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Long range relations: stakeholder engagement in Queensland road construction

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ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION

This paper presents the historical and contextual background of road construction by state and local government in Queensland. It also highlights some key events that have shaped stakeholder participation in road infrastructure planning and delivery in Queensland. This synthesis was developed from a review of publications, organisational documents and interviews. To set the scene, the factors that shaped road delivery will be discussed.

FACTORS THAT SHAPED ROAD DELIVERY

As the most decentralised state in Australia, Queensland has a very dispersed road network. The public road network in Queensland currently covers 180,000 kilometres, comprising 33,337 kilometres of state-controlled roads (Department of Transport and Main Roads, 2010) and 150,000 kilometres of road which is under the stewardship of 73 local government councils (Local Government Association of Queensland Inc, 2002). Public investment in these road assets by state and local government is in the order of \$30 billion (Department of Transport and Main Roads, 2010).

Private vehicle ownership is the predominant mode of transport in Queensland (Department of Transport and Main Roads, 2009), thus the road network in Queensland is one of the primary connectors for regional and urban communities and is important for their sustainability. Surpassing rail, road transport is the leading mode of transport for commodities (Productivity Commission, 2006) making road infrastructure is critical to state and regional economic development in Queensland. However, the current social and economic importance of roads in Queensland and decisions about who should have input into

their planning and delivery has been influenced by policy decisions and subsequent events over the past 150 years.

Early Days of Road Construction

Although roads were constructed throughout Queensland from the early days of colonisation, the concept of establishing a state-wide managed road network began to emerge in the late nineteenth century. This was legitimised by the creation of a central roads authority, the Main Roads Board in 1920. The total length of roads controlled by the Board at that time was 1,209 miles (Simmonds, 2007), which is around 17% of the size of the current state road network. Prior to 1920, road construction had been the domain of local shire councils that focused on meeting the requirements of local communities. This meant that road construction between towns was largely ad hoc, unplanned and lacking in a state-wide focus. To overcome this problem, the Board established a road classification system under which local councils retained responsibility for roads within towns, while roads outside of towns became the responsibility of the Board.

Three priorities underpinned activities of the Board: 1. to build roads which joined towns not connected by railway, 2. to construct a series of feeder roads linking farming areas to the existing rail network, and 3. to build developmental roads designed to open new areas for settlement (Department of Main Roads, n/d-b, p. 15). While the Board assumed responsibility for construction of these roads, shire councils contributed up to half of the construction costs and were responsible for subsequent maintenance (Department of Main Roads, n/d-b). This approach to sharing road construction costs between regional councils and the now amalgamated Department of Transport and Main Roads (TMR) has continued

through the Transport Infrastructure Development Scheme (TIDS program) (Department of Transport and Main Roads, 2010).

As awareness grew of the strategic importance of roads in Australia's economic development and a means of nation building by linking rural communities, the federal government began to inject funding into the Queensland road network and by 1922, was providing road subsidies totalling 35,000 pounds. This type of funding continues today through the Roads to Recovery Program which has directed \$356 million in road funding to local authorities in Queensland from 2009-2014 (Department of Infrastructure and Transport, 2010).

By the time that the Main Roads Board was established as a Commission in 1922, the political dimensions of road decision making were becoming evident, with questions being asked about political favouritism and "why certain road projects were chosen at the expense of others" (Department of Main Roads, n/d-b, p. 26). This politicisation was also demonstrated in the long-standing rivalry between road and rail transport which was partially driven by the differing priorities of the state and federal state governments. At the state level, maintaining employment on the railways and the repayment of the massive debt incurred in construction of the railway was a high priority. However, without the debt burden, the federal government's priority was national highway construction. The situation was exacerbated by the Royal Automobile Club of Queensland (RACQ) lobbying in favour of motor vehicle transport (Department of Main Roads, n/d-a)

However, the dominance of rail over road began to diminish with the introduction of the by Road Plan for Queensland in 1963 (Ford, 2009) the Department of Main Roads (Main Roads) . In responding to shifts in population, the Plan, which remained in force until 2001,

provided for roads to be constructed to service populations over 500. The decision to dramatically increase the size of the road network in Queensland, which is the most dispersed in Australia (Doyle, 2008), also contributed to the rise of road freight transport. In such a highly decentralised state the expanded road network provided greater road access to farming and extractive industry areas in rural and remote Queensland, which improved the viability of road freight. Over time, the accessibility of roads has resulted in a high level of dependence on road transport to undertake the freight task across Queensland (Local Government Association of Queensland Inc, n/d).

