

**Submission
No 90**

INQUIRY INTO TOURISM IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Organisation: Rail Trails Australia

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NSW Patron

The Honourable Tim Fischer AC

26 November 2013

The Hon. Natasha MACLAREN-JONES MLC
Chair, General Purpose Standing Committee No. 3
Legislative Council
Parliament House
SYDNEY NSW 2000
Via email: gpsc3@parliament.nsw.gov.au.

Dear Committee Members

RAIL TRAILS for NSW – Submission to Tourism in Local Communities Inquiry GPSC3

We are pleased to be able to make a submission to this inquiry.

The aim of this submission is to show the value of tourism to New South Wales Communities and the return on investment of Government grants and funds that would flow from the development of rail trails in NSW. We do this by explaining:

- what rail trails are
- the tourism value of rail trails and their benefits to NSW
- where rail trails are
- how New South Wales can learn from other states.
- NSW's potential rail trails.

Rail Trails Australia is the national organisation promoting the development and use of rail trails around Australia. We are working collaboratively with several other NSW organisations, particularly Bicycle New South Wales and GO-Alliance. We support their purpose of creating a better environment for cycling and together we share the view that establishing a network of rail trails in NSW can help achieve that goal.

We ask the Committee to recommend that the NSW Government, as one of its urgent State policy objectives:

- formulate a state plan for the introduction of rail trails throughout NSW with a deadline for report by 30 June 2014
- make sections of unused rail corridor available immediately for pilot rail trail projects where communities have already expressed a high level of support and designs undertaken.
- establish a mechanism to release unused rail corridors to local government and community bodies so that they can develop rail trails for their community and visitors.



What are Rail Trails?

Rails trails reuse currently disused or abandoned rail corridors to offer people of all ages a uniquely quite, safe and easily graded path to enjoy.

By opening up these corridors, visitors and residents alike can enjoy some of the most scenic regional areas in NSW while also learning of the important history of these areas and the rail lines that contributed to the development of this nation. They also act as conservation corridors and preserve the corridor in public ownership for the future.



Fernleigh Track Rail Trail before and after

Who uses them and what's their tourism value?

Locals use rail trails the most: to walk their dog or as a safe and pleasant ride with the kids.



Railway Reserves Heritage Trail in Western Australia (Shire of Mundaring)



Visitors come: about 40,000 people visit north east Victoria’s rail trails each year. A La Trobe University study found Easter visitors spent on average \$244 a day; and the level of the economic contribution to the region in terms of the ‘trickle down’ throughout the community the multiplier effect rose to \$447 per person per dayⁱ.

The Spring 2013 edition of our magazine, *Rail Trail Connections*, pp 7 – 9 shows the economic benefits as businesses expand to meet the demand of people who use rail trails.



Businesses in small regional town on the Murray to Mountains Rail Trail in Victoria (Greg Hutchison)

The 2009 study for Gundagai Shire Council to assess the feasibility of a Murrumbidgee Valley Rail Trail estimated the direct additional expenditure as a result of a rail trail development in the region to be in the order of \$1.006 million/yearⁱⁱ.

The Otago Central Rail Trail passes through some of New Zealand’s most remote, bleak, but highly scenic South Island. A 2005 study on the impact of on accommodation and general businesses found:

- 64% of accommodation providers operating prior to the opening of the Rail Trail in 2000 attribute more than 20% of turnover to people using the Rail Trail
- 80% of accommodation provider respondents to set up since the Trail opened attribute more than 20% of turnover to people using the Trail
- 53% of these businesses attribute more than 60% of their turnover to the Rail Trailⁱⁱⁱ.

Usage of the Otago Central Rail Trail has expanded significantly since then. A 2011 survey estimated the economic impact of the Rail Trail to the inland Otago economy:

Impact Summary	Direct	Total
Output	\$8,159,042	\$12,277,024
GDP	\$4,213,793	\$6,245,289
Employment (FTE's)	96.0	121.3



Health benefits associated with rail trails are significant as well. A 2013 study for a proposed rail trail in Nova Scotia, Canada projected the total annual value of increased physical activity expected to arise from the trail to be approximately \$456,000. Direct health benefits were estimated to be nine times greater than the costs of the trail^{iv}.

