

# Richmond Vale Rail Trail Stockrington To Kurri Kurri Review of Environmental Factors

## List of Full Submissions

Contact:

Kate Harris

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council@cessnock.nsw.gov.au

Very keen to see this done.Myself and Friends .have walked sections. Of course very keen to Bike ride the entire trail.

As a mountain biker who has travelled to new zealand and around australia for biking, it is hard to overstate the benefits that I have personally seen to local communities of having safe trails away from cars.

This trail would see so many families and tourist using it, everyone will be asking themselves why it was not done 20 years ago.

Thanks for the opportunity to comment on the value of this project. This will be a a breakthrough project for the Hunter. The benefits to all communities along the trail are reflected in the project objectives.

However, what isn't articulated in documents is the tremendous energy that will be injected into the community as soon as it commences. This energy will be ongoing, it will grow and it will be intergenerational.

Kids in the future will look back and appreciate what has been delivered.

It's also a stepping stone to connection from Kurri to Cessnock and Maitland via retired rail networks.

It's a great project, it's overdue so let's get on with it.

Hello,

I wish to write in support of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail

As a Cessnock resident and I cyclist I well understand the health, fitness and economic benefits this trail will bring to our part of the Hunter. Our region deserves this type of green corridor to link Cessnock with Newcastle.

As everyone is now aware this project has been in the making for many years now since its original conception. With 3 individual councils involved it's still a battle to get the appropriate funds and to tick all the boxes re land owners/environmental issues/natural habitat to name just a few. The public are crying out for this cycle/ walking track to happen as the state off NSW is sadly lacking in this facility not in the future but NOW.!!!!.

Additional submission on page 6.



Re: - RVRT ( Review of Environmental factors).

1 strongly support current plants for the 17 Klm western section of RVRT ALONG with the other 2 sections under the authority of LMCC+NCC cend need "your" support to highligh Hils. As andavid Walker and cyclist this project is well overclue and will on completion open up. Deautiful areas of bushland which, in itself. is home to a vast array all flora and fauna plus having great historic value re it's tunnels. This project has been in the limelight for far too long and financial funds need to be made available to kicksfart this as ap With rising fuel costs its a "no brainer" to encourage people to get out and explore and also provide the local areas. Look what the Victorian Government neve done with their Rail Trails. ... Hong with this of course the RVRT could open up endless oportunities to local Hunter businesses and tourism. voice your opinion to the appropriate cultenties to help make Rikt a reality

I am very excited about the Rail Trail for our region.

The only feedback I wish to give is that toilets, a bin and water stations of some description would be invaluable in a few spots along the route.

Hello

I'm incredibly excited to learn that we will invest in a 32 km rail trail.

If there's anything we've learnt from the Covid era is the need to invest in community "doing things" infrastructure. I believe our community wants and needs safe and enjoyable bike riding off road routes.

What an amazing opportunity for our people and visitors.

Having enjoyed some of the well known Victorian rail trails, I can't wait to invite my friends and family to ride the Richmond Vale rail trail.

Congratulations and wishing you great success.



To O Recreation

#### Please! Make this wider than 3m.

"Summary of design principles for good bicycle infrastructure", bicycle NSW, May 2020.



## Summary of Design Principles for Good Bicycle Infrastructure

Updated 7 May 2020

Dear Madam/Sir,

Surely a MTB Rail Trail cannot pose any environmental problems compared to smoke belching coal fired steam trains. It is yet more bureaucratic BS.

All I can say is bring it on now.

### DONALDSON CONSERVATION TRUST

C/- Ashton Coal Operations Pty Ltd PO Box 699 CAMBERWELL NSW 2330

17<sup>th</sup> May, 2022

General Manager, Cessnock City Council PO Box 152, CESSNOCK NSW 2325 Sent by E-mail: <u>council@cessnock.nsw.gov.au</u>

Dear General Manager,

#### Re: Richmond Vale Rail Trail (RVRT) *Review of Environmental Factors (REF*) for Western Section – Brief Submission Supporting Approval by Cessnock City Council and Lake Macquarie City Council

On behalf of the Donaldson Conservation Trust (DCT), I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Cessnock and Lake Macquarie City Councils on finalising the background studies for the 17km Richmond Vale Rail Trail (RVRT) Western Section and putting the associated *Review of Environmental Factors* (*REF*) on public exhibition.

As you are probably aware, we have been strong supporters of the RVRT. Over the life of the Trust, approx. \$750,000 was allocated to RVRT and related projects (see details below). Consequently, we are keen to see the RVRT become a reality and fully endorse approval of the current *REF* by each Council for the part of the Western Trail Section within their LGA.

Approval for the Western Trail Section will also complement the approval granted for the initial 13km section within Newcastle LGA in December 2021 by the Hunter and Central Coast Regional Planning Panel. So, hopefully, we can all look forward to the commencement of detailed trail design work and actual trail construction in the near future.



#### Donaldson Conservation Trust Support for the Richmond Vale Rail Trail (RVRT)

In 2007, as part of approvals for the Abel Underground Coal Mine and its commitment to the Hunter community, Donaldson Coal allocated \$1 million over 10 years to an independent Trust promoting environmental conservation, education and research, and associated environmental management activities within the area covered by its mining leases (approx. 100 square kilometres, to the south of John Renshaw Drive and west of the M1 Pacific Motorway) – which subsequently included most of the Sugarloaf and Stockrington State Conservation Areas (SCAs) and about 14km of the proposed RVRT.

Members of the Donaldson Conservation Trust (DCT) had the foresight to progressively allocate approx. \$750k of the available funds to RVRT and related projects. This included: a \$175k contribution to the City of Newcastle, as co-ordinating Council for the initial design and environmental assessment components of the RVRT project; \$257k to the National Parks and Wildlife Service to facilitate future development of a Midtrail Precinct, from which to access and explore both the RVRT and Stockrington SCA; and approx. two-thirds of the \$500k in research funds awarded to the Tom Farrell Institute for the Environment at the University of Newcastle. The latter contributed to a host of productive outcomes, including: studies examining RVRT flora, river catchment contamination, and ecotourism potential; promotional materials; and the highly successful "Towards the Richmond Vale Rail Trail" book and associated "Active Transport" conference (September 2017).

Dear General Manager,

I am a young railway worker myself, I work out of Maitland Station. Additionally, I nearly hold a Bachelors of Science degree in Environmental Science (finish in June). The environment is my passion.

I recently became aware of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail and to my understanding will be a shared off road path the full stretch- I think this is great. Truly linking the communities with the environment along the way.

What does this mean for the future state of the railway? say running on the South Maitland line? I am so eager to see passenger services run from Cessnock into Maitland/Newcastle. I am far too young to remember that line open, but being a passionate railway enthusiast also, I think it is a wasted opportunity to not re-open the South Maitland line.

With our economy in these surroundIng areas booming and continuously growing - Cessnock, Abermain, Weston, Kurri, Heddon Greta/Cliftleigh, Gillieston Height, the list goes on!

What better way to commute than via train.

Our bus services are so unreliable, even more so now with the driver shortages. They also fail to meet commuters needs through the hourly timetables for some services.

Not only will it be a great asset to the vineyards with tourism etc. It also takes commuters off the roads, reducing our peak hour traffic along Cessnock Road. And by doing so, reducing our LGA's greenhouse gases.

The road is there already for the rail, it will of course need new rails and probably ballasts etc. and of course, new platforms and safety measures, but the original establishments are there already. This project will pay for itself in time I know it.

It will bring so much of the community and tourism together by improving transportation services for visitors, residents and workers.

I would love to see Cessnock City Councils future transportation plans, because this should be it.

I have overall support for the RVRT!

Basic human right for fresh air and to travel in safety and not put others in danger. We can be more happy with a transition to an ethical World's best practice city planning and transport. Ethical habits are using appropriate technology. All cars above 30km/hr in residential streets are a danger to pedestrians. Car focused cities (with urban sprawl) make people unhealthy (body and mind), causing social isolation and internet, homes, food & other infrustructure too costly. Bust the transport myths that 99% of people are confused about: cyclingfallacies.com/en/

Faster main roads for cars, more buses/trains (screen time and active transport), better pushbike shortcut paths. Pleases everyone, so we can stop the fighting of motorists vs cyclists vs public transport user. Need to start talking about the elephant in the room, the whole system. No silver bullet on one small part of the problem. #cyclesafenetwork#bestbangperbuck#visionzero

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Seriously, they need to prioritise safe and convenient places for walking first (footpaths). Then they need to prioritise safe and convenient places for pushbiking 2nd (separate cycle lanes). Then they need to prioritise safe and convenient places for public transport 3rd. Then cars. They need to stop prioritising cars first in the cbd which is causing congestion, pollution, danger, sedentary lifestyle. Basic human rights to walk and cycle without fear of cars please

#### 1b. Better City Planning

High density cities (with affordable housing) are faster (spread out suburbs are inefficient and get people addicted to cars) and cost benefit ratios for bicycle paths show increase in society health and increase in business/shops near them. Currently half of the vegetables we in NSW eat are from city fringe farms that are due to be overrun by urban sprawl. Train transport through the bush linking up higher density cities. Stop urban sprawl causing social isolation and wasted travel time and contributing to housing being unaffordable. Curtin uni has done a study that shows the infrastructure (road, water, sewage, phone/NBN, electricity etc) costs for a new suburb are \$684,000 per dwelling (Curtin\_Sustainability\_Paper\_0209). Why waste this money to build a house that makes people unhappy driving 2 hours to work and unhealthy because they have no time for exercise. More mixed social housing (and making it compulsory for 30% of apartments in each sky scaper is needed for basic human right to have a home. Bust the transport myths that 99% of people are confused about: cyclingfallacies.com/en/

Some people only drive in day time, so who should pay for street lighting. Whole of society pays for footpaths, roads and street lighting. Walking, buses and cycling is good for the whole of society, reducing congestion and making society more healthy.

