

Government Administration Committee 'B'
Inquiry into Tasmania's North-East Railway Corridor

Terms of Reference

To inquire into and report upon tourism opportunities provided by the *Strategic Infrastructure Corridors (Strategic and Recreational Use) Act 2016* in relation to Tasmania's North East Railway Corridor with particular reference to —

1. the feasibility of the proposed Scottsdale-Lilydale Falls rail trail;
2. the feasibility of the proposed Lilydale-Turners Marsh tourism railway;
3. the feasibility, funding, future management and maintenance of any tourism developments on the North East Railway Corridor; and
4. any other matters incidental thereto.

1. The feasibility of the proposed Scottsdale-Lilydale Falls rail trail

Surveys have indicated a decline in the popularity of track cycling Australia-wide while popularity in mountain bike riding has increased, e.g. Derby/Blue Tier.

The Scottsdale – Billycock bike trail is greatly underutilised; this suggests a similar paucity of use would result for the proposed Scottsdale – Lilydale trail.

It appears unlikely that some parts of the existing corridor would be wide enough to meet Australian Standards for cyclist paths¹.

Informed estimates² consider it unlikely that the Federal Grant of \$1.4 million³ would cover the cost of converting the rail corridor from Lilydale to Scottsdale. Further maintenance costs estimated to be \$2000 per km⁴ appear unfinanced.

2. The feasibility of the proposed Lilydale-Turners Marsh tourism railway

Enthusiasm shown by the Launceston and North-East Rail (L&NER) group currently working on the rail car restoration at Karoola is indicative of the ongoing dedication of volunteer rail groups Australia wide. Don River and Derwent Valley groups are other examples.

There is no doubt that the L&NER group is capable of restoring the rail service between Lilydale and Turners Marsh and beyond; their membership has the expertise and qualifications. The line was declared 95% ready for service by Robert Vanselow⁵.

This would make a pleasant rail excursion to Lilydale Falls, particularly if extended into Launceston. Unfortunately it would miss the 'jewel in the crown': the iconic *Denison Gorge*, also the *Tunnel* and the opportunity to visit *Bridestowe Lavender Farm*, the owners of which have expressed interest in running a shuttle bus to Wyena for the purpose.

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

Advice from interstate interests⁶ has firmly recommended a *volunteer* run model for a tourist rail venture. Interstate groups have proven this model to be economically sustainable plus offering the benefit of community involvement.

Using the Yarra Valley volunteer run rail line as an example, towns along the line have received economic benefit in the form of cafés and souvenir shops plus employment resulting from skills learned by volunteers working on the project.

4. Any other matters incidental thereto

The existing infrastructure has been valued at \$40 million⁷; it would be a tragic loss to the state's tourist potential if it were removed. Restoration of the Denison Gorge picnic area would add another tourist destination and take some pressure off Lilydale Falls and Hollybank which, at times, are overused. If accessible by rail, Denison Gorge would attract many more visits than it would by bicycle access.

It has been suggested that local service clubs might restore the picnic area to the condition described and illustrated in the monograph by J & M Grist⁸.

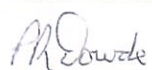
The fact that the Tasmanian Government has offered use of the North East line suggests confidence in the capabilities of the N&LER group. Why not allow access to all of the line?

The North East Working Group of 2011⁹ included 'Tourism and Recreational – NE Steam Rail tourist track, Launceston to Scottsdale' in its 'Long-term Integration Concept' list.

References:

1. www.austroads.com.au
2. Cost estimate to lift the 69km rail between Casino and Mooloolaba NSW is currently \$70 million.
3. To be matched by Dorset Council and Tasmanian Government.
4. This is the experience in the Yarra Valley area Victoria as reported by Brett Wheelan; it contradicts the \$12,000 – 15,000 per annum suggested by the Mayor of Dorset.
5. Rail engineer Victoria 2018.
6. Brett Wheelan of Yarra Valley Rail.
7. Christopher Martin 2018.
8. <https://trove.nla.gov.au/work/206490865?q&versionId=243926002>
9. Priority Initiatives Paper May 2011, co-chaired by previous Dorset Mayor, Barry Jarvis.

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Photos of the Denison Gorge area



Typical scenery in the Denison Gorge area. Large expanses of the line are in excellent condition.



The (Queen Victoria) 'Jubilee Arch' which takes the Denison River under the line.



A cascade on the Denison River adjacent to the former Denison Gorge Station.



On the opposite bank the walking track appears to be a remnant of the Denison Gorge Picnic Ground.



The standpipe that previously rewatered steam trains.



The tank that fed the standpipe.