

## **INQUIRY INTO TOURISM IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES**

**Organisation:** Tumbarumba Shire Rail Trail Steering Committee  
**Date received:** 25/11/2013

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## *Riverina Highlands Rail Trails Inc*

**Tumbarumba Shire Rail Trail Steering Committee**

**NSW Patron the Honourable Tim Fischer AC**

Tumbarumba Shire Rail Trail Steering Committee  
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### **Pilot Rail Trail – Submission to Tourism in Local Communities Inquiry GPSC3**

This submission is in support of the development of a pilot rail trail on the disused rail corridor located in the Tumbarumba Shire to support tourism within the Tumbarumba Shire. This is part of the disused Wagga Wagga to Tumbarumba rail corridor which was abandoned on 15 September 1974 following disastrous flooding near Tarcutta.

#### **Background**

The Tumbarumba to Wagga Wagga rail corridor passes through three local government areas, the City of Wagga Wagga, the Greater Hume Shire Council and the Tumbarumba Shire Council. Following the closure of the rail line, sections of the corridor have been neglected and, in some cases, destroyed due to the lack of maintenance and the absorption of the rail lines into the farming properties despite the railway corridor remaining in NSW public ownership. We are proposing the piloting of a rail trail within New South Wales between Tumbarumba and Rosewood, a section of approximately 22 kilometres, to confirm the viability of a rail trail along this rail corridor.

The history of rail in the area is slowly disappearing due to the neglect of the corridor, a rail trail would preserve that remaining history and through interpretative signage a lasting reminder to the struggles of our forebears will be provided. The Tumbarumba Historical Society fully supports the project.

Some ten years ago a group of enthusiasts began looking at turning the disused rail corridor into a rail trail, a multipurpose corridor for use by walkers, cyclists and possibly horse riders. The impetus for this was the success of such ventures in particularly Victoria, but also in other Australian states and overseas. Over the past ten years there have been numerous community meetings and one-to-one sessions with landholders. Transplan Pty Ltd conducted a feasibility study, available at **Attachment A**, in June 2006.



*Sections of the disused rail corridor between Tumbarumba and Rosewood*

Funding was sourced from the Commonwealth and a number of companies expressed an interest in developing the trail, but inactivity from the state government saw the development of the project stall.

### **Local Planning**

The 2006 feasibility study indicated that the establishment of a rail trail is not only feasible but also likely to have financial benefits to the local community due to the promotion of tourism and other socio-economic benefits. This Study recommends that both railway corridors be the subject of rail-trail conversions and that they are 'top drawer' opportunities. Due to various factors, progress in developing a rail trail was delayed.

Interest in the project was renewed in 2011 following correspondence from the NSW Transport Minister, the Hon Gladys Berejiklian MP indicating that the NSW State Government is happy to consider proposals for disused rail lines where there are clear community benefits and strong community support. Correspondence between the NSW State Government and the Riverina Highlands Rail Trails is at **Attachment B**.

A community meeting was held on 24 July 2013 to determine if there was still interest in developing a rail trail. Approximately 70 people were in attendance with around 30 minutes of apologies –considering the population of the shire this is an impressive number of interested people. The meeting was unanimous in its support of the concept. The Tumbarumba Shire Rail Trail Steering Committee was formed at this meeting, with this committee to be a subcommittee of Riverina Highlands Rail Trail Inc.

The following week the Tumbarumba Shire Council voted to support the project. This led to the committee gauging support for the concept within the business community, the community at large and with the landholders through which the rail corridor passes. Support has been given by the Tumbarumba Chamber of Commerce, Riverina Tourism, Snowy Mountain Tourism, Australian Rail Trails, many of the businesses along the trail and within the community, as well as overwhelming support from the community. The Tumbarumba Shire Council has a MOU with the Mannus Correctional Centre which could facilitate ongoing establishment and maintenance support with direct and positive support to the inmates involved.

