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**THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SESSIONAL COMMITTEE GOVERNMENT
ADMINISTRATION 'B' MET IN THE LONG ROOM, PARLIAMENT HOUSE,
HOBART, ON MONDAY, 20 MAY 2019**

NORTH-EAST RAILWAY CORRIDOR INQUIRY

Mr CRAIG RICHARDS, CEO, AND **Ms ALISON HETHERINGTON**, PUBLIC AFFAIRS
ADVISER TASMANIA, BICYCLE NETWORK WERE CALLED VIA TELECONFERENCE.

CHAIR (Ms Armitage) - Welcome, Alison. We appreciate you coming and welcome to the public hearing. Just to advise you that all evidence taken at the hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege. I need to remind you that any comments you make outside the hearing may not be afforded such privilege. I am assuming you have read the copy of information for witnesses which I believe was sent to you.

The evidence you present is being recorded and the *Hansard* version will be published on the committee website when it becomes available.

The procedure we intend to follow is if you would like to speak to your submission and then the committee will address some questions to you.

Ms HETHERINGTON - I would like to start with an opening statement. As all the members are aware, Bicycle Network has made a submission to the inquiry. Within our opening statement we would like to address some of the concerns raised in other submissions about what rail trails are what the users of them are like.

The first one is that cycling tourism numbers would be lower than that for rail customers. Looking at Tasmanian tourism figures for the last few years they show that cycling, whether it is general cycling or mountain biking, has been increasing over the past four years with general cycling increasing by 9.9 per cent and mountain biking by 23.8 per cent. Both areas are even in raw numbers but general cycling is slightly ahead. The 2018 total number of visitors cycling was around 46 345 which is a similar number to the number of visitors taking train trips in Tasmania at 46 920.

Evidence from elsewhere also shows that cycling tourism numbers can be high for good quality infrastructure. A 2015 review of New Zealand's 22 cycling trails found they attracted 1.3 million users each year. In north-east Victoria, which is home to two of the state's longest rail trails - the Great Victorian and Murray to Mountains trails - it is estimated that about 100 000 people a year ride in that area. It is predicted that number will rise to 255 000 by 2025 as part of the North East Victoria Cycling Optimisation project which is a collaboration between Tourism North East and Regional Development Victoria.

Another misconception is that most tourists will not be fit enough to use the rail trails but the beauty of rail trails is that they can be ridden in sections, so you can ride as much as you want or you could ride the full length. Rail trails are all about easy riding that is suitable for families and older people. There is also the opportunity for a tourism business to offer e-bikes which are

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becoming increasingly popular for older people to help them stay on their bikes. Not all older people are people with disabilities who are incapable of riding bikes. Some people actually find riding bikes easier than walking, if they have some sort of problem with mobility, especially with electric bikes and modified bikes like three-wheeled bikes. A New Zealand research project from 2009 found that most cycle trail tourists were aged 40 to 65 and that they liked to take a couple of days to cycle an area. Electric bikes mean more people in their 60s and older are continuing to cycle regularly including for tourism.

Another misconception seems to be that cycling tourists will not spend money. The 2015 New Zealand research found that economic benefits that flowed from the 22 studied cycling trails had an annual economic value of over \$37 million. Victorian research from 2010 that reviewed the Murray to Mountains Rail Trail estimated it injected \$200 into the economy each day for each visitor. Many people in the 40 to 65 age group who like to ride the rail trails would also prefer accommodation to camping, and sampling local food and cafes and restaurants. There will of course be people who do choose to camp along the way but they will also visit local businesses for food, souvenirs and other experiences.

Biosecurity risks were also cited as a concern by some submission writers. I wanted to say that we now have available wash down stations for bikes just as we have for hikers and their boots on some of our premier walks. Boot and bike wash down stations could be provided at the major entrances to the rail trail, along with educational signs and supporting material. This is actually being proposed at the new mountain bike trail outside of St Helens to stop the spread of the root rot fungus. It is the same sort of wash down stations used at the entrances to walks in the wilderness world heritage area.

Other concerns seemed to be around things like crime and land value. We wanted to point the committee to a very good feasibility study available online for the Goulburn-Crookwell Rail Trail in New South Wales which analysed concerns about crime, biosecurity risks and devaluing of land being not supported by evidence from rail trails elsewhere in the world.

Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you very much. Craig, did you have a comment you would like to make?

Mr RICHARDS - No, not at this stage.

Mr ARMSTRONG - We have heard in evidence that we could have joint rail trails and heritage railways working together. Do you have any comments?

Ms HETHERINGTON - No comment other than that, as I understand it, there is a lack of land but if the government was willing to invest more money to make more land available that sounds like a good thing.

Mr RICHARDS - The only comment I would make about that is, if that was to be the case, it would be a good idea to consider the possibility of also providing ability for people on bikes to combine the two. They could ride some of the rail trail and then perhaps put their bikes on the train for some of it as well. That is something that, certainly not as much from the historical side but the multi-modals, particularly in countries like Europe where there are a lot of people doing

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bike tourism, combination can be terribly effective. That is the way to go and it would be worth considering.

CHAIR - Thank you. Ivan Dean has a question.

Mr DEAN - Yes, a couple of questions. Has the Bicycle Network had discussions with the Heritage Rail people?

Ms HETHERINGTON - I haven't, but I am not aware if my predecessor, Garry Bailey, had discussions or not.

Mr DEAN - Right, so we don't know. In relation to the Victoria rail trails, we visited the trail at Lilydale, which is great. Do you have a much larger population to draw on in that area than we would have in Tasmania for the North East Rail Trail?

Mr RICHARDS - While that is correct, a couple of the trails that Alison mentioned, particularly the Murray to Mountains Rail Trail and Great Victorian Rail Trail, are still three or four hours from Melbourne by car or by other means in areas of population that are probably similar to the north-east in Tasmania. While there are locals who do ride the rail trail and enjoy them daily, it is the number of people who come in from a tourism perspective you're looking at, particularly in that area. There is a great opportunity with Launceston being so accessible. There will be lots of people from the mainland who will come, inbound tourism, to experience the rail trails. People have become well aware of Tasmania and they love this type of riding.