The Fernleigh Track Rail Trail on a former private coal line in Newcastle is a rare example of a NSW rail trail. A 2007 survey counted 898 visitors on a Sunday and 590 on a weekday^v, which was when the trail was only partially complete. Usage is now much higher and this popular and valued local community resource is now widely promoted as a visitor attraction to the Newcastle area – see attached brochure.



Fernleigh Track Rail Trail

The Newcastle City Council's web page on Fernleigh includes a video showing how Fernleigh changed the life of a person with cerebral palsy who now can cycle on the Track to do his shopping, as well as for the sheer enjoyment of the ride:

[http://www.newcastle.nsw.gov.au/recreation/walks and cycling/fernleigh track](http://www.newcastle.nsw.gov.au/recreation/walks_and_cycling/fernleigh_track).

This demonstrates convincingly that the people of NSW and visitors alike would accept, adopt and use rail trails in NSW.

Some of the unused rail corridors in NSW have already been cut by freeways and other developments; all are generally neglected and undervalued. Rail trails will protect these corridors making them highly valued assets of the communities they pass through.

Rail trails keep corridors intact for the public's use and available for other future transport needs.

Where Are They?

Rail trails have been successfully developed in all other states of Australia. They are well established in New Zealand, extend for 15,000 km in Europe^{vi} and for more than 20,000 miles in North America^{vii}.

Yet there are none on non-operational state-owned rail corridors in NSW.

Rail Trails Australia's national rail trail web site: <http://www.railtrails.org.au/> lists the more than 2000km of rail trails in Australia.

Victoria and South Australia have led the way with the development of high standard rail trails. Victoria has over 850km of high standard rail trails, the most economically successful being the 100km+ Murray to the Mountains Rail Trail, see: <http://www.murraytomountains.com.au/the-rail-trail/>.

The links below provide examples in other states, cities and councils and NZ bodies that are involved. A quick look the links will give an indication of the strong support communities and businesses have for rail trails.

NT: [Darwin Rail Trail](#)



QLD: <http://www.dsdip.qld.gov.au/bvrt-homepage.html>

TAS: <http://www.tassietrails.org/news/8-routes/mtb/57-scottsdale-rail-trail-tonganah-legerwood>

SA: <http://www.marion.sa.gov.au/coast-to-vines>

Vic: [Victorian Rail Trails](#)

WA: [Shire of Mundaring - Railway Reserves Heritage Rail Trail](#)

NZ: <http://www.otagoctrail.co.nz/>



All ages welcome construction of a rail trail in their community

How can NSW catch up to other States in this economically beneficial tourist attraction?

There are several reasons why all of the other States have moved ahead so quickly and successfully. In particular they wish to secure the economical benefits to the country communities. We in NSW have the ability and the basic ingredients to change this quickly. They are:

- A progressive government that understands the need to assist the rural communities.
- NSW's unused rail corridors have been protected – therefore much of the infrastructure and history is in place. In Victoria most of the stations had fallen down and been removed, built up sidings were still visible however in many cases they were rebuilt to help create the history.
- Lines and sleepers are still there – the rails have a resale value.
- Most of the railway easements are still in place.

NSW is able to learn from the other States particularly Victoria how they have gained fantastic support. Neighbouring shire councils and community groups have worked well together and with State and Federal government to achieve the results we see in Victoria today. A great example is the recently formally opened trail from Mansfield to Tallarook, the renamed Great Victorian Rail Trail. The Mansfield Shire Council took the lead and worked with the other two shire Councils to secure significant Federal funding to produce 134kms of continuous trail for people to cycle, walk and ride horses. They are now promoting to businesses the opportunity to become commercial involved –see:

<http://www.greatvictorianrailtrail.com.au/>



The High Country Rail Trail from Wodonga to Tallangatta shows how Federal and State funding rebuilt seemingly impossible linking sections of rail trail, in this case the replacement of spans of the 600m long Sandy Creek Bridge on the Hume Weir – see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1grpd3VWej8>.



