

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE 'B' –
NORTH EAST RAILWAY CORRIDOR INQUIRY

02/11/2018

Submission: Issues with Rail Trail Project and making a case for utilisation of current easement for Tourist & Heritage Rail Passenger Services.

Michael de Bomford -

Board Member Launceston North East Railway.
Secretary Tasmanian Association of Tourist Railways.

Dear Sir, Madam,

Thank you for the opportunity to present this personnel submission, in recent times the opportunity for community input has been lacking since initial announcement of the Regional Funding Grant for the current divisive recreational trail concept with the main focus accommodating cyclist's interests only! Questions & concerns raised with previous & present state govt infrastructure minister's has been to be redirected to the current Dorset Council (mayor\manager) which has provided inadequate bias feedback and conflict of interest with councillors involved with the rail trail project.

I have a general understanding of operating & running railways to comment on, as had associations with the Heritage Rail Sector in this state for over 37 years also being involved until recent times assisting with operation & running of main line excursions including the popular destination to Scottsdale on the North East line; it is also with great pride to have also been involved with the Mt Lyell Abt Railway Project now called the West Coast Wilderness Railway being an inaugural & long term committee member of the Mt Lyell Abt Railway Society acting as treasurer, secretary & public officer, committee member of the Tasmanian Association of Tourist Railways since the mid 90's also Don River Railway, Red Water Creek Railway Society, Wee Georgie Wood Railway organisations.

CV –

- Employed as Electrical Inspector, Auditor, Trainer for Tas Networks also employed with Aurora Energy & HEC for >34 years.
- Member of Don River Railway for 37 years – Note: Involvement with Main Line train running until cessation in 2004 & accredited safety observer with TasRail.
- Public officer & Treasurer for the Mount Lyell Abt Railway Society 1994 – 2002
- Secretary – TATRail – Tasmanian Association of Tourist Railways
- Member of Redwater Creek Heritage Society & Wee Georgie Wood
- Member Pearn's Steam World – 34 years.
- Involved with Hydro Tasmania, consultative committee for Heritage retention of the Lake Margaret Power Station.
- Member of the Launceston City Band involvement with UTAS Community Music Programme.
- Member of LNER since 2017

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Consultation: or lack thereof is a good starting point for this 'Rail Trail' project!

How was the Federal grant to remove the Launceston to Scottsdale Rail line obtained without the knowledge of and in consultation with Tasmania's Heritage Rail sector, line side property owners & even the public? This questions the validity of the National Infrastructure Grant guidelines process as part of the assessment criteria referring to the "need to consult", this is also applicable where no discussions occurred with the Launceston City Council as **two thirds** of the rail easement is located within it's municipality where rate payers funds are expected to maintain this recreational corridor. Please note: LCC pulled initial support & token funding for project in 2017 and recently publically endorsed both co rail & cycle trail to Wyena, which is within the outer limit of the municipal boundary.

TasRail was definitely not consulted regards future use of the north east rail line or any consideration given regards planning or logistics for the rail trail project getting into Launceston; trail was to terminate at a dead end junction at Cold Water creek with no external accessibility other than to the existing operating rail freight corridor which would be prohibited due to safety reasons. There was a possible expectation or presumption that the operational Bell Bay rail line may also be considered or just expected to be turned into a "Rail Trail" & or future funding be sourced to continue trail alongside existing rail formation to accommodate getting into Launceston?

In recent times, community opinion appears to be ignored especially where minority noisy interests are making an impact on. Rail Trail & The Bicycle Network lobbyists are very proactive promoting their cause within local councils & government also having professional & political strategy's to tackle community & pro rail influence or objections in an attempt to capture perceived underutilised rail corridors for recreational (mainly cycling) use. Most if not all 'Rail Trail - Cycle Way' projects & maintenance, funding come from Federal, State and local ratepayer contributions. In this instance half the funding for the North East Rail trail is Federally funded with the remaining half expected to come from the Dorset electorate being approx. 1.47 mil including long term trail maintenance as the deemed corridor manager under the Strategic Infrastructure Corridor Act. Local council commitment is similar to the current maintenance and upgrade commitments for the Blue Derby mountain bike trails. Liability, responsibility, care & maintenance is also a grey area for recently created Scottsdale to Tulendeena rail trail section that is already in part overgrown, a local project by local Rotary group where local council has since been contacted to also assist with care & maintenance.

Initially "Rail Trail" intent was to preserve rail corridor's (rail banking)for future use with the possibility the rail corridor used for infrastructure projects including returning back to railway usage. Most current rail trails have been created where the actual rail lines have long been removed, but in recent times with aggressive lobbying & obtaining extensive grant funding's are able to include removal all infrastructure including rail, sleepers etc. Even though the rail infrastructure is still owned by the crown, the intended north east project has allowed for scrap recovery of the steel to contribute to removal of the rail, but with current scrap value does not cover costings and will fall far short of initial budget forecast.

