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Attn. Ms. Natasha Exel,
Inquiry Secretary,
Legislative Council,
Parliament House HOBART, TAS 7000

SUBMISSION TO:
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE 'B'
NORTH-EAST RAILWAY CORRIDOR ENQUIRY

Dear Honourable Members,

I would like to offer this submission to your inquiry, into the future of the North-East Railway Corridor and the best potential future for the corridor as a contributor to tourism visitation and experiences in the North East Region of Tasmania.

I offer these comments based on my extensive experience in the rail industry in Tasmania of 39 years as a;

- Train Driver, (ANR, ATN, Pacific National, TasRail).
- Qualified vintage diesel and steam driver, (Don River Railway)
- Senior Driver Trainer, (TasRail)
- Train Operations Supervisor, (TasRail) Current.

Over the years I have been involved with heritage rail tourism ventures across the state driving vintage diesel tourist trains, rail cars and steam trains, driving to Fingal, Scottsdale, Bell Bay, Burnie, Ross, Hobart, Launceston and many other locations around the state.

My employment experience at TasRail contributes towards my knowledge of driving trains, safe working procedures, locomotive theory, diesel and air, air brake systems, vacuum brake systems, health & safety practices and systems, writing and reviewing procedures, conducting risk assessments, on job and off job training, delivery of class room training, Peer trauma support and mental health first aid.

Addressing the Terms of Reference in order;

1] The feasibility of the proposed Scottsdale – Lilydale Falls rail trail:

I have strong doubts, that the "Rail Trail" proposal is one that will generate strong tourist visitation and economic output by users that will comprehensively exceed expenditure required from the Council's concerned, by way of revenue from resident's rates.

- **Target users:** No comprehensive fact based analysis has ever been provided on how the "Rail Trail" would attract specific users that would travel to the region and spend significantly in the community "as originally claimed by the Dorset council" on the basis of the provision of such an attraction. The proponents have not supplied a business case to support any claims of the Rail Trail being an economic benefit in terms of cyclist numbers or dollars spent per cyclist night in the Dorset region. The Lilydale falls to Scottsdale Rail Trail will be too long for many families with small

children and older people and will not be challenging enough for mountain bike riders who are currently well catered for at Derby.

- **Prior experience of the concept**: Prior to the establishment of the current stretch of "Rail Trail from Scottsdale east to 'The Billycock', no such concept has ever before been established and proven in use in Tasmania (unlike heritage rail), despite many kilometres of closed and empty railway formations around the state the Dorset council are still insisting on pulling up rail and sleepers between Scottsdale and Lilydale Falls. Unlike the heritage rail proposal that has had both its business plans produced and feasibility studies undertaken* the "Rail Trail" proposers have, other than a zealous and exaggerated concept proposal, produced neither an independent feasibility study nor a business plan. (*NB: the railway proposal had two major feasibility studies undertaken. One by Linqage which has experience with heritage rail tourism, was relatively accurate in its analysis of the rail proposal. The alternate study by Raylink Consulting betrayed its poor grasp of the subject matter by making technically nonsensical statements such as its concern about "frozen joints" whilst ignoring the many kilometres of continuously welded track in this state and world-wide).

- **Effectiveness of the existing extent of "Rail Trail"**: A length of "Rail Trail" has already been established from Scottsdale east, to the area known as "The Billycock" near Legerwood. Casual observation has indicated that the success of this stretch is not achieving the outcomes that were promised. Local dog walkers seem to be the predominate users, whilst the recreational cyclists seen seem to be locals – none of whom would be seemingly prompted to expend any additional funds in the area where they already live. There is still scope for the existing "Rail Trail" to be extended east and given more time to prove itself, but that is still a long way off. Based on current performance, I can see no justification for extending the "Rail Trail" west of Scottsdale.

- **Connectivity and access**: Outside of the main centre of Scottsdale, the multiple points of access and multiple attractions with convenient access from the route of the "Rail Trail" could be considered insufficient for the length of trail contemplated. Connection to Launceston was never feasible due to the difficulty of accessing Launceston from Cold Water Creek, and likely even more remote now Launceston City Council have declined to support a rail trail within their council boundaries, which would truncate the proposed trail to Wyena at the Launceston – Dorset municipal boundary. Major regional attractions like Bridestowe Lavender Farm which attracted 85,000 visitors last year and some of the local wineries are not conveniently accessed from the trail by bike, but would be far more easily accessed by shuttle bus, transferring train passengers to and from the farm (or vineyard), who would then be far more likely to buy products that are more easily carried back by train than by bike.

