

**TRANSPORT ADMINISTRATION AMENDMENT (CLOSURE OF RAILWAY LINE BETWEEN
ROSEWOOD AND TUMBARUMBA) BILL 2017**

First Reading

Bill introduced on motion by Mr Andrew Constance, read a first time and printed.

Second Reading

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE (Bega—Minister for Transport and Infrastructure) (16:18):

I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I introduce the Transport Administration Amendment (Closure of Railway Line Between Rosewood and Tumbarumba) Bill 2017 with a very clear intent in mind—that is, to drive tourism opportunities in the electorate of the member for Albury. I note that the member is in the Chamber, and I acknowledge his ongoing efforts on behalf of his electorate. I particularly acknowledge that the good member has worked tirelessly on this issue in order to secure funding so the project can commence. The purpose of bill is clear. It is to close the non-operational railway line between Rosewood and Tumbarumba to progress the development of a rail trail along the corridor.

Rail trails are an innovative use of disused rail lines that can generate substantial economic and social benefits for local communities, helping to unlock their potential, including through stimulating tourism and improving the physical and mental health of users. This legislation establishes the first rail trail in New South Wales, which makes it historic. I draw to the attention of the House that most States already have rail trails in their jurisdictions—some having multiple rail trails already established, with more than 25 active trails in Victoria alone.

A 2009 study of the Murray to Mountains Rail Trail in northern Victoria revealed that cycle tourists visiting the trail spent on average \$244 per day each at local businesses. I know of and can understand some apprehension in parts of the State in relation to these types of tourism projects, but the good thing about this is that the project is backed by the member for Albury on behalf of his constituents. It is interesting that the member for Blacktown is in the Chamber, because when he was transport Minister he did not do much at all. I note that he is sitting on the sidelines now. Section 99A of the Transport Administration Act 1988 provides that a rail infrastructure owner may close a railway line outside the greater metropolitan region only after it is authorised by an Act of Parliament. Closure includes the removal of the tracks, which is a fundamental requirement to enable the repurposing of the corridor for pedestrians and cyclists.

Accordingly, the Transport Administration Amendment (Closure of Railway Line Between Rosewood and Tumbarumba) Bill 2017 seeks to authorise the closure of the non-operational line between McEachern Lane, Rosewood, and Albury Street, Tumbarumba—a distance of approximately 22 kilometres. As members may be aware, the Tumbarumba to Rosewood Rail Trail project was announced by the Government in June 2015 as a pilot rail trail with the provision of a \$4.8 million grant allocation from the Restart NSW—Regional Tourism Infrastructure Fund. I add for the benefit of the House that the member for Albury led the charge in terms of securing those funds. I also add that the Regional Tourism Infrastructure Fund was opposed by members opposite—the Labor Party and The Greens—because, in essence, the fund was established as a result of recycling capital from our existing asset base, be it through the port transactions or the poles and wires transactions.

That type of investment now enables us to drive good, regional tourism-based projects, whether a rail trail or an upgrade of an original airport. That is what this fund was established to do. It is why this investment has been so good for Albury and has enabled the progress of the project in advance of this legislation coming before the House. The rail line between Tumbarumba and Rosewood has not been in operation since 1974 and is ideal for renewal as a vibrant, new tourism

attraction building on the significant natural beauty of the region. It is an incredible region. The Tumbarumba to Rosewood Rail Trail Pilot Steering Committee has been established and is chaired by Snowy Valleys Council—I thank it for its work—and local community engagement with the proposal has been very strong. The State is represented on the committee, which includes the Department of Premier and Cabinet, Infrastructure NSW, Transport for NSW, the Department of Industry—Lands, the Department of Primary Industries and Destination NSW.

It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the local community. It must be acknowledged that certain individual landholders have not been as keen on this project as others, but the overall view is that this short rail trail will benefit the whole community. The steering committee has helped to ensure good progress in the planning and consultation stages of the project. However, formal closure of the railway line is required to progress the development of the rail trail further. The Government has developed an innovative model that allows access by the public to the former rail corridor while maintaining public ownership. Transport for NSW is working with the Department of Industry—Lands to determine appropriate land transfer arrangements. It is anticipated that the corridor will be declared a Crown reserve for which Snowy Valleys Council will then be appointed trustee.