From the early 1920's, the state road construction authority has had to balance the competing demands of a range of groups including: federal, state and local elected representatives, politicians, the RACQ, local authorities, industry and farming communities (Department of Main Roads, n/d-b). However, the political sensitivity of road placement meant that road planning during the twentieth century was tightly controlled by state government and centralised within Main Roads. Implicit in this approach was that road planning and delivery involved technical problems to be solved rather than negotiation processes involving a wide range of actors with conflicting needs and interests. As a result of this technocratic approach, "little consultation or consideration of stakeholders other than motor vehicle users occurred" (Waterhouse & Keast, 2007).

However, the technocratic approach began to be eroded the late 1980's as a range of different actors, including project specific lobby groups, began to push back against traditional insular road planning decisions. This shift is demonstrated in the forceful response of stakeholders in two high profile road projects in South-East Queensland. These will be

examined in the next section to illustrate the complex nature of growing/emerging stakeholder engagement in road infrastructure.

TURBULENT TIMES FOR ROAD PLANNING AND CONSTRUCTION

Between 1987 and 1996, there was a significant investment in road infrastructure in Queensland, particularly in the southeast corner of the state. Route 20 and the South Coast Motorway between Brisbane and the Gold Coast were two high profile road construction projects of that period that attracted significant negative attention from an extended range of stakeholders. These projects set the scene for greater involvement of stakeholders in road decision-making at the end of the twentieth century. At first the Queensland government was dismissive of attempts by citizens and interest groups to secure input into these road projects; however, in the face of unrelenting pressure they were accepted as groups that needed to be engaged.

In 1987, Main Roads commenced planning to construct the Western Arterial Bypass ring road in Brisbane, known as Route 20. This proposal met with significant opposition from a coalition of stakeholders called Citizens Against Route Twenty (CART) (Whelan, 2001; Witherby, 1996). This opposition strengthened after it was identified in a leaked confidential government document that the government was seeking to “defuse the route 20 issue and try to eliminate public comment” (Citizens Against Route Twenty, 1989, p. 6). After an intense media campaign spearheaded by CART, work was suspended on Route 20 until completion of an environmental and social impact statement. By effectively mobilising the media to oppose the road, which was seen to be shrouded in secrecy and subterfuge (Citizens Against Route Twenty, 1989, p. 5), “Route 20 was scuttled in 1990 after resident protests” (Heywood, 2000, p. 19).

Criticising the defunct Route 20 planning process, a member of the state opposition observed that the policy “had more in common with a Monty Python script than sensible town-planning”(Queensland Parliament, Record of Proceedings, March 20, 1990, p.410).

While falling short of acknowledging problems with Route 20, the government later conceded that “People deserve the chance to have a say in significant decisions that affect their lives and lifestyles” and “gave an undertaking to establish proper consultative programs to address road safety issues on Route 20” (Queensland Parliament, Record of Proceedings, August 2, 1990, p. 2664).

The problematic nature of the Route 20 project points to the fact that neither the government nor Main Roads had understood the need or benefits of engaging with stakeholders in road projects. The inadequacy of using a state controlled expert-led approach which shut out external inputs into the planning for Route 20, resulted in significant concessions by government. These included a comprehensive consultation process (Dick, 1990), “a rare event in Queensland at the time“ (Hutton & Connors, 1999, p.220). While a change of approach had been forced by the Route 20 stakeholders, government had yet to embrace the fundamental issue that effective engagement of stakeholders was required to achieve successful road program planning and delivery.

In 1995, the interest of stakeholders in road planning decisions intensified as a result the proposal of the government to build the South Coast Motorway parallel to the Pacific Highway. As the motorway was to pass through the koala habitat of the Daisy Hill State Forest, it was dubbed the “Koala Highway”. The proposal evoked significant community opposition (Krosch, 2010) with residents fearing the destruction of koala habitats during and

after the development of the highway (Marinac, 2002). It appeared that the government misjudged the strength of public feeling about the roadway and faced intense opposition with the environment minister being targeted with protests, placards and dead koalas. (Wason Moore, 2005).

The “Koala Highway” protests were widely covered by the media and “it became obvious that no amount of reassurance was going to swing public opinion in favour of the plan” (Marinac, 2002, p. 82). As a result of the widespread and unrelenting opposition, the road proposal was abandoned. However the “Koala Highway” was a decisive issue in the 1995 election (Riley, 1993) with the incumbent government losing four seats, and eventually losing government in a by-election in 1996 (Waterhouse, Brown, & Flynn, 2001).

