

ROADS AUSTRALIA

President's Report 2008

Last year I reported that our future success would be judged by whether Roads Australia exercises influence in policy development and provides services which are valuable to members.

The Board focused specifically on this at its workshop in February. Six months later we changed our name to Roads Australia and the real business of being a national stakeholder body began.

The Creation of Roads Australia

The launch of Roads Australia was not simply a name change. It conveys a message about what we do and our national focus. The name also makes it very clear that we are the national stakeholder body for our industry. When Minister Albanese launched Roads Australia in August he acknowledged that it is to have a key voice for the road sector in Australia and committed the Government to working with Roads Australia in the future.

Policy Development and Industry Representation

The creation of Roads Australia coincided with the introduction of Policy Chapters within our membership to provide a policy dimension we have never had before. The initial policy chapters cover congestion, sustainability and capacity issues.

In forming the policy chapters we were not simply seeking to establish interest groups. Our vision is much more far reaching. We are offering Government a partnership in policy development – the chance to draw on the industry's knowledge and experience in formulating policy. Roads Australia wants to be involved before policy is announced – to work inside the tent. This is a ground breaking vision for our industry, but policy makers, industry members and our nation all have lots to gain from it.

The response has been very encouraging. Within two months of launching the policy chapters, over ninety participants from government, industry and academia had joined – representing over seventy different organisations.

Government has also been very positive. It turned out that our timing was perfect. Our initiative coincided with a new spirit of openness to new ideas among our industry's policy makers across Australia – as typified by the creation of Infrastructure Australia and the new federal/state ministerial responsibilities within the ATC.

Roads Australia swiftly established new working relationships with ministers at state and federal levels. I met personally with the ministers critical to our areas of interest and they committed to working with us in a new kind of policy relationship. I would particularly like to acknowledge the vision shown by Ministers Pallas and Pitt in Victoria and Queensland respectively.

This is now translating into a program of workshops and practical policy exchanges. Two examples:

- the Victorian Government has indicated that it will invite Roads Australia to work as a “Focus Group” on the response to the Eddington Report before it is made public;
- Next week the Chief Executive of the RTA and most of his senior management will have a workshop with twenty of our most senior member representatives to talk about how the RTA and industry can work together in planning the RTA’s response on capacity issues.

Who would have thought this level of partnership possible a year ago? Next year we must consolidate and deliver on our positive start. In that regard I would like to acknowledge the Chairs of our new Policy Chapters – Jo Moss from SKM, David Stuart-Watt from the RTA and Phil Mumford from Queensland Motorways. And above all, we should thank Neil Doyle who chairs the Board’s Policy Committee and who inspires many of our initiatives. I would also like to welcome our new Policy Director, Christine Keyes.

Membership

Our growing influence and relevance has been matched with expanding membership. At last year’s AGM I reported that during the year our membership grew from 43 to 49. It now stands at 62.

Forum Meetings and Other ARF Events

Our Forum meetings, annual summit and industry events also reached new levels of activity – with attendance doubling – from 966 attendees last year and 1991 in 2008. Two weeks ago in Melbourne our lunch with Minister Pallas was attended by 230 people. It sold out within a week and over sixty people on the waiting list had to miss out.

Our Forum meetings this year were held in Sydney and Brisbane, and were generously sponsored by Caterpillar and Queensland Main Roads. The annual Summit in June was sponsored by ARRB and Hyder. The John Shaw dinner was sponsored by John Holland. At the dinner Janet Holmes a Court presented Colin Jordan with the John Shaw medal. In August Pioneer Road Services sponsored our wonderful lunch to launch Roads Australia. Our other events during the year were sponsored by Leighton, Abigroup, the RTA, Fulton Hogan, Macmahon, the Gateway Upgrade Project, ConnectEast, Clayton Utz, Boulderstones, SKM and Maunsell AECOM, All of them are consistent and generous in their support for us.

In response to member demand, we are holding more small “members only” lunches with key decision makers. Unfortunately there are not enough ministers to go round! Tim Pallas, the Victorian Roads Minister, attended three this year.

Our Member Services Manager, Rachael Rooney, has a passion and talent in her work – and it shows in full houses every time.

Other Member Services

Our fortnightly newsletter, the RA Insider, launched last year, has evolved into an accepted business tool for the industry. It is now distributed to 2000 subscribers – a powerful audience of the industry’s leaders. It now incorporates a news section about staffing changes in the industry and a list of coming industry events. Our Media Director, Mark Bowmer, edits the Insider and puts his finger on exactly what the industry wants to read.

In last year’s report I called for expressions of interest from members in sponsoring the newsletter. Congratulations to Leighton who have taken up the sponsorship.

Our interactive website was visited by members in increasing numbers not only to register for events but to access the documents, photographs and other information which are constantly being refreshed.

International Activity

As President I had the honour to continue to serve on the World Executive Board of the International Road Federation (IRF). I have, in fact, just returned from an IRF Board meeting and International Sustainability Conference in Europe.

Acknowledgments

Last year I said that the Board and Management had pursued an energetic and diverse program in 2007 – they excelled in 2008. I congratulate my colleagues and RA’s management on the work they have done to establish Roads Australia.

Once again I want to acknowledge the very significant leadership, energy and enthusiasm shown by Ian Webb as CEO of our organization.

Finally I would like to express the Board’s and my own appreciation to our members whose enthusiasm for Roads Australia provides me and the Board with all the reward we need.

Ray Fisher, President

2 December 2008