

October 2018

5 Lalla Rd
Lilydale 7268
TAS
E: mikeandkathrynscoott@gmail.com
T: 0448540251

Submission to the Legislative Council Inquiry

In support of

The North East Recreation Trail Project

We are 20-year residents of the Lilydale area and ardent supporters of the proposal to convert the unused sections of the Launceston to Scottsdale railway into a trail for people be they cyclists or on foot. Our unequivocal support for the Recreation Trail project is based on a mix of personal experience and hope for future amenity and prosperity of our communities.

1. Responsible Management of the Railway Corridor

We are owners of a property that borders the railway corridor for almost a kilometre. Along this section a lack of active management has resulted in a weed (gorse, blackberry, thistle etc) infested nuisance that requires constant and costly vigilance on our part to contain and to keep our pastures in good condition. The corridor is also a haven for native fauna that like nothing better to partake of our pasture at every opportunity. We have, as a result had to invest in \$20,000 worth of wallaby proof fencing in order to leave something for our sheep. We now find this investment continuously under threat from dead and decaying trees within the railway corridor. In short, we are desperate to have the corridor come under responsible management

We are encouraged by the Recreation Trail proposal as it is a proven concept (see our experiences with other rail trails below) and is backed by Dorset Council providing resource and expertise in management of public spaces and bike trails. Rail trails elsewhere in Australia, that are backed by local Councils are, in our experience, well managed and no threat to adjoining landowners.



With the expert assistance of local councils the organising committees of rail trails are able to undertake effective management of their corridors. (R&R)

2. Experiences With Existing Rail Trails

Between us we have 30 years of living in the UK where the default use of decommissioned rail lines has been to successfully return them to public use as byways for non-vehicular traffic. With their gentle grades these byways are perfect both for casual walkers and for those seeking a more strenuous form of exercise such as running as well as for cyclists of all ages and abilities. The attraction for all was safe and peaceful access to the countryside away from road traffic and farmland.

On a recent trip back to the UK we visited our old home town of Ilminster in Somerset which lies at one end of the Chard to Ilminster railway. This has now been successfully converted into a rail trail. It was delightful to see the trail in use from early in the morning by joggers and right through the day by the full spectrum of the community from elderly dog walkers to kids cycling to school.



Above: The Chard to Ilminster Rail Trail. Note the motorbike obstacle on the right. The gates are now permanently open as inappropriate (motorised) use of the trail stopped almost as soon as the trail opened.

We do not like taking positions without good evidence to support our beliefs. Accordingly, when the opportunities arose we have cycled established trails on the Australian mainland to sample for ourselves the experience of travelling long distance rail trails and to see their impact on local communities. We have ridden the Murray to Mountains (M2M) rail trail in North Eastern Victoria and the Rattler & Riesling (R&R) trails in South Australia. These trails have done nothing but cement solidly our belief that a rail trail is simply the best thing that could happen for the communities along the Launceston to Scottsdale line. All along the trails are small local businesses from farm produce stalls, vineyard cellar sales, cafes and eateries and all levels of accommodation.

Talking to the proprietors of many of these businesses it is clear that they see the rail trails as a boon and in many cases the mainstay of their business. It is interesting to note that these people said that these trails experienced a lot of opposition and angst from sections of the local communities and landowners at the stage the North East Recreation Trail proposal now finds itself. That opposition and the fears that fomented it rapidly dissipated after the opening of the trails.

The trails now fit seamlessly into the fabric of the countryside with minimal disruption to landholders. Despite visiting out-of-season and in less than perfect weather, we witnessed both trails experiencing plenty of peaceful, appropriate use. Below are photos that illustrate a few of these points.



Wangaratta Tourist Information Centre. A very prominent display illustrates the importance of the M2M rail trail to the local economy.



The M2M Rail trail approaches Bright along an avenue of businesses like these accommodation units directly serving the trail.



An information board (one of many) on the R&R trail showing the many local organisations that provide financial and/or voluntary service support to the trail in recognition of the great benefit it confers to their communities and their businesses.



Art installations commissioned by community organisations (R&R) (Note the vineyard alongside the trail, one of the many businesses that offer hospitality/sales direct to trail users and contribute both to the maintenance of the trail and the local economy).



Basic but quirky trailside facilities (M2M) add to the attraction and amenity of these trails. The railway theme and historical connections remain important to visitors and community alike.



We have been for many years active members of local voluntary groups that work towards long term social, economic and environmental sustainability of the Lilydale district communities. These groups have struggled to identify ways to help future proof communities like Lilydale from the blight of population and resource loss as traditional forms of rural employment decline. From our perspective, there has at no point been any opportunity for community growth, both social and economic, as positive as the North East Recreation Trail proposal. Based on precedent elsewhere, what sets this proposal head and shoulders above other potential options is that it:

- opens up public access to public land in a manner that enhances amenity to all residents,
- it will encourage business activity all the way along the trail creating a boost in economic activity,
- create substantial gainful employment rather than relying on an army of volunteers to be viable.

It would be wonderful to see the broad benefits so evident in the communities along the Victorian and South Australian trails reproduced in the communities along the North East Tasmanian line. With a tourist hub like Launceston, the rapid growth of cycle-based tourism in North East Tasmania, the existing Scottsdale to Billycock Hill trail and the clear successful precedent of rail trails elsewhere, the North East Recreation Trail is as close to a bankable, proven proposal as it is possible to get.

Multi-use bike trails may not seem glamorous but their benefits are profound and long lasting. It is what our communities need and, accordingly, has our absolute support. Cycle based tourism, in all forms, is experiencing significant growth worldwide. One only has to look to the impact of the Blue Derby trails on that community. To quote a local Estate Agent, "Five years ago you couldn't sell a property in Derby, now you can't buy one".

Even a fraction of the growth seen in Derby if spread along the 100km length of the North East rail corridor would be a massive boon for the region. We, like many in our community, are seriously considering either building or converting existing workshops into

accommodation units. This investment is conditional on the implementation of the Recreation Trail.

The alternative, a tourist rail service, would bypass the majority of these prospective businesses. Even at stops there is little benefit as the vast majority of rail customers do so on a day trip from elsewhere or as a stop off on route from one regional centre to the next. We have ridden rail attractions in many countries and this has been our experience.

Our experience of both tourist railways and Rail Trails leaves us with no doubt. The best fit and the best potential benefit for the North East would be the Recreation Trail proposal.

We strongly urge this inquiry to look beyond the hype and nostalgia that has infected much of the debate. There is in the Recreation Trail project a solid proposal with clear precedent for success demonstrated by rail trails world-wide. We are prepared to back it. We believe this inquiry should too.

Mike & Kathryn Scott