Unfortunately the rail trail & bicycle network has become a serious competitor to the tourist and heritage sector as seen in a couple of recent 'Rail Trail' conversions in Victoria, which has raised public concern with rail lines being converted with little or no public consultation, also where local rail preservation society's had shown serious interest & intent to re instate passenger trains on those section of regional lines. Again this is mirrored here in Tasmania with the intended lobbying for conversion of all of the North East, Burnie to Wiltshire (Coastal Pathway) and Derwent Valley lines.

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This current fight to preserve our rail corridors has rallied the general public with now separate user groups being established as has occurred with the North East Land users group being established. One of the main grievances with land users has been the lack of consultation regards intended future use of the N\E rail corridor & issues involving biodiversity, liability, open public & unauthorised vehicle access e.g. motor bikes are just some of the issues raised. Similar objections & issues arose when the Deloraine to Mole creek trail when brought to public attention was unsuccessful due to landowner objections. Current land user's group & general public is very supportive for retention of the north east easement for rail use and is supported by various recent polling carried out in the North & North East electorates as over 70% of the population was in support of keeping the existing rail corridor for rail use & only 12% was in favour of a rail trail.

Since 2005 the T&H sector also other private interests have attempted to gain access to the North East line following main line passenger cessation by then private commercial track managers with last lessee being Pacific National cancelling the mainline agreement in 2005. Rail regulation & accreditation, commercial insurance premiums & a rundown state rail system have been major hurdles in attempting to gain access to the state main lines.

Obtaining dialog with government also TasRail representatives has been extremely difficult with little support in achieving mainline access & accreditation let alone being able to operate on the North East section. The back door approach to regional grant funding by the Dorset council & Northern Tourism body is disappointing & frustrating where minimal external consultation has occurred, where the decision had already been made regards future use of the N\E easement and all other interest groups including the Tourist & Heritage sector totally ignored!

This is identical in the formulation of the Strategic Infrastructure Corridor Legislation as no representation occurred from lineside property owners, T & H rail sector or other 3rd party interests. The SIC Act is specifically tailored for recreational trails as does\did not accommodate provisions for operating as a railway, this is also relevant to the Derwent Valley operation as found with review of the Act with the previous Upper House Legislative Council amendments.

With the matter of due fairness & equality in assessing a project on its merit especially involving government agents & ministerial entity's leave's one perplexed\disappointed regards due process. Recent government feasibility review mainly carried out by personnel in Dept Finance appears inadequate where technical & engineering criteria of a railway including on viewing\evaluating rail infrastructure were carried out by finance personnel (bean counters!) Aspects of the report appeared lacking in areas and decisions made on individual opinion and not based on fact. e.g asset value of the current rail infrastructure as deemed 95% fit for purpose as 0\$ value?

With an approx. one third of the total easement is now converted to a recreational trail being from Scottsdale to Tulendeena, a question as to why the trail has not continued onto Herrick or at least Derby being the home of the Blue Derby mountain bike trails also rail has been already removed in that section? It is locally known that legal or class action was threatened here previously by a couple of land owners in the Legerwood section of easement; information obtained from the North East Land Users Group, there may be further if not more (multiple) similar actions undertaken from adjacent landowners within the Scottsdale to Cold Water Creek section.

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Maintenance.

Current SIC legislation is cumbersome, puts all costings, liabilities & responsibilities back to the corridor manager with no other assistance at all!

The Strategic Infrastructure Act is cumbersome, difficult to work with & places all management, responsibility back to the corridor manager also negating all responsibility & liability. *(just cause they (the crown) owns the land, doesn't mean they manage it)* The rail corridor to Scottsdale is 70 km's in length and passes through over 200 properties which is a considerable area of land to maintain dealing with vegetation, drainage, adjacent property owners, line side fencing, level crossings etc which is a huge responsibility to undertake by any management board. It is fortunate that in the south of the state the New Norfolk Council with its resource base has accepted responsibly to take on board role of corridor manager for the Derwent Valley Railway group. Any assistance for a non for profit association from government areas to assist with management is important to make the operation successful also backing & supporting at times of potential liability, commercial risk & events eg. Storm damage, natural disasters, land slip, etc

On the mainland there is in kind support from within state governments and rail operators assisting the T&H sector being for public liability insurances, rail infrastructure (buildings & bridges) also installation of controlled level crossings. Simple lease arrangements are in place as can occur in this state with the minister's discretion in place with the Maydena Rail Track Riders, WWR & Ida Bay Railways negating the complex SIC legislation. Financial assistance & general support in Tasmania for our T&H sector receives minimal attention as seen in last state election being 50k promised for the DRR for a feasibility study & 4.5 mill for cycling trails.