Sandy Creek Bridge on the High Country Rail Trail is a real icon for the area

NSW's Potential Rail Trails

The attached brochure *Rail Trails for New South Wales* shows many of NSW's potential rail trails.

Rail Trails Australia is

supporting community groups and local government across the State that are working within council areas to develop rail trails, in particular:

- Tumbarumba Rail Trail, part of the potential rail trail from Wagga Wagga to Tumbarumba – feasibility study completed, community consultation underway - see <https://www.facebook.com/tumbarumbarailtrail?fref=ts>
- Murrumbidgee Valley Rail Trail, Gundagai - feasibility study completed, local council considering – see http://gundagai.local-e.nsw.gov.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=498494:rail-trail-proposal-gundagai&catid=254&Itemid=3237
- Northern Rivers Rail Trail, Casino to Murwillumbah – feasibility study about to get under way - see <http://www.northernriversrailtrail.org.au/>
- New England Rail Trail – gathering support – see <https://www.facebook.com/NewEnglandRailTrail>

The Tumbarumba Rail Trail and Northern Rivers Rail Trail community groups in particular have a high level of community support and are awaiting action from the government to enable the construction of rail trails to also begin in NSW. We understand that the Northern Rivers Rail Trail has also outlined the tourism benefits of rail trails to this Inquiry. The Tumbarumba Shire Council specifically highlighter the importance of a rail trail in their submission to this Inquiry.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

1. That the government convene a NSW rail trails working party comprising senior officials from relevant departments and agencies, and community stakeholders including representatives of NSW groups developing rail trail proposals for their local area
2. That the working party formulates a state plan for the introduction of rail trails throughout NSW with a deadline for report by 30 June 2014.
3. That the government make available immediately sections of unused rail corridor for pilot rail trail projects where communities have already expressed a high level of support and designs undertaken.
4. That the government establish a mechanism to release unused rail corridors to local government and community bodies so that they can develop rail trails for their community and visitors.

NSW members of Rail Trails Australia are available to discuss these issues further with interested members of the Committee. Our contact people are:

- John Moore:
- John O'Brien & Kathy Furney j

Yours sincerely

Damian McCrohan
President

The Hon Tim Fischer AC
NSW Patron



Getty/National Archives

Nothing compares to the simple pleasure of a bike ride.
~ John F. Kennedy, U.S. president

Attachments

- A: Rail Trails for New South Wales Brochure
- B: Fernleigh Track Rail Trail brochure
- C: Spring 2013 *Rail Trail Connections*, pp 7 – 9



References

- ⁱ Beeton, S. (2009) A Longitudinal Study of The Murray to the Mountains Rail Trail, Victoria, Australia, School of Management, La Trobe University
https://www.bicyclenetwork.com.au/media/vanilla/RT%20Report%2009_Final.pdf
- ⁱⁱ <http://gundagai.local-e.nsw.gov.au/images/documents/gundagai/Planning/RailTrailFeasibility.pdf>
- ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.otagocentralrailtrail.co.nz/pdf/reports/TheOtagoCentralSurvey.pdf>
- ^{iv} Comparing the costs and health benefits of a proposed rail trail, Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events, Volume 5, Issue 2, 2013
<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/19407963.2013.789729?journalCode=rprt20#preview>
- ^v <http://www.pushon.com.au/downloads/F.T.%20Survey%20report%202007.pdf>
- ^{vi} http://www.achim-bartoschek.de/bahn_rail-trails.html
- ^{vii} <http://www.railstotrails.org/aboutUs/index.html>



RAIL TRAILS FOR NEW SOUTH WALES

Walking and riding in safety while enjoying the regional towns and beautiful countryside of New South Wales:
rail trails offer this possibility ... but are a dream at the moment on NSW's many disused government rail corridors.

NSW is missing out

The people and regional businesses of NSW are missing out **on the economic and health benefits** that rail trails can deliver.

Overseas and in all other states of Australia rail trails attract both local and widespread use, help bind communities and are destinations for tourists.

Why no rail trails in NSW?

There are virtually no rail trails in NSW primarily due to complex issues unique to NSW. At times there have been concerns from some adjacent landholders, concerns addressed or unfounded on established interstate rail trails.