While Route 20 and the South Coast motorway situations represent extreme actions by stakeholders who considered that their concerns were not being treated seriously (Citizens Against Route Twenty, 1989; Marinac, 2002), they serve to demonstrate the difficulties of managing the diverse expectations and interests of stakeholders within the complex and politically volatile environment of road infrastructure planning and delivery. The impact that stakeholders had on both the Route 20 and the South Coast motorway projects exemplifies the problems associated with conventional approaches to stakeholder engagement. However, these approaches gave way to more relational and deliberative methods of stakeholder engagement and this is discussed next.

NEW APPROACHES

The Route 20 and the South Coast Motorway experiences galvanised Main Roads into reviewing how and when it should engage stakeholders and the wider community and how it

could improve on its public consultation policy. This policy review may also have been prompted by the realisation that “the future survival of as a separate government department was closely tied to its ability to foster good external relationships both with the community and through partnerships and alliances, community groups, private enterprise and local government ” (Waterhouse, 2003, p. 111).

Acknowledging that “*as ' work becomes more complex, community involvement more strident,..... must shift from a "one size fits all" approach ”*(McLennan, 2000, p. 7), Main Roads made fundamental changes to how it related to stakeholders. This shift was underpinned by two mechanisms: the introduction of partnership and alliance agreements and strengthening of the public consultation policy to require mandatory community engagement in departmental projects.

The shift to more networked approaches to road delivery by Main Roads could be seen through the establishment of alliances which were formed with an industry group, the Australian Asphalt Pavement Association, and with local government through the Roads Alliance. The 2001 agreement with the Asphalt Association committed the parties to collaboratively “increase innovation and optimise the performance of road pavements (AAPA/Main Roads Strategic Alliance Strategic Alliance, 2001, p. 1) and in doing so, made the Alliance Board accountable for management of external stakeholders. Such alliances paved the way for the introduction of more formal partnering arrangements in the area of project delivery.

Alliance contracts which combined contractual arrangements with an agreement to a joint project vision and a focus on managing relationships as a means of improving project outcomes began to emerge as an alternate project delivery methodology. Alliance contracting was thought to be particularly suitable for projects where there were “various diverse key stakeholder interests to be brought together early and these key stakeholder interfaces and relationships” were complex (Queensland Government, 2008, p.16). Through the use of alliance contracting, Main Roads was able to ensure early engagement of both project partners and external stakeholders to negotiate the best possible solutions for all parties. In this way local knowledge and community expertise could be blended with technical knowledge to create better outcomes.

The Port of Brisbane Motorway (PoBM) project in the early 2000’s provides an example of the benefits of relational contracts through improved relationships with stakeholders. The project was highly complex; involving the construction of five kilometres of motorway, twelve bridges and a multi-level interchange over the Gateway Motorway (Manley & Blayse, 2003). As a result of this complexity, an alliance contract was chosen as the project procurement method. The underpinning premise of this decision was that optimal project outcomes and minimisation of the conflicts and disputes could be achieved by embedding collaboration and sound relationships into the project governance system. Alliance contracting was also partially selected in recognition of the need to deal with “poor stakeholder/community relations” (Manley & Blayse, 2003, p. 19).

The project involved two types of stakeholders: project partners who were the decision makers and community stakeholders who were consulted during the project. The project partners included the “the state and federal government, two government owned corporations

and a consortium of three private sector organisations” (Waterhouse, 2003, p. 139). External stakeholders included a local school, residents, road users and environmental groups.

Difficulties were experienced with external stakeholders about a number of issues: the “stop/start” character of the project, noise concerns, loss of access and environmental problems (Cooperative Research Centre for Construction Innovation, 2004). The Alliance proactively addressed these issues by implementing a series of targeted processes designed to increase community interest and connectivity with the project.

A particularly difficult stakeholder issue facing the project was the rehabilitation of the Bulimba Creek Oxbow. While commitments had been given to undertake the rehabilitation, the scope of the work was increased to satisfy stakeholder demands. An additional \$250,000 in funding was injected into the rehabilitation project and flood modelling technology was used to demonstrate to stakeholders that appropriate environmental outcomes could be achieved (Cooperative Research Centre for Construction Innovation, 2004). By bringing stakeholders into the project from an early stage, providing ongoing opportunities for issues to be raised and working collaboratively to find solutions, stakeholder engagement appears to have contributed to the project being completed six months early with a cost saving of \$13.4 million (Manley & Blayse, 2003).

