

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

Second Reading

The Hon. DAVID CLARKE (15:46 : 0): On behalf of the Hon. Don Harwin: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The purpose of the Transport Administration Amendment (Closure of Railway Line Between Rosewood and Tumbarumba) Bill 2017 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 railway 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.

The Hon. Mick Veitch: They are not dysfunctional?

Mr SCOT MacDONALD: They are not dysfunctional. This legislation is historic. Most States in Australia already have multiple rail trails established, with more than 25 active trails in Victoria alone. A 2009 study of the Murray to Mountains rail trail in northern Victoria revealed cycle tourists visiting the rail trail spent, on average, \$244 per day each at local businesses. Section 99A of the Transport Administration Act 1988 (New South Wales) provides that a rail infrastructure owner may only close a railway line outside the Greater Metropolitan Region after being 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 into a safe trail 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 a non-operational line between McEachern Lane, Rosewood and Albury Street, Tumbarumba, which is 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. The rail trail 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. The Tumbarumba to Rosewood Rail Trail Pilot Steering Committee has been established and is chaired by the Snowy Valleys Council, and local community engagement with the proposal has been very strong.

The State is represented on the committee, including the Department of Premier and Cabinet, Infrastructure NSW, Transport for NSW, the Department of Industry—Lands, the Department of Primary Industries and Destination NSW. 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 further progress the development of the rail trail. The Government has developed an innovative model which allows access for 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 the corridor will be declared a Crown reserve, for which Snowy Valleys Council will then be appointed trustee.

Current and forecasted 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. There have already been a number of public forums and meetings between Snowy Valleys Council and local landholders and in early 2015 the member for Albury, Greg Aplin, MP, met with local residents. I thank in particular the hardworking member for Albury for his continued advocacy on behalf of his community—he is a very effective member.

There has also been engagement with the New South Wales Farmers Association which is representing the interests of landholders along the proposed route. More recently, the Murray Local Land Services completed a detailed strategic risk assessment. The risks of greatest concern detailed

in the strategic risk assessment were largely related 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 into a valuable process that can be used to inform similar assessments for any future rail trail proposals in other areas. We have seen applications for other rail trails across New South Wales 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 the 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 beautiful part of our State. The rail trail will provide employment prospects, including during its construction phases. Local residents and visitors will also enjoy social, cultural and health benefits as a result of the trail. In conclusion, this bill is indicative of this Government's support for local communities and the tourism industry across New South Wales but especially in rural and regional areas. I commend the bill to the House.