'Newy Council's 2030 Vision :"Walking, cycling and public transport will be viable options for the majority of our trips." So most less than 5km trips. Covered cargo electric assist bikes are useful and all other excuses of not cycling are solvable. Higher main road speeds, more public transport and building a CycleSafe Network will reduce congestion Win Win Win for all! And human rights for fresh air, & walk and cycle safely (UN's UDHR Articles 3,5,13,25,26,27,29). Bust the transport myths that 99% of people are confused about: cyclingfallacies.com/en/.

The RVRT ... Health and Lifestyle Benefits ... promotes active lifestyles, which will have positive physical and mental health benefits; ... will benefit a broad range of users, across all age groups; ...

encourages locals and visitors to actively explore an array of Hunter Valley landscapes and attractions; Community Access and Connection Benefits ... provides a safe, pleasant pathway between communities; ... thoughtfully considers users with reduced mobility; ... strengthens Hunter recreational opportunities and promotes connections between metropolitan and rural communities; ... will foster precinct development and a mixture of cycling and other activities for families (encouraging return visits); Cycling-specific Benefits ... increases safety via alternatives to road network usage; ... facilitates daily bicycle commuting, reducing emissions and road congestion; ... will promote increased recreational cycling by casual riders, as well as those who enjoy a longer group ride; ... will improve the Hunter's image as an active lifestyle and cycling destination; ... will add to the other dedicated local cycleways (e.g., Fernleigh & Tramway Tracks), encouraging multi-day regional cycling visits; ... will expand the Australian rail trail network, which already contributes positively to many communities; The RVRT ... Environmental and Heritage Benefits ... improves accessibility to a host of environmental attractions adjacent to the RVRT (e.g., coastal wetlands, nature reserves, and national parks); ... includes well-constructed bridges and boardwalks; ... promotes biodiversity and habitat protection (through education, specialised groups and community participation); ... increases access to local environmental, cultural and heritage features, promoting community appreciation (including indigenous, mining and rail heritage); ... minimises potential negative impacts on the local environment, by using previously cleared areas; Economic, Tourism and Other Regional Benefits ... is clearly cost effective (BCR = 2.4), so the sooner we build it, the better; ... will support local businesses and new initiatives (e.g., trail side coffee shops, bike hire, funruns, guided walks); ... will further stimulate local economic growth and diversity; ... will provide the spine for future regional network connections (e.g., to the Newcastle Cyclesafe Network, BGH Regional Park, other Maitland and Cessnock trails); and ... has such obvious merits, it should have already been built.

I strongly support current plans for the 17km western section of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail. As a 74yr OLD CYCLIST, I can't wait to ride both the eastern and western sections of the RVRT, which will provide an off-road round trip not exceeding 50-60km. Safety is one of my main concerns. So, having a major new trail that is totally separated from cars is exactly what I want in my local area. The RVRT will also benefit a broad range of other user groups, promote healthier lifestyles, and encourage local Hunter businesses and tourism initiatives. The RVRT is long overdue and approval for this western section by Lake Macquarie and Cessnock Councils is critical. I also call on the local Councils to actively pursue funding to construct the trail.

I refer to the REF for the Richmond Vale Rail Trail - Stockrington to Kurri Kurri, dated March 2022.

I fully support the proposal. The document presents a well-planned and thought-out proposal which will be one of the most beneficial infrastructure proposals for the Lower Hunter in a long time. Having cycled in much of Europe as well as parts of North America and Victoria where cycling, and walking trails are common and popular, I have no doubt this one will be verry well used and a great asset for the community. Just look at the popularity of the Fernleigh Track. When both sections of the project are completed, it will provide a safe cycle route between the lower Hunter and Newcastle, something that is long overdue.

Having looked through the document fairly quickly, I did not notice any mention of e-bikes. The popularity of e-bikes is growing rapidly, amongst older riders and cycle commuters. Future tourist operators will almost certainly provide e-bike options for their clients/customers. Given that an e-bike with a flat battery is not much use, I believe some that provision should be made for including charging stations at the two extremities and middle of the trail. These could be built at a later date once volumes of e-bike use can be quantified. However, consideration of locations and power requirement should be considered now.

Good afternoon,

I formerly lived in Adamstown.

Fernleigh track is near Adamstown and it changed my life living there. I got into cycling and mountain bike riding.

It helped with my fitness and mental health.

Now that I live at West Wallsend there are no safe local paths to ride on for me anymore and the prospect of this Richmond Vale Rail Trail coming is such a fantastic proposal for our area.

It will bring a great deal of tourism business to the area and provide a great place for people to exercise.

My suggestion is to ensure that there are some toilets along the route and if possible some water stations.

Thank you for your consideration on this.

I write in full support of the RVRT. It will be a great tourism attraction, economic enhancer for the small business community, will encourage healthy exercise amongst the local community and add an historical element as well.

I regularly ride on the Fernleigh track and Tramway track (both NCC & LMCC). The number of people using the trails for riding and walking is amazing. As a touring bike ride I am attracted to regions with rail trails for holidays - there is nothing better than some touring riding whilst on holiday. It's a great way to explore an area safely, away from the danger of motor vehicles.

In summary, the RVRT has my 100% support and I look forward to it progressing to reality as soon as possible.

Thank you

I would like to register my support for this trail.

I have ridden bits of this trail several times , usually with my daughter and grandson's, also with my wife. We range in age from 8 to 62.

As regular bike riders we will travel to use cycleways, We are residents of Lake Macquarie and Cessnock.

Cycleways are a great asset for any area and one with 3 tunnels will be well used The sooner the better in our opinion Regards

To: The General Manager, Cessnock City Council

Re: Richmond Vale Rail Trail

I strongly support current plans for the 17km western section of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail.

As a cyclist, I look forward to riding both the eastern and western sections of the RVRT, which will provide a 50-60 km off-road round trip . Having a major new trail that is safely separated from cars is exactly what we need in this local area. The RVRT will also benefit a broad range of other user groups, promote healthier lifestyles, and encourage local Hunter businesses and tourism initiatives. The RVRT is long overdue and approval for this western section by Lake Macquarie and Cessnock Councils is critical. I also call on the local Councils to actively pursue funding to construct the trail.

Kind regards,

To: The General Manager, Cessnock City Council

I strongly support current plans for the 17km western section of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail. As a cyclist, who has a family of cyclists (16 in total in my immediate family) I can't wait to ride both the eastern and western sections of the RVRT with my immediate family and with friends and family from Sydney and interstate, this will provide us an off-road round trip exceeding 50-60km. Safety is one of my main concerns. So, having a major new trail that is totally separated from cars is exactly what I want in my local area. The RVRT will also benefit a broad range of other user groups, promote healthier lifestyles, and encourage local Hunter businesses and tourism initiatives. The RVRT is long overdue and approval for this western section by Lake Macquarie and Cessnock Councils is critical. I also call on the local Councils to actively pursue funding to construct the trail. Regards,

To: The General Manager, Cessnock City Council (recreation@cessnock.nsw.gov.au)

From:

Re: Richmond Vale Rail Trail REF

I strongly support current plans for the 17km western section of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail. As a cyclist, I have ridden multiple trails, Of course Newcastle's Fernley but also other overseas trials including 970 km on the Camino Santiago that year there 250,000 pilgrims Of those there was a large number of cyclists. Also I ride the trails around Bright in Victoria and the increase in the cycling tourist population is huge for the use of the bike trails and parks.

I can't wait to ride both the eastern and western sections of the RVRT, which will provide an offroad round trip exceeding 50-60km. Safety is one of my main concerns. So, having a major new trail that is totally separated from cars is exactly what I want in my local area. The RVRT will also benefit a broad range of other user groups, promote healthier lifestyles, and encourage local Hunter businesses and tourism initiatives. The RVRT is long overdue and approval for this western section by Lake Macquarie and Cessnock Councils is critical. I also call on the local Councils to actively pursue funding to construct the trail.

Hi there

I strongly support current plans for the 17km western section of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail. As a cyclist, I can't wait to ride both the eastern and western sections of the RVRT, which will provide an off-road round trip exceeding 50-60km.

Safety is a big concern. So, having a major new trail that is totally separated from cars is exactly what we need in our local area. The RVRT will also benefit a broad range of other user groups, walkers, horse riders (hopefully) and promote healthier lifestyles, and encourage local Hunter businesses and tourism initiatives.

These sort of projects have been a success in other areas, such as The Tumbarumba to Rosewood trail, new business has grown as a result of the influx of riders and walkers.

The RVRT is long overdue and approval for this western section by Lake Macquarie and Cessnock Councils is critical. I also call on the local Councils to actively pursue funding to construct the trail.

Re: Richmond Vale Rail Trail REF

I strongly support current plans for the 17km western section of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail. As a cyclist,

I can't wait to ride both the eastern and western sections of the RVRT, which will provide an off-road round trip exceeding 50-60km. Safety is one of my main concerns.

So, having a major new trail that is totally separated from cars is exactly what I want in my local area.

The RVRT will also benefit a broad range of other user groups, promote healthier lifestyles, and encourage local Hunter businesses and tourism initiatives.

The RVRT is long overdue and approval for this western section by Lake Macquarie and Cessnock Councils is critical.

I also call on the local Councils to actively pursue funding to construct the trail.