The one thing I would say is that for most people, with some of the objections, the traditional view of people who are doing bike tourism is an old-style thing called bikepacking. That is basically where a person, often on their own, would jump on their bike, have some packs on the back of their bike and off they would go. They would camp by the side of the road and do all this pretty hard-core thing. It was all about how far they could ride. That is certainly not the modern way at all. There are still some people who do bikepacking and that is amazing.

But the modern thing we see here, more and more, are people who are 50-plus and in their 60s who are the empty-nesters type. They love being able to go on tourism adventures where they ride for some of the time, probably only half the day, and it is well within their means and their physical capabilities. For the rest of the time they get out and enjoy things - the food and wine offerings, whether it is boutique shopping, antiques and that sort of stuff. That is really what we have seen. It will be the inbound tourism that gets driven on a consistent basis that would be of great benefit.

Mr DEAN - The committee had difficulties obtaining the numbers of people currently riding the Billycock to Tonganah or Scottsdale line. There is lack of evidence as to the users of that trail and indications are that it is not used a lot. What is wrong with that? Why is that the case, if that is the situation?

Ms HETHERINGTON - Some of what I have heard about why it may not be utilised as well as it could be is that it is a relatively short section of rail trail for tourism. Billycock Hill is not in the middle of nowhere but you still have to go on the road for quite a bit of the journey to get to Branhholm as the nearest major town. If you are riding on a rail trail because you don't

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want to ride on the road you are left a bit out in the open with nowhere to go at Billycock Hill. But if you can link with the rail trail, Scottsdale is going in close to Lilydale, it opens up more opportunities. Without evidence, without actual counters on the trail, we don't know how many people are using it. That is a good thing for the council or the local groups to consider, to install a counter to see how popular it is.

Mr DEAN - What about the other rail trails we have in Tasmania? Do we know of their usage?

Ms HETHERINGTON - We don't have any rail trails of any real length. This is what, as Craig said, if you are going to get people coming for tourism and they want an adventure and an experience, riding a five-kilometre trail, or whatever, is not going to draw a lot of people other than locals to them.

Mr DEAN - I'm a bike rider and I have ridden on a number of them including in Fernleigh, Newcastle, which is a long one that is used a lot, but that is a sealed rail trail. It is sealed all the way with some cement sections and it leaves itself open to multiple use, skateboarding and those other things they use now. The gravel surface, I believe, will not leave itself open to that multiple use we could have. Is that the position? How do you see that?

Ms HETHERINGTON - It is interesting you say that because I am thinking of one of the most recent infrastructure projects to have been completed in Tasmania is the Margate to Snug track. It is not a rail trail, but it's a new track that has been created. That has a fine gravel surface. I've been on that a few times and it's become very popular with locals down there. I have seen kids on scooters and I have seen people on a variety of bikes, even though only a small section of it is sealed. Yes, the sealed surface is going to be better for more uses and you could consider having fine gravel to start with, but have that as an end goal: that you slowly seal the surface as you get more funding for the trail. Craig, is the Murray to Mountains Trail sealed?

Mr RICHARDS - I might not be absolutely certain whether it is sealed the whole way, but quite a bit of it is sealed. As Alison mentioned, often with these types of projects from the cost perspective, you can start with the compacted rail trail and it's obviously inexpensive and as the use goes up you can look at the sealing options. The Murray to Mountains Trail is the main one that is sealed, but there are plenty of others that aren't. The other day I rode on the O'Keefe Rail Trail, which is another magnificent rail trail out of Bendigo, going south. One day that rail trail will go all the way to Melbourne. Most likely, you will be able to ride off-road from Melbourne to Bendigo. That was fantastic. It was a sealed surface. A local group had done some amazing things recreating some old railway-type stations along the way, places for people can stop and places of interest. You can see that once locals get behind it, it makes a magnificent difference. That was an unsealed road - and I rode that on a semi-road bike with thin tyres and it was fine.

Mr FARRELL - I want clarification on that point. That proposed track, which you said will eventually get to Melbourne, is it envisaged that that will take up the railway corridor to get to Melbourne, or will it alternate onto other ways. This is something we probably have not investigated, where tracks use a bit of rail here and then deviate onto other roads. Is that what has been considered?

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Mr RICHARDS - There will be some combination because there is some existing off-road infrastructure. There are a couple of links at the moment just to be completed. In effect what is known as the rail trail part of it is half done - there is another half to go. Then there is another couple of links you can use off-road. A substantial section of that will be rail trail, pretty much from Bendigo to Kilmore. Then there are other sections that need to be completed, and quite a bit of it already is.

Again, it is what we were speaking about. When the rail trail has some length to it, then it becomes a two to four day-type exercise for people, if they enjoy it. Most people riding are using it as a holiday. They tend to ride 40, 50, 60 kilometres a day-type exercise, stop, and enjoy themselves in the afternoon. It is not usually the domain where people say, 'I'm going to ride 150 kilometres in a day to give myself a good old test'.

Mr DEAN - On the Snug track, how long is the one at Snug that we are talking about? Do we have any statistics in relation to the use of it?

Ms HETHERINGTON - I don't know off the top of my head, I am sorry Ivan, but I can follow that up and send it through to you. It is not long, it is only about 15 or so kilometres. At the moment it is being used by locals to get between the two towns, the primary schools and so on. It has only just been opened; it has only been opened for a few months.

Mr DEAN - Thank you.

Ms RATTRAY - Thank you very much Alison and Craig for joining us today. I am looking for your feedback: what I have gleaned from the hearings, speaking to people and our site visits more recently, was that the success of rail trails is about having landowners and the community pretty much onboard, having full support for it.

I acknowledge that there was place where they said they were still waiting for one landowner to come onboard and they had to go around their property because that hadn't been achieved. Do you have a comment about that, that the success or otherwise of a trail like this does depend on having that landowner and community support?

Mr RICHARDS - It certainly helps but I think the one thing to keep in mind is that unfortunately with all projects you are not going to get unanimous support, with all people in favour. With any change or development, it tends to be that there will be some people who are somewhat reluctant, and obviously there have been some opponents who have put forward their opposition here as well.

I think what we have seen though in many of these cases is that once the trail goes in, most of that opposition disappears fairly quickly because once people see the benefits it brings they say, 'Okay, I get it' and after a period of time everyone - not quite everyone because there could always be someone - tend to get onboard. The one thing I say about that is that while it certainly helps and we definitely want support from locals, and we see the support from local people here because they need to get behind it, it would be unrealistic to think that every single person is going to be in support.

