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Committee B
Legislative Council
Government of Tasmania

SUBMISSION FOR NORTH EAST RAILWAY CORRIDOR ENQUIRY

CASE FOR RETAINING THE NORTH EAST RAILWAY LINE AND CORRIDOR : SCOTTSDALE TO COLDWATER CREEK FOR RAIL TRANSPORT

I wish to make a submission regarding this enquiry and it is based on railway maintenance experience over more than 30 years.

This included:

- Commenced with the Special Gang in 1964 and this work covered specialised installations and maintenance, ie points and crossings, relaying rail yards including Fingal Coal Rail yard.
- Transferred to Maintenance Gang on North East Railway between Lilydale and Nabowla.
- For a number of years I was Ganger with responsibility for 15 employees and the maintenance of approximately 126 km of track on the NE Line. This included sleepers, relaying rail, spreading ballast, track repairs after derailments caused by uneven loading of log wagons, and prior to welding of rails in extended lengths, dealing with buckling of rails during summer heat.
- Operated a rail slashing machine to clear scrub on the rail verges on the North East and Fingal Lines.
- Relief Supervisor for the North East Rail Line from Launceston to Herrick, and George Town to Deloraine.
- Employment with a contractor providing advice on rail network relaying statewide.
- Employed by Roger Smith to prepare rails for installation in the Apt Railway at Strahan. This involved crowing the rails for curves and strapping them in packs to be transported and laid directly into their track position. When this was completed, I went to Strahan to help sort out safety issues with the track created by a Company contracted to do the work, but had absolutely no railway knowledge. I lead a gang of workers to bring the track to the standard required and was directly involved in the accreditation process with the Australian Rail Authority.

FEASIBILITY, FUNDING, FUTURE MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF ANY TOURISM DEVELOPMENTS ON THE NORTH EAST RAIL CORRIDOR:

It is my opinion that rather than destroy a \$40m heritage railway which is owned by the Tasmanian people, and on land that was acquired, and in many instances donated with conditions of use, for the specific purpose of being used for a rail corridor servicing the North East, that the 5% maintenance (Bob Vanslow Report) be carried out so that it can be used for the purpose intended.

My experience and background provides me with the knowledge to make informed and accurate comments on the probability of what trackwork is involved in the 5% to bring it up to operational standards to meet accreditation. I base this 5% on the detailed report prepared by Bob Vanslow, a fully qualified and experienced Railway Engineer, who walked the entirety of the railway from

Scottsdale to Cold Water Creek and recorded the track condition using GPS co-ordinates for location of features and repairs.

I question the assumptions made by the Dorset Mayor of the many millions of dollars bandied about to bring the North East Line up to standard for accreditation. One conversation I had with a person from Treasury who had been sent to verify details of the report by Ray Bartlett Raylink Consultants and who had travelled the track via rail vehicle confirmed she did not notice that the number of crossings between Turners Marsh and Lilydale had been grossly exaggerated (15), which in turn would exaggerate the supposed costs for rail crossing lights etc. When questioned as to where and on what the \$4m would need to be spent on the section Lilydale to Wyena, she did not know. With all due respect to the person, why send an unqualified person to verify information unless it was to avoid the questioning of accuracy of the document, and getting acceptance by stealth. This is a common theme throughout the whole investigation, yet discredited reports (RayLink Consultants) are frequently used as factual information.

There are major discrepancies in the Ray Bartlett report which indicates that he is neither a qualified rail engineer or has any particular working knowledge of railways. He made references to practices that have not been carried out in the living memory of any rail worker, and two bridge replacements he referenced were in fact replacement of timbers in cattle baulks either side of a main road. These are a very few that renders this report worthless.

PROPOSAL

I propose that for a period of 10 years the Launceston and North East Railway (L&NER) be given the opportunity to prove that they can make a viable and successful tourist venture, and after this period if it is not a demonstrated success, it then be converted to a recreational corridor with the removal of the railway line. To achieve success I would suggest that the upgrade be staged:

1. Lilydale to Wyena

This section requires the least work – I estimate the work could be accomplished in 3 months to achieve accreditation by the Australian Rail Authority.

As per Bob Vanslow's report there are 603 sleepers to be replaced between Lilydale Falls and Wyena – this does not support the \$4m purported to be required as per Page 4 – Summary of the Raylink Report - Review of Launceston & North East Railway's Proposal for Tourist Heritage Rail Service on the North East Rail Line (Infrastructure Tasmania – Final Advisory Report October 2017).

When this section is operational, it will provide funds for the next section of work to Nabowla.

2. Wyena to Nabowla

It is important to complete the maintenance to this destination for the tourists to the Nabowla Lavender Farm – with around 80,000 visitors to the farm, there is an opportunity to extend the visitor experience. Also, from an operational point of view, there is the area available at Nabowla to install a train turning area.

3. Nabowla to Scottsdale

This will provide an influx of visitors and support to the town, and give visitors the opportunity to explore the area, and enjoy a meal or coffee.