To whom it may concern

I strongly support current plans for the 17km western section of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail. In particular, I look forward to being able to cycle in new areas in the Lower Hunter, including beautiful bushland settings and historic tunnels. The RVRT will also benefit a broad range of user groups, promote healthier lifestyles, and provide safer off-road connections between communities. The RVRT is long overdue and approval for this western section by Lake Macquarie and Cessnock Councils is critical. I also call on the local Councils to actively pursue funding to construct the trail. This sort of infrastructure has brought great financial gains to other areas of NSW and other states.

Re: Richmond Vale Rail Trail REF

I strongly support current plans for the 17km western section of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail.

As a cyclist, I can't wait to ride both the eastern and western sections of the RVRT, which will provide an off-road round trip exceeding 50-60km. Safety is one of my main concerns. So, having a major new trail that is totally separated from cars is exactly what I want in my local area.

The RVRT will also benefit a broad range of other user groups, promote healthier lifestyles, and encourage

local Hunter businesses and tourism initiatives.

The RVRT is long overdue and approval for this western section by Lake Macquarie and Cessnock Councils

is critical.

I also call on the local Councils to actively pursue funding to construct the trail. Regards,

Dear General Manager,

I refer to the request for community response to the Richmond Vale Rail Trail.

This is a wonderful idea and should be supported by the council wholeheartedly. Not only would this trail be a much needed tourism boost - look how well they have been received in other areas, particularly in Victoria - but would benefit health and well-being to all.

From little things big things grow. I have recently ridden in Queensland on the Brisbane Valley Rail Trail, and the towns and communities I passed through have embraced the trail riders and have developed other areas of interest around it, such as Taste the Trail, where local producers showcase their wares.

Rail Trail users tend to be more aware of sensitive environmental needs too, and do not pollute the areas they use.

Thank you in anticipation of a positive outcome - bring it on!

Yours sincerely,

Hi,

As an avid cyclist (road, mountainbike and racing), runner, I can't wait to ride both the eastern and western sections of the RVRT, which will provide an awesome 50-60km loop. Safety is one of my main concerns. So, having a major new trail that is totally separated from cars is great. The RVRT will also benefit a broad range of other user groups, promote healthier lifestyles, and encourage local Hunter businesses and tourism initiatives.

With Newcastle's only current approved road racing circuit at Kurri Kurri, HEZ, this path would provide a great safe link from Newcastle area to the track avoiding dangerous roads and freeways which have already claimed lives.

Approval for this 17km western section by Lake Macquarie and Cessnock Councils is critical and I strongly support the current plans outlined in the REF.

I would also like to encourage the local Councils to seek trail funding as soon as possible and to commence trail construction.

**Richmond Vale Rail Trail** 

As a ratepayer and keen local cyclist, I urge you to support this project. There a many excellent rail trails in Victoria that are used by walkers runners and cyclists, both locals and tourists.

I strongly support current plans for the 17km western section of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail. As a cyclist, I can't wait to ride both the eastern and western sections of the RVRT, which will provide an off-road round trip exceeding 50-60km. Safety is one of my main concerns. So, having a major new trail that is totally separated from cars is exactly what I want in my local area. The RVRT will also benefit a broad range of other user groups, promote healthier lifestyles, and encourage local Hunter businesses and tourism initiatives. The RVRT is long overdue and approval for this western section by Lake Macquarie and Cessnock Councils is critical. I also call on the local Councils to actively pursue funding to construct the trail.

Dear General Manager

Cessnock City Council

Re: Richmond Vale Rail Trail (RVRT)

I strongly support current plans for the 17km western section of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail.

Any cycling infrastructure across the Hunter and of course the world, reaps a myriad of benefits for local councils and their citizens.

The planned eastern and western sections of the RVRT, will provide an off-road round trip exceeding 50-60km.

Traffic-free pathways offer safe riding for all ages and less cycling hazards for road-user traffic.

I belong to a large network of cyclists in the Newcastle area and regular small group tours are taken within the region.

Dungog council is reaping the benefits of touring cycling groups, thanks to the construction of tracks and designated loops around Dungog.

Owners of Bicycles catering for the lifespan (babies to late seniors) plus on-road/ off-road/ gravel and e-bikes) - continue to multiply.

So please push for funding of this long-overdue upgrade, with a view to continue expansion across the Councils and Hunter region.

Yours sincerely

Re: Richmond Vale Rail Trail REF

As a cyclist, I often ride from Thornton to Mayfleld/Newcastle, Thornton to Bellbird/Cessnock or Thornton to Lake Macquarie to visit my family. These rides are all require riding on highways and main roads with vehicles travelling between 80 and 110km/h with often very narrow and debris filled cycle lanes. I can't wait to ride both the eastern and western sections of the RVRT, which will provide an off-road alternative to riding on major roads which is quit dangerous at times. Safety is one of my main concerns. So, having a major new trail that is totally separated from cars and trucks is exactly what we need in our local area.

The RVRT will also benefit a broad range of other user groups, promote healthier lifestyles, attract cycling groups to the area, and encourage local Hunter businesses and tourism initiatives. It will also improve access to existing cycle paths and make travel between Cessnock Maitland and Newcastle much safe for cyclists.

Having a safer alternative to current roads will also help to encourage people to use more environmentally friendly transportation instead of vehicles which will be better for our environment and help reduce traffic on our overcrowded roads.

Approval for this 17km western section by Lake Macquarie and Cessnock Councils is critical I strongly support the current plans outlined in the REF.

I would also like to encourage the local Councils to seek trail funding as soon as possible and to commence trail construction.

Thanks

I think that all the promises made by the rail trail lobby will leave a huge amount of debit to the council due to ongoing costs with the maintance of the trail.

By keeping all the rails intact like at the richmond vale rail museum you have a greater range of people who can use the area not just for push bike riders.

Once the mine shuts down at pelton the south maitland railway could easy be opened up for a tourist railway for day trips out of the sydney and newcastle regions allowing people of all ages to enjoy the line not just a few who ride a push bike.

Other railtrails that started off being self funded by the comunity after a few yrs were handed back to the council and bought added costs to the rate payers even for people who did not use the trails.

By having steam trains along the south maitland railline between maitland and pelton using the smr 10 class would be a bigger draw card esp of a weekend and school holidays than what a cycle way will ever return to a area.

Hi,

I'm writing to offer my enthusiastic support to the proposed Richmond Vale Rail Trail. Re-use of existing, un-used infrastructure is smart use of land and resources. The popularity of rail trails is well proven in other Australian districts and has been shown to bring significant benefits to the community through increased tourism, employment, and community fitness. Added to these benefits, it opens up a route through to areas of the Hunter that are currently limited, for practical and safety reasons, to travel by vehicle only.

The perceived issues of the safety of on-road cycling, particularly for families with children and on roads with higher speed limits, severely restricts the uptake of cycling in our region. So, the addition of this 17km of off-road path, combining to give a 50-60km total path length would be a great facility for the Hunter.

Given the favourable cost/benefit shown in the REF, I would like to encourage Lake Macquarie (my LGA) and Cessnock Council's support of the current plans, and also encourage the local Councils to seek trail funding as soon as possible so that trail construction can commence.

thanks

To: The General Manager,

I strongly support the current plans for the 17km western section of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail.

In particular, my family looks forward to being able to actively explore new areas in the Lower Hunter, including beautiful bushland settings and historic tunnels.

The RVRT will also benefit a broad range of user groups, promote healthier lifestyles, and provide safer off-road connections between communities.

The RVRT is long overdue and approval for this western section by Lake Macquarie and Cessnock Councils is critical. I also call on the local Councils to actively pursue funding to construct the trail.

I have actively worked on getting this rail trail built since 2010 and am delighted to see it progress through both Newcastle City Council and now Cessnock City Council.

Hi,

I strongly support the current plans for the 17km western section of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail.

My family and I love getting out on our bikes and using rail trails to visit new spots and explore what they have to offer.
Dear Sir or Madam,

In response to submissions for the RVRT my outlook is as follows.

Safety to commuters and social riders and walkers is paramount.

As a commuting cyclist, and the trauma of being hit by a car, the more safe cycling options available is immeasurable.

I fully support this 17km western section, along with the other two sections under the authority of LMCC and NCC.

Both the safety and health benefits of the community should be given the highest priority.

Yours sincerely,

I strongly support current plans for the 17km western section of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail. (RVRT)

Rail trails are wonderful. The mild grade variation is perfect for walking and cycling. Both are activities that are useful for promoting happiness and health for your citizens. As a bonus this rail trail passes through wonderful bushland. Additionally, by enabling people to easily and safely experience this beauty, the 'social licence' for protecting our natural legacy is enhanced.

The wonders of a functional RVRT will promote business. Visitors- local and out of town, will require feeding and watering - so boosting local commercial operations. And out-of-town visitors will be symbiotically attracted to Cessnock's other alluring sights and activities.

Cessnock has a spectacular opportunity to promote happiness, health, prosperity, conectivity, and natural conservation - all by supporting and promoting the RVRT.

I look forward to being able to actively explore new areas in the Lower Hunter, including beautiful bushland settings and historic tunnels. The RVRT will also benefit a broad range of user groups, promote healthier lifestyles, and provide safer off-road connections between communities. The RVRT is long overdue and approval for this western section by Lake Macquarie and Cessnock Councils is critical. I also call on the local Councils to actively pursue funding to construct the trail. Regards,

The General Manager

As a cyclist who regularly rides, not only in my local area (Newcastle/Lake Macquarie), but all over NSW, I would like to add my strong support for the finalisation of this unique community asset.

The benefits are numerous, including:

Safe cycling environment for 80km,

Low impact access to beautiful tunnels and environments, Promotion of inbound tourism — cyclists spend money!