In addition to using alliances and alliance contracts which focused on the importance of relationships in construction planning and projects, in the early 2000’s Main Roads shifted its policy position from public consultation and introduced a requirement for community engagement in all departmental projects (Doyle & Addison, 2005). Adoption of the Community Engagement Improvement Strategy by the Queensland Government in 2002 (Queensland Government, 2003) legitimised the position taken by Main Roads to focus

strongly on community engagement. This decision had a significant impact on the breadth of stakeholders involved in road planning and construction in Queensland due to the number, value and geographic reach of contracts awarded by the department. In 2010/11 (Transport and Main Roads, n/d) TMR expects to award contracts to the value of \$650 million for fifty two projects situated across eighteen local government areas in Queensland. Despite the changed focus of stakeholder engagement in planning and construction of state-controlled roads, until recently, local government did not have the same impetus to engage with community engagement

CHANGES FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Prior to changes to legislative changes in 2010, the, engagement of local communities in council planning decisions, including road decision making, was discretionary. In 2004 (Local Government Association of Queensland Inc., , p. 3) growing concern was expressed “that Local Government’s engagement practice and techniques, including community consultation, demand improvement”. However, changes to the *Local Government Act 2009* have required that “meaningful community engagement” must inform council decision making processes (Department of Infrastructure and Planning, 2010, p. 2). Although the impact of this change is not yet apparent, it could be argued that there will be a flow-on effect, resulting in higher levels of stakeholder engagement in road planning and delivery by regional councils.

Policy and legislative changes which have impacted on stakeholder engagement in road decision making in Queensland have been accompanied by changes in the way road planning and construction occurs. Of significance has been the introduction of networked arrangements for road delivery, and in particular the Roads Alliance

NETWORKED ARRANGEMENTS FOR ROAD PLANNING AND DELIVERY

As a result of the long-standing relationships between local government and state road authority a high degree of interdependence exists between the two levels of government. For example, in some parts of the state, TMR relies on local government to deliver its maintenance program. Despite council amalgamations in 2008, some small regional council, remain reliant upon TMR for funding which creates stability for the local workforce.

In 2002, Main Roads leveraged this long-standing relationship with its primary stakeholders, local government (Department of Main Roads, 2008), in establishing the Roads Alliance, a partnership between the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ), local governments and the department. The Roads Alliance is now responsible for managing a five year program of regional investment for 32,000 kilometres of regionally significant local roads across Queensland (Department of Main Roads & Local Government Association of Queensland, 2008). The primary source of funding is the Transport Infrastructure Development Scheme (TIDS) which is in the order of \$3 billion over five years. TIDS provides funding to local governments for transport-related infrastructure development and is allocated among RRGs to primarily undertake minor works and maintenance projects.

Establishment of the Roads Alliance was approached by Main Roads as a stakeholder engagement activity targeting two key stakeholder groups: LGAQ and 125 local councils. Bringing these stakeholders together in partnership with Main Roads involved extensive state wide consultation to obtain commitment to the alliance approach. Acknowledging “that the community wants a seamless high standard road system irrespective of the ownership of individual links” (The Roads Alliance, 2010, p. 14) the Roads Alliance brought together councils and in a co-operative arrangement to deliver an integrated road program across