The Fernleigh Track Rail Trail, on a former Newcastle private coal line, is now a popular local resource and convincingly demonstrates that the people of NSW would enthusiastically adopt and use rail trails in NSW.

Show support for rail trails

We now need to show the state government that there is broad support for the widespread development of rail trails in New South Wales before the railway corridors degrade further and are lost forever. Write to your local state member and ask for rail trails to be established in NSW.

Short term goal: let's get started

Feasibility studies undertaken for rail trails in several areas already provide convincing arguments for the benefits trails will bring. It is now time to establish initial pilot rail trails on these to conclusively demonstrate the benefits of regional rail trails here in NSW.



Tumbarumba to Rosewood (21km)

Part of the proposed Riverina Highlands Rail Trail.



Gundagai (4km)

Part of the proposed Murrumbidgee Valley Rail Trail.

Long term goal: let's make it easier

Our ultimate goal is that the state government enacts the necessary legislation to encourage the use of these assets and to establish the criteria for the ongoing approval and development of rail trails elsewhere in regional NSW.

WHAT ARE RAIL TRAILS?

Rail trails built on disused or abandoned rail corridors offer people of all ages a uniquely quiet, safe and easily graded path to enjoy.

By opening up these corridors, visitors and residents alike can enjoy some of the most scenic regional areas in NSW while also learning of the important history of these areas and the rail lines that contributed to the development of this nation. They also act as conservation corridors.

WHERE ARE THEY?

Rail trails have been successfully developed in all other states of Australia and are well established in Europe and America. Victoria has over 800km of high standard rail trails.

WHO USES THEM?

Locals use rail trails the most: to walk the dog or as a safe and pleasant ride with the kids.

Visitors come: about 40,000 people visit north east Victoria's rail trails each year, and each visitor spends on average \$244 a day according to a La Trobe University study.

HOW DO THEY PROTECT RAIL CORRIDORS?

Some of the unused rail corridors in NSW have already been cut by freeways and other developments; all are generally neglected and undervalued. Rail trails will protect these corridors, making them highly valued assets of the communities they pass through.

Rail trails keep corridors intact for the public use and available for future transport needs.

HOW DO I FIND OUT MORE?

For information, trail descriptions, photos and maps visit www.railtrails.org.au

If you can also help us make Rail Trails a reality in NSW, contact admin@railtrails.org.au



Go! Alliance

bicycle NSW

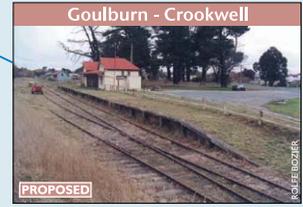
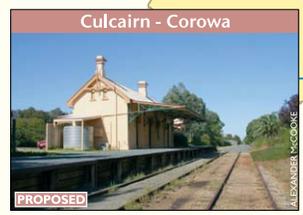
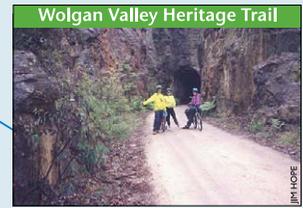
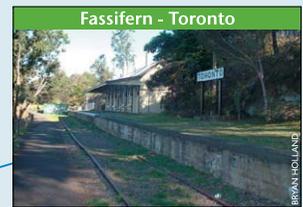
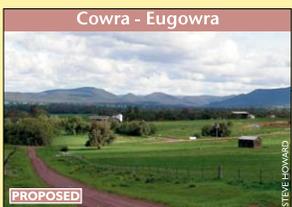
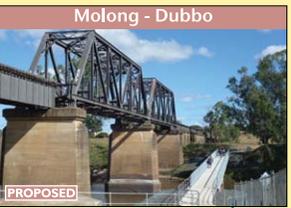
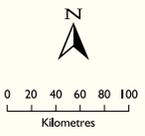
BICYCLE NETWORK

RailTrails AUSTRALIA

RAIL TRAILS FOR NEW SOUTH WALES

LEGEND

- Rail Trail (open)
- Proposed Rail Trail with feasibility study
- Proposed Rail Trail



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Walk, cycle and explore
this unique heritage rail trail

What is the Fernleigh Track?