I recently completed a five day, guide assisted cycling holiday with four other adults along the Central West Cycle route from Dunnedoo — Gulgong. Each day we met other cyclists from ACT, Adelaide, Sydney and Newcastle. The towns along the route enthusiastically supported all of the cyclists and the committee that maintains the website and the trail itself.

Please, PLEASE complete this track ASAP, so we cyclists can support our healthy sport.

Good morning, there's been support for Richmond Vale rail trail for years. I'm a walker and can't wait to set off along the track. I've walked the Newcastle trails and hope this one gets started very soon, I know the Mayor supports it, great for tourism too. Sincerely,

Attn. The General Manager, Cessnock City Council

Re: Richmond Vale Rail Trail REF

I strongly support current plans outlined in the REF for the 17km western section of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail.

As a cyclist, I can't wait to ride both the eastern and western sections of the RVRT, which will provide an off-road round trip exceeding 50-60km. Safety is one of my main concerns. So, having a major new trail that is totally separated from cars is exactly what I want in my local area.

The RVRT will also benefit a broad range of other user groups, promote healthier lifestyles, attract cycling groups to the area, and encourage local Hunter businesses and tourism initiatives.

Approval for this 17km western section by Lake Macquarie and Cessnock Councils is critical and I strongly support the current plans outlined in the REF. I would also like to encourage the local Councils to seek trail funding as soon as possible and to commence trail construction.

Dear General manager and Cessnock council,

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The RVRT will benefit cyclists, walkers and runners, promote healthy active lifestyles, and provide safer off-road connections between communities.

The RVRT is long overdue and approval for this western section by Lake Macquarie and Cessnock Councils is critical. I also call on the local Councils to actively pursue funding to construct the trail.

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The RVRT will also benefit a broad range of other user groups, promote healthier lifestyles, attract cycling groups to the area, and encourage local Hunter businesses and tourism initiatives.

Approval for this 17km western section by Lake Macquarie and Cessnock Councils is critical and I strongly support the current plans outlined in the REF. I would also like to encourage the local Councils to seek trail funding as soon as possible and to commence trail construction.

**General Manager** 

Cessnock City Council

I strongly support current plans for the 17km western section of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail.

Any cycling infrastructure across the Hunter and of course the world, reaps a myriad of benefits for local councils and their citizens with a positive flow on benefit to all local businesses.

The planned eastern and western sections of the RVRT, will provide an off-road round trip exceeding 50-60km. Traffic-free pathways offer safe riding for all ages and less cycling hazards for road-user traffic.

I belong to a large network of cyclists in the Newcastle area and we take regular small group tours within the region.

Dungog council is reaping the benefits of touring cycling groups, thanks to the construction of tracks and designated loops around Dungog. Many towns in the Central West of NSW, such as Mudgee, Dubbo, Gulgong and Duneddoo are benefiting greatly from the large numbers of cyclists riding the Central West Cycle Trail.

Owners of bicycles, catering for the lifespan (babies to late seniors) plus on-road/ off-road/ gravel and e-bikes) - continue to multiply.

So please push for funding of this long-overdue upgrade, with a view to continued expansion across the Councils of the Hunter region.

sincerely,

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As a regular user of the Fernliegh track I can certainly say these trails pay for themselves many times over and provide an awesome resource for the community amd visitors.

Attn. The General Manager, Cessnock City Council

Re: Richmond Vale Rail Trail REF

Thanks to the Council for support so far for the Richmond Vale Rail Trail works. I strongly support the current plans outlined in the REF for the 17km western section of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail.

There is a huge potential for recreation visitation, and in particular my family looks forward to being able to actively explore new areas in the Lower Hunter. We actively use the congested Fernley Track and other beautiful bushland settings and histo atric railway tunnels.

The RVRT will be well used and promote healthy active lifestyles, and safer off-road connections between communities. The RVRT is long overdue.

Your support and approval for this section, as well as encouragement of Lake Macquarie and Cessnock Councils is critical. I also call on the local Councils to actively pursue funding to construct the trail.

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Yours sincerely

Hello,

I think it is very important that this project goes ahead for the benifit of the entire community.

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As a cyclist, I can't wait to ride RVRT, and the dirt trails surrounding. You only have to spend an hour of a weekend and look at people using the Fernleigh track to have some idea how popular this trail will be. Please get it done ASAP.

Dear General Manager,

I write to provide my enthusiastic support for the Richmond Vale Rail Trail. I'm nearly 70 years of age and I would love to be to ride this rail trail while I'm still able. Please get it happening as soon as possible.

We know that this sort of rail trail is very attractive to visitors and will be a boost to local tourism and the local economy.

Please make every effort to expedite this exciting development.

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To whom it may concern,

I strongly support the RVRT. As a local family who love the outdoors and cycling we really look forward to being able to ride with our kids as well as on our own and with friends. A dedicated shared use trail that is separate to roadways is exactly what we need in the area!

The trail will bring much benefit to the region in a number or areas including:

- promotion of healthy lifestyle
- safer recreational cycling for all users non vehicular transport safe route

• economic benefit to region through the huge cycle tourism industry • attraction of new tourism sectors

The sooner this trail happens, the better.

Dear General Manager,

While I am not a resident of your area (I'm in Sydney) I would wholeheartedly support the development of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail from the perspective of a cyclist who travels to Victoria at least once a year to ride the rail trails there. If there was a more local option I would be spending those accommodation and coffee/wine/food dollars in NSW, which would make me very happy, indeed ! If I can include a trip to Pepper Tree Wines near Cessnock, even better !

It's great to see the rail trail movement gaining traction in NSW at last. Victoria has been way ahead of us for years and NSW has SO MUCH to offer. My last trip was only a month ago, where I stayed in Beechworth for a few days and rode to Yackandandah, Wangaratta and Myrtleford on consecutive days, but in the past have ridden pretty much all the trails around there on multiple occasions.

In recent times, most riders seem to be retired folks on electric bikes and they can cover a lot of distance. They have the time and the money to make a good holiday of it, too. The perfect tourist, really !

Thanks for your help in trying to get this great public resource off the ground, the benefits are many and profound.

Well done !!

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The RVRT is long overdue and approval for this western section by Lake Macquarie and Cessnock Councils is critical. I also call on the local Councils to actively pursue funding to construct the trail.

This infrastructure will be an investment that will pay for itself and bring extra business to the area.

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As a cyclist, I can't wait to ride both the eastern and western sections of the RVRT, which will provide an off-road round trip exceeding 50-60km. Safety is one of my main concerns as I have seen so many accidents involving cars and cyclists in the past 3 years.

So, having a major new trail that is totally separated from cars is exactly what I feel is essential in my local area.

The RVRT will also benefit a broad range of other user groups, promote healthier lifestyles, attract cycling groups to the area, and encourage local Hunter businesses and tourism initiatives.

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Dear Council/General manager.

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Dear General Manager, Cessnock City Council

As an over 50s mountain bike rider, I am very keen+ to experience both the eastern and western sections of the RVRT, Both for physical and mental health. Safety is one of my main concerns. So, having a major new trail that is totally separated from cars is exactly what I want in my local area.

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Approval for the western section by Lake Macquarie and Cessnock Councils is critical. I strongly support the current plans outlined in the REF. I would also like to encourage the local Councils to seek trail funding as soon as possible and to commence trail construction, maintaining the beauty and keeping the trail as natural as is possible.

To: The General Manager, Cessnock City Council

Re: Richmond Vale Rail Trail

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The General Manager,

Cessnock City Council

19/6/22

I am writing to express my support for the proposed 17km Western Section of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail.

Having recently retired from full-time work, I am enjoying the extra time I have available to walk the paved walking/cycling tracks in the Hunter.

Our communities have never had greater need for healthy, family friendly activities for locals and tourists visiting the area.

Combined with the Eastern section of the trail, this will provide a 30km stretch of safe cycling and walking track away from traffic.

I strongly urge Cessnock and Lake Macquarie councils to approve this proposal and seek funding to bring the trail to develop the trail.

Kind Regards

To: The General Manager, Cessnock City Council (recreation@cessnock.nsw.gov.au) From:

Re: Richmond Vale Rail Trail REF

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Attn. The General Manager, Cessnock City Council

I strongly support current plans outlined in the REF for the 17km western section of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail.

As a local cyclist and keen birdwatcher, I can't wait to ride both the eastern and western sections of the RVRT, which will provide an off-road round trip exceeding 50-60km. Safety is one of my main concerns, especially as we ride with our 6 yr old daughter. So, having a major new trail that is totally separated from cars is exactly what I want in my local area.

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Approval for this 17km western section by Lake Macquarie and Cessnock Councils is critical and I strongly support the current plans outlined in the REF. I would also like to encourage the local Councils to seek trail funding as soon as possible and to commence trail construction.

Regards,

#### Dear General Manager

I email in support of the Richmond Vale Rail trail extension to be considered by CCC and Lake Mac councils.

As a former Novocastrian, now living in the Hunter I am aware of the benefits of off road pathways, notably The Fernleigh Track which has been a resounding success since opening some years ago.

It attracts cyclists: young and old, athletes, bushwalkers, birdwatchers and families - health and lifestyle benefits are obvious.

The extension, and cooperation between local governments is a farsighted initiative with ongoing benefit for all communities with the opportunity to access this path.

A by product - it will save lives: cyclists, commuters and pedestrians both stand to gain from a dedicated traffic free pathway without the tragedy of (car) accidents.

I believe the 17km extension will serve to put Newcastle and the Hunter on the map as an active tourist destination taking in various points of interest along the way.

There are outstanding examples of this in New Zealand. I have personally ridden the 'Alps to Ocean' cycle trail of some 500km - spending 5 nights in various accommodation en route and in doing so keeping the tiny, local communities active.