- **Emergency access**: A number of stretches of the proposed "Rail Trail" are remote from roads, thus would present some major hazards for users and the community. Rail trail users would be at considerable risk, should they become ill or sustain injuries on remote sections of the trail. Some areas along the rail corridor are mobile phone 'black spots' thus if riders are on their own, they would have no recourse to attract attention for assistance unless riding in a group or with an accompanying rider. Emergency vehicles would have difficulty accessing some areas, especially if needing to cross bridges, which would have to be engineered to allow emergency vehicular

access. This would also be applicable for fire appliances responding to fires along the trail. Ensuring emergency vehicle access would invite unauthorised abuse of the trail by motor bikes and road vehicles. Cyclists being confronted by fast moving trail bikes would be at severe risk of severe injury or death in the event of a collision on a blind corner.

- **Security**: Neighbouring land owners have repeatedly expressed concern about the security and lack of privacy of their properties. Unlike road frontages, where passing motorists provide some means of informal monitoring of adjacent properties, the Rail trail would be far more hidden and provide cover for illegal access to properties, theft, acts of vandalism and the danger of weeds and plant viruses being transmitted to adjacent properties. The trail would particularly effective as cover for illegal shooters or as an avenue to dump and destroy stolen vehicles and growing of illegal drug crops.

- **Trail safety**: Potential safety hazards along the trail that could seriously endanger riders include branch or tree falls, rock-slides and bush fires. Access to the bridges would have to be engineered and safe with rated surfaces and fencing provided along their length at considerable expense, with ongoing maintenance or they would need to be bypassed, (Dorset council have indicated at a council meeting 20th August that they intend to seek government funding to seal the Rail Trail surface from Scottsdale to Lilydale Falls, at what cost to the tax payer?) The tunnel, if part of the trail would be particularly concerning. Never designed for anything other than mechanised rail transit, with personnel access only in emergencies or in controlled conditions for maintenance, the tunnel has absorbed many decades of toxic hydro-carbons and has high levels of water seepage and potential for flooding, which all pose a risk for cyclists or walkers passing through. Again, it provides attractive cover for illegal activities. Numerous blind corners are a high risk of collisions between cyclists and horse riders, walkers with dogs and illegal trail bike riders.

- **Commercial viability**: Unlike heritage rail, which through fares and sales of merchandise collect revenue to sustain the ongoing operation, no provision has been made to collect fees or tolls from riders to finance the trails upkeep. Thus all expenditure will have to be sourced from local ratepayers or taxpayers. The Federal Government grant is far short of fully financing the creation of the trail, so ratepayers will be financing the balance of the establishment costs in the first instance and on an ongoing basis to maintain the trail. Propositions to liquidate the railway track assets through scrap sales are unfeasible, as the track remains the property of TasRail, who would determine the means of disposal (or re-use) of the track and claim any revenue generated by disposal – so as a source of revenue for the trail establishment, that is not an option. Unlike the heritage rail proposal, there is unlikely to be a large voluntary community contribution of cash, labour and equipment, for establishing the rail trail, which can off-set government sourced funding.

- **Community support**: A large contingent of North-east property and business owners (about 200), have clearly and consistently expressed their implacable opposition to the proposed "rail trail" (for many of the reasons noted above) and through their representative body, North East Residents & Farmers Inc. (NERAF) have thrown their support behind the Launceston & North Eastern Railway (LNER) tourist railway proposal. One of the generators of this unanimous opposition and resistance to the