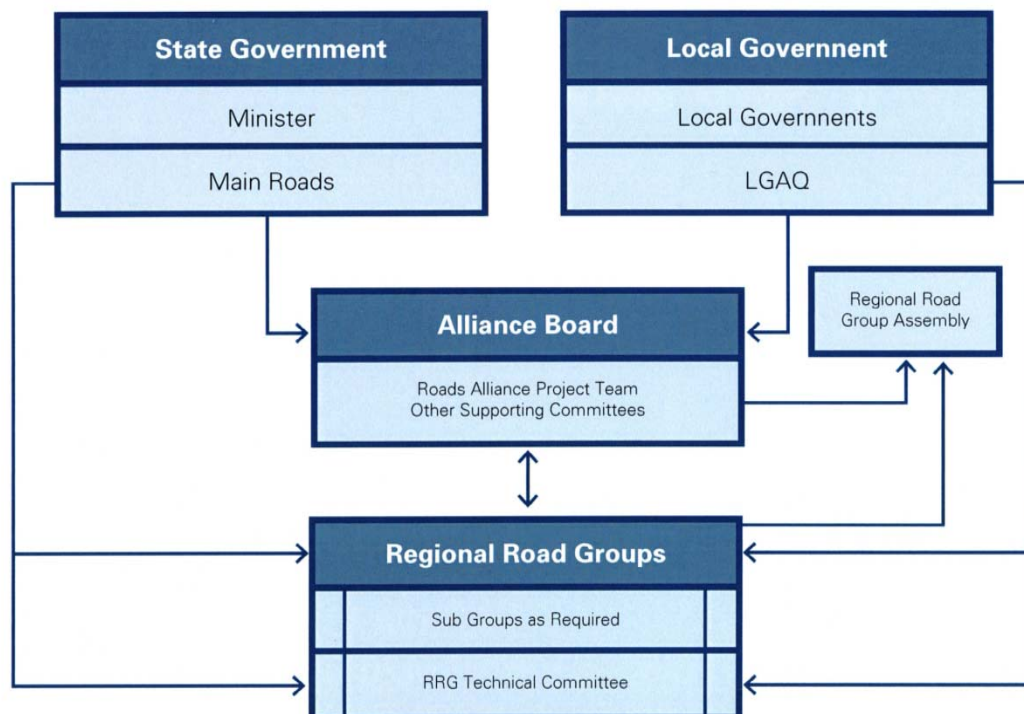
Queensland. This joint commitment by state and local government was also driven by the “need to act collectively to achieve systemic, state-wide improvement in planning, resource-use and capability... to deliver the outcomes required by their stakeholders” (Doyle & Addison, 2006, p. 19).

Governance

Doyle (2008, p. 185) contends that the Roads Alliance represents “a new way of thinking about governance”, challenging the traditional siloed ways that Main Roads and local government managed the road system. This new approach incorporated a number of key features: it brought together political and technical actors in collaborative decision-making processes, provided a mechanism for long-term road planning that transcended local and state election cycles, and transferred control of state government funding priorities to a series of regionally-based governance bodies: Regional Roads Groups (RRGs).

As depicted in Diagram 1, the Roads Alliance operates through a multi-level structure comprising a Board, network management group (RAPT) and eighteen RRGs and their associated Technical Committees.

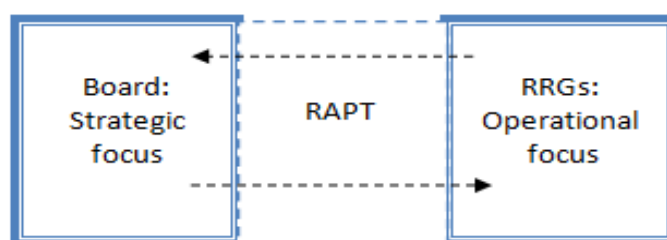
Diagram 1 Structure of the Roads Alliance



(Department of Main Roads & Local Government Association of Queensland, 2008).

As indicated in Diagram 1, the Roads Alliance operates as a three tier committee structure with each level having distinctive responsibilities. At the meso level, the Board is responsible for setting the strategic direction of the Roads Alliance and overseeing implementation and operations across the state. At the operational level, RRGs are responsible for the management of the local roads network, including investment and maintenance decisions as well as collaborating to address regional transport issues (Local Government Association of Queensland & Department of Main Roads, 2008). Acting as a conduit between the Board and RRGs, RAPT undertakes a number of network management functions with a particular focus on co-ordination and driving the implementation of programs and initiatives set by the Board. The linkages between the three subgroups comprising the Roads Alliance are depicted in Diagram 2.

Diagram 2 Linkages between the sub-groups of the Road Alliance



The Board “is the highest level decision making body of the Alliance” (The Roads Alliance, 2008, p.5) with membership limited to senior representatives of the alliance partners: TMR and LGAQ. One of the Board’s major roles is to ensure effective governance arrangements for the Alliance. Governance at the Board level operates through a traditional bureaucratic committee model in which directions come from the top down with RAPT co-ordinating among the RRG’s on behalf of the Board. As a result of this intermediary relationship, there is little connection between the Board and RRGs. This may also be a result of the wide geographical dispersion of RRGs across the state.

Operating within a multi-dimensional governance framework, has resulted in a closer alignment between the Alliance and its two major stakeholders: Main Roads and LGAQ (Doyle, 2008). Despite the desired objective of achieving “collaborative road network management” (The Roads Alliance, 2008), the Roads Alliance represents a largely exclusive space in which alliance partners and the seventy six councils interact. The relatively impervious boundaries mean that there is limited opportunity for input into by other stakeholders affected by delivery of roads in regional council areas.