Please do approve this extension.

Regards

This would be such a great cycle and walking track for our local area . We drive all the way to victoria to do the rail trail and love them .

I organise groups to Kayak circumnavigate Lake Macquarie and walking the whole great north walk both in stages but have to go along way for longer rides like this one .

We would love to see this be approved and go ahead . From all the great north wander group and lake Mac shore huggers . We love staying fit together. Makes exercise so much more fun connecting with people and having a goal to accomplish .

DEAR cessnock council,

I am very excited and in strong support of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail.

I look forward to using my bicycle for some lovely rides up to Kurri Kurri to meet the bicycle group up there and have a coffee or meal.

As a community Occupational Therapist I am in strong support of pathways that encourage all ages and abilities to transit for productive and recreation. I applaud this project for the benefits it will offer for healthy transport, exercise and the environment.

I especially support separate road and pathways for safety of pedestrians, cyclists, children and people with disability.

I will bring my family and enjoy links from existing Wallsend Tramway cycle way.

Kind regards

#### Hi Council

I would like to give my strong support for the plans outlined in the Review of Environmental Factors for 17km of separated walking/cycleways in the Hunter Valley. As a resident of Sydney I believe that this would be a great tourist drawcard to the region. Active transport and the local tourism benefits are vast and a becoming more recognised and more people travel locally + walk and cycle due to covid restrictions. The 3 sections of tunnel add interest and character to the route, similar to the Fernleigh track. People could then go an have a pub lunch in one of the towns such as Kurri Kurri afterwards which adds to the economic benefits. I note that the cost benefit ratio is 2.4:1 which is very positive.

To the Councillors – please approve the REF and find funding sources – either from the State or Federal Government to commence construction within this term of council.

Regards

Re: Richmond Vale Rail Trail REF

We Support the current plans for the 17 km western section of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail.

As cyclists we are always looking for off road cycle/walking paths in Australia and in particular NSW. As we like to live a healthy lifestyle, we only holiday where there is a safe, well formed path or rail trail of no less than 15 kms (30 kms return). We have done the Fernleigh Rail Trail several times and have even led our local bushwalking/cycling club for a long weekend there a few years ago staying in Belmont.

We often venture to Victoria and Queensland to ride their rail trails. It would be nice not to travel so far.

We love to visit coastal wetlands and nature reserves and support local small business when visiting an area.

As we have interests in Newcastle, and enjoy cycling and walking. This trail would be perfect for us to spend more time in your council areas.

Looking forward to riding the rail trail soon.

Kind regards

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Thank you

Attn. The General Manager, Cessnock City Council

Re: Richmond Vale Rail Trail REF

I strongly support current plans outlined in the REF for the 17km western section of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail.

In particular, my family looks forward to being able to actively explore new areas in the Lower Hunter, including beautiful bushland settings and historic railway tunnels.

The RVRT will benefit cyclists, walkers and runners, promote healthy active lifestyles, and provide safer off-road connections between communities.

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This would be a good thing to have in cessnock council BUT focus needs to be made on the roads, including condition and congestion which are assets that rate payers use to make their income directly. As a rate payer and a business owner in the Iga I'm paying upto \$1000 a week in lost time and repairs due to the local roads.

Thank you for giving the option of feedback

Bring it on already waiting to long already. Good for the area and Tourism.

I support this project - active transport infrastructure for commuting and recreation is important for the area.

Kind regards

Attn. The General Manager, Cessnock City Council

Re: Richmond Vale Rail Trail REF

Council approval for the 17 km western section of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail is very important to local and visiting families seeking active leisure and greater local knowledge. I urge Cessnock Council to enact this approval as soon as practicable.

The trail provides for the enjoyment of nature, and for the appreciation of historic engineering in the building of the railway tunnels.

Cyclists, walkers and runners, and others pursuing healthy activity will all benefit.

I also encourage council to seek funding for the construction for the trail.

To The General Manager, Cessnock City Council,

I am looking forward to seeing the completion of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail project. I can't believe it has taken so long to get this project started given the huge benefits this would bring to our local area.

The massive community benefits surely mean this should be a top priority for council.

Other similar projects I have had the pleasure of using such as the Fernleigh Track show how popular these are for outdoor recreation. I have also enjoyed rail trail cycling tracks in Victoria and New Zealand where they are tourists attractions benefiting local communities and businesses. The more of these built close by creates greater attraction for longer touring and multi day use, making it a bigger attraction.

There are benefits for all age groups and interests from families, cyclists, bird watchers, wheel-chair users, prams, runners and walkers. It creates a safe space off the roads for these activities.

Benefits for physical and mental health from an active lifestyle are well proven and creating more spaces for the growing population will improve access and encourage participation.

It also connects communities for off road commuting, reducing road traffic congestion and improved safety as well as environmental benefits.

For me personally, I would love to be able to take my family bike riding or walking along this area to see the history of the old train line, enjoy the scenery and nature in our local area, have easy access to the beautiful bush and birdwatching. For us it is so close and convenient compared to having to travel into similar tracks in Wallsend and Fernleigh Track. I have many friends and family that would also enjoy and benefit from this project.

It also adds appreciation and preservation of heritage areas and protects from other development and makes use of old infrastructure.

I can't believe this hasn't been built already! Let's make this happen now, it won't get any cheaper to build.

Regards,

Attn. The General Manager, Cessnock City Council

Re: Richmond Vale Rail Trail REF

It is terrific to see the Richmond Vale Rail Trail moving forward to Councils for approval. I'd urge Council to approve the 17 km western section of the Trail as soon as is practicable.

Not only will local people enjoy the beauty of the area and walks and bike rides along the trail but this will benefit visitors which sees the Trail become a major tourist investment. This not only is beautiful but showcases the rich historic infrastructure left from the railway.

I fully support this application and trust that Cessnock Council will support this too.

Respectfully,

To: The General Manager, Cessnock City Council

I strongly support current plans outlined in the REF for the 17km western section of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail.

Newcastle, Lake Macquarie and the local council areas of the Hunter Valley such as Cessnock are home to many wonderful recreational facilities and this will be another such facility. I believe the Richmond Vale Rail Trail will:

> Provide a first class recreational facility for everyone including walkers/runners, cyclists, anyone interested in exercise and outdoor fitness.

> Allow sections of the community who enjoy the outdoor life another opportunity to discover the history of the trail/Rail.

> Allow school groups to broaden their horizons through environmental studies, including the history of local Aboriginal people.

> Strengthen the local cultural and heritage within the region.

I hope the Richmond Vale Rail Trail will be seen for all of the many positive attributes it will provide and work will be undertaken to enhance the trail, repair/rebuild any infrastructure (eg. bridges) and provide the community and visitors with a facility of which we call all be proud.

Yours, (for a positive outcome)

I belong to 2 groups of both with over 100 members. We regularly choose to spend a week in towns we're cycling trails are available.

We visit Victorai twice a year to enjoy their trails. We would love to stay in your wonderful area!

We buy meals, visit cafes and stay in accommodation. We travel to N Z every few years.

So I hope you consider the great boost your rail trail will do for your community.

I have stayed in Cessnock and find your community very friendly to cyclists.

Look forward to bring a group to enjoy the great new rail trail soon!

Regards

What a fantastic way to open up the Hunter Valley to cyclists and walkers by taking advantage of an existing rail line network.

These dedicated paths are safe and always attract people. Fernleigh track is a big draw card for the people in Newcastle. The RVT would be hugely popular with the fast growing suburbs of Cameron Park and Fletcher.

Thanks

The General Manager

I would like to support the Richmond Vale Rail Trail for the reasons stated below

Utilising Railway Corridors should be seen as the game changer to promote cycling in our state.

In addition to providing opportunities for the local community it will also attract tourism income to the region

It would be useful to contact the newly formed NSW Parliamentary Friends of Active Transport (PFAT) the members are Shayne Mallard MLC, Hon. Rob Stokes MP (Liberal), Jo Haylen MP (Labor) and Cate Faehrmann MLC (Greens), and give them the opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to the community

Regards

To: The General Manager, Cessnock City Council

As a cyclist, I can't wait to ride both the eastern and western sections of the RVRT, which will provide an off-road round trip exceeding 50-60km. Safety is one of my main concerns. So, having a major new trail that is totally separated from cars is exactly what I want in my local area.

The RVRT will also benefit a broad range of other user groups, promote healthier lifestyles, attract cycling groups to the area, and encourage local Hunter businesses and tourism initiatives.

Approval for this 17km western section by Lake Macquarie and Cessnock Councils is critical and I strongly support the current plans outlined in the REF. I would also like to encourage the local Councils to seek trail funding as soon as possible and to commence trail construction.

Regards,

Hi,

I'm writing in support of the Richmond Valley Rail Trail (RVRT) project currently still under planning & consideration.

As a former cycling event organiser including the winner of a national cycling award for best event to promote cycling I can certainly attest to the great value rail trails bring to the communities where they are established. I'm sure you're well aware but the value to the community, especially children to have a safe environment to enjoy cycling, walking and running away from the traffic is well documented. There are numerous examples around the world where these projects have delivered enormous value both economically & socially back to the community.

I have been following the development of the RVRT and looking forward to the day it becomes a reality.

Keep up the good work.

Cheers,

To; The General Manager, Cessnock City Council

RE; Richmond Vale Rail Trail REF

I am writing to show my support of this excellent community asset RVRT.

I believe this trail will bring enhanced community spirit and great benefits to the local areas through health, tourism and national recognition.

This is an ideal opportunity for our community leaders to be bold with vision and realise the ongoing potential by reinventing a corridor of yesteryear.