"Rail Trail" proposal was the failure of the Dorset Council to consult with residents as to what they wanted to see happen to the rail corridor and then impose a proposition regardless of the resident's feelings towards it. Even subsequent to the realisation of the community disquiet over the proposal, the Council have hardened their attitude and stubbornly and arrogantly dismissed any alternatives to the Rail Trail plan, attacking supporters of the railway proposal with misrepresentations, false claims and ultimately and most disappointingly, personal attacks on the railway proponents. Of note, in an interesting twist to the usual process of railway preservation initiatives coming from rail enthusiast collectives, in this instance, a previously uninvolved body, Launceston based Diesel Traction Tasmania (DTT), who were originally planning to establish a rail heritage centre in the Inveresk precinct, were co-opted by NERAF and convinced to change focus from the Inveresk precinct to the threatened North East Line. Thus the railway proposal is strongly community driven instead of rail enthusiast driven, as would normally be the case. This has huge implications for the level of support the rail proposal could muster, in stark contrast to the generally reviled "Rail Trail" plan. The political implications would likely also be evident.

- **Compromise / split of railway between tourist rail / rail trail:** With the State Government finally recognising the groundswell of community support for the railway, they have tried to impose a "compromise" option to satisfy both proposals. The compromise is unworkable in its current form, as it denies the railway access to its main potential business generators, Lilydale Falls, Denison Gorge, the transit of the tunnel and the destination of Scottsdale as outlined in the L&NER business plan, it seems that an unintended outcome of the "compromise" would be to scuttle the L&NER business plan. The Launceston City Council have in subsequently defining the dividing point of the rail and trail sectors as the council boundary, then shifted the Denison Gorge and Tunnel back into the tourist rail sector (whilst still isolated from Scottsdale). Propositions have also been floated of co-locating the railway line and trail in the same corridor. In most instances that seems to be physically unfeasible due to the restricted width of the corridor in cuttings, tunnels, bridges and embankments. A better "compromise" would be to consider lengthening the existing rail trail towards the tourist hub towns of Branxholme and Derby, linking with the Blue Derby Mountain bike trails, so both the railway and 'rail trail' can feed off each other in Scottsdale and access their own dedicated destination markets. If cyclists really need access west of Scottsdale, consideration could be given to constructing bike lanes along the roads parallel to the railway. The existing compromise is also unworkable due to the aggressive and personal nature the debate about the preferred use of the rail corridor has descended to, as detailed in the preceding point.

2] The feasibility of the proposed Turners Marsh – Lilydale (Scottsdale) tourism railway:

I am of the opinion that the full length of the North East Railway be re-opened for heritage tourist rail services from Cold Water Creek to Scottsdale and is a far more feasible and economically progressive option based on the following experience:

- **Proven history of heritage tourist rail services:** Tasmania has numerous successful tourist railway ventures, as listed below, they have a long history of proven past

successes and the potential for future growth. Examples include ongoing investment in Heritage and Tourist railways; they need to have tenure on their accessible track, and the ability to comply with requirements from ONRSR and any 3rd party access agreements, also strategy by TATRAIL (the peak Heritage Tourism Rail body) organising greater promotion of the sector in Tasmania. The Heritage Tourism Rail societies were regular uses of the TasRail mainline network until 2005 when Pacific National rail withdrew access to the mainline; I cannot remember any safety violations or incidents that impacted on TasRail operations during my many passenger tourist journeys around the state over many years.

- Tasmanian Transport Museum, Glenorchy: A sustainable museum only operation, with past successful main-line ventures, in co-operation with the Derwent Valley Railway, before min line access was lost, a casualty of the battle between private rail operator Pacific National and the State Government over track maintenance, investment and safety.

- Derwent Valley Railway, New Norfolk (and precursors, Tas. Loco. Co. and Tas, Rail Tours): Successfully ran main-line excursions from 1984 to 2005, when Pacific National withdrew rail access. Excursions became centred on the Derwent Valley Line and following closure to commercial freight traffic, DVR gradually refurbished and progressively re-opened the track between New Norfolk and National Park with their own labour and maintained the track in exchange for access (until the P.N. shut-down). Patronage was generally healthy in a tourist market far smaller than today with eventually 3 to 4 permanent jobs created. DVR had just had a breakthrough in gaining access to the tightly regulated cruise ship market in 2005, when P.N. withdrew access. Since 2005, DVR has continued managing to self-fund its activities (mostly rail vehicle restoration and depot track refurbishment) through collecting and processing scrap materials. Despite having no current commercial trade, DVR activities still contribute on average a minimum of $1000 a month to local businesses and the local community. DVR is currently engaged in increasingly fruitful negotiations to progressively regain access to the Derwent Valley Line, with the assistance and support of the Derwent Valley Council.