4. Launceston to Lilydale

This will provide the ultimate link that will open the corridor from Launceston to Scottsdale, with Launceston being the starting location. By making the previous stages successful, it will provide the funding to make the necessary upgrade to the Turners Marsh section. The work required in the Lilydale to Turners Marsh section is equivalent to the work in the stage Lilydale to Scottsdale. From Turners Marsh to Cold Water Creek there is little work required.

With the dedication already demonstrated by volunteers through funding by donation of materials, equipment, cash and time, and the expertise in many trades, I have no doubt that it has the potential to be successful. Apart from improving a State asset, there are many benefits apart from economic. Akin to the social benefits of the Men's Sheds, this project is already bringing people from many walks of life and experience together on a weekly basis, their knowledge and experience is being handed on to younger interested people, and will provide opportunities in the future for employment as the project progresses. The economic benefits will flow to communities along the Railway Line, opening up opportunities for small businesses and markets. This has been demonstrated on the mainland through the Yarra Valley, Puffing Billy, Kuranda to name a few. Let's not forget the success of the Apt Railway, which is profitable in its own right, apart from the economic benefits to the West Coast area of bringing visitors.

There is the opportunity for there to be a flow on to other recreational activities like the Bike Trail from Scottsdale and can be complementary to each other in providing combined activities, ie the train to Scottsdale, the Bike and Fun Run on the trail and overnight in Scottsdale and return to Launceston the next day. To complement events, a train could be incorporated as part of the experience, ie during the Lavender Season of course Nabowla would be the focus, trips to wineries could be an event with co-ordination with local bus operators.

Trains are by their very nature are restricted to a rail corridor, whereas other recreational pursuits such as bike and horse riding, trail bikes and walking are not restricted by specific requirements like a railway track. These recreational pursuits are already well catered for, ie the bike and walking trails throughout Launceston, the walking track to the Launceston Gorge and Trevallyn Lake, the North East Bike Trail from Scottsdale to the Billycock and for specialised mountain bike riding there is the Derby Blue Tier trail.

Rather than destroy the North East Railway, there is the viable potential to extend the North East Bike Trail from the Billycock through to Herrick as the corridor has already been allocated but remains undeveloped.

The North East Residents and Farmers group installed electronic equipment on the North East Bike Trail during a 9 day period which included the 2018 Australia Day Holiday – it recorded an average of less than 4 people per day using this trail. It makes a fallacy of the grant submission made where it was claimed that 26,000 people would use the bike trail from Scottsdale to Cold Water Creek and resulted in a \$1.47m grant being awarded. If the current available facility is not being utilised, what is the purpose of providing many kms of recreational corridor at the expense of taxpayers and ratepayers for installation and ongoing maintenance to sit idle? Worse still, it will prevent the use of an asset already in place that can be developed into a viable tourist attraction by a group who have already demonstrated their commitment through private donation and volunteering their time and expertise. Unlike the alternative, there has been NO request for taxpayer funding, only the given the opportunity to develop an already existing asset.

The upgrade to the North East Rail Line from Coldwater Creek to Scottsdale would provide for a unique experience that does not exclude anyone from participating, regardless of their physical limitations, and provides an attraction for tourist visitors and particularly if their time is limited.

Already the Lavender Farm at Nabowla, which had approximately 83,000 visitors last year, is getting enquiries about visits using the train. There are historical features, ie the Victoria Culvert, and Tunnel built in 1888 which would only be available to a minority group yet is the heritage of all the people of Tasmania. Likewise the terrain of the Denison Gorge where a picnic ground area and nearby falls was enjoyed by visitors through train travel will be excluded from those who are unable to ride a bike or horse to access it.

LACK OF CONSULTATION

The Dorset Council is dependent on getting the \$1.47m grant to commence the bike trail. However this will only commence the work – there is no plan for where the remainder of the cost of crushing the ballast, sealing the track, installation of safety railing along drop-offs in some instances of metres to 40 or more metres.

There was no consultation regarding this project, particularly with landowners adjoining the rail corridor. Many were not even notified of the intention despite assurances from Dorset Council. From canvassing all the adjoining landowners, there was 95% opposition to a bike track.

Farm security requirements have not been considered in the Strategic Infrastructure Corridors legislation which totally removed control from the landowners over their property. This is contrary to farm security requirements, and highlights that this legislation was put in place to validate the destruction of the railway corridor for a minority for recreational purposes without any consideration to other legislation.

The Dorset Council has never attempted to hold public meetings for open discussion on the different proposals – it has been the Bike Trail or nothing.

LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY

At no time has the Dorset Council had to provide a Business Plan for the proposed Bike Trail, or be required to provide evidence of its claims, ie 26,000 bike riders to use the trail annually (now downgraded by the Dorset Mayor to a 'steady trickle'), that 67 full time equivalent positions would be provided in 5 years, and economic benefits of \$3.5m when the project was completed.

If these benefits were likely to flow on at the end of this proposed Bike Trail, where are the equivalent benefits that have flowed from the Scottsdale to Billycock Bike Trail?

Recently, the Dorset Mayor was again stating that the rail removed from the track and sold to fund the project – isn't this contrary to the requirements of the Strategic Infrastructure Corridor Act? Doesn't it have to be stockpiled??