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

Rail Trails Australia Inc.
ABN 94 479 743 813

PO Box 2127
Oak Park, Vic 3046

Phone: 03 9306 4846
Email: admin@railtrails.org.au

ner@parliament.tas.gov.au

Legislative Council Government Administration Committee 'B'
North-East Railway Corridor Inquiry

Dear Administrative Committee 'B'

Rail Trails Australia (RTA) strongly supports the Tasmanian government's balanced proposal for the North East Railway Corridor, to allow a two-stage tourist railway from Coldwater Creek to Lilydale and extend the successful rail trail from Scottsdale to Lilydale Falls and Lilydale.

RTA is the national organisation promoting the use and development of rail trails throughout Australia. All over Australia and internationally, former rail lines have been converted into multi-use trails by councils for walking, cycling and horse riding, providing a safe, health-promoting corridor between communities for locals and visitors alike. Please refer to our website for more information.

The inquiry terms of reference include:

1. the feasibility of the proposed Scottsdale-Lilydale Falls rail trail;
2. the feasibility of the proposed Lilydale-Turners Marsh tourism railway;

which are addressed below,

Feasibility of the Proposed Scottsdale-Lilydale Falls Rail Trail

There has been ample evidence provided on the benefits of this rail trail, sufficient to convince the federal government to commit substantial funds and the Dorset council to provide in-kind funding. This is summarised in the recent Treasury report.

RTA would like to provide further reassurance that it is quite feasible to construct a good rail trail with the funding provided and that it will be well used by the community.

The RTA president travelled in Queensland in September 2018 to view open and prospective rail trails. Victoria and South Australia have long been recognised for their significant number of well-used rail trails.

Queensland is now also moving forward with rail trails, including having Australia's longest rail trail. The Queensland government has a record amount of funding available to communities wanting to turn disused corridors into valuable rail trails.



Please refer to the attached Spring 2018 Rail Trail Connections for more information.

One of the rail trails visited was the Murgon to Kingaroy rail trail in the South Burnett shire that opened a year ago. This is a 43km rail trail, very similar to the 42km Scottsdale to Lilydale Falls length. It has a sealed surface, most of the bridges are in place, interpretive signage and shelters. It was built with funding of \$1.4m and some in kind contribution from council.

Even without considering the very low funding cost, this project is a great example of a rail trail and community asset. Most impressively, it is also widely used by the local community with many regular events such as Park Runs and other annual events. It is really helping the community get active, improve health outcomes and create social interactions.

RTA strongly supports the Dorset Council's position that the rail trail should connect with Lilydale and should be contiguous with the existing rail trail.

Feasibility of the Proposed Lilydale-Turners Marsh Tourism Railway

RTA supports feasible tourist/heritage railways. RTA has many supporters involved with operating heritage railways.

RTA is assisting community groups for several rail trail proposals in other states where there is a similar situation to the NE Railway corridor. It is frustrating to see the construction and usage of clearly viable rail trails that will be of great benefit to the community being delayed by tourist railway proposals of questionable viability.

Similar to our approach with the rail trail, benchmarking existing tourist railway examples is a good basis to determine the likely outcomes of this proposed tourist railway.

RTA notes that the majority of operating tourist railways on former government railways in Australia are in Victoria. New South Wales and Queensland have none at present. South Australia and Western Australia have several. As you would be aware Tasmania has the West Coast Wilderness Railway and the Don River Railway.

The scarcity of tourist railways in most Australian states unfortunately suggests the great challenges faced in construction, maintenance and operation.

In Victoria, the longest tourist railway is the narrow gauge Puffing Billy at 24km. All others are less than 20km. The most popular sections of these railways are considerably closer to 10km rather than 20km.

The Yarra Valley Railway, to the east of Melbourne, has been working on restoring the 13km Healesville to Yarra Glen line for over 10 years. A rail car has provided services for several years on a 4km section. Despite hundreds of active volunteers and approximately \$8m in funding, completion date is still unconfirmed but suggested to be beyond 2020.

Given the much smaller pool of potential volunteers in the north-east region and the examples highlighted above, it would appear that restoring the 21km of railway from Coldwater Creek Junction to Lilydale will be a great challenge and take considerable time. It is unlikely that reconstruction of another 42km from Lilydale to Scottsdale would be feasible in any reasonable time period.

RTA supports the L&NER re-establishing tourist rail services between Turners Marsh to Lilydale. It is noted that a verified business case has yet to be provided for assessment. Similarly, estimated capital costs for railway return, including stations, passenger facilities and rolling stock housing/maintenance facilities seem to be absent. It is specifically noted that the type and costs of road & bridge crossings has also yet to be provided.

RTA suggests that strict deadlines on business case provisions, transparent capital & employment cost estimates and project progress should be applied to this development, given the intended use of this valuable community resource.

RTA urges the inquiry committee to support the Tasmanian Government's hybrid proposal for the North East Railway Corridor and allow the government to proceed with formalising the rail trail as outlined in the Department of Treasury and Finance report of July 2018.

Extension of the rail trail from Scottsdale to Lilydale will bring great benefits to the north-east community and all Australians.

RTA would be pleased to provide more information if desired.

Yours sincerely



Damian McCrohan
President

0407 547 016

dmccrohan@railtrails.org.au