- Don River Railway, Devonport: DRR have maintained a productive tenancy of the stub of the long closed Melrose Line between Coles Beach (Don Junction) and the Devonport suburb of Don since the early 1970's, with the museum at Don and the line to Coles Beach having long been a popular Devonport tourist attraction. From the late 1980's to the blanket termination of main line access in 2005, DRR also conducted profitable main line passenger excursions throughout the state, including frequent very popular excursions on the North East Line to Scottsdale. Confined to their own short line since 2005, they have made good progress in negotiating a return to the main-line in the not too distant future.

- West Coast Wilderness Railway, Queenstown / Strahan: Unlike the above mentioned railways / museums, which were started by and continue to be maintained by volunteer work forces, the WCWR was started as a politically supported commercial venture, with a full time paid staff. Operated for a

number of years by Federal Hotels, its owners eventually gave up the railway because of its capital intensive nature and returns incompatible with Federal's business model. Too valuable strategically and politically to allow to close, the Government assumed ownership and continue to manage the operation, which sustains itself, despite the near overwhelming handicaps of a geographically and infrastructure-wise difficult to maintain route, an unappealing climate for a lot of the year and location in an isolated region a considerable distance from the main population hubs of Hobart and Launceston, that struggles to attract large numbers of tourists.

The location of the North-East Line, adjacent to the major population hub of Launceston and numerous attractions along the route to a natural terminus of Scottsdale, with a highly supportive community and volunteer base, has all the hall-marks of a successful heritage tourist railway operation.

- **Community support**: The preference for the utilisation of the rail corridor for heritage rail services has been demonstrated by the strong backing of the North East Residents & Farmers group (NERAF), which comprises a significant number of major land-owners and business owners from the area, including major winery owners and the owner of leading North East tourist attraction, Bridestowe Lavender Farm. As noted previously, NERAF sought out Launceston based Diesel Traction Tasmania (DTT) to adopt the preservation of the North East Line, which led to the creation of the Launceston & North Eastern Railway (LNER) project. Again, as previously noted, this demonstrates the preservation of the railway is very much a community led initiative, rather than a railway enthusiast one. Beyond the involvement of NERAF, public meetings in the North East to present and promote the rail preservation project have been generally very well attended, with some public meetings, such as the one at Lilydale Hall, having been standing room only. Reachtel opinion polls taken of the local community have unfailingly indicated an overwhelming public preference (over70%) for the tourist rail project. The support extends beyond the N.E. region, with many supporters in the west and south of the state, interstate and overseas. This augers well for the promotion of the rail heritage experience in the future.

- **Community assistance & funding**: In a practical demonstration of the above point, community members have already offered significant assistance to LNER, ranging from offers of land to temporarily house rolling stock (rail vehicles) to financing the purchase of a railcar and trailer from Burnie Council for the initial provision of heritage rail passenger activities on the line. Rail industry professionals have been strongly supportive, from direct involvement with DTT / LNER to providing professional consulting services for free and an offer by a prominent Victorian rail training company to help with training and accreditation and development of a SMS. A local business has offer free timber for the decking of bridges, free cartage of 1000 tonnes of materials and TasRail have committed to donating second hand steel sleepers which are in good condition once L&NER have a lease on the track.

- **Suitability of the line:** Although TasRail have assessed the NE line as needing major works to restore it to a serviceable condition, their assessment has to be seen in the context of their standards of bringing the line to a standard of supporting heavy freight services at an improved speed to that of the lines last use for commercial service. That is not necessary for the use proposed by LNER, who propose to initially resume