The Fernleigh Track is a popular shared pathway, built along a former railway line between the cities of Lake Macquarie and Newcastle. The track can be used by walkers and cyclists, however motorised travel is prohibited.

Users can absorb the history of the Fernleigh Track through numerous railway relics preserved along its length. Old sleepers, signage and former stations have been adapted to create interpretational features and welcoming rest areas.

Travelling from the wetland environment of Belmont past an ancient sand dune system, through cool, quiet forests and into urban Newcastle, the track takes a spectacular journey through various coastal environments.



Kahibah – Adamstown (3.6 km)

Start: Burwood Road, Kahibah – parking, local shops within 600 metres of the track

End: Adamstown Train Station, Park Avenue, Adamstown – drinking fountain, parking, cafe within 600 metres

From Kahibah to Adamstown, the track consistently slopes downhill. Continuing through the Glenrock State Conservation Area, this section is full of interesting features. The track crosses Flaggy and Little Flaggy Creeks and passes through mahogany, Sydney peppermint and smooth-barked apple forest. The area is home to possums, bandicoots, echidnas, rosellas, honeyeaters and more.

A curved former rail tunnel of 181 metres guides the path under the Pacific Highway, marking the transition from the Lake Macquarie to Newcastle. Upon arriving at Adamstown train station, the Fernleigh journey is complete.



Features of the Fernleigh Track

- See heritage railway relics along the track, including former stations, signage and old rail sleepers
- The Fernleigh Tunnel is a highlight, a restored 181 metre long, curved rail tunnel that marks the connecting point between the cities of Lake Macquarie and Newcastle
- The track is built along a green corridor, taking in wetland, coastal and bushland environments. You may even be lucky enough to spot some of the native birds and wildlife that call this stunning area home
- Paved and gently graded for people of all fitness levels
- Facilities along the pathway include numerous access points, public toilets, drinking fountains and parking, with cafés, takeaways and local shops close by

The Fernleigh Code of Conduct

- Keep left at all times and do not block the track.
- When cycling, ring bell on approach of other users and travel at a safe speed.
- Keep dogs under control on a short lead.
- Ensure young children are supervised at all times.
- Whilst sharing the path, consider children, elderly users and people with disabilities.
- The track runs through a corridor of natural bushland. In the event of extreme weather conditions including bushfires and high winds, reconsider use.
- A number of fresh water supplies are located along the track, however it is advisable to carry one's own supply if travelling in high temperatures or for long distances.
- Help protect this beautiful natural resource. Please retain all litter and dispose of in the bins provided.

Emergency: **000** or **112** from a mobile
State Emergency Service: **132 500**

Belmont – Jewells (3.3 km)

Start: Railway Parade, Belmont – public toilets and local shops within 600 metres of the track, drinking fountain, parking

End: Wommara Avenue/ Kalaroo Road, Jewells – drinking fountain, parking

Leading from the landscaped former rail platform at Belmont, the Fernleigh Track begins its journey through a wetland forest of paperbarks and swamp mahogany. This area is particularly attractive in winter when the rough-barked eucalypt trees produce cream-coloured flowers, a delicacy for local birdlife. Further along, a 200 metre-long elevated timber boardwalk travels over the fragile swamp environment of the Belmont Wetland State Park. The scenery slowly changes from wetland to coastal heath vegetation as the track continues along behind the 10,000-year-old sand dune system of 9 Mile Beach.



History behind the Fernleigh Track

For an estimated 6,000 years, the Fernleigh Track area was home to the indigenous Awabakal people. They lived amongst the rich natural environment and utilised the resources of the open and rocky coastline, swamp land and hilly forests.

Rail construction began in the late 1880's, and the Adamstown to Belmont railway line was opened for traffic early in the 1890's. It was used to transport coal from the mines in Lake Macquarie to the port of Newcastle and the Newcastle steel works.

In addition to coal haulage, a passenger service existed between Belmont and Newcastle. The trip took around one hour and was frequently used for weekend excursions from the city. When coal transportation began to decline, the service and maintenance of the line decreased.