The RRGs function as regional decision-making bodies which make use of both bureaucratic and networked structural arrangements to deliver small, but politically significant, regional works programs. While participation by local governments is voluntary, there are financial incentives for participating i.e. additional road funding for individual councils. RRGs comprise two interlinked groups, one of which focuses on engineering issues and the other operates at the political level. This approach distinguishes between the technical and political aspects of regional road delivery.

“Underpinned by differing operating frameworks...and each requires different actors, institutional arrangements and strategies” (Keast, Mandell, & Brown, 2006, p. 27), RRGs operate in a complex environment which combines both hierarchical and network governance modes. The formal governance structure of RRGs is enshrined in their constitutions (Local Government Association of Queensland & Department of Main Roads, 2008) and also follows a traditional hierarchical approach in which decision making occurs vertically between the politically focused RRG and engineering based technical committee with reporting back through RAPT to the Board.

Alongside the hierarchical arrangements, RRGs also exhibit some network governance features. As TMR has ceded authority for the TIDS program to RRGs, these groups have decision-making authority for prioritisation and expenditure of funds Further RRGs are expected to operate in a manner which promotes ”cross regional collaboration” (The Roads Alliance, 2008) and resource sharing. Additionally, some RRGs have a designated network manager i.e. technical co-ordinators whose role is primarily co-ordination and driving joint initiatives to keep RRGs “ moving forward and achieving desired milestones” (Local Government Association of Queensland Inc., 2009, p. 9).

RRGs operate in a mixed governance mode incorporating bureaucratic administrative systems and network features and cuts across state and local government jurisdictional boundaries. The extent to which external stakeholders are involved in RRG activities i.e. who is included and who is excluded, appears to be tightly controlled. The majority of stakeholder

engagement occurring within RRG boundaries, demonstrating a reliance on more traditional approaches in which preference is given to internal inputs. By maintaining rigid boundaries, there is little external input from the broader range of stakeholders. For example, broader community input into RRG business is obtained indirectly “through routine community engagement activities undertaken by and local councils” and is “considered in the Alliance process” (Wright, 2006, p. 7).

This closed approach may be applicable where RRGs are conducting “business as usual”. However more intensive interaction with a wider group of stakeholders may become necessary as funding priorities for road delivery change and access to resources becomes more difficult. For RRGs to effectively transition to a more relational model of stakeholder involvement more needs to be understood about the governance systems that RRGs employ, and the issues that arise for stakeholder engagement from the choice of governance approach.

CONCLUSION

This paper has provided historical and contextual background pertaining to road planning and delivery in Queensland, and has shown that the influence of stakeholders on road planning and delivery is not a new issue. From the early twentieth century, road construction authorities in Queensland have been buffeted by competing pressures exerted by traditional stakeholders including the three tiers of government, elected representatives, motoring organisations, industry and communities. As well, new stakeholders including environmental groups, industry organisations and community based organisations have emerged as the social, economic and environmental impacts of road management have become more

apparent. However it is not always clear how the needs these stakeholders are incorporated in road decision making and what approaches are the most effective.

Traditional expert-led responses to stakeholder pressures are no longer effective. This position is supported by Stirling (2001, p. 71) who asserts that “Divergent public interests and values cannot therefore be adequately addressed by ‘bolting on’ inclusive deliberation at the end of an expert-led process”. As demonstrated in the Route 20 and Pacific Motorway cases, inadequate stakeholder engagement at the outset of planning was a major contributor to significant and costly project disruptions. In the case of the Pacific Motorway, this resulted in severe political consequences.

Expert-led processes of consultation have gradually given way to much deeper stakeholder engagement activities which focus on achieving mutually beneficial outcomes. The introduction of new models of governance has driven the development of networked arrangements for road delivery which incorporate more relational approaches to managing interactions with stakeholders. The effectiveness of such approaches was exemplified in the PoBM project, in which effective stakeholder engagement contributed to delivery of the motorway under budget and ahead of schedule,

At a regional level, Main Roads and local governments have come together to jointly manage a regional system of roads through networked arrangements which incorporate a mix of hierarchical and relational elements. However what drives stakeholder prioritisation and engagement, and how these processes are linked remains unclear. Future empirical research exploring examples of networked arrangements for road delivery needs to be undertaken to

gain an understanding of how stakeholder prioritisation occurs and how such decisions flow through to stakeholder engagement activities.

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