a tourist service with a light railcar at moderate speeds. The track has been assessed for LNER by a well-qualified track engineer as 95% fit for purpose, whose report taking into account the significant amount of track upgrading works undertaken not long before the lines final closure, has determined that with the high proportion of steel sleepers already in the line and extensive amounts of clean ballast, the line can be re-opened for public service with minimal labour and cost. The main issues identified include the required re-decking of one of the major bridges (which is otherwise structurally solid), the refurbishment of a number of culverts, a minor landslip, some patches of remnant wooden sleepers requiring replacement and the restoration of level crossing protection. All of this is mostly achievable within the LNER's members and supporters own resources, without calling on substantial contributions from ratepayers and taxpayers (unlike the "Rail Trail" proposal, which requires 100% Gov't funding). The track is far from being a weed strewn, rotten, derelict ruin that some opponents would portray it as. LNER would also reject, in the strongest terms, the portrayal by the railway's opponents of their track engineer's inspection as being a "paid for favourable report". With professional credibility on the line, the track engineer's report can be relied on to be a "warts 'n' all" accurate assessment of the line. The track, preserved and maintained in a usable state by LNER, would retain a valuable strategic transport infrastructure asset, connecting Scottsdale and the surrounding region to the rest of the state, for potential future restoration for commercial freight usage. Whilst TasRail cannot see a viable commercial freight source in the North East at present, circumstances can always change in the future. Removal of this asset would eliminate essential transport options for the North East region forever.

- **Commercial viability:** Based on the railway's easy access from the major population hub of Launceston, choice of multiple attractions along the line, strong community support and history of past well supported public excursions, there is no legitimate reason a heritage tourist railway cannot work successfully on the line. Potential future through access to Launceston proper, subject to a future restoration of main-line access agreement with TasRail, will enhance viability, as would a potential agreement with a Victorian based Tourist & Heritage rail entrepreneur, who has secured a supply of relatively modern passenger carriages from Queensland. The LNER Business Plan has conservatively used figures supplied by Tourism Tasmania and assumes a progressive and controlled growth in service as the track is restored in four manageable stages, designed so service and revenue on completed stages can finance the next stage. Beyond the sustainability of the railway itself, it is considered the railway will be a conduit of increased numbers of visitors to established North East attractions, like the wineries and Lavender Farm, adding to the revenue those venues already turn over.

- **Access for all:** Unlike the "Rail Trail" which discriminates in favour of people fit and able to ride bicycles for long distances, excluding those that can't, the railway proposal is a fully inclusive means of travel for the very young, elderly, infirm and disabled people, who can share in the pleasure of exploring the region via the rail corridor and experience the associated attractions. The railway is not dependant on weather and seasonal factors either, being able to comfortably accommodate all in warmth and comfort, whether it is raining, windy or bitingly cold. The railway is also more attractive to the increasing numbers of Asian visitors that view bicycles disparagingly as "peasants transport" incompatible with their aspirational nature.

- **Compromise / split of railway between tourist rail / rail trail**: As detailed previously, the Governments proposed compromise is unacceptable, as it denies the railway the means to generate the business it is capable of as outlined in the L&NER business plan. The most acceptable compromise is for the rail trail to concentrate on the North East Lines abandoned and empty formation east of Scottsdale allowing the railway to concentrate on the route west of Scottsdale. This is the only form of compromise that can maximise the commercial prospects of both proposed projects and also allows them to support each other to the benefit of Scottsdale and the north-east region.

3] The feasibility, funding, future management and maintenance of any tourism developments on the North East Railway Corridor:

As previously discussed, the funding, management and maintenance of each proposal have vastly different implications for the rate-payers / taxpayers of the North East Region and in to some extent the rest of Tasmania.

- **'Rail Trail' proposal**: All development, management and maintenance costs are borne 100% by the respective councils (Launceston City & Dorset) or State / Federal Governments, with the ultimate source of funding being, of course, the rate / tax payers of the region. There is no intention of applying commercial norms in requiring any form of toll or fee from users to contribute to the trails management and upkeep. And as outlined earlier in my submission the Dorset council have indicated at a council meeting 20th August 2018 during questions from the public gallery, that they intend to seek government funding to seal the Rail Trail surface from Scottsdale to Lilydale Falls, (at what cost to the tax payer?)