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Ms RATTRAY - I acknowledge that you won't get everybody onboard but the amount of support from landowners has not been overwhelming, I think it would be fair to say, for this proposed rail trail. Would that be fair to say?

Ms HETHERINGTON - It is difficult for us to make those judgments. I notice in the submissions there are a few individual landowners who oppose it but again I point to what I said in the opening statement, that some of the concerns can be dealt with. So things like biosecurity concerns, concerns about land values don't seem to be borne out. In our bicycle network submission we talked about how, anecdotally at least, in Maydena and Derby where the mountain bike tracks have gone in, that they have led to land booms in those areas as people snap up land for overnight accommodation and tourism businesses.

Ms RATTRAY - Is this a similar demographic that uses the mountain bike tracks to what the rail trail is, or are they similar? I am not a biker, unlike Mr Dean.

Ms HETHERINGTON - They are not similar demographics, there is some crossover. Bike riding is very popular with people who are middle-aged, regardless of what it is. Mountain biking is popular with people in their 30s, 40s, 50s, but so is rail trail riding. It is just a different type of riding. A slightly different experience. But still over multi days. The mountain bike at Maydena and Derby attract people for multiple days to ride the trails, in the same way that the rail trail would attract people over multiple days.

Ms RATTRAY - Alison, as the public affairs adviser for Tasmania, what work have you been doing with the Dorset Council with regard to extending the Billycock, at least into Legerwood? I know there has been some opposition with regard to the Billycock into Legerwood network - the rest of the trail - but there is an alternative route being put up. Has there been any progress on that, in your capacity as the public affairs adviser?

Ms HETHERINGTON - No, I am not aware of any progress on that. I have spoken to the council about their plans to extend a trail from Derby down to Branxholm, which I think is a positive thing for their area, so Branxholm gets a bit more of that economic success that Derby has received. But I am not aware of the council's plans for the Legerwood extension.

Ms RATTRAY - How is it ever going to link up then? Effectively there is no link there from the Billycock if they can't get to Legerwood, or not looking to get to Legerwood - the Legerwood to Branxholm hook-up. I absolutely acknowledge that the Branxholm initiative is quite a good one because it doesn't go through any land - there are no adjoining landowners that are actually farming on that stretch.

Ms HETHERINGTON - No, that's it. It's a good one to go ahead. These things are difficult and I am not really aware of the best route to link the trails up all the way through to Derby. I do not know if it is absolutely necessary to do that. I think it would be great if it could happen but sorry, I am not aware of any plans for that.

Ms RATTRAY - There is quite a bit of support in the community for the link-up, given that there is an alternative route. I would have thought that would have been a really good project for the network to get their teeth into.

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Ms HETHERINGTON - Yes, I certainly would be interested in looking into it. I suppose we have been a bit preoccupied with the rail trail extension south of Scottsdale.

Ms RATTRAY - Thank you very much Alison.

Mr DEAN - I note in your submission to us that you make this comment:

The North East Rail Trail already has committed funding from the Federal Government and the Dorset Council for just \$3 million in establishment costs and ongoing maintenance performed by volunteers and funded by trail users and the community, the region could receive many flow-on benefits.

Can you explain to me what you mean by funded by 'rail trail users and the community'?

Ms HETHERINGTON - As I understand it, the rail trail committee is proposing to raise money to fund the maintenance and I do not believe that they have come up with a set way of doing that. Other rail trails around the country have different ways of raising money, whether they are just dedicated fundraisers; whether it is getting businesses on board to sponsor rail trail; whether it is a donation system, at the starts and ends of trails; or just local business sponsorship in general for the rail trails.

Mr DEAN - I think in your submission you are saying is that those using the rail trail will make contributions, there will be contributions and you have just explained there where the community will be required to make, or are expected to make, donations. Do I have that right?

Ms HETHERINGTON - Yes. As I understand it, the volunteer committee looking at these sorts of things are looking at how other rail trails around the country raise money. There are a variety of ways that other rail trails have successfully raised money for maintenance costs, but it is like any fundraising venture, I suppose; the world is your oyster. It depends what you choose for your fundraising.

Mr DEAN - I raised that because it has been suggested to us by way of evidence, et cetera, that a heritage rail would have difficulty raising funds, so I am just trying to get the two together as to why there might be any difference between the raising of funds for both organisations.

Ms HETHERINGTON - I suppose the rail trail is looking at other rail trails and how they have done it. The volunteer committee and Dorset Council have estimated costs of around \$25 000 a year. I do not know what the heritage rail is estimating their operating costs to be per year.

Mr DEAN - Thank you.

Mr ARMSTRONG - I am interested in your comments here, or it is in your submission, about the heritage rail operations over 30 kilometres are extremely rare and that they struggle to do that. A couple of heritage rails that we have visited are reasonably long, and they are talking about extending one of them in Victoria, the Yarra Valley. I am wondering where you get that information from and how you can confirm that information.

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Ms HETHERINGTON - I am sorry, can you read out the paragraph from the submission.

Mr ARMSTRONG -
[TBC]

It was heritage rail operations over 30 kilometres are extremely rare and where they have access to such lengths of track the full distance is rarely used with the ideal of a heritage rail operation into the Launceston terminus both the tunnel and Denison Gorge were simply too far for the service to operate and would encompass a length of corridor that any heritage rail operation would struggle to manage even with significant subsidy.

It is on page 9.

Ms HETHERINGTON - I do not think that is from my submission, I am sorry.

Mr RICHARDS - No.

Ms HETHERINGTON - Our submission is only five pages and we do not refer to it.

Mr ARMSTRONG - Wait on, I am sorry. I am on the North East.

CHAIR - If there are no further questions from members, Craig or Alison do you have any closing comments you would like to make?

Ms HETHERINGTON - I don't, but I will leave it open to Craig.

Mr RICHARDS - The only closing comment I would make is obviously we are a bike riding organisation so, of course, we come from that side of things. This is a great opportunity for Tasmania to stick to its strategy, as Alison outlined in the submission, has been declared the cycling tourism strategy and the plan to become the tourism capital of Australia because of Tasmania's unrivalled scenery. Rail trails are an integral part of that. This is a great opportunity to complete a rail trail in a very accessible area that would obviously bring in a lot of tourists from the mainland and other places in the world as well. It would be a great thing for Tasmania.

