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## MAYORAL MATTERS

In a column to the local newspapers, I referred to the Queens reference to Annus Horribilis, well last year had to be the world's Annus Horribilis, but somehow, we must move on. The recent state lock down has been a disaster for regional Victoria and the tragic accident at Serviceton magnified the plight of our neighbours in West Wimmera Shire. In particular the southern area of Edenhope, Apsley and surrounds who so strongly rely on cross border trade. If any local residents out there have half a reason or desire to visit this area, just now would be a great time.

Tourism, as I have said before is vital for all our small town's survival and we, Wimmera Mallee Tourism are putting some great new initiatives in place for the, hopefully not too distant, recovery. It is pleasing to see the re-emergence of a Hindmarsh Tourism group that can focus at individual town level, something that has been lacking for some time.

Our road networks, as often is the case, are under scrutiny at the moment with regard to B Double access. Heavy vehicle access is imperative to our farm industry to get produce to the end user. Our roads, both local and VicRoads are deteriorating at an alarming rate. Funding, Federal, State and Local is totally inadequate, not just for our Shire but across the entire Rural / Regional network.

The merger of our major regional health service with Ballarat is also a hot topic at the moment, something I was reluctant to comment on because of the lack of information. There is now a huge groundswell of opposition / discontent with the proposal and having served on the board of West Wimmera health service for eighteen years I have no doubt whatsoever this merger is being overseen by the health powerbrokers in Melbourne. I am not against mergers, WWHS has had many over the years but they have to be the correct ones. This merger has scant detail and has not, it appears, looked at any other options.

Road funding and health are both topics that need a great deal of focus given that there will be an election in the not-too-distant future. Regional and rural Victorians need to become very vocal about

both issues sooner rather than later.

Enjoy your day.

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Cr Ron Ismay  
**Mayor**