The history and significance of the old rail tunnels and bridges in the western corridor plus the bush that has replaced old mining areas should be embraced and promoted. With innovation and difference it can be more iconic than the Fernleigh Trail which we all love and recall the amazing old rail tunnel.

With good planning I believe there are net environment benefits by awareness and learnings of the users who will stop, look, reflect, read, and listen to the natural environment this trail will traverse. What an ideal project, especially with such little initial impact to the natural environment and relatively small construction & maintenance costs. Money well worth spending for current and future generations.

Although I live in the western growth area (Fletcher Minmi) I regularly walk and run the bush trails and Blue Gum Hills Park and appreciate the new bushland and creeks and the historical significance of these old coal mining areas. The western section through to Kurri Kurri would be essential to give this asset an end point destination that people can stop over and appreciate the Cessnock Council area that is reinventing and growing.

To: The General Manager.

I would like to express my support for the Richmond Vale Rail Trail.

I ride a mountain bike in the bush around the Kurri-Weston-Abermain-Cessnock areas.

I have ridden along the old Richmond Vale rail corridor several times to Newcastle on group & individual rides.

It is a fantastic way to enjoy the outdoors and safely cycle between the coalfields and Newcastle.

Upgrading the track to allow people of all abilities to access it would be a great asset to our area in my opinion.

I think a simple approach to get it up and running in a basic form so it can give users access and it's popularity will grow, proving that further investment will be worthwhile for the community from a health & wealth perspective.

I have travelled to Bright in Victoria and ridden along the old railway line there (Murray to Mountains) and enjoyed the experience. It is 150km long and travels through quite a few towns.

Thank you for your time.

Kind Regards,

To: The General Manager

There are numerous community benefits to this project going ahead. As a Mountain bike rider, I can't wait to ride both the eastern and western sections of the RVRT, which will provide an off-road round trip exceeding 50-60km. Safety is one of my main concerns. So, having a major new trail that is totally separated from cars is exactly what I want in my local area.

We just need to look at the popularity of the fernleigh track.

The RVRT will also benefit a broad range of other user groups, promote healthier lifestyles, attract cycling groups to the area, and encourage local Hunter businesses and tourism initiatives.

Approval for this 17km western section by Lake Macquarie and Cessnock Councils is critical and I strongly support the current plans outlined in the REF. I would also like to encourage the local Councils to seek trail funding as soon as possible and to commence trail construction.

Regards,

To: The General Manager, Cessnock City Council

I am an avid cyclist, riding both mountain and road. I have lived in the Fletcher area for 15 years and have been riding parts of the Richmond Vale Rail corridor for the past 6. I have lead many group rides through the tunnels and the surrounding bush area. I have also ridden the extensive trails in the Kurri/Richmond Vale area many times.

I have been very excited since I first heard of the plans to connect my area with Kurri Kurri.

The RVRT will provide a link between the suburbs to allow riders, runners and walkers a safer and easier way to enjoy the outdoors.

The current roads out of Fletcher are not safe for riding as there is no shoulder, the RVRT will be a much welcomed safe route from Fletcher to Minmi.

It will be a great trail for my elderly father, my wife and children to ride who are after something a bit more easy going.

I have seen the success of the Fernleigh track and the Tramway track and know that having something like that in the outer suburbs will gain slot of attention from families and fitness fanatics.

Approval for this 17km western section by Lake Macquarie and Cessnock Councils is critical and I strongly support the current plans outlined in the REF. I would also like to encourage the local

Councils to seek trail funding as soon as possible and to commence trail construction.

Regards,

To: The General Manager, Cessnock City Council

#### Re: Richmond Vale Rail Trail REF

I wish to add my support for the entire RVRT project and write this email to strongly encourage the Cessnock and Lake Macquarie Councils to not 'drop the ball' resulting in a half finished project but rather catch the vision and fall in sync with the Newcastle LGA so that the full potential and benefits of the project can be realised. To be honest, I'm very surprised that the RVRT hasn't been developed already.

In my view it is the Cessnock LGA that stands to gain the greatest economic benefit from such a project (don't tell Lake Mac or Newcastle ;-). Why? My wife and I are cyclists. We are part of the Geriactive Playgroup, a group of older cyclists loosely based around Newcastle. The group rides every Wednesday and Friday. The Friday ride is a bit here or there; sometimes it's from Stockton wharf up to Medowie, other times it's a circuit taking in West Wallsend and Fletcher or a circuit down to Belmont, the top of the lake and back via Glendale. Other Fridays it's down to Toronto and back, or Caves Beach and back. We have ridden the Fernleigh and Tramway Tracks hundreds of times. Each of these day rides involves a stop at a cafe where the two dozen or so riders will spend a little over \$10 on coffee and cake.

This same group often organises rides a little further afield over multiple days. Scone to Singleton with overnights at Scone, Merriwa and Denman. You may also be aware of the Central West Cycle Trail (CWCT): https://centralwestcycletrail.com.au which includes accommodation at such places as Gulgong, Dunedoo, Mendooran, Ballimore and Wongarbon. These rides are specifically designed around not carrying much but rather picking towns with cafes, pubs and/or bakeries so we don't have to carry food or a tent. Because of limited accomodation in towns such as Mendooran, we had to split up our group into smaller units and set out on different days and go in opposite directions so that we all didn't end up in the same small town at the same time. For the towns where we overnighted our expenditure includes dinner, accomodation and breakfast, so each couple is spending around \$150-200 and singles not much less. Even in our small group I know a handful have ridden the CWCT more than once.

The members of the group are always looking for somewhere to ride.

In May of 2020 the group had organised a 1 week trip down to Canberra to stay in one central location and then fan out to enjoy the excellent cycle paths on offer there. At the end of the week, half the group, about a dozen riders, decided they were going to do a 'detour' to Tumbarumba (that's 3hrs from Canberra and an extra 2hrs to the trip back to Newcastle - so a 5 hr detour for what is normally a 5hr trip Canberra to home) because we'd heard that the Tumbarumba to Rosewood Rail Trail (TRRT) had recently open and we wanted to check it out.

https://www.visitnsw.com/destinations/snowy-mountains/tumbarumbaarea/tumbarumba/attractions/tumbarumba-rosewood-rail-trail

We'd ridden Canberra in the morning so arrived in the afternoon at Tumbarumba so only had enough time to jump on the bike and find the trailhead and check out a few kms - all of which bode well. The next day we rode the 21kms to Rosewood, checking out all the history signposts along the way. At Rosewood the strategically placed GoneBarney Cafe captured our entire business. By the time we got back to Tumbarumba it was lunchtime and cyclists always have an appetite. The afternoon was spent walking the town to check out the historical and other items of interest. We all left for home the following morning so in all we'd spent 2 nights accomodation, 2 x dinner, 2 x breakfast and 1 lunch in Tumbarumba.

The most recent trip we've done was in May to ride a 'C' to include the Kilkivan to Kingaroy Rail Trail (KKRT)\* and the Brisbane Valley Rail Trail (BVRT):

https://www.railtrails.org.au/trails/kilkivan-kingaroy-rail-trail/

https://www.brisbanevalleyrailtrail.com.au

This included accommodation at Gimpie, Kilkivan, Wondai, Nanango and Linville with food stops at Widgee, Goomeri, Murgon, Kingaroy, Yarraman and Blackbutt.

Unfortunately due to further downpours in SE Queensland we had to abandon the remainder of the Brisbane Valley Rail Trail at Linville and make a strategic exit to Caboolture with food stops at Kilcoy and Woodford.

My wife was so impressed (not saying I wasn't) with the BVRT that she has determined that as La Nina seems to have moved on and downpours in SE Qld are unlikely, on our next trip to visit our daughter in Nyngan we will make a 'detour' to ride the 120 kms of the BVRT that we missed. To put that in perspective it takes us 6.5hrs to drive to Nyngan. To get to Esk, where we will radiate our ride out of, will take 9.7 hrs and then from Esk back home will take 8.9 hrs. That's the kind of 'detour' we're prepared to make to ride a properly prepared trail suitable for cycling - especially when all you read is excellent reviews and you've been given a taster and it's better than expected. I expect the detour will cost us around \$1000 in a couple of nights accommodation, food, shuttle bus service to various points on the BVRT, and fuel.

So now let me distill this all down for you. The Geriactive Playgroup isn't an official club or Bicycle User Group (BUG), just a small bunch of people who like to cycle, but there are much more motivated and organised cycling groups than us. Visit to BicycleNSW.org and check out the BUG page:

#### https://bicyclensw.org.au/bicycle-user-groups/

I recommend you contact a couple of these groups as I can assure you the message will be the same; they are always looking for somewhere interesting and safe to ride and are willing to travel, even interstate, if the trail is 'good enough'.\* The simple fact is there are groups with money to spend who are looking for places to ride and spend their money.

Having said that, they are not loaded with cash; they have no intention of staying at a Hilton or Sheraton. If you looked at that list of where we typically stay, it's towns. I can assure you, if I didn't live in the area and I were driving a day to stay and ride the RVRT, I wouldn't pick Newcastle, I'd pick Kurri Kurri if I hadn't done my research, or more likely Cessnock because Cessnock would allow me to ride not only the RVRT but I could also ride out to the wineries. There Geriactives, at least once a year, ride the wineries around Lovedale, Pokolbin and Rothbury.

Please take a look at how successful the South Burnett Rail Trail (SBRT) (part of the KKRT\*) Taste the Trail has become:

#### https://tastethetrail.com.au/

I can assure you, if the RVRT is done right then my recommendation to anyone considering riding the RVRT and has to drive several hours to get there; would be to stay the night in the Cessnock area and do both the RVRT and the wineries.