CHAIR - Thank you very much for taking the time to come to speak to the committee today. We really appreciate it.

THE WITNESSES WITHDREW.

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Mr MIKE SCOTT, VICE PRESIDENT, **Mr GLENN MOORE**, COMMITTEE MEMBER, **Mr MICHAEL LOWE**, SECRETARY AND **Mr RICHARD FORREST**, TREASURER, NORTH EAST RAIL TRAIL INC. WERE CALLED VIA TELECONFERENCE, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WERE EXAMINED.

CHAIR - Welcome to our hearings. All evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege. I need to remind you that any comments you make outside the hearing may not be afforded such privilege. I believe you have all been forwarded the information for witnesses and assume you have read it. The evidence you present is being recorded and the *Hansard* version will be published on the committee website when it becomes available.

By way of introduction, the procedure we will follow is that we will ask you to speak to your submission and the committee will ask questions. We are taking sworn evidence and I ask each of you to make the statutory declaration that was forwarded to you as well.

Mr SCOTT - Unfortunately, it has not been forwarded to us.

CHAIR - If each witness could solemnly and sincerely declare the evidence they are about to give the committee is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. If you can state your name and then declare.

Messrs SCOTT, MOORE, LOWE and FORREST - I do.

CHAIR - It is challenging on the phone. We have half our committee in Hobart. We have Robert Armstrong in Hobart and there is myself, Rosemary Armitage, and Tania Rattray. Please feel free to offer comments with regard to your submission and members will ask some questions.

Mr SCOTT - I will be giving the initial summary of the submission. Please let me know if you have difficulty hearing or want anything repeated.

This is a submission from the North East Recreation Trail Incorporated group. We are a voluntary group working in partnership with Dorset Council to realise a project that would convert the north-east railway corridor initial proposal from Launceston through to Scottsdale joining the existing North East Rail Trail into a multi-use, non-vehicular trail basically for cyclists, walkers and anyone else who wants to use it.

This follows the rail trail format that is familiar around the world and brings a set of benefits to local communities and the local economy. It improves the amenity, allowing locals to access the countryside and local settlements away from traffic and other nuisances. It provides accessibility because the gradients of the railway are relatively low for anyone of any ability to access the track, whether by bike or on foot. It provides for visitor incentive by allowing a multi-day transition or trek through an area, particularly an attractive area like the north-east of Tasmania. It has potential, as rail trails and this format is known to be a growing phenomenon around the world. It has potential to create significant economic benefits in the area.

The northern Tasmania development report set the groundwork for this proposal in 2014. They were looking at an increase of over \$9 million total output 10 years after inception of the project, giving a \$4.4 million increase in gross state product and an estimated 54 full-time

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equivalent jobs in the area. That is based on visitor numbers of around 30 000 per year, which compares quite conservatively with other rail trails that are already established around the area like the Hauraki Rail Trail in New Zealand, which has 81 000 people visiting it each year, the Murray to Mountains Rail Trail in Victoria with 45 000 people visiting per year, and the Riesling Trail in South Australia with 51 000 per year.

We know that established rail trails are financially independent and generally well managed. They provide considerable local employment, particularly in the small businesses that inject that money directly into local economies. Rail trails also enhance value in the community, both in terms of property values and the lifestyle value for the communities.

NERT, the North East Recreation Trail group, will be responsible for the management of the trail once it has been established by Dorset Council. We have seen from other trails elsewhere that they are well-managed, particularly those we plan to be like, and are backed by a local council. We also understand through community expectation that there is a genuine will in the broad community to see this corridor used beneficially for the community. We have both projects that are subject to this inquiry - a rail option and our option. Between them, we have seen a great deal of interest in the community and the community, from our perspective and elsewhere, strongly suggests to us that they want to see something to happen to this corridor. They do not want to see it left as it is or returned to the local landowners.

Our experience with existing rail trails has shown that concerns of local landowners have been grossly exaggerated in this area. Local people next to those established rail trails see little crime or nuisance because of passive surveillance. That is, the nuisance disappears when trails are used. We have seen these rail trails well-integrated into local communities, into the landscape and have become a fundamental part of those communities. We see the essential benefits for our community members in terms of social health and amenity, economic community, the employment that is going to come from it, and we also know that rail trails are sustainable and intergenerational, they keep going. It is not subject to the favour of one particular slice of the community.

Our position is that we still think that a rail trail or recreation trail running from Launceston to Scottsdale, as the initial proposal, remains the best option for this corridor. We know that the installation can happen, which has been proven by the installation of the north-east recreation rail from Scottsdale through to Billycock Hill. We know there are the benefits and they are proven from the evidence of rail trails elsewhere in the world, and we note the projections of the northern Tasmanian development preliminary report are conservative based on the experience of established rail trails elsewhere.

We have believed for quite a while now that compromise is possible. We know that compromise must involve different lengths of the track. There is no possibility for side-by-side use due to the prohibitive cost but to make it successful for both projects, it must be a viable prospect that links Launceston to Scottsdale using the whole corridor.

To get that far and to be able to have a useful partner to discuss the proposals with, we believe the rail option must prove its capability prior to access to the corridor.

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A lot of unfounded projections within their specifications need answering and the report given to this inquiry by the rail regulator only emphasises that fact even more.

We have a proposal that puts what we have discussed and what we believe is the best fit - that is, a railway linking Launceston to Turners Marsh, but no further.

We also believe that if a railway is to be established on the corridor, it must start with, or initially be established at, the Launceston end. This is so both projects can work towards a natural joining point without leaving any section of the line on the corridor unused.

We also believe that both projects should be rolled out against strict time lines with sunset clauses to provide certainty for all stakeholders.

In summary, our project has good evidence to back it on existing rail trails elsewhere. We know they are sustainable and they can futureproof communities by providing increased income and employment.

One last statement; one last issue: we know Tasmania already has several heritage rail operations, but Tasmania does not have a long-distance rail trail. A rail trail would be a significant extra boost and an increase in the portfolio of tourist operations in Tasmania and therefore it should have the priority in that sense. Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you. Does anyone else have a comment they would like to make before we go to questions?

Mr MOORE - I endorse everything Mike just said. I represent the Scottsdale Rotary Club so I am perfectly willing and able to answer any questions you have about the existing part of the trail. I am also an adjoining landowner and I know the number of kilometres the proposed trail would run.