- **Heritage Tourist Railway proposal**: In contrast to the "Rail Trail", the railway expects to be mostly self-funding on a sustainable basis. The railway's business plan[2] has been structured to enable this to happen over the long term. With a volunteer workforce providing free man-hours of labour, a supporting society providing membership subscriptions, support from sympathetic land and business owners with both cash and 'in kind' contributions (goods & services) of over $2 million, a major part of the railway's establishment and maintenance will be at no cost to ratepayers / taxpayers. Funds for insurance cover will come from the LNER, which will hold the liability for the railways operation. Meanwhile funds spent on the railway's development and maintenance will flow directly a to community business, that hasn't originated from the businesses pockets in the first place. "New" money will be guaranteed to flow into the community from visiting intra / inter-state and overseas railway patrons, without hopeful assumptions of passing opportunity spending that underpins the "Rail Trail" proposal. Revenue will be rolled back into the project to develop it through its progressive stages. Although principally designed to be self-funding, the LNER will still reserve the right to apply for Government Grants, which if successful will speed the development of the project and allow further churn of funds back to the community.

4] Other matters incidental thereto:

Additional benefits to the community offered by the railway that wouldn't be applicable with the "Rail Trail" proposal include:

- Skills development and training for community members, through gaining competencies in operating / maintaining the railway;
- Further promotion and marketing opportunities for the North East region, via specific marketing of LNER and co-operative promotion through the Tasmanian Association of Tourist Railways (TATRail) "Great Rail Experiences of Tasmania" (GRET) marketing initiative.
- Adding the North East as a region sought out by purveyors of rail related experiences
- Increasing the stay duration of visitors in the North East to include the LNER in their itinerary.

Summary:

This submission recommends the approval of the LNER heritage tourist railway proposal assuming the tenancy of the entire Coldwater Creek to Scottsdale length of the intact North East railway line and instead develop the abandoned and trackless formation east of Scottsdale to Branxholme / Derby for the purposes of a "Rail Trail" in lieu of any portion of the intact track west of Scottsdale.

Principal reasons for the approval of the heritage tourist railway plan:

- Proven historical success of Tourist & Heritage Rail in Tasmania;
- Extensive North East community support;
- Substantial offers of N.E. community assistance in labour, equipment & funding;
- Track requires minimal resources to restore to a safe functional standard;
- Business model is considered realistically viable;
- Proposal is expected to be, in the main, self-funding;
- No ongoing burden on Councils / Governments for funding, thus burden on rate / taxpayers;
- Non-discriminatory access for all – very young, elderly, infirm, disabled;
- Not dependant on the weather or the season;
- Substantial economic and social benefits for the community;
- Avoids security risks for neighbouring landowners.

Principle reasons for rejecting the "Rail Trail" proposal:

- Indistinct and / or limited target audience (does not appeal to road riders or downhill adrenaline riders);
- Limited to able & fit riders. Excludes the very young, elderly, infirm and disabled;
- Limited usage in winter or in bad weather;
- No precedent of a successful rail trail in Tas. despite many kilometres of empty, long abandoned railway track-bed around the state;
- Prototype 'rail trail' east of Scottsdale performance is underwhelming. Need to get that performing to expectation before looking west of Scottsdale;
- Lacking density of access / egress and closely spaced attractions;
- Access / visibility for safety needs is limited;
- Security concerns on isolated areas of the trail;

- High potential for abuse by persons using motorised vehicles (e.g. trail bikes) or engaged in illegal acts (dumping stolen cars; illegal shooting, vandalism, theft from properties)
- Has no sustaining income – assuming unrealistic 'flow-on' economic benefits;
- Requires 100% ongoing council / government funding and imposes an ongoing rate / taxpayer burden;
- No community support – strident community opposition;
- Existing proposed compromise (split railway between heritage rail and rail trail) is unworkable and untenable.
- Recommend the rail trail proponents look east and optimise the existing trail (with extensions to Branxholme / Derby to link up with Blue Derby Mountain Bike Park).

Final recommendations:

1. Honourable Members dis-allow approval of Dorset Councils application to become a Strategic Corridor manager (under the Strategic Infrastructure Corridors Act 2016) if intent on removing the track for the creation of a "Rail Trail"
2. Approve any application of the Launceston & North Eastern Railway to manage and operate the corridor for the purposes of running tourist passenger trains.
3. Recommend the Dorset Council, if intent on moving forward with a "Rail Trail" proposal; optimise the existing trail east of Scottsdale, with extensions to Branxholme or Derby if feasible.

Thank you Honourable members for you attention,

Yours sincerely,
David Payne,