The Catchment Management Authority (Murray) has built into their future plans the support of the implementation of a rail trail. This support is through forward estimates funding of management of vegetation, erosion and drainage along the trail.



*Existing signage along the rail corridor*

### **Community Consultation**

Although the majority of the local community is overwhelming in support of the development of a rail trail within the Tumbarumba Shire, there are some (and there always are no matter what you are trying to do) who are actively against the development. There are also those who see the issue as not affecting them so there is no need to be involved either for or against. It is acknowledged that it is unachievable to gain complete consensus on the development of a rail trail, however as stated, the majority of the local community are supportive of the project. The Steering Committee is seeking to make contact with those who are actively against the development to negotiate potential solutions to their concerns.

To overcome these concerns, the Steering Committee in recent weeks have been meeting with affected landowners to address specific issues, most of whom have accepted the invitation to meet. The committee members have answered all questions put to them and allayed the concerns of landowners. The responses from landowners have varied from – “fantastic, you’re to be commended on your foresight” through to “I’m not supporting it on principle, even though you have answered all my questions”.

The Steering Committee has established a Facebook page, it currently has 230+ likes; with local, state, national and international interest. Each post to the site attracts at least 300 visits, with all comments being supportive.



*Scenic vistas along the disused rail corridor*

### **Financial Implications**

The development of a rail trail, as pilot project, within the Tumbarumba Shire will have a significant positive impact upon the local community and bolster the tourism industry.



The Tumbarumba Shire is considered an extremely scenic area and has become well known as a producer of fine wine and with the additional agricultural pursuits of fruit and berries the Tumbarumba Shire would be a 'must see' destination for those who visit rail trail areas. This has proven to be the case along the Murray to Mountains Trail just across the border in Victoria. Tumbarumba Shire is in a unique position to tap into the Victorian cycling tourist market by virtue of its close proximity to some of Victoria's rail trails.

Rail trails are recognised as providing a boost to local economies through a steady stream of tourist traffic. This is important to this shire, with the small village of Rosewood slowly disappearing and the large regional centre of Wagga Wagga becoming dominant in the retail domain. A regular stream of income into the shire is considered important to maintain the viability of existing businesses and services. A visiting cyclist would spend money on accommodation, meals, fuel, not to mention spontaneous purchases from local businesses or attractions along the trail.

### **Social and Health Benefits**

Rail trails also provide a significant impact to local communities through providing an area in which to exercise. The easy gradient of rail corridors allows all members of families to participate; on visiting the rail trails of North Eastern Victoria it is not unusual to see the trails being used by the very young through to the elderly. Australia is recognised as becoming an overweight country, any infrastructure that can be put in place to help address this problem, especially on disused and neglected public land is to be commended. Where easily and accessible walking and cycling trails are provided people invariably make use of them. It is also well known that a healthy nation is more productive.

A rail trail in the shire would provide a safe place to cycle (and walk), by removing recreational riders from roads that see a significant number of heavy transport movements each day to service the Hyne timber mill. Hyne Timber is the major employer in the district and is located adjacent to the rail corridor; a rail trail would allow employees to cycle to and from work in safety. There are other industries and businesses along the proposed rail trail that would allow employees to cycle safely to work such as at vineyards and berry farms.

A rail trail also allows the common man to move from place to place easily without trespassing and in safety, much like the footpath system in the United Kingdom.

### **Recommendation**

We recommend that the Government supports the rail trail initiative, not just in our shire but across the whole state, it is an area in which NSW is lagging behind the rest of the world. It is time for our politicians to show leadership and develop infrastructure for our future generations.

### **Attachments**

**Attachment A:** Riverina Highlands Rail Trails Feasibility Study

**Attachment B:** Correspondence between NSW State Government and Riverina Highlands Rail Trails

### **Signed and authorised by**

Owen Fitzgerald  
Chairman  
Riverina Highlands Rail Trails Inc.  
25 November 2013

Grant Harris  
Chair  
Tumbarumba Shire Rail Trail Steering Committee  
25 November 2013