Fernleigh Loop, Adamstown - Belmont railway line, early 1970s



Former location of the Fernleigh Loop, Fernleigh Track, present day



Lake Macquarie Visitor Information Centre
228 Pacific Highway, Swansea
1800 802 044
www.visitlakemac.com.au

Newcastle Visitor Information Centre
Newcastle Regional Maritime Museum,
Honeyuckie Drive, Newcastle
1800 654 558
www.visitnewcastle.com.au

Looking for some more walking trails to explore?

Pick up your FREE copy of our Walking Trails Guide at the Visitor Information Centre, download it online at www.visitlakemac.com.au or call **1800 802 044**.

This brochure has been sponsored and produced by Lake Macquarie Tourism:



Redhead – Whitebridge (4 km)

Start: Cowlishaw Street, Redhead – public toilets, drinking fountain, parking, local shops within 600 metres of the track

End: Station Street, Whitebridge – drinking fountain, parking, local shops within 600 metres of the track

There are ample ocean views looking back towards Redhead as the track steadily climbs up and away. Notice the change in natural environment travelling past the twisted scribbly gum bushland of the Awabakal Nature Reserve. The highest elevation of the track's entirety occurs just south of Whitebridge station. The local shops are within sight here, a handy spot to stock up on supplies.

Jewells – Redhead (2.4 km)

Start: Wommara Avenue/ Kalaroo Road, Jewells – drinking fountain, parking

End: Cowlishaw Street, Redhead – public toilets, drinking fountain, parking, local shops within 600 metres of the track

Predominantly flat, this section of the Fernleigh Track continues through the coastal heath environment. This type of vegetation is compact in nature, caused by constant exposure to sea breezes. Flora to look out for includes banksia trees, tea trees, wattles and the 'bacon and eggs pea' bush, named for its distinctive red and yellow flowers. The Redhead train station has been transformed into a predominant feature of the track, with north and southbound traffic separated by the former platform.



Whitebridge – Kahibah (2 km)

Start: Station Street, Whitebridge – drinking fountain, parking, local shops within 600 metres of the track

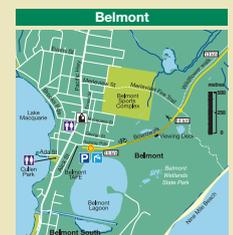
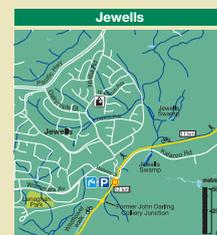
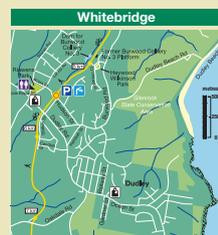
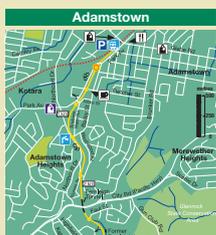
End: Burwood Road, Kahibah – parking, local shops within 600 metres of the track

The stretch from Whitebridge to Kahibah traverses through the leafy forests of Glenrock State Conservation Area. Blue gums provide dappled shade along the gentle downhill slope. Listen carefully to hear the musical, bell-like chimes of the native bell miner bird, and keep a watchful eye out for the shy tawny frogmouth owl camouflaged amongst the treetops.



Welcome to Fernleigh Track

Adamstown to Belmont Rail Trail



Fernleigh Track is a shared path and is part of the 'R1 Swansea to Newcastle' bike route linking with R4 to the University

The economic assessment of rail trails

Rail Trails Australia is acutely aware of the value of understanding the economic benefits of rail trails. Being able to outline a trail's potential to improve local economies is critical to obtaining support - and this needs to be backed up by evidence from established trails. Mike Halliburton outlines how his company approaches economic studies and we provide some examples of the benefits from business along some well-used trails.

Despite what goes on in the hothouse of election bidding, projects requiring substantial expenditure of public funds must make a strong business case. Rail trails are no different. My colleague, Mike Maher, Transplan Pty Ltd, and I have done numerous rail trail feasibility studies around Australia and we have always provided assessment of the economic benefits of the proposals. This is a critical tool for advocates as it helps them converse with the decision makers in their language.