Mr LOWE - I thank the committee for talking to us today. I also endorse Glenn's and Mike's comments.

I am involved with the social media side of our efforts, Facebook and the webpage. Our Facebook page is a joint cooperative effort across the whole North East Rail Trail - NERT. I have been involved in that process.

The overwhelming message from the thousands of people who engage with us on our Facebook page is that they want politicians to deliver something. They don't make any distinctions between state or federal, or upper House or lower House. They want the people in charge who make decisions to actually get that corridor doing something. That is what they want.

Further, there is an overwhelming support on Facebook for a recreation trail, a rail trail, and the comments are very positive about the rail trail. A few people criticise the rail trail, but unfortunately that group is negative, nasty and disrespectful, and they are not nice at all. They don't have an argument, they only say, 'Train good, bike bad' really. That is what it comes down to. It even comes down quite strongly to the 'wee and the poo' argument. They keep asking about

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where are toilets will go - 'What about the toilets?' The answer is the same for any other trail across Tasmania - it is managed during the planning progress.

There is a really strong will out there for something to happen along that corridor.

CHAIR - Thank you. Richard, do you have a comment?

Mr FORREST - Good morning. I support everything Mike had to say. I will leave my comments until later, thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you.

Ms RATTRAY - Glenn, during this inquiry, a lot of the people I have been talking to about the proposals are interested in whether there has been any progress around negotiations from Billycock into possibly Legerwood. I know there has been some argy-bargy around that. I am interested in whether you have done anything about negotiating an outcome. It is pretty obvious to me that you need a destination when you're going anywhere on these things. While the top of Billycock Hill offers a spectacular view, there isn't anything there. Has there been any progress, Glenn?

Mr MOORE - I couldn't agree more with you, Tania; I am 100 per cent behind what you are saying. It is a very difficult thing to try to discuss that with people who are against continuing that for various reasons. Within the club we often talk about needing that; Legerwood, in particular, needs that because Legerwood really has a fair bit to offer. If we can get people to -

Ms RATTRAY - It has.

Mr MOORE - If we could get people to go there, it would really make the existing part of the trail successful. It is certainly something we as a rotary club want to happen.

Ms RATTRAY - What about that alternative route, Glenn, going right past the rail?

Mr MOORE - The most obvious way is just to go down the road to the abattoir.

Ms RATTRAY - Close the Snake Track off to all vehicles except the people who live on it?

Mr MOORE - It would be the council's responsibility to close that off. Where we conclude the rail trail now, we go there until we get to Snake Track, then go around the back and then come to the Snake Track again. We just go down Snake Track into town and bypass the abattoir and the waterworks.

Ms RATTRAY - Okay, but you need a destination.

Mr MOORE - We would love to have that happen, Tania, and will probably need your support on that one, mate.

Ms RATTRAY - Happy to work with the group.

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CHAIR - Rob, do you have any questions from Hobart?

Mr ARMSTRONG - I am just reading in your submission - and I have the right submission this time - that you have made contact with the heritage rail proponents to enable better mutual understanding. You said they haven't reciprocated in helping to move the debate along. Has there been any advancement in that area since you put your submission in? Who have you spoken to there?

Mr SCOTT - In terms of the first part of the question, there has been no advancement on that at all. I will let Michael Lowe answer the point about contact in a minute. Unfortunately, we also work within local groups, and I was hoping to work through with the Lilydale District Progress Association and use that as one of the links. They have tried to put themselves in that position by calling for compromise and for everyone to work together.

However, looking at the last meeting of the Lilydale District Progress Association, the chairman of the North-East Residents and Farmers Association, a key group promoting the rail at the moment, stood up and said that the objective of this group was to see no rail trail on any part of the corridor. Unfortunately, it is talk like that which makes it extremely difficult for us to be able to have any contact or any meaningful dialogue.

Personally, a while back I approached an intermediary who has been working with the rail group. He went away with the promise of getting talks underway, but nothing eventuated from that. I have to assume he is quite a reasonable and approachable gentleman and he was not given permission to do that. However, I believe Michael has some other information about this as well.

Mr LOWE - I do have more information. Some time before submissions went in, I spoke directly with Wendy McLennan, who is now on Dorset Council, and she said that the train and the bike people should get together and talk. I said, 'Yes, that is what we want.' I actually gave her my email address, my name and my phone number, and she promised me she would get in contact to get this process going. She never did. We have tried hard to get contacts. Further, in our work on Facebook and social media, there is this overwhelming campaign to delegitimise bikes and bike riders as even being worthy of talking to. For instance, I noticed the other day on the Keep the North East Railway page public forum, they have posted a video of bike riders falling off their bikes and hurting themselves with funny comments. I know from our experience that we had to ban people if they used rude words. We have reached out several times and we get rebuffed in no uncertain terms.

I know that your committee members were saying there should be some dialogue and that someone needs to be found to move that process forward. We are there, we support the state government's compromise, so it would be great if the other side would come on board like we are. Thank you, Rob.

Mr DEAN - Good morning. Having visited New Zealand, and contrary to some of NERT's posts on Facebook, it was well done. It wasn't a junket and we learned a lot from that. One of the things we learnt from that is that it is imperative that there must be a strong board set up that can work with both parties to bring the parties together to form the compromises when looking at these rail trails and heritage rails. It was said that these areas will not exist without the other. It is very important to have both and they complement one another. What is your view? What do you

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think of trying to get a good board together with a good driver to try to bring the groups together to work through this?

Mr MOORE - It would have to be totally independent board, wouldn't it?

Mr DEAN - Absolutely.

Mr MOORE - The other party, Ivan, just will not come to the table.

Mr DEAN - The interesting thing is that we are getting from that group that there is a problem with your group as well. This is why we need a strong board. Do you believe there needs to be some strong board set up to try to bring this together? We are not getting too far with the groups currently split.

Mr MOORE - Is it possible for you to get us more information about the other party, in saying that we will not come to the table?

Mr DEAN - Evidence has been given, information provided, that there has been concern about the two groups talking to one another.

Mr LOWE - I can help you with that, Ivan. Your information is incorrect because we reached out to the other group, directly, and gave them information how to contact us. They promised they would come and talk to us, and they did not do that. We support the state government compromise. As we have told you several times now, we have reached out to them and they have refused to accept our open hand of compromise. That is where it is at.

