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27 February 2020

The Hon. Jacinta Allan
Minister for Transport Infrastructure
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Dear Minister,

Re: Land management and disposal process concerns

Campaspe Shire Council is concerned at the inconsistency of surplus rail reserve land management and disposal process for rural and regional communities.

We note that VicTrack own or manage on behalf of the Crown a significant number of parcels of land across the State. In many rural and regional communities rail stations and rail tracks dissect or are located in the heart of towns. These parcels generally receive minimal maintenance and are industrial in appearance and usually underutilised. Consequently they are often a visual blight on the respective towns.

Many small rural communities have recognised the value of these parcels and with limited or no approvals, have developed and continue to maintain them as public spaces or environmental revegetation areas. Without the actions of the community these sites would remain unmaintained and present as an increasing fire risk, evidence of weed infestation and negatively impact the aesthetics of the local environment.

Largely the release of these surplus parcels for either sale (for commercial purposes) or lease (for either commercial or community use) appears to remain at the discretion of VicTrack. Priority appears to be given to those sites where commercial return to VicTrack may exist.

It is felt that this is inconsistent with the Department of Treasury and Finance policy *Victorian Government Landholding Policy and Guidelines*. In particular the purpose of the policy to:

- a) ensure that land is only purchased or retained by Victorian Government agencies where State ownership of land:
 - i. contributes directly to current or future service delivery outcomes expected by Government;
 - ii. is central to the core business of agencies as explained in agency corporate plans;

- b) promote the highest and best use of land by providing the opportunity for the private and community sectors and other government agencies to further unlock the value inherent in the State's land estate; and

Further at Section 2 the policy requires that:

- a) Victorian Government agencies must only hold land or an interest in land where State ownership of that land:
- i. contributes directly to current or future service delivery outcomes expected of agencies as explained in agency corporate plans and does this by the most cost effective means possible;

It goes on to note that:

- c) Upon declaring land surplus to agency requirements, Victorian Government agencies must:
- i. provide notice of 60 days of the agency's intention to dispose of land during which period other State, Commonwealth or local government agencies may express interest in acquiring the land;

(Underline emphasis added)

The commercial nature in which VicTrack operates is significantly impacting opportunities in rural and regional communities. Consequently there is a need for change in the way in which your government considers the disposal of surplus land particularly that located in rural and regional areas where there may be limited commercial value, but significant local economic and social value.

Where not already identified, we seek that land which is surplus be transferred to the Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning (DELWP). DELWP understand the value and contribution that community make to improving and maintaining public spaces within and surrounding their towns. Reflecting the role of the CoMs under the Crown Land Reserves Act (1978) is to “manage, improve, maintain and control” Crown land reserves that have been set aside for the benefit of the people of Victoria.

Transferring of surplus rail land within rural and regional areas to the Crown (DELWP) would improve access and management arrangements for land and communities.

To support implementation of this approach we call on the State Government to financially support VicTrack to facilitate surplus land identification and transfer.

Thank you for the opportunity to communicate these concerns.

We invite your office to contact Keith Oberin, Economic & Community Development General Manager on 5481 2200 should you wish to discuss these concerns further.

Yours faithfully



Adrian Weston
MAYOR

CC: Mr Campbell Rose, VicTrack Chief Executive