

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE
NORTH EAST RAILWAY CORRIDOR INQUIRY

Thank you for the opportunity to make submission to this inquiry.

Our family's comments reflect our extensive experience of recreational cycling, mountain biking and long distance walking trails in Australia, New Zealand, North America, South America and Europe. We also have extensive experience of rail travel (urban and country public transport as well as heritage rail) throughout Australia and around the world.

The collective experience and professional activities of our family includes:

- Extensive Tasmanian, National and International travel for recreation, business, education and professional development
- High level health care, strategic management, advocacy and education
- High level tourism management, development and marketing
- High level wilderness and remote guiding, education and environmental management
- High level primary industry practice, management, research and development

Our submission and recommendations relate principally to:

1. The economic benefits of a cycle/recreation trail
2. The health benefits of a cycle/recreation trail
3. The social inclusion of a cycle/recreation trail

We have deliberately used the terminology "recreation trail" to indicate the potential for low cost, multi-use activities within the rail corridor.

Economic benefits

We do not have specialist knowledge to comment specifically on economic benefits or otherwise of heritage rail, although our observations would suggest most heritage rail lines are of relatively short distance and depend heavily on unpaid volunteer input to maintain viability. It is difficult to see that a heritage rail service – even on the approximately 15km between Lilydale and Turners Marsh – would achieve viability, let alone profitability without substantial external investment. It is even more difficulty to envisage that viability could be achieved on a much longer heritage rail route from Launceston to Scottsdale.

Heritage rail is almost entirely a short duration "out and back" same day activity with limited synergies with local accommodation and hospitality services.

Our cycling experience over many years - including re-visits to some favourite locations – has demonstrated beyond doubt the flow on benefits of expanded accommodation, cafes and other food services, cycle hire/sales/repair services, as well as growth of other town infrastructure that comes with increased business and visitor activity. This is of even greater

significance when the trail is of sufficient length to encourage multi-day use and links to other related activities such as mountain biking and group participation rides.



Cycle hire/coffee shop on the Reisling Rail Trail, Auburn SA (Population 661). April 2015. (Photo P Arvier)

We have been delighted to see the growth and new activity in the communities of Derby and Scottsdale during successive visits to those localities to ride the Scottsdale to Legerwood section on the North East rail trail and the Derby mountain bike trails.

This is comparable with changes we have seen with other Australian and New Zealand trails where declining rural communities have been revived when longer stay visitors come in increasing numbers.



Tavern at Chatto Creek NZ (Population 11) adjacent to the Otago Rail Trail. April 2016. (Photo P Arvier)

We also note that rail lines and recreational trails can develop a mutually beneficial relationship. Examples include the Lilydale (Vic) to Warburton rail trail that can be accessed via the Melbourne suburban commuter rail network; the Gippsland Plains rail trail (Vic) that can be accessed at either end via Vic rail country services; the Otago Rail Trail (NZ) that can be accessed via the Dunedin to Middlesbrough railway; and the Rimutaka Rail Trail (NZ) that can be accessed at several points by the Wellington to Masterton rail line. All these rail links provide cycle transport as part of their regular services.



Cycle/rail connection Gippsland Plains Rail Trail, Victoria. September 2015 (Photograph P Arvier)

This suggests that a similar cooperative arrangement could be developed on the North East Recreation Trail and it is disappointing that the proponents of the North East Heritage Rail have rejected the proposal of developing separate sections of the rail corridor for cycling or other non-rail activities.

On a cautious note, we have become aware that the Korumburra Heritage rail line that once linked to the Great Southern Rail Trail (Vic) at Leongatha, closed in 2016 due to declining numbers of volunteers to keep it running (<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-01-21/korumburra-tourist-railway-folds/7103948>)

Health Benefits

Passenger rail travel is essentially a passive activity requiring little physical exercise. As such, it is an activity that can be accessed by persons with limited mobility. It also has the potential to provide great personal enjoyment particularly when it provides historical and scenic experiences not easily accessible in other ways.

However, it is well researched and evidence based that Australians are increasingly overweight and inactive through largely sedentary lifestyle and consequently suffering from “lifestyle” diseases of obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes, musculo-skeletal degeneration and cardiovascular disease.

Much of this can be prevented, treated, or even cured by participating in regular physical activity. If this is provided and sustained in an easily accessible and pleasurable way, the potential health benefits to individuals and the wider society are enormous.

Many rail trails now incorporate sections with appropriate surfaces and engineering to encourage people with mobility aids to access and enjoy the trails (www.railtrails.org.au for full details) in shared use with cyclists, horse riders and walkers.



There is now also a considerable body of research that demonstrates a strong relationship between physical activity and improved mental health (for example:

[www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366\(18\)30227-X/fulltext](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366(18)30227-X/fulltext))

Walking and cycling are a perfect fit for enjoyable, safe, low impact activities to achieve this. The documented increasing use of recreation/rail trails for these activities confirms that large numbers of people are already realising these benefits.

(<http://www.northernriversrailtrail.org.au/rail-trails-work/community-health-benefits/>)

Social inclusion

Humans are social beings and activities that can be enjoyed at different levels irrespective of age, ability, background or financial status, help break down barriers by promoting social cohesion and interaction. There is now considerable research in this area that demonstrates this strong association (e.g. [http://www.dsr.wa.gov.au/support-and-advice/research-and-policies/policies/inclusivity-\(substantive-equality\)](http://www.dsr.wa.gov.au/support-and-advice/research-and-policies/policies/inclusivity-(substantive-equality)))

A recreational trail that is engineered appropriately to accommodate a wide range of activities that is inclusive irrespective of the level of basic physical fitness can help facilitate this for individuals, families, common interest groups and the wider society. An accessible and safe (separate-from-road) rail corridor linking small and large communities is ideal for fostering such needs.



Re-built rail bridge over the Eildon Dam on the Great Victorian Rail trail linking the small communities of Bonnie Doon and Mairdample. April 2013. (Photo P Arvier)

Recommendations

- The North East Railway corridor should remain as Crown Land to ensure that the corridor remains available for whatever publicly beneficial activities may be developed now or in the future.
- Encroachment of private farming and other activities on this Crown Land should be addressed in a sensitive and conciliatory manner before considering any legal proceedings.
- The compromise proposal previously put forward (Heritage Rail from Turners Marsh to Lilydale and Recreation Trail from Lilydale to Scottsdale) should proceed as soon as possible so as not to lose funding already granted.
- These developments should be reviewed at regular intervals to assess ongoing viability, sustainability and relevance to societal needs and Tasmanian development. Consideration should then be given to adopting different uses for those sections of the corridor if appropriate.
- Regardless of the development or not of a Heritage railway line, investigation should proceed into the development of a safe, separate-from-road cycling/recreational trail to link Lilydale to the Launceston cycle pathways.
- Investigation should also proceed into the development of a cycling/recreational trail from the end of the existing rail trail (near Legerwood) along the old rail corridor to Branxholm with a safe, separate-from-road link to Derby and the mountain bike trails.



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(on behalf of the Arvier family - Meg, Robert, Christopher and Andrew)

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