Major infrastructure corridors should always be owned & maintained by the state government even for possible future transport (freight) use. Compared to road infrastructure funding where in reality is only 3-4% of total national transport spending is spent on rail; actual care and maintenance of a minor rail corridor asset is insignificant! Current government assistance of the WWR operation on the west coast give's back many times over to the local community involving real jobs and support in a fragile remote economy.

Considerable risk, and costing impediment to any rail organisation are level crossings especially updating to modern regulatory requirements; in the past installation & management was carried out by the Dept of Main roads. In recent times with cost shifting between Govt & Private entities, this responsibility & cost burden has been pushed back to the rail entity! A basic question needs to be asked here as to 'who should be' responsible for level crossings Road, Rail or both?

In 2017 in the state of Victoria, up to 17 Rail Trail management groups have given intention that they want to hand\return responsibility back to local shires\councils. Please find a copy in part of an interesting social media article that is relevant to this subject dated – 23rd may 2017 in the Australian Rail page news –

The management committee of Victoria's Great Southern Rail Trail (GSRT) has quit, saying the job is 'beyond the capacity of a volunteer group to continue to manage' and calling for the South Gippsland Council to take it over.

As of next month, 16 of Victoria's 17 rail trails will be managed by local councils. Council has the skills and is already heavily involved,' he added.

The committee said the cost to maintain the rail trail's 77 kilometres is around \$120,000 per year, plus additional capital works of around \$30,000 annually.

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Works are financed by a fund inherited by the committee and council's contribution of \$60,000 per year. It also receives around \$37,000 annually from licences along the trail, however the committee's cash reserve will be mostly used by the time of handover.

Mr Knight told the publication, 'The role of maintaining this \$6 million asset is too much for a volunteer committee.'

Funding model But spokesperson for the Northern Rivers Rail Trail (NRRT) Marie Lawton said the same situation would not happen here because its funding model will be more robust.

'Once significant sections of rail trail are built, a central trust or governance body would be established to manage the entire trail,' she told EchoNet daily.

Necessary funding to operate the trust could be provided by the state government, supplemented by income streams created by the rail trail, such as leasing railway station buildings.

'On the Otago Rail Trail in NZ users purchase a \$10 passport which they get stamped in each of the townships they go through. This money all gets put towards the management of the trail. 'There are also thoughts along the line of local businesses that benefit from the trail, contributing in some way to the maintenance,' Ms Lawton said. She added the group hoped that \$75,000 per year in state government funds currently allocated to maintaining the disused rail corridor 'could be transferred to rail trail maintenance.'

'It is likely some maintenance activities would be delegated to councils, with funding assistance.

Ms Lawton said rail corridor land that is surplus to rail trail requirements 'could be leased to adjacent landowners in exchange for maintenance of these areas.'

'Of course this is all a work in progress. We understand that councils would not be able to afford to manage the trail without funding assistance,' Ms Lawton said.

Rail group wants equal time, Meanwhile pro-rail group Northern Rivers Railway Action Group (NRAG) is calling on Lismore City Council to give it 'equal time' with the rail trail group after a NRRT half-hour presentation resulted in a \$50,000 grant to create a business plan.

NRAG spokesperson Beth Shelley said, 'we suggest it's time Lismore Council looked to the future. Byron Council has given \$200,000 for a feasibility study into multi-use of the rail corridor.

'Investors in Byron would like to extend the rail shuttle about to start operating from North Byron to run services from Bangalow to Byron and Mullumbimby,' she added.

'There are many privatised railways in Victoria. We wonder why the NSW government hasn't tendered out the railway for private investment?

'Won't it be strange if there are rail services in the Byron shire while Lismore and Tweed have rail trails and no prospect of future rail services?'

'The rail trails will not protect the corridor and generally councils have to pick up the costs. In the future we will need trains for passengers and freight. Let's keep our tracks safe till then,' Ms Shelley said.

"We are not against the idea of a cycle way," we're against the destruction of the permanent railway infrastructure to build such a cycle way."

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Mountain bike trails are popular at the moment especially with the current investment occurring in the state but definitely not 'rail trails', statistic's stated regards assessed intended users on the Scottsdale to Cold Water Creek section is questionable and appear overstated. A weekend survey (Saturday) conducted last year on the Scottsdale to Tulendeena section revealed only 6 users! 2 were cyclists, one rode back to Scottsdale by road, two people walked part of the easement & the others were unauthorised trail bike riders! Note: Cyclists do not like the crushed ballast of the rail trail surface as cause's tyre & punctures issues.