Rail trail visitors spend money in towns and communities along trails. Rail trails, and recreation trails generally, generate intrastate, interstate and overseas tourism spending. Trails support and enhance local business opportunities. For example, many local businesses along the Bibbulmun Track, Western Australia's premier long distance walking track, are now able to identify a turning point in their fortunes relating directly to the popularity of the track.

While it is always difficult to predict the economic impact of a new trail, figures from other trails provide some useful starting points. Fortunately there is good research around on likely visitor numbers and their expenditure patterns. We regularly use research on the Mundaring Trail network in Western Australia (by Jessop and Bruce), the Murray to the Mountains Rail Trail and other rail trails in Victoria (work by Professor Sue Beeton and the 2005 Victorian Trails Strategy), the Riesling Trail in South Australia (work by Market Equity) and the Otago Central Rail Trail (work by the Otago Central Rail Trail Trust) to forecast user numbers and economic expenditure.

This work contributes to reaching a defensible conclusion on whether a trail should proceed or not. Decisions are not limited to economic benefits but also include a range of other benefits, as well as costs and practical issues associated with trail development.

This approach serves us well not just in rural and regional communities but also in looking at rail trails in urban or near urban environments. In urban locations, local user numbers are likely to be more critical. Economic benefits are likely to be smaller per user as users do not have to travel far and do not therefore spend as much as day trippers or overnight visitors. However their overall impact can be just as great given the greater numbers. Two recent Queensland examples illustrate this issue.

The proposed Caboolture to Wamuran Rail Trail is a 10 kilometre corridor connecting the major centre of Caboolture on Brisbane's northern outskirts with Wamuran, a small but growing community to the west. The trail's immediate neighbours (suburbs through which the trail passes) are home to over 20,000 people and there are over 1.6 million people in the surrounding areas who are potential day-trippers. We predicted an injection of \$73,000 annually into the local economy, with local users alone contributing over \$35,000, based on visitor scenarios and expenditure profiles established on the Mundaring Trail network and the remaining half coming from day trippers.

Work for the Bethania to Beaudesert Rail Trail, south of Brisbane, used the same methodology. In this case, the relative contribution of local users was smaller as day trippers and overnight visitors were a much bigger consideration as it was a significantly longer trail at around 43 kilometres and with broader appeal. However, local use was still a significant consideration given that the trail's immediate neighbours totalled 35,000 people with significant growth potential. We predicted potential local users would inject almost \$50,000 into the local economy out of a total benefit of over \$800,000 annually.

One of the other key considerations for a rail trail benefit in urban areas is the opportunity for the trail to be used for commuting. In both the cases cited here, there was significant potential for the establishment of a safe off-road commuting facility. In each case, some 5,000 students have easy access to the rail corridor, either because their school is located alongside or has easy safe access on local streets to the rail corridor. At least some of these students are likely to use the corridor for commuting to school. The opportunity for local schoolchildren to ride bikes on a safe off-road facility is a wise use of community resources. In addition, rail trail development provides a safe off-road facility within easy access of schools for schools' activities. More generally trails that are used by commuters also reduce traffic congestion - itself a significant cost to city economies.

One of the challenges of arguing these benefits is how to work out how to excite the responsible authority, be it a local government, a regional development board, or a state agency. The money 'raised' by the additional economic activity does not go directly to the rail trail manager - there are no examples of tolled rail trails! The money saved on roads and health costs by children cycling to school does not appear on anyone's balance sheet as it is preventative expenditure. Where a saving can be estimated, the benefit is often enjoyed by a different arm of government than the funding bodies.

Despite the challenges, advocates shouldn't underestimate that it can be even more difficult to get the attention of decision makers without solid economic assessment supporting a decision to spend significant amounts of public money.

*Mike Halliburton
Principal,
Mike Halliburton Associates*



Building businesses on Rail Trails



Top: Happy and well fed riders at the Blackbutt Bakery on the Brisbane Valley Rail Trail.

