Submission No 35

INQUIRY INTO STRUCTURE AND FUNDING OF THE ARTS, MUSIC, NIGHT-TIME ECONOMY, AND TRANSPORT PORTFOLIOS

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 14 November 2025

To whom it may concern.

I write in response to the Inquiry into ‘Structure and funding of the arts, music, night-time economy, and transport portfolios’ established on 23 October 2025.

My submission pertains entirely to the transport portfolio, specifically with regards to the targeted reduction of technical capability (by both sides of government) over at least the last decade. With that in mind, I specifically speak of my own personal experiences during my tenure with Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA), Roads and Maritime Services (RMS) and now Transport for NSW (TfNSW).

The Inquiry’s Terms of Reference speak directly to the matter of technical capability, directly or indirectly relating to various restructuring over the years. One key fact to note, is that the technical decline in the responsible NSW roads department commenced with the restructure from RTA to RMS back in 2011, this aligns with a clear shift away from the department being led by technical (historically Engineering) experts at the top of the roads and highways field. Since this time, we have seen a revolving door of MBAs, career bureaucrats and now a former political staffer with experience in journalism and HR leading the department.

This is an important overarching issue, as it directly influences the degree to which technical capability is considered (or even understood) by the recent line of management. The choice of leadership sets a clear intention and direction for the organisation, and this trend has been in the negative direction.

My own experience has been that of young man from Tamworth in rural NSW, being accepted into the RTA undergraduate program during my Civil Engineering studies at Newcastle University. Upon completing my degree and required work experience, I progressed onto the RTA/RMS graduate program before winning my first role with RMS. I have some 15 years of hands-on experience with the development and delivery of major road infrastructure upgrades within the Newcastle, Central Coast and Upper Hunter regions. Over this time, while my role has been that of a Project Engineer/Manager, I have developed specialist technical expertise in the field of pavements, and specifically concrete pavements. I am fortunate enough to represent on the board of the Australian Society for Concrete Pavements (ASCP), where I currently serve .

My observation over recent years has been a dramatic shift away from management seeing value in staff pursuing technical expertise, and even more clear shift away from Transport upholding their role as responsible corporate citizen in these type of technical societies.

ASCP was founded in 2007, with RTA being pivotal to the establishment (as the largest concrete pavement client in Australia, and with the most well-regarded technical capabilities). Since that time RTA/RMS/TfNSW have remained as a corporate member and have collaborated with the biannual technical conference, where best practice is shared from across Australia and across the world, with a select group of invited international speakers brought to Australia to enable regular international knowledge transfer.

It is unfortunate that over recent years, the TfNSW management have stepped away from any involvement/financial support with this biannual conference, and even more unfortunate that under current TfNSW leadership, approvals for attendance have dwindled.

Historically the technical conference (and more frequent technical forums) would see 150-200 attendees, with close to ¼ being from TfNSW. This years' conference, saw just 12 attendees from across all of TfNSW, despite the department remaining the largest Australian builder and maintainer of concrete pavements, as well as leading the field with regards to technical capability and specifications. This is made more bewildering by the fact that the conference was held in Penrith, within a short drive of a number of very large concrete pavement construction projects (M12 Motorway, M7 Widening to name a few). It is also important to note that the conference location allowed (the majority) Sydney based TfNSW staff to attend without the need for significant travel or accommodation expense (over recent years this has been a strong factor in management justifying refusal for various training).

In my plea to management to consider increased conference participation, I made the following ROI observations. Over the past decade, TfNSW has constructed an annual average of 319 lane kilometres of concrete pavement (predominately on the Pacific and Hume Highways and the Sydney Motorway Network). The value of this pavement could be considered to be in the order $200M annually. Before we even consider the annual pavement maintenance budget, simply a 1% improvement in pavement costs (via international best practice) could amount to $2M in annual benefit. This potential cost reduction is not unreasonable to expect with best practice. My own paper at the recent International Society for Concrete Pavements Conference identified one simple advancement that has been demonstrated to provide cost savings of up to 5% alone (sadly not yet accepted as standard practice).