Mr SCOTT - I might add a few things. We have, as Mike said, tried to work with them but both myself and Harry Rigney, our president, have felt for a long time that there does need to be some link somewhere. That is why the approach I initially made was with someone who had worked within the rail group with a well-known local figure, and he has submitted to the inquiry already. I don't feel free to give his name because this will go on record but he did think there was room for manoeuvre and, particularly, a dialogue between us and people who genuinely want to have a rail operation, as opposed to a large section of the group that simply don't want anything.

There is another person who we believe would be a completely legitimate interlocutor for us and that is Mr Chris Griffin of Tourism North Tasmania. I believe he has also submitted to this inquiry. He said he would be quite happy to take on that role. We would be more than pleased for someone like that to take a good, objective role, particularly given his experience in combined rail and trail operations in New Zealand.

Mr DEAN - Thank you for that, and I don't disagree with what you are saying. That would be a good way to start. To my knowledge, we haven't been given any information to the effect that nothing needs to occur with that area. Evidence has been given toward heritage rail and rail trails, there is a use for it and we need to do that.

While we were in Dunedin, we rode the Taieri Gorge rail. On board that train, it was pretty well packed. I don't want you to hold me to this, but I would say that the train probably had

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70 per cent Asians on board. A lot of our tourists today are from China, Japan and some of the Asian countries. Their experience is not bike riding or walking. Their experience is more in heritage rail or other types of tourism. Do you have any comments?

Mr SCOTT - Yes. It goes back to my earlier point that this state has some excellent rail operations in existence. By adding one more all we potentially do, and this is evidence given elsewhere and particularly by Mr Chris Griffin, is dilute what could already be excellent operations such as the West Coast Wilderness Railway, which really needs more and more visitors to keep it sustainable and making money and operations like Don River Railway. They are still crying out for passengers and for volunteers as well. There is a great risk that another heritage rail operation will dilute the passenger numbers and severely dilute the number of volunteers available to these other operations.

We have spoken to Don River Railway and they have an excellent plan for the future, which I think could be exemplary in this inquiry in that rather than trying to extend their four kilometres of self-managed railway, they have taken on board a full-time manager whose job it is to work with TasRail and the rail regulators to get them access onto the main rail network. That gives them access to a variety of essential locations, a variety of excursions, and relieves them of the heinous tasks we know cripple most other heritage rail operations like Ida Bay, which is the management of their own track. We already have enough heritage rail operations that have potential for great scope and improvement, like Don River, without trying to add another one to dilute that market.

Mr DEAN - You mentioned that one heritage rail would dilute the others, et cetera. Can we say the same in relation to rail trails? Can we say the same in relation to mountain bike trails? I understand that they build on one another. People coming here want to ride a trail wherever they can, and they then want to ride mountain bike trails wherever they can. That is why others are being considered at this time. They are looking at another one for George Town and other mountain bike trails are being considered. Wouldn't it work the other way as well?

Mr SCOTT - Actually, no, because rather than being competitive attractions, a rail trail and mountain bike tracks are complementary. I think Chris Griffin was quite clear on this and said that he goes with his family and he would like to do the mountain bike trails. It is the same with my family. The rest of the family would like the trail, he would like the mountain bike tracks, so rather than just getting individuals coming on short stays, you get a whole family coming on multi-day stays. That has a much bigger compound effect on the community.

I cannot see that with heritage rail because heritage rail is essentially a heritage rail. It is not two sides of a different coin, like mountain biking being a different activity to trail riding, which is gentle, goes through communities, allows slow time within those communities visiting all the attractions those communities have. To us they are very complementary. That is why it works so well. That is why it is of particular interest for us to get a rail trail established in the north-east where there is already that catch, that lure, from excellent mountain bike facilities as well.

Mr DEAN - Thank you for that. Another question can I ask you - and once again I will just talk about the heritage rail and the evidence that has been given to the committee so far identifies that for a heritage rail to be successful at all it must have good scenery along the route and it must have good access points. In other words, there must be a point where you get on the train at an

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interesting point and also a good destination point if that can be the position. There must be good scenery in between. I guess the Denison Gorge, the tunnel and that area from Lilydale to Wyena would probably offer that. Do you have any position that you would like to put forward or comment you would like to make in relation to the success of heritage rail?

Mr SCOTT - I am not sure I agree with that at all. You only have to talk to Don River Railway people, as we have done, and they don't have a particularly scenic line. It is nice and pleasant, the four-kilometre strong road, which as you say has good access to the beach, but they have been saying that most of their passengers come for the experience of travelling on a train, something they don't get very much elsewhere. Scenery is absolutely secondary to that.

For our point though, scenery is absolutely essential for a successful rail trail. That is what people come for, to spend time gently travelling through the countryside, so features like the Gorge, features like the tunnel, are essential for a successful rail trail.

The other side, we think, the link between Lilydale and Wyena, is totally unsuitable for a train because it is simply right in the middle of a corridor. We should have one operation at one end and one operation at the other. If we have the railway there we believe it is a gross overreach based on benchmarking against other heritage rail elsewhere in the country and elsewhere in the world. It would simply be too far from Launceston to operate within the time frames and the costs that would normally be associated with a heritage rail and the expectations of users of heritage rail. I think that is quite clearly set out in the linkage report that says you need heritage rail to operate between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. so passengers can get to the terminuses and get away at the end of the day. Getting to Wyena and back from Launceston would be a trip substantially longer than that based on the known speeds allowed on that line.

Mr DEAN - Mike, thanks for your comment. But let me say this - and I don't want to get into any argument with you and I won't - that is contrary to what Taieri Gorge and all the rail proponents in New Zealand were telling us. They were saying scenery is a must and absolutely essential for the benefit of any heritage rail. The same as for rail trail.

Ms RATTRAY - Mike, in regard to your comments in your opening statement around your aim for the trail to be Launceston to Scottsdale, can you enlighten me as to how you are going to achieve that?

Mr SCOTT - The initial plan set out was for a link eventually into Launceston. As you are aware, there is a stretch of rail between Rocherlea and Coldwater Creek that is part of the currently used Bell Bay line. We have spoken with TasRail in regards to that. Because that particular corridor is 40 metres wide as opposed to 20 metres wide on the north-east rail, they believe there is space enough there for a side-by-side operation. That has been costed and we believe that it is costed at about \$1.8 million to put that link in. That would be one of the later stages of a recreation trail getting back through to Launceston. That would link in with the Rocherlea trail and the work that Launceston City Council is doing putting usable walking and cycling trails right into the hub at Inveresk.

Mr LOWE - At the last election, the one before last not the one held at the weekend, Labor promised \$7 million to connect the rail trail from Coldwater Creek to the existing rail trail from

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Launceston. We did have a connection there but unfortunately someone other than us, the Labor project for that money was not forthcoming.

Mr MOORE - If I can say something at this stage. Only last week on the ABC radio, there was an article where the Don River Railway announced they were in extreme trouble and they might have great difficulty progressing it much further. That is one of the two icon heritage rails in the state, isn't it? That and the Abt Railway.

Ms RATTRAY - Going back to the Launceston to Lilydale connection for a rail trail, have you gained some support from the Launceston City Council in that regard?

Mr SCOTT - We have talked to the Launceston City Council. We have ample support within their bikes and recreation panel. We are not forcibly pushing our case with the council at the moment. They have taken a position back in October that we personally disagree with. We have talked to them but we are not pushing a change in position. We are waiting for this inquiry to go through before we start talking with all proponents. It has been a key part of our position in the last year or so to say we basically support a compromise and to not be aggressive in chasing our position over anything else.

That has been not necessarily because of the inquiry that is going on but because of divisions within our community. We have tried deliberately not to excise or increase those divisions by being, if you like, politically active in this.

Ms RATTRAY - One of the key pieces of information I gained from the speaker from the Lilydale on the mainland, the Lilydale Shire, and New Zealand was that you need to have the council on board.

Mr FORREST - I have been making representations to the Pedestrian and Bicycle Users Group for the Launceston City Council and without a shadow of a doubt, they have been supportive of our general thrust and endeavour to create a bike trail. That was certainly the case in the past. I am not totally up to speed with where they are currently.

Because they had the elements in place up to the Mowbray racing facility, there is that leg of the journey that is already done and I have cycled that on many occasions, as a lot of people in Launceston have done. The final leg along the active railway, the George Town Railway, is certainly an achievable outcome. I have walked that leg with an engineer and we have an indicative costing on it. Like everything in life, it is another way of slicing the apple.

There is another way of approaching it as well which would be far cheaper and would offer another experience to people that would allow people to cycle from Launceston and still get to Coldwater Creek on their cycles and continue the journey to wherever. There is more than one way of achieving this but ultimately, we really need the first step to be given and that is for the job to start so that we can at least do the first leg. Then bringing together the second leg, in my humble view, is quite an achievable task.

It would be going through private land, there is no doubt about that, but there are advantages with going through private land that the landholder might agree to. In today's world, where

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having a social contract is appropriate for businesses, this big business would look at it in a positive light.

Ms RATTRAY - Thank you for that. I appreciate that. I have no more questions.

Mr DEAN - One of my last questions in on the Tonganah-Billycock Hill rail trail and now we have somebody from Rotary here, what is the use of that trail? Do we have any reliable figures on its use?

Mr MOORE - It is something, Ivan, that has been discussed in our club meetings quite a bit. Are you talking about financial figures or usage? Are you talking about participation?

Mr DEAN - Yes, I am talking about people riding the track, walking the track, pushing a pram, whatever.

Mr MOORE - For example, we had our inaugural Rotary Rail Trail Run and Ride last August, which brought around 300 people to that competition over a weekend, the runners on the Saturday and the riders on the Sunday. That was enormously successful and has now become the Scottsdale Rotary Club's biggest fundraiser. That is ongoing again this year on 17 and 18 August. With two-and-a-half months left to go we are getting very close to 100 early bird entries, and we are expecting in excess of 300 people for that.

One of the problems with it is that there are so many places to get on and off, which makes it very difficult to monitor how many people are using it. At any one particular time, you can drive on there and find four or five people on the nice days. There are lots of young mothers whose husbands come home from work in summer, the husbands take the children and go for walks in groups of three and four. The immediate retired pharmacist and his wife ride it every day.

Mr DEAN - Why aren't there counters on this track in different areas? In Dunedin, for instance, and even in Lilydale and so on, they have counters on their tracks and they can give you extremely reliable figures on the use of the track every day of the year. I accept that on special days you are going to have numbers. I am trying to gauge the use of the track last weekend, today, tomorrow. I am trying to get some reliable figures to work on.

Mr MOORE - You would need about 20 of them, Ivan, to monitor that correctly. You would have to add and discount because of the number of places you can get on. It goes through Scottsdale; there are about four or five different places in Scottsdale. They start at the closest point to their home and walk to where they want to go. There are so many places to get on that rail trail, which is an advantage if there were ever any physical problem and you need an ambulance or the SES, but we have never had that yet. It would be a great advantage to have that but as I said, Ivan, you would need about 20 different counters to monitor that correctly. Then you would have to know if they went through one, two or three of them. It is a very difficult task. We have had discussions about how we can do that.

Mr FORREST - To give you a number that you might be able to take some comfort in, I have a letter here signed by the former director of community and economic development with Dorset Council, Susie Bower. This is in relation to the Derby cycling experience. For the month of April -

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Mr DEAN - Are you talking about a mountain bike track?

Mr FORREST - It is for the Derby track at Blue Derby. It is a bicycle track.

Ms RATTRAY - It is a mountain bike track.

Mr FORREST - Yes, it is a mountain bike track at Blue Derby. For the month of April 2015, they had 1978 riders. They had an average of 66 riders per day.

Mr DEAN - That is a different experience.

Mr FORREST - Excuse me, I have cycled for 18 years over most parts -

Mr DEAN - I have too.

Mr FORREST - of Australia on roads and bicycles and I have cycled both tracks. With respect, it is a different experience but it is part of the cycling experience of life. The busiest time for people riding those trails is between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. I, with respect, after 18 years of cycling on road and mountain bikes say it is a different experience, like every road in Tasmania is a different experience, but that is the part of the experience of cycling.

Mr DEAN - The rail trail track that aligns the Taieri Gorge heritage rail is 70 or 80 kilometres long, so there are many points people can get on and off the rail trail, but they have numerous counters on the trail. I raise it because they can give you accurate detail on its use, which is good.

Michael, was NERT responsible for that Facebook page?

Mr FORREST - No, that's not true. It is a group effort.

Mr DEAN - The reason I ask is there are a number of inaccuracies in that Facebook reporting and I want to raise that question as to what is happening with it.

Mr FORREST - Yes, Facebook is very inaccurate. People post from all over the world. It is an open posting situation. We try to moderate the worst of the posts but that is how Facebook works.

Mr DEAN - It is NERT's comments I am talking about. It is disappointing to this committee that some of those comments on this committee are quite derogatory. I take some umbrage at it and I suspect other members would as well.

Mr FORREST - Why don't you jump onto the page and do your umbrage on the page? That would be good.

CHAIR - We need to go back to questions. Ivan has asked his questions and made his comment. Are there other comments you would like to make? Any closing comment relevant to

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the hearing, because we have run over time. I have allowed a little leeway. We have another hearing following this.

Mr FORREST - I would like to give you a bit of a financial overview of the NERT proposal. I come to you with my experience of life. I have a Bachelor of Commerce, I was a CPA, I have worked in professional accounting office, and I have been in private enterprise for most of my life. For NERT to be successful, I have brought it back to four key points I thought you might be interested in. Those are our current position, where we start from, we have the handover from Dorset Council, our expected costs of managing the rail trail, I have some firm figures there, and our revenue model. They are the keystones that will bring it together, in my view.

First, our current position: We are a not-for-profit organisation acting as an incorporated entity under the Associations Incorporation Act 1964. We were incorporated back in 27 November 2014 and our incorporation number if you are interested is 1A-AA-627[TBC]. More importantly, we conduct a community solutions bank account with Westpac, established back in June 2015. Our current balance as 30 April 2019 stands at \$31 813.44. We have funds in our bank account. In addition to that, two signatures are required to transact all affairs to this account.

Another part of our background is we have to have good financial record-keeping and audit. NERT has established an arrangement with chartered accountants, Watson and Hegarty of Level 3, 65 St John Street, Launceston, to provide accountant professional services. Additionally, we have and we will continue to meet the statutory requirements of an annual audit as per the requirements of the Associations Incorporation Act 1964.

That is our current basis. We are not starting with just words and whatever. We have those elements in place to move forward.

The second step of moving forward is the Dorset Council handover. Since July 2014 until the present, Dorset Council and NERT have worked tirelessly together to create this rail trail.

The agreement between Dorset Council and NERT has always been that Dorset Council would build the rail trail and NERT would then manage the rail trail. Dorset Council, as we know, received federal funding back in 2015 for building a rail trail.

CHAIR - If you could keep it a bit tight, Richard. We are running well over.

Mr FORREST - Okay. Once the rail trail is completed by Dorset Council, then NERT will take on the care, maintenance and management of the rail trail for the community. We have that agreement established.

The expected cost of managing the rail trail, the Rotary Club of Scottsdale is the founder and the manager of the 28-kilometre rail trail from Scottsdale to Billycock Hill. Through our NERT board member Glenn Moore, and he is also the Scottsdale Rotary Club member, Glenn has passed over to us the actual costs that have been expended by Scottsdale Rotary in the maintenance of this rail trail. These figures I can put for you, but these figures show that it costs \$100.43 per kilometre, per year to manage their rail trail. I cannot tell you what it is going to cost to manage

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our rail trail because we don't know our distance yet. We do at least have the hard numbers over 12 months as a very firm guidance for going forward.

I also acknowledge that volunteer labour is part of this management maintenance outcome and this has to be factored into our management and maintenance budgets. That is the cost side of things.

The revenue is the other side of things that we have addressed and looked at. That is, we recognise that our rail trail experience will be a no-fee paying activity, full stop. Clearly though, we understand that good service and labour will be expended to maintain and manage this experience. We have looked at sources for securing our revenue which will come from service clubs, corporate and individual gifts and sponsorship signage, crowdfunding and paid service arrangements.

One of the key assets we have is that we already have a website that is up and running. We hold in excess of \$20 000. We can apply through our website and build into our existing web page, a revenue generation facility that attracts membership and sponsorship packages.

CHAIR - Do you have all of this written down, Richard?

Mr FORREST - I do.

CHAIR - Because of time, would you be able to send that to the committee? The notes that you have just read out? That would be good. The parts that we haven't got on *Hansard* yet. If you have more information obviously that you have for us.

Mr FORREST - Quite happy to do that.

CHAIR - How much longer do you have?

Mr FORREST - I was going to close in saying that with the modern facilities that are out there, I have confidence that we can look forward and get a reliable revenue stream, particularly with having the back-end systems in place to maintain the back-end banking and accounting systems. I have reasonable confidence in moving forward in that area.

CHAIR - Thank you, Richard. We appreciate all that information you have provided. I hope I haven't cut you off. It is that our next hearing was due at 11.10 a.m. so it made it a little difficult. If you had more to say, more notes that you could provide that to us.

Mr FORREST - Have you got any questions about what I have said?

Mr DEAN - There are a number of questions but we haven't got time.

CHAIR - That is a problem. Perhaps members may want to put the questions together that we do another teleconference at some stage during the week, if that is possible, or put them on notice. Would that suit you? We can put them on notice, or try to get the members to get any questions that they might have. Mr Dean has quite a few questions.

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Mr DEAN - Maintenance costs.

Mr FORREST - It is \$100.43 per kilometre per year.

CHAIR - I have noted that. Thank you very much for coming along. Richard, you might be able to send anything else that you have, any other information that you weren't able to provide to us today and perhaps the committee can get back to you with any questions we need.

Mr LOWE - If Ivan sees anything wrong on our web and our Facebook page, he can send it to us and we will look at it. I will be in touch with your office to give him a contact address for that.

CHAIR - That would be good but I don't really think that we want to have any sort of argument on a social medium like Facebook. That would be really good, and we appreciate you taking the time to speak to us today and if we have any questions, we will get together and we will sort -

Mr SCOTT - Just to sign off, we will send through a package of any extra information that Richard or anyone else has through to you and we are quite happy to receive anything in return.

CHAIR - Members who have any questions will email them to you or we can have another teleconference, whichever suits all members, and yourselves as well.

Mr SCOTT - Fair enough.

CHAIR - Thank you very much that and we will look forward to the information you provide.

Mr SCOTT - Thank you for giving us the opportunity to talk to the inquiry.

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