Centre: Loading the Myrtleford-bound bike trailer on a Murray to the Mountains ride.

Left: Sampling the vintage at Windy Ridge Winery, near Foster, on the Great Southern Rail Trail.



The Brisbane Valley Rail Trail and its slow but steady reopening since the 2011 floods is outlined on page 6 of this issue of Connections. The ambassadors of the trail have established counters at Linville to demonstrate the numbers to decision-makers and have recorded ~30 per day (that's about 10,000 annually). So even with the disruption from the floods, businesses in the area are benefiting from trail visitors

In the village of Moore there were two retail businesses when the trail opened in 2008. There are now six businesses with an art gallery set to open later this year!

In Blackbutt, three local businesses are thriving:

Blackbutt Bakery

Roberta Anson and Jim Roberts from the Blackbutt Bakery have won over 20 awards for their baking and are the current champions (2012) for the Speciality section of the Great Aussie Pie competition. The Bakery even boasts a celebrity clientele - recent visitors to the bakery include the Irwins (Terry, Bindi & Bob), Bob Katter and Bruce and Denise Morecombe. Roberta said that New Zealand cyclists have voted the Blackbutt Bakery the second best tourist facility in Australia.

Roberta says "traffic from the rail trail is constant, so much so we are thinking of installing bike racks or championing the council to do so!" She also said that from time to time They've had to put on new staff!



WiiKirri B&B

Terry Dixon and Julie Taylor are another innovative couple taking advantage of the tourism visits generated by the trail with their B&B, in a picturesque setting adjacent to the trail.

Terry Dixon said that Blackbutt is not actually a tourist town and that the BVRT is the town's biggest attraction. "WiiKirri B&B is in a prime spot to capture users of the rail trail"

Edelweiss B&B

Lucy Kessler's B&B hosts visitors to the trail; Lucy says 'the rail trail is very important to our business'. Edelweiss is a pet friendly B&B and Lucy has installed yards for two horses, catering for riders.

Since the 2011 floods the main road to their B&B has been closed but visitors have travelled the extra six kilometres detour to Edelweiss, which is well signed posted.

The nearby town of Benarkin has also benefitted. Tracy Rieser, co-owner of the Benarkin General Store, says that the rail trail is important to the village. She notes that "not a lot of railtrailers actually stop in Benarkin ... however the free camping (with showers) is a great asset to users of the rail trail and we get people returning to our village to stay."

The Hotel Radnor at Blackbutt on the Brisbane Valley Rail Trail; frequented by many a trail trail user in the now rare old style pub way. Will Owen

A rail trail and a hotel business - a great match!

Peter and Lisan Hall own Yea's Peppercorn Hotel and are one of the business sponsors of Rail Trails Australia's webpage, which includes advertising for businesses providing relevant services for trail users. Peter outlines how the newly opened Goulburn River High Country Rail Trail or GRHCRT for short!) rail has contributed to the growth in their business.

The Goulburn River High Country Rail Trail - what else is there to say, except, FANTASTIC! My wife and I own and operate the Yea Peppercorn Hotel, situated opposite the old Yea railway line. The trail officially opened in autumn last year, however with the wettest winter I can remember, the trail's start was slow. But, as the saying goes; "build it and they will come". And with some sunny days, they certainly came (from everywhere).

In 1978 the last train passed through Yea Station. Many businesses were affected, including this Hotel, known then as the Commercial Railway Hotel. Thirty four years later, we now see the same line breathing life back into industry and commerce via the rail trail. Every day we see mums, dads, kids, friends, and groups of all kinds using the trail. Many drop in for a coffee, a light lunch, or even stay the night in our hotel. It is not just us; all the businesses in Yea are benefiting either directly or indirectly.

We are about to build a outdoor vista area specifically designed for trail riders who, not surprisingly, seem to be outdoorsy type of people. A bike cage is currently being finished to house the bikes in a undercover secure area. If only we had more accommodation!

We are looking forward to seeing what the next 12 months brings and are taking an active part in directing our business towards trail riders. If you are riding past, pop in and say hi to either myself or Lisan. You can check out our hotel at

www.yeapeppercorn.com.au

