

Rural roads campaign has positive impacts

Rural Australia took an important step closer to more equitable roads funding on Friday.

About 30 council representatives from across Australia converged on Horsham for a meeting of the Australian Rural Roads Group, where Transport and Roads Minister Terry Mulder highlighted key aspects of the State Budget, which included \$160 million over four years for country roads and bridges.

Friday's meeting brought together likeminded coun-



MAYORAL MATTERS

Colac Otway Shire Mayor Brian Crook

cils which each produce more than \$100 million of agricultural product per year.

The Australian Rural Roads Lobby Group, of which Colac Otway Shire councillor Lyn Russell is a founding member, nominally represents 114 councils nationwide

which together produce \$18 billion in agricultural product annually – almost half of Australia's total output.

People travelled from as far as Gwydir, Griffith, Hindmarsh, Tatiara and Naracoorte councils, as well as all corners of Victoria for the meeting.

These councils are calling for state and federal governments to deliver a fairer funding model for roads, one that considers a road's productivity and value to the Australian economy.

Those at Friday's meeting recognised that we all share a similar challenge, which is large rural road networks and comparatively small ratepayer bases, with a limited ability to fund roads up to required standards.

Take Colac Otway Shire for example.

We have 1100 kilometres of unsealed and 550 kilometres of sealed roads to maintain, with a value of \$157.3 million.

We also have a \$152-million bridge network.

Colac Otway Shire Council, together with other members of the AARG, cannot expect our ratepayers to continue paying higher rates to keep up with our decaying road network.

Government funding for rural roads is not a subsidy – it is an investment which gives our nation a significant economic return.

Friday's meeting strengthened the ARR's resolve to seek reform on behalf of all rural communities, whose industries could be made more productive, and whose communities could be made safer by an improved approach to rural road investment.