

Submission to Legislative Council Government Administration Committee "B" North-East Railway Corridor Inquiry

1. Feasibility of the proposed Scottsdale - Lilydale Falls rail trail:

The proposal removes one of the features of the rail trail i.e. the ability to ride bikes off road from Launceston to Scottsdale. For tourists, there is only very limited public transport to Lilydale, so there is the option of riding on the Tasman Highway to Lilydale with the inherent safety risks or the expense of a hire car.

2. Feasibility of the proposed Lilydale - Turners Marsh tourism railway:

The proposal offers the opportunity to test the viability of tourist rail. However, in doing so, it excludes significant feature attractions such as the railway tunnel at Tunnel, Denison Gorge and access to the Bridestowe Lavender Farm. By starting in Turners Marsh, access is made extremely difficult for tourists as there is very limited public transport option.

Providing a section of the rail corridor that has just one attraction i.e. Lilydale and is remote from Launceston, with no public transport presents significant obstacles to the railway viability.

3. Feasibility, funding, future management etc

- Using the entire North East (NE) rail corridor from Launceston to Scottsdale for a tourist railway would open up a variety of opportunities.

- The railway would complement the West Coast Wilderness Railway and the proposed Derwent Valley Railway, providing a variety of experiences for visiting rail enthusiasts. Having three significant railway journeys would make a trip to the State more worthwhile and keep visitors in the State for a longer period and across multiple regions.

- The NE railway would provide an attraction with multiple experiences for time poor visitors. It has become apparent that many visitors (particularly from the Chinese market) have very limited time to spend, so they are looking for activities that provide a variety of experiences. Apart from the rail journey (an attraction in itself), the trip could include the Lilydale Falls, Denison Gorge, wineries en route, Bridestowe Lavender Farm (via shuttle bus connection) and Scottsdale. For those with more time, the train could connect visitors with the bike rail trail from Scottsdale and the Derby Mountain Bike trails. As an option, bikes can be transported on the train.

- Public transport for tourists is very limited in NE Tasmania. An operating tourist railway would add additional and alternative capacity for visitors to travel to the North East.

- On board train experiences such as themed dining (jazz, wedding, history, picnic, school holiday activities) could provide another source of paying passengers, similar to the long standing offering on Puffing Billy, Victorian Goldfield Railway and the Queenscliff Blues Trains.

- A community based railway operation would offer a variety of opportunities for local volunteering. As the Baby Boomer generation heads into retirement, there will be many people looking for opportunities to use their skills for the benefit of the community. This could include training and mentoring of young people as well as opportunities in the running of the railway.

- There are further possibilities including bringing trains back into the old railway workshop site at Inveresk. Visitors could soak up the atmosphere of the historic site with interpretation provided by

the QVMAG, then take a journey from the site. The addition of an occasional steam locomotive trip would provide a huge draw card for rail enthusiasts as well as the casual visitor looking for points of interest and experiences.

4. Other Matters

* The Yarra Valley Railway has been offered as an example of what can be achieved by a community based tourist rail venture. We took the opportunity to visit the railway. It's hard not to be inspired by what has been achieved. They started with just a rail corridor. No rails, bridges, buildings or rolling stock. The project has brought the community together. Rails have been laid, bridges and a station built and an operating rail car is delighting visitors who ride over the short track.

More importantly, skills gained from volunteering at the Yarra Valley Railway have led to up skilling and better employment, jobs are being created in the nearby township and the activity has led to improved facilities. We could sense the feeling of pride in the achievements so far and an optimism from seeing the positive developments resulting from a community working together.

The NE railway corridor already has so much more infrastructure in place than the Yarra Valley Railway at its re-birth. For the NE railway the rails are largely ready to carry traffic, rolling stock is available. Add to this an existing group of volunteers who are already showing their commitment by attending numerous working bees over recent months. Drawing on the experience of the Yarra Valley railway and many other heritage railways around the country, there is much to suggest that the North East railway could once again become a valuable working asset.

* We have joined the Launceston and NE railway group, supporting their efforts to see the railway fully restored as a tribute to the vision and hard work that created it, and also playing its part in adding to the economy of the North East.

* It seems very short sighted to remove rail infrastructure that requires a relatively small investment to make it fully operational. Once re-established, the railway has the potential to generate income that will maintain it into the future.

* The proposed community based operator has the advantage of having a low cost base through its volunteer work force plus donations in cash and kind. This makes the NE Railway sustainable where a commercially based operation may not be viable.

* Once the rail infrastructure is removed, it would be prohibitive to replace should there be a proposal to re-start the railway in the future. Any decision to remove the rails now virtually precludes any option for rail in the future. It is a lesson learnt from the re-establishment of the Abt railway. The significant costs involved to re-build the railway could have been avoided if it had been retained and maintained.

* This is a wonderful opportunity to develop a community based activity in the North East of Tasmania – not just a tourist attraction but also a project that develops community. The railway project has similar characteristics to the Men's Shed model. It brings together people of all ages with a range of skills, working together, and in the process builds and strengthens a sense of community.

Thank you for the opportunity to express our thoughts.

Jenny and Phenton Gardam 31/10/2018