


31st October 2018

Ms Natasha Exel
Inquiry Secretary
Legislative Council
Parliament House
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re: North-East Rail Corridor Inquiry - Submission

Dear Madam and Members of the Committee

I am writing to urge you to find in favour of the use of the north-east corridor for a recreational trail, known as the North East Rail Trail.

Having experienced the Murray to Mountains Rail Trail at Bright, I can attest to the economic and health benefits for that local community. Bright hums with bike riders of all kinds, filling the businesses that once relied on limited winter skiers. There is a railtrail café (and almost nothing else) at nearby Porepunkah, servicing almost exclusively railtrail users, and similar small businesses exist in tiny towns all along the route, which would otherwise have lost their shops without that business. Many wineries, cheeseries, bakeries, transport businesses, accommodation and others, tap into the market that is the flexible, daily passage of bike riders. Some riders decide to have lunch at one winery, others at another. Some riders don't like wine but love cheese, so they pop into that business instead. Some riders go to everything! Each bike rider can make their own decisions, with their own timing, and they tend to spend a lot, as they are travelling slowly. This is especially so with a longer rail trail, which requires an overnight stay or several. The longer routes are also more appealing as a special adventure, so bring more custom to the area.

It has been estimated, by Professor Sue Beeton in 2010, that the Murray to Mountain rail trail injected \$200 into the economy, per visitor, per day. The two longest rail trails in north-east Victoria attract about 100,000 riders per year, with that number rising. After we've seen the massive appeal of Derby's MTB, we can imagine that a railtrail in NE Tasmania will complement that and attract the 23,000 riders that are estimated (2014 economic benefit assessment).

I noticed the significance of the Great Victorian Rail Trail even just as I was passing through Yea; every shop in the town stocks railtrail brochures and maps, as rail trail users form a large part of the business there. This is also true of the Otago Rail Trail in New Zealand, which I did not ride but drove past, and could see the riders and the businesses catering for them. You can't miss the dynamism of these rail trails.

The NE Rail Trail is ready to go, and easy to complete. It will take very little maintenance. It will be free for all participants, thereby appealing to visitors and locals alike, and is inclusive of rich and poor, those with fancy bikes and those with simple ones, the brave and the nervous. Being flat, safe and appealing, it will attract people for short visits and longer adventures, with much repeat use. The railtrail proposal is cheap, feasible and healthy, and will attract locals and visitors 24/7.

By contrast, the tourism railway has been found by the Department of Treasury and Finance (July 2018 examination of the business case) to have a significant risk of a funding shortfall and may seek public funding to assist in its establishment costs, or its operation and maintenance costs.

Not only is the proposed heritage railway expensive, and the current proposal reliant on an extraordinary assessment of volunteer involvement, but it would not deliver on economic benefits to local businesses.

Consider a tourist who arrives in Launceston with a week or so in Tasmania. They want to go to Cradle Mountain, Freycinet and Hobart, so already have quite a packed agenda. With a night booked in Launceston, they wonder what activities can be done this afternoon and see that there is a heritage railway. It is unlikely that the train timetabling (perhaps once a week? Daily at a fixed time? Taking some hours to do the return journey...) fits into the short time they have here, so it is likely that they won't bother.

Even if a tourist is very keen, and makes sure to have time to do the train journey, they will not be free to visit all the local businesses that interest them. A train will stop once or twice only, at which point all the tourists will have to get off together. Any businesses will have to be waiting for them there, with a bus to transport them and to return them to the train station before the train leaves. There will be very little or no choice for the tourist, and a lot of competition amongst businesses. More likely, only one or two businesses will be in a position to take advantage of the train passengers' custom. Between trains, there will be no tourists using the corridor at all, so "a long time between drinks" for a business.

I have been to the Don River Railway. Once. I took the kids, and it was quite fun for the first half hour. Then we all felt trapped and a little bored. There was no flexibility for our family. When I ask local advocates for the heritage train if they have been to the Don River Railway, so far no-one has.

I support the state government's recent decision to allow the railway proponents to set up a tourism railway from Turners Marsh to Lilydale, as a compromise that allows all users to attempt to show their case. There should be a time limit on both the railway and railtrail activities (of 5 years) to substantially complete their projects, so that neither can be a blocker on other activities indefinitely.

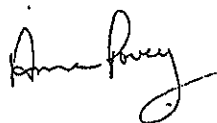
Finally, please remember that a major value of the NE Rail Trail will be for locals. It was clear at Bright that locals use the rail trail every day, for walking the dog, jogging, riding and getting about town. We passed classes of school students, riding bikes as a fun excursion, as well as parents and children using the rail trail daily to get to and from school. At last, country people in NE Tasmania will be able to get exercise in a pleasant and safe environment, rather than having to mix it with traffic on roads. Now that is something that could reverse Tasmania's poor health statistics.

In conclusion:

- The proposed Scottsdale-Lilydale Falls rail trail is feasible in terms of being ready to go immediately, cost-effective, flexible and creative of huge economic benefits and local health opportunities
- The proposed Lilydale-Turners Marsh tourism railway may be given an opportunity to show if it is feasible, but there should be a 5 year time limit on this. No-one did anything about trains for the last 10 or 15 years, so please don't allow this proposal to block the real potential of a railtrail forever.

I trust that this Inquiry will back the sensible proposal to allow the North East Rail Trail get on with providing a fabulous experience for Tasmania, all the way from Billycock Hill to Lilydale.

Yours sincerely



Anna Povey