The next thing you need to know is who the RVRT is going to appeal to.

Now I'm only 60 years old and I've ridden the entire length of the abandoned Richmond Vale Rail Line several times, including negotiating the 4 dilapidated culverts across the Hunter Wetlands National Park and through all three tunnels, in and around the Richmond Vale Rail Museum, up to Pelaw Main, and thru to Weston and I love it. For any cyclist who belongs to a Club (especially a mountain bike club) as opposed to a group like a BUG, they will happily attack the abandoned line as is; but these cyclists are only a very small fraction of people who want to enjoy cycling. The oldest guy I ride with is 84 and the condition of the abandoned line as it is now is not suitable for him and whilst my wife is a competent rider; like most females I've ridden with they don't really like riding on the road but will do so if the 'off road' trail is too rough and unmaintained.

The Geriactives, like BUGs, are the largest group of riding females I've come across and it's the females who have a major influence over where such groups ride. If there is too much road, or the roads are too busy, or the track is too rough they simply won't go.

Then we have the rise of the eBike and a complete shift in who is willing to give a trail a go. My older brother and his partner aren't cyclists but they have twice now forked out silly amounts of money to hire eBikes to ride Kangaroo Island and the wineries in the Barossa - because it was 'she' who decided that if they were going to ride it had to be an eBike. My neighbours on the left are slightly older than me and have already bought their eBikes as they had experiences similar to my brother. The neighbour on my right is contemplating purchasing an eBike whilst riding her manual bike a little more often before she commits to spending thousands. Another couple I know who are not regular cyclists but are grey nomads, are also looking at buying eBikes as they appreciate the extra opportunity to explore the areas they visit an eBike offers.

So the rapidly growing number of eBikes will have a corresponding growth in people looking for trails to ride and as many of them will be female their overriding preference will be for trails where they feel safe because there are no cars and the surface is maintained and smooth.\* If we are talking about a mum with children, then a dedicated cycle/walking path will always be a winner no matter how wide or smooth the bike lane on the side of a road may be. What the vast majority of cyclists are looking for is the 'Goldilocks Trail'; not too steep, not too rough, not too boring and without any motor vehicle traffic. A properly maintained Rail Trail with its intentional gentle grades will always be a clear winner over any other kind of road/trail/path.

So Cessnock LGA is ideally placed to take advantage of the RVRT as in the words of Kevin Costner, "Built it and they will come". If you were to contact the Tumbarumba council you will discover that since the rail trail was built several cycle specific businesses have popped up to cater to the influx in users. It may also be worth asking about the early naysayers, many of whom have come to appreciate that the TRRT has brought many benefits to the area. In regard to the CWCT I'm aware that two B&Bs have popped up in Mendooran as word spread that there are more cyclists than the pub can handle. I'm sure proper research would reveal that other businesses have grown due to the popularity of the CWCT.

\* And whilst my focus here has been money and I could go on and on about the many other benefits, I realise that it will be cost that is the overriding factor of whether the RVRT gets the final nod. So I wish to make it quite clear that the track itself need NOT be 'flexible sealed pavement'. I know that whilst this would be ideal; the TRRT, Fernleigh and Tramway tracks are, as are large portions of the KKRT and BVRT, it is NOT a necessity. Large portions of the extremely popular East Gippsland Rail Trail are not sealed. A good portion of the CWCT is on dirt roads that were so enjoyable to ride that members of our group noted that they were better than the sealed but heavily potholed roads of Dungog and Port Stephens LGAs! The 40kms of the BVRT that we have ridden were not sealed except for some creek crossings where wisdom dictated it was the safe option, yet the dirt was so well maintained, smooth and enjoyable that, as mentioned above, we are prepared to add 18.5hrs driving and spend hundreds and hundreds of dollars, to ride well maintained tracks in beautiful bushland with the only 'obstacles' we come across are other cyclists, horse riders or walkers.

In my own view, money will be tight and compromises will have to made, so if push comes to shove, a 100% trail that is 5% pavement and the rest hard compacted and maintained dirt will be far better than a 75% trail that just doesn't connect up but those portion of the trail that do exist and are pavement.

To get a feel for how one Council can get it right and the one next door get it wrong you just need to research the current situation with the KKRT:

https://www.railtrails.org.au/trails/kilkivan-kingaroy-rail-trail/

The KKRT runs through two council areas, the South Burnett and Gimpie LGAs, and the change occurs about halfway between Murgon and Goomeri and it's chalk and cheese - see attached photos. The South Burnett council have a clear vision and understand the benefits the rail trail bring and it appears to me that they seem to be distancing themselves from the KKRT and now call it the South Burnett Rail Trail (SBRT) and all the events that centre around it (like Taste the Trail linked above, but there are other events) now refer to the SBRT not the KKRT. For those cyclists who do their homework the grapevine is full of reports of how the portion of trail within the Gympie LGA is overgrown, unmaintained and the sighting of brown snakes common. Needless to say many cyclists therefore end their cycle trip at Murgon having spent all their money in South Burnett LGA, whilst Goomeri, Kilkivan, Widgee and Gympie are missing out at a time when Gympie LGA really needs the injection of tourist dollars.

I strongly urge you to proceed with the RVRT as it is my view that the Cessnock LGA stands to benefit the most from the project, and if there needs to be compromises, complete the entire length of the RVRT as smooth compacted dirt first leaving the expense of 'flexible sealed pavement' to the very end.

I thank you for your time, Attached Photos:

GympieLGA.jpg - a photo taken at Kilkivan at the start of the KKRT showing that the trail is so overgrown that you wouldn't know it was there if it weren't for the signs and gate. We were forced to ride on roads but attempted to access the trail at several points but at each place the condition of the trail was similar.

Sth\_BurnettLGA.jpg - a photo immediately after crossing into the South Burnett LGA and getting on to the KKRT (also referred to as the SBRT). After unprecedented rain in SE Qld, the Sth Burnett LGA seems to have placed maintaining the SBRT high on the list of priorities - or it just happened to be scheduled for that time; either way, we were very happy with the gentle uphill of the wide, smooth, dirt rail trail. Why would anyone bother, or recommend riding the Gympie LGA portion of the KKRT when the entire South Burnett LGA portion is a 'Goldilocks Trail'! Add Attachments \*\*x2 Photos\*\*

# GympieLGA.jpg

## Sth\_BurnettLGA.jpg


#### To The General Manager

#### Cessnock City Council

I am writing to express my support for the Richmond Vale Rail Trail. My husband and I are regular mountain bikers and belong to the Hunter Mountain Bike Association. We are both seniors. We use our bikes for recreation, exercise, and social connection and regularly use the Fernleigh Track, as well as other shared pathways and MTB single trail networks. The expansion of the existing cycleway network in the Lake Macquarie/Hunter area would be very beneficial to us, for the following reasons:

- It would provide more options for safe riding away from traffic,

- It would provide additional access to existing local heritage and natural features of our area,

- It would be attractive for our family and friends who visit from different areas, and who like to explore new areas on their bikes, thereby contributing to local tourism,

- It would provide an additional all-weather option for those times when bush and trails are too wet to ride.

I'm sure this rail trail project will add to the attractiveness of our area for residents and visitors alike and I am happy to provide my support. Yours Faithfully,

27 June 2022

The General Manager, Cessnock City Council, Post: PO Box 152, Cessnock NSW 2325

E: recreation@cessnock.nsw.gov.au

# Re: Richmond Vale Rail Trail REF

To whom it may concern,

# This is a submission supporting the current plans outlined in the Richmond Vale Rail Trail Review of Environmental Factors

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission into the proposed plans for the Cessnock LGA and Lake Macquarie LGA sections of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail and taking the time to consider my submission.

In a volunteer capacity, I am a committee member of several organisations including the Richmond Vale Rail Trail Inc., Newcastle Climate Change Response, Hunter Innovation and Science Hub, and the Clean Energy Association of Newcastle and Surrounds. I am also a member of the Charlestown chapter of The Wilderness Society. I am involved in what could be termed environmental outreach, informing the public on environmental information, news, and activities through newsletters, conducting seminars, events, and conferences. I have helped run a number of conferences in the Hunter Valley over the last 4-5 years including the annual Mined Land Rehabilitation Conference, and the Hunter Valley Electric Vehicle Festival. On the ground I am involved with Landcare work including for the Richmond Vale Rail Trail.

Growing up in Newcastle, I enjoyed family walks and picnics near Mt Sugarloaf, and as a teenager hiking in the Sugarloaf ranges and surrounding areas. The area has great natural beauty and I welcome the opportunity to open it up for others to enjoy.

Having spent most of my working life in Melbourne I returned to Newcastle an avid cyclist and was disappointed by the limited opportunities for cyclists in the area. I am very pleased to see plans underway for the development of a significant shared pathway in the Richmond Vale Rail Trail (RVRT).

During the development of the book <u>'Towards the Richmond Vale Rail Trail'</u> book (2017, Tom Farrell Institute for the Environment [TFI], University of Newcastle)<sup>1</sup>, I got the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Golightly, N., McNab, B., Hart, R., Lucas, S., Vizer, C., Marshall, K. & Roberts, T. (2017) Towards the Richmond Vale Rail Trail. University of Newcastle, Tom Farrell Institute for the Environment. <u>http://hdl.handle.net/1959.13/1384605</u> Retrieved from <u>https://www.richmondvalerailtrail.org.au/towards-the-richmond-vale-rail-trail---book.html</u>

opportunity to walk along parts of the RVRT and explore the amazing heritage along the route including tunnels and former bridges. Associated with the launch of the book, I helped run the "Active Transport: The Richmond Vale Rail Trail Conference" as part of my role at the TFI. The conference explored the ecological, eco-tourism and health benefits of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail, with a focus on the local benefits of an active transport system, with the Richmond Vale Rail Trail (RVRT) converted into a highly utilised system and corridor for active transport.<sup>2</sup>

# Health and Lifestyle Benefits

In Melbourne, the construction of pathways such as the Federation trail and Warburton Rail Trail led to many of my work colleagues ditching their cars and commuting to work in the city by bicycle (myself included). Being able to relive the weekend rides in their daily commute was a great temptation. Soon the loading bay at work was full of bicycles.