Current and forecast rail passenger and freight patterns suggest it is unlikely that the Tumbarumba to Rosewood railway line will ever be required for future rail services. However, the arrangements will ensure that the corridor can be resumed by Transport for NSW for operational purposes if the need arises. While the Tumbarumba to Rosewood project has enjoyed considerable community support, I also understand the concerns of impacted landholders regarding biosecurity, privacy and public liability. I note key feedback from landholders regarding the security of barn equipment, sheds and the like. Snowy Valleys Council and local landholders have held a number of public forums and meetings, and in early 2015 the member for Albury met with local residents. I thank the member for Albury for that engagement and for his continued advocacy to achieve this outcome for his community.

There has also been engagement with the NSW Farmers Association, which represents the interests of landholders along the proposed route. More recently, Murray Local Land Services completed a detailed strategic risk assessment. The risks of greatest concern detailed in the strategic risk assessment related largely to biosecurity but a number of mitigation measures have been identified to manage these appropriately. One such risk that can be managed effectively is the introduction of various animal diseases to the area that may result from animal and human transfer. Measures to mitigate this risk will include the prevention of contact between animals and trail users through signage warning of trespass and biosecurity risks and obligations. These obligations will also constitute rules for use of the rail trails, with warnings extending to the treatment of food scraps, human waste, soil and seeds. The prevention of disease transfer between animals will also be managed through the instalment of fencing and gates to control animal movements.

Other issues to be managed include road safety risks where the trail crosses roads and issues regarding livestock containment and livestock access to watering points. Mitigation measures have been identified to address each of the risks and discussed in detail with adjacent landowners. The risk assessment provides insights and a valuable process that can be used to inform similar assessments for any future rail trail proposals in other areas, and applications for other rail trails across New South Wales have been submitted as part of the recent expression of interest process for the Regional Growth—Environment and Tourism Fund. The Rosewood to Tumbarumba Rail Trail is being progressed as a pilot initiative. As such, council and the relevant government agencies involved are working hard to ensure that the process for planning and delivering the trail sets an example for potential future proposals in other locations.

The Rosewood to Tumbarumba Rail Trail will have a positive impact on local communities, providing increased business and tourism opportunities for the surrounding region as well as

enabling better access to this incredible part of our State. I reiterate, as someone who comes from the country and who understands country rail, that I am sensitive to viewpoints of local landholders but we can work around those issues. That is the great thing about what the member for Albury has been doing: There are ways to work through issues. The rail trail will provide employment prospects, including during the construction phases of the trail. Local residents and visitors will also enjoy social, cultural and health benefits as a result of the trail.

In conclusion, the bill is indicative of the Government's support for local communities and the tourism industry across New South Wales, especially in rural and regional areas. I recognise what has been achieved from a steering committee perspective, a community perspective and the local member's perspective, which is important. We know there are other communities around the State that are championing the cause of these types of trails. We will consider each on a case-by-case basis, as there are other communities in the State that do not agree with the proposals. It is about finding the right balance and ultimately ensuring that the good people of regional New South Wales see the conversion of some of our existing rail assets into something more dynamic.

We have literally thousands of kilometres of disused rail infrastructure across this State because of an archaic provision in the Act. It is ironic that, as Minister for Transport, I can close a rail service but I cannot order the lifting of rail lines. To do so, I must ask for the approval of this Parliament.

Based on the feedback the Government has received from the member for Albury, this legislation will result in a fantastic outcome for the people of the region. I have every confidence that it will be well marketed by the council, Destination NSW and local chambers of commerce. This is the type of tourism initiative that can be integrated well into other opportunities in the region, be it wineries, camp sites, national parks and so on. I hope that members opposite will support this legislation, even though they did not support the funding proposal. I call on them to support the bill because it makes sense. I congratulate the member for Albury on his efforts with regard to the bill and I look forward to his contribution to the debate. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned.