Roads

Arterial Roads

The Road Management Act 2004 clarified the roles and responsibilities for roadspace, and local governments now have responsibility for the entire road reservation for local roads and the roadsides (including parking) of state-managed arterial roads in built up areas. However, although without direct responsibility, local governments need to negotiate vigorously on behalf of the community, as the activity on arterial roads can have significant local impacts on abutting land use via noise, pollution, accidents and general loss of amenity. In addition, the freeway network can impact severely on local networks by channelling traffic and reducing amenity close to entry and exit points.

The Road Management Act directs road authorities to manage roadspace for efficiency and safety. By using a triple bottom line approach to efficiency and safety local governments can highlight the value of sustainable transport over the traditional single mode approach to road space. Information on the Road Management Act and its implications for local government is in the Arterial Roads Information Library.

The state-managed arterial network is primarily to cater for the regional movements of through traffic with at most one trip end in the municipality. The arterial network is also the main conduit for freight and commercial vehicles, as well as accommodating much of the road based public transport system. Establishment of a road hierarchy which accommodates regional movements allows local governments to develop some measure of protection for local roads.

The Arterial Roads Information Library contains the most recent information on State strategies for arterial road management systems.

The arterial network is not isolated from local infrastructure, and can result in tensions and conflicts between local expectations and regional connectivity. The identification of activity centres as the ideal location for future developments in Melbourne 2030 has highlighted the difficulty in resolving the:

- Amenity and 'liveability' needs of activity centre users; and
- Capacity and flow demands for regional connectivity.

...where activity centres are located on arterial roads.

Local governments, with a commitment to sustainable transport, can best promote community interest by:

- Advocating for integrated broad based solutions to transport problems, which benefit all road users and support long term goals of sustainable growth;
- Identifying the through traffic component of the traffic stream and monitoring this over time;
- Seeking corridor solutions to avoid relocating problems;
- Resisting road capacity improvements without benefits for all road users;
- Investigating mechanisms to balance regional demands with liveability within activity centres located on arterial roads; and
- Developing a municipal statement to position local governments to negotiate with state agencies regarding traffic management on arterials within the municipality.

Local Roads

The Road Management Act 2004 clarified the roles and responsibilities for roadspace, and local governments are the designated responsible authority for the entire road reservation for local roads and the roadsides (including parking) of state-managed arterial roads in built up areas.

As the responsible authority for local roads, local governments are empowered to act to:

- Design, construct, maintain and manage the local road network;
- Undertake traffic management through roadworks, lane marking and signage; and
- Allocate and control kerbside use for parking including taxi ranks, bus stops and loading zones for both local and arterial roads within built up areas.

Local governments can influence the use of the network through the planning scheme, and via planning permits, may require developments to regard appropriate access to the local road network and off-street parking. In addition, local governments can influence the road network within new developments via subdivision approvals. Legislation provides an opportunity to identify a connection between a proposed development and local infrastructure requirements which could be fulfilled with a developer contribution.

These activities are conducted by local government personnel within regulations, guidelines and funding criteria established by VicRoads, with some leeway for local conditions as judged by local expertise. Likewise the relationship between land use and road management, as expressed through planning permits, is controlled through the State Planning Policy Frameworks and Rescode, and the municipal planning scheme allows expression of particular local interest.

Local governments therefore have significant powers to influence how road space is used and have the opportunity to encourage greater use of sustainable transport on local roads. This activity is already evident through local area traffic management (LATM) work whereby local governments identify the amenity, safety and accessibility needs of all users of a locality within the municipality and seek to broker acceptable traffic management solutions. However these are often car directed and may not consider all modes in design options.

Local government personnel are resourced in this work by documentation setting standards for design and practice. Australian Standards and Austroads Guide to Engineering Practice provide national guidance for road design solutions, supported by VicRoads publications in the form of Road Design Guidelines, Traffic Engineering Manuals and Standard Specifications.

Local governments are also required to approve road design (movement networks) in new residential developments and it has been noted that the often popular curvilinear street layout is not conducive to pedestrians or cyclists who prefer the direct routes of more permeable grid patterns. Likewise buses can offer a better level of service on less circuitous routes. While every situation is different, local governments can require layout patterns that favour direct connections by non motorised modes. Local governments can also take an active role planning bus routes and bus stops in the early stages of subdivision planning to ensure feasibility and connectivity.

Parking

Parking is one of the most challenging issues for local governments to manage in order to enhance integrated transport outcomes.

On the one hand parking represents a powerful travel demand tool local governments could use to discourage car use. On the other hand, parking is a major attractor to local facilities and highly valued by commercial interests. Commercial facilities compete for custom with regional centres and with facilities in neighbouring municipalities. Likewise the car dependent community demands parking access. Even clearways of limited hours are seen as detrimental to trade and user amenity and are often bitterly resented.

Local governments understand that to move towards their vision and long term goals parking must be better priced to reduce car over-use. However, entrenched and regulated practices of parking provision and community expectations can dictate otherwise. This is further complicated by the activity centre basis of Melbourne 2030, which is dependent on people using sustainable modes for short trips. Short trips can only be made if local destinations are available. Reducing car parking without a significant increase in public transport access may threaten the viability of nearby shops and reduce the short trip option, forcing people back into cars.

In most cases, local governments respond to parking demands by putting restrictions in busy commercial centres and resident parking schemes where parking overflow threatens resident amenity. All developments are required to supply on-site parking and some local governments supply parking space as well. However land prices have largely precluded municipal land purchase for parking so unless supplied privately, parking supply at commercial centres is in effect capped. Further growth pressures are causing local governments to start considering more strategic and municipal-wide measures.