned by a Mr N and his sons, who along with Dr K, also owned land in the remnant strip. Mr N, who represented his sons in dealings with us, was a senior person, both in years and in his position as a Shire councillor. As we were to discover later, he was to play a significant role in our discussions with Dr K.

I received a call from Dr K, who wished to talk about granting us access to his land. I met him in his office with Peter Ransom, then new to the project. Dr K was alone and said he would allow us entry on the condition we rented his land for the site office. He said he had received advice his land was valued at \$1.00 per square foot and that a reasonable annual rental return might be 10% of this amount. I quickly did the sums in my head. Using Dr K's value, his Light Industrial-zoned land would be \$43,560 per acre¹³ (about 7 times its then actual value of about \$6,000 per acre). At ten percent, the rental of his land would be \$4,356 per acre per year – and we would need at least 2 acres for the office and on-site plant and equipment storage. We hadn't even contemplated renting Dr K's property because it had no dwelling on it that would be suitable for a site office.

I told Dr K I would not be prepared to recommend his proposal to senior management because it was so outrageous, they would think I had taken a bribe. Dr K then countered that those were his terms, and that unless we agreed to them, he would not agree to early entry. He added that, without his approval, we would be unable to commence the works. This was straight-out blackmail, and I replied to him that we did not need to access his property to commence the works (even though I knew he was right). I told him that we were only giving him the opportunity to earn 5% of the value of the considerable compensation he would be paid in perhaps 18 months to 2 years' time.

We politely bade our goodbyes. Peter had not said a word during these proceedings – even though he was my boss, probably because he was unfamiliar with the world of land acquisition. I think he was a bit shocked at my rebuttal of Dr K's offer, however. The next day, a letter from Dr K arrived by courier, addressed to me. It contained his signed permission to enter his property. The construction of our project could now proceed.

There are several interesting postscripts to this story:

1. Several months later, I met an independent valuer at the project site to discuss likely property impacts. He was an older, highly experienced person and had been in contact with both Dr K and Mr N. He told me that Dr K had discussed the issue of renting his land with Mr N, who had given him the \$1 per square foot figure for the land. It was clear to the valuer that Mr N, who wanted the CRB to rent his son's land, had deliberately sabotaged Dr K's bid by providing him with bogus land value information.

¹³ This was not mathematical genius. I already knew there were 43,560 square feet in an acre.

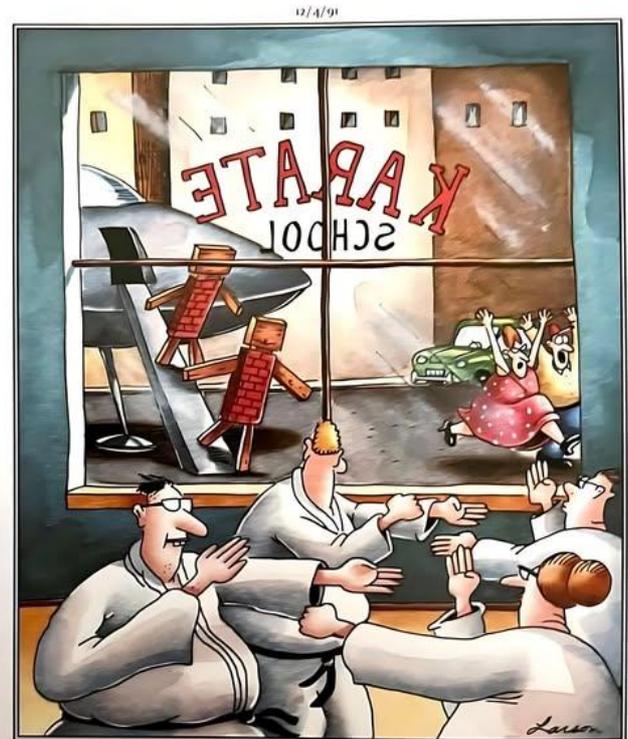
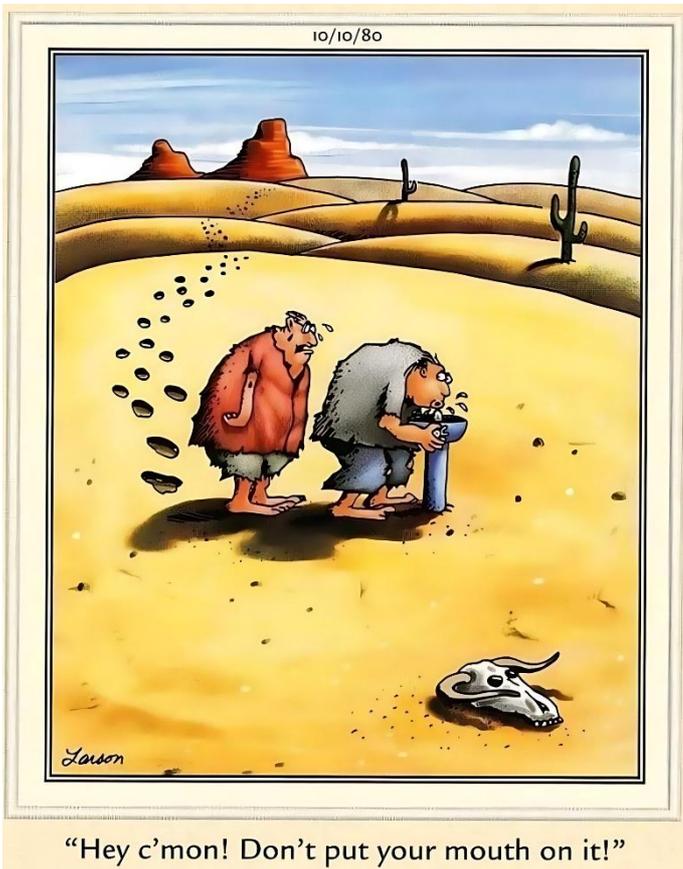
2. The CRB did not pursue Dr K's offer and instead rented Mr N's son's adjacent property and its empty brick veneer dwelling, for a fairly modest cost for the entire duration of the project.
3. About 3 years later, Dr K launched Supreme Court Action seeking compensation for material excavated from his property. I recall one particular day when I was directed to investigate some seemingly minor matters at the far end of the Division at Garfield. I was later to suspect that there was a hidden reason behind this direction. This was in the days before mobile phones, and there was no 2-way wireless communication with my vehicle. The CRB's lawyers may have caught wind of a proposal by Dr K's lawyers to summon me to appear before the Supreme Court on the last day of the case to discuss an alleged conversation I'd had with their client, 3 years earlier.

Unaware of this, I arrived back in Nunawading around 4.00 pm to be told I was urgently required to attend the Supreme Court in the City. I was bundled into a car with Peter Ransom, but when we reached the City there was a major traffic jam. Armed thieves had held up a city jeweller, shot the owners dead and were at large on foot in the city – which was in total Police lockdown. Alas, we were unable to attend, and the case necessarily finished without us – thank heavens. To be continued...

AMUSEMENTS



Another gem from the Australian cartoonist Sprod, whose work frequently appeared in the English *Punch* Magazine in the 1950's. He was a contemporary of other famous artists like Ian Searle, Low, Petty, Jolliffe and Mercier.



The class abruptly stopped practicing. Here was a chance to not only employ their skills, but also to save the entire town.

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