
Appendix 3 – Lessons for local government road asset management

Councils should ensure their community's vision and priorities for local roads are captured in key IP&R documents

As stewards of local roads, councils need to understand and document how their communities use, value and prioritise their roads. A community's vision and priorities for roads are likely to be informed by economic drivers, the essential and critical functions served by certain roads, levels of satisfaction, and expectations for condition, function and safety. This may also be informed by the council's budget and expenditure on road assets.

A community strategic plan should contain a council's aspirations, and this audit has also observed its effective use to focus on improving a high-priority, routine service or function such as roads. This is especially the case where customer satisfaction is low or where the service represents a high level of expenditure.

Councils should adopt an approach of continuous improvement

An asset improvement plan enables a council to document its long-term ambitions for road asset management and can assist the council to monitor progress of enhancements. In this report, audited councils demonstrated the challenges of implementing and monitoring asset management improvement.

An improvement plan should also establish overall goals for the council's asset management maturity while identifying steps for incremental change. Councils can perform self-assessments against relevant industry and OLG guidance to identify opportunities for improvement.

Councils should manage data methodically and take a considered approach to the introduction of artificial intelligence and semi-automation

Road asset managers require a great deal of data to produce meaningful information. Road asset data must be methodically collected, assured, analysed and shaped in order to meet the requirements of a broad range of tasks. Some councils are using artificial intelligence-based data collection and management processes to improve the efficiency of asset data collection, improve the completeness and accuracy of data available, and to inform decision-making.

Such developments could represent a significant change to the way some councils collect and use their road asset management data. Understanding the systems, data and practices that artificial intelligence-based solutions offer may assist councils to manage the risks associated with implementing new processes. Piloting systems and validating information may support councils to ensure the completeness and accuracy of asset condition assessment data.

Councils should identify and set out planned service levels to assist in meeting community and technical expectations for the function, quality and capacity of their roads

A range of industry guidance and standards recommend councils develop levels of service frameworks for road asset management. These levels of service frameworks consider a range of criteria across customer and technical service levels and are data-intensive. To be successfully implemented under the guidance, councils require high levels of asset management maturity and the capacity to collect, manage and quality assure the data.

To implement a levels of service framework that is appropriate to their context and resourcing availability, councils can initially:

- develop costed technical levels of service within their asset management plans across function, safety and capacity
- understand and document community priorities for roads by establishing and assessing their opinion of levels of service to evaluate options and aid decision-making for major/high-risk road projects.

Councils should consider updating key strategic asset management documents and capturing lessons learned as a standard step in their disaster recovery process

Local councils, including those subject to this audit, have faced significant disruption following natural disasters, and have been required to deliver works programs several times larger than usual. This has often required balancing renewal or upgrade works with restoration works.

Actions taken to progress disaster reconstruction works have included:

- reorganising and reprioritising internal resources
- procuring externally contracted resources and materials
- pausing, deferring or cancelling planned works.

In some circumstances, councils' disaster responses have also included identifying and implementing road asset betterment.

In transitioning back to their usual asset management practices, councils should revisit and update their capital works programs and other key documentation and plans. This is important to identify necessary changes and refocus on long-term objectives.

Capturing lessons learned, identifying potential efficiencies in structure and governance, updating asset conditions (that may not yet be due for revaluation or updates), and ensuring these are documented would assist councils in responding to future disruptions should these occur.

Some councils are routinely addressing these aspects of disaster recovery. However, this could be recognised formally as an important step in all councils' disaster recovery planning.