I understand that initially approval had been sought for 20-30 TfNSW staff to attend, with only 10 granted. At the full request of 30 staff, this could reflect an ROI of over 50:1, in a single year! My pleas went unanswered by very senior staff from our Technical Design and Engineering Branch, showing exactly the level of respect for technical capability, professional development and adoption of international best practice that has become the norm over the last decade.

TfNSW specifications for concrete road pavements have long been renowned within Australia and around the world. They are set to become the basis of the Austroads specification as part of the current harmonisation process. While these specifications were largely developed in the 1990s, with the Australian Bicentennial Roads Program driving a push towards contractor delivery methods, the last decade has seen little to no technical advancements. In fact, the last major revision was in 2013 (aligning with my commentary about technical decline as far back as the RTA/RMS restructure).

Recent restructures (the one currently underway and the last 'Evolving Transport' restructure) served to introduce an arrangement whereby the technical subject matter experts for a given discipline, were no longer the owner of the technical specifications and other relevant engineering documents in their field. This ownership has shifted to the Asset Management Branch, with reviews of standards only permitted by the relevant subject matter expert upon direction of (and funding from) the Asset Management Branch. This (and other process inefficiencies introduced with publishing technical specifications/standards etc) has directly led to a stagnation of TfNSW technical advancement. While laughable, it is not unusual for very simple corrections to existing specifications to take well over 12 months to reach publication. In a world that is moving very fast, that is clearly woefully insufficient, and is entirely linked to the De-Engineering agenda of the last decade or so.

While these examples from the concrete road paving industry are highly specific, they are representative of the systematic De-Engineering that has been felt within RTA/RMS/TfNSW for at least the last decade. I'm sure others from other specific technical areas could testify to their own specific examples.

The most obvious response to these concerns (particularly if De-Engineering was intended from the outset) is, so what? Well, with the challenges facing the transport industry, particularly in relation to mitigating emissions linked with climate change AND with addressing the impacts of current and forecast changes to climate (for example, building more resilient pavements), Engineers are critical to meeting those challenges without sacrificing the underlying durability of our built environment.

One doesn't need to look far to see examples of government agencies implementing sustainability driven changes, only to very quickly realise the durability impacts. Recently, the International Society for Concrete Pavements reported (INDOT and Lawmakers Address Concrete Performance Concerns on State Infrastructure – International Society for Concrete Pavements and INDOT and lawmakers aware of issue impacting roads and bridges) that the US Department of Transportation for Indiana (INDOT) have uncovered widespread concrete durability issues with new and unopened infrastructure projects right across their state. It is reported that these issues may be in relation to the increased use of Type 1L cement (a form of Portland Limestone Cement, where Portland Cement clinker is interground with increased proportion of limestone).

This type of cement has long been in development and in recent years has become widely accepted across all US states, predominately due to it's sustainability benefits. In response to the durability concerns, INDOT has implemented a strict limit on the proportion of limestone that can be interground with Portland Cement (limited now to 10%). The parallels for Australia are stark, with recent trials on NSW and QLD roads with a new class of cement referred to as Type GL. Type GL cement is very closely aligned to the US Type 1L, with allowable limestone addition of 10-20%. We can see that this cement type would fall in excess of the limit recently introduced by INDOT.

The point to this example is purely to draw attention to the impacts of De-Engineering. Only when Engineers (and other Technical Subject Matter Experts), Sustainability Experts and Policy Makers work together can real sustainable outcomes be achieved. Without Engineers, the short-term sustainability gains can blind the long-term durability implications, with major impact to taxpayers AND the environment when expected infrastructure design lives are not achieved.

I would be glad to discuss any of my submission further with whomever it may concern, and would also be willing to speak further on my experience over the last 15 years in NSW roads and transport departments.

Regards

Project Development Manager – TfNSW