Searching the internet reveal interesting statistics easily found that give a true indication of the general population riding bike's in Australia each week; there is an average number of 17% stated on one web site but on the information details below (surprisingly) cycling hours are on the decline? Details below come from a well-known reliable data source by Aust Roads.

Australian cyclist numbers and population - 1985/86 - 2017

The [2017 National Cycling Participation Survey](#) results published by Austroads and the Australian Bicycle Council suggest that Australian cycling is in free-fall and has been since 2011 when the National Cycling Participation strategy was launched with the aim of doubling Australian participation by 2016.

From 2011 to 2017, the data show almost 640,000 *fewer* Australians aged 2+ riding a bike at least once per week and about 1.4 million fewer having cycled in the year prior to survey.

As [noted by the Australian Bicycle Network](#): "*The latest results from the Cycling Participation Survey are shattering. While bike riding across the world grows, Australia's participation languishes and falls away - we should be embarrassed.*"

Below are key results from the 2017 National Cycling Participation Survey.



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Working together

Recreational trails\cycling can co exist together as is occurring in other parts of the world and could work here. Cyclist's take advantage of trains for transport to trail riding areas where carriages are designed to cater for bicycles & other luggage\camping gear. Trains also cater for people of all ages, abilities including weather conditions as a safe and comfortable transport option.

Railways are not just about indulging rail fans or keeping branch lines, but to cater for all tastes & experiences of tourism and heritage and doesn't have to be confined to small areas but can range across the state. Railways put far more back into the community than any recreation trail can, create real jobs involving trade skills that can involve mentoring & opportunities to TAFE & ASQA qualifications. Trains link to other tourism opportunity's & businesses also the community as has been successful at the Yarra Valley Railway in Victoria and our own North West Coast Don River Railway with major links to funding opportunity and heritage & volunteer awards & recent recognition as seen below to be proud of!



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Northern Tasmania needs another major tourist attraction apart from the Cataract Gorge and entice visitors the area, to venture further out of Launceston in the regional areas like Scottsdale. There is still an existing rail link into the CBD of Launceston at the Inveresk precinct also serviced by the Don River Railway workshop with good access to parking & other attractions at location like the Queen Victoria Museum, Esk River bank paths & UTAS. There needs to be more than just another bike trail covering all visitor interests especially the growing Asian market where cycling is definitely not on their itineraries due to their cultural perceptions & short holiday time frames available.

Rail tourism is an extremely environmentally friendly means of transportation as well as minimal impact on the surrounding landscape, people are controlled and there is an ability to take count of visitation numbers & plan in advance to cater for. Special outings such as picnic, food, music trains attract big crowds and can benefit business on route and able to squeeze further value from visitor spending. The North East section to Scottsdale has some special areas of interest for rail side attractions that can be experienced safely such as the tunnel, regional forest reserve of the Denison Gorge and Lilydale falls. Currently access at the falls is not suitable for passenger disembarking due to steep embankment as experienced in the past, this is not a good terminus location as with current intent of short operating section as allocated with recent splitting up of 'trail'-'rail' sections.

Safety to the public is a serious subject involving liability, people & safety management of the easement as an operating railway can be controlled but when it's a recreational trail this is where it becomes a grey area, inaccessible & remote locations, steep embankments also high bridges such as Pipers River bridge are a real risk; safety assessments & installation of type of railings\barriers for the trail appears under scope\engineered!

In reality for the LNER business to be financially successful has to have an easy access point from a main central (Launceston) city location and have a major destination (Scottsdale) to terminate at, involving services & road access also buildings like a rail yard to operate out of including turning trains (locomotives) around. As noted with comments made in the public arena especially those in (& local) government bodies, do not understand trains & train running but do so uniformly!

Operation does not have to require huge state subsidies as most events are either self-funding or profitable; even abandoned railways cost money, whether to maintain or rip up! Tasmania is fortunate that even the closed lines tend to be in good condition with steel sleepers and in this instance as found with engineering reports as is 95% fit for purpose for this 40m dollar asset.

You cannot understate the valuable input from volunteers and community support with a project as is occurring on the DP rail car under restoration at Karoola.

Never before have I seen such wide spread community support\swell for the re-introduction of the train on the N\E line again and great to see!

In reality it is going to be a challenge dealing with rail regulation & accreditation, with assistance here and with current skill base acquired already within the LNER & external industry contacts (ATHRA - TATRail), will step through this methodically and carefully also grow & expand as resources allow to ensure compliance and also being financially responsible.

I strongly support the retention of the North East corridor for future passenger rail use!

Yours Sincerely

Michael de Bomford