I feel that the opportunity to enjoy exercise through walking and cycling on the weekend has a spill-over effect to daily life, with people undertaking exercise through utilising shared pathways such as the RVRT more likely to having a healthier lifestyle in general.

Physical activity (walking and cycling) has spectacular benefits. Research conducted in 2007 estimated that if more Australians were physically active for just 30 minutes a day the Australian health care system could save \$1.5 billion annually.<sup>3</sup>

Cycling, particularly commuter cycling, has large health benefits which have been precisely measured in population cohort studies. Using conventional economic evaluation methods, building a city in which people choose to cycle has benefits that greatly outweighing the cost.

A longitudinal study found that cycling to work gave a 28% reduction in mortality. A UK study found that commuting by bicycle lowered the risk of cardiovascular disease and cancer occurrence and mortality and walking to work also lowered the risk of cardiovascular disease.<sup>4</sup>

With a shift of just 5% of the Newcastle population to cycling, the annual value of health gains is \$19.5million. This gives a benefit to cost ratio of 5.06:1 over 10 years for the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> TFI (2017, September 27). Active Transport: The Richmond Vale Rail Trail Conference. Retrieved from <u>https://www.richmondvalerailtrail.org.au/active-transport-8203the-richmond-vale-rail-trail-conference.html</u>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Moore, D. (2017, September 27) A paradigm shift for us all – Active Travel/Transport. Retrieved from

https://www.richmondvalerailtrail.org.au/uploads/1/2/0/4/120411157/1110\_170927\_deborah moore\_active\_travel\_conference\_all\_6.pdf

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Ewald, B. (2017, September 27) Valuing the benefits of cycling. Retrieved from <u>https://www.richmondvalerailtrail.org.au/ben-ewald.html</u>

construction of a cycleway which is twice the estimated economic benefit to cost ratio for the construction of the Hunter Expressway.<sup>4</sup>

# Cycling-specific Benefits

The highway connection between Kurri Kurri and Newcastle is very dangerous for cycling. The RVRT provides a safe alternative for cyclists along this treacherous stretch of road. This will probably increase the number of cyclists commuting into Newcastle. Daily cycling commuting helps reduce emissions and road congestion, saves money, and as noted above has clear health benefits.

# Environmental and Heritage Benefits

The RVRT is unique as it offers a previously unavailable opportunity for the community to experience within one walk or ride a range of ecosystems as it passes through sixteen distinct vegetation communities from tidal swamps through to the rugged forests of the Sugarloaf Ranges.

The area has a high level of biodiversity as it is the northern limit of the Sydney Basin Bioregion, the eastern boundary of the Hunter Valley floodplain and provides a connection with the Northeast Bioregion. There are 1951 species of plants and animals in the area with 713 threatened species and 33 migratory species.<sup>5</sup>

At the local scale, the species diversity is considerable and provides a wonderful opportunity to experience the wonders our local natural heritage. A great value of the potential Richmond Vale Trail is that it opens an immersive opportunity for the community to move through this landscape and gain appreciation of the biodiversity value in this landscape.

The potential negative impacts of the construction of the RVRT pathway should be relatively minor and manageable as the RVRT follows in principle previously cleared areas.

Through Landcare works in association with the National Parks and Wildlife Service on a section of the RVRT near Lenaghans Drive we have begun to remove weeds from and around the track.

Over time, biodiversity and habitat protection and enhancement will occur along the various sections of the RVRT through local groups and community participation in flora and fauna surveys, workdays, and events.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Mahony, M. (2017, September 27) Biodiversity in the local region of the proposed Richmond Vale Rail Trail. Retrieved from <u>https://www.richmondvalerailtrail.org.au/prof-</u> <u>michael-mahony.html</u>

# Economic and Tourism Benefits

In regional Victoria, a family member inherited a small rural property in Yarck about 160 km north-east of Melbourne. I remember this small town as a rundown place with not much more than a pub. When I returned, it is now on the Great Victorian Rail Trail and now has cafes, a country bakehouse, stores, and local accommodation. They even have a monthly market selling local produce. This I believe is a direct result of the rail trail passing nearby.

RVRT users will support local businesses both new and existing near the trail (similar to what I saw in Yarck), whether that being trail side coffee shops, local produce stores, or bike hire. The RVRT will also attract tourists including rail trail enthusiasts (there is lots of them in Victoria!) which will benefit local accommodation and restaurants and help boost tourism, recreation, and hospitality in the Hunter area.

The documents on public exhibition for the Cessnock and Lake Macquarie part of the RVRT do a good job at meeting both the proposal's planning objectives and the community's expectations. The RVRT is a unique and iconic multi-use recreational trail for walking and cycling and will provide great benefits to the Hunter Region and its visitors, promoting active lifestyles, showcasing the areas significant biodiversity and landscapes, and contributing to the economic wellbeing of the region. The proposal, as a whole is, I believe in the public interest and has significant community support and I look forward to the fruition of the RVRT.

Yours Sincerely



To the General Manager,

The addition of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail would be a great addition to the Hunter to allow local communities to connect via walking/cycling without the danger of walking/cycling on the side of major roads.

The use of the Fernleigh Trail demonstrates how popular these trails can be for families, locals and tourists alike.

I highly support the development of the RVRT, and would be an active user after it has been constructed.

Many Thanks,

The Manager

#### Cessnock City Council

The RVRT proposal represents outstanding value, whether measured in terms of tourism, environmental preservation, community education, or in the promotion of local small business. The REF draws attention to the richness of biological diversity along the track, and refers to the trove of industrial archelogy to be found along its proposed route.

I have walked most of the track's full distance, ridden significant sections of it, and have developed my knowledge of the mine workings at Stockrington. I have been present at several committee meetings leading up to this proposal, and have witnessed a powerful, high-functioning committee, full of enthusiasm and promotional skills.

The rail cuttings, many dug by hand, provide a strong linkage to our mining heritage, and the continued preservation of the wash house and associated buildings on Doghole Road, serve as a powerful link to our past.

This RVRT proposal is clearly the most imaginative and well-realised project in the Hunter for many decades. Investment here will surely be rewarded in economic stimulus, species preservation, and tourist visitation.

I heartily commend the project!

Richmond Vale Rail Trail Planning,

I strongly support and recommend current plans for the 17km Western section of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail.

As an avid Trail and Road runner, I along with the various running groups that I am associated with look forward to being able to link both trail and road running along the section and to be able to do so in a safe manner. Similarly to the existing Fernleigh Track, all members of the Hunter Region will be able to benefit from the Trail that runs through some stunning bushland and significant local history inclusive of the existing heritage rail tunnels.

The option to head West and explore this area will no doubt provide immense benefit for the local communities particularly with respect to interconnection between these communities and also the benefits afforded by a healthy and active lifestyle.

The Rail Trail is long overdue and approval for this Western section by Lake Mac & Cessnock Councils is critical.

This is an opportunity for Council to provide an outstanding health and wellbeing corridor which gives back to the community in lieu of the persistent destruction of any suitable green corridors for the purpose of housing as witnessed currently by NCC with the destruction of bushland and natural habitat in vicinity of Bluegum Hills Regional Park.

Don't be like NCC!

Regards,

To The General Manager of Cessnock City Council

With reference to the above I strongly support the construction of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail project which is planned for the 17km western section of this trail. I look forward to the completion of this project as I am sure it will benefit many members of the community. The RVRT will provide much needed safe amenity for cyclists and walkers alike.promoting a healthier lifestyle for those including myself and friends who would want to experience this trail when completed. I sincerely hope the council will approve this project in the near future so that work on this project can commence ASAP.

Yours faithfully

To whom is may concern,

I support the prospect of a connecting rail trail in the Newcastle/Lake/Cessnock area. This would be great for local and visiting cyclists of any level and type, as well as walkers and other users.

Regards,

30th June 2022

Cessnock City Council C/- General Manager 62 Vincent Street

Cessnock NSW 2325

Attention: General Manager

# Subject: Richmond Vale Rail Trail – Stockrington Impacts

This letter provides feedback with respect of the proposed Richmond Vale Rail Trail and its potential impacts on the amenity of Stockrington residents. The feedback relates to the impact of the shared pathway and the proposed carpark at the intersection of Dog Hole Rd and Seahampton Rd.

### <u>Context</u>

Stockrington is a secluded community nestled between the M1 Motorway to the east and extensive remnant bushland recently transferred to NSW National Parks to the west. There are approximately 25 homes scattered throughout the landscape with the only concentration being around the site of the former Stockrington Colliery at Blue Gum CI. The only sealed road access to Stockrington is via Dog Hole Rd, off Lenaghans Dr. The lack of through links to other areas means traffic is generally residents with few other vehicles coming to the area.

The local topography comprises a generally north-east to south-west valley along the alignment of Dog Hole Rd. Land clearing is not extensive and generally limited to along the alignment of Dog Hole Rd and the location of previous colliery and associated workings. Blue Gum Creek is the main watercourse and flows northeast into Pambalong Reserve and the Hunter Wetlands. This provides a highly valued landscape setting described by the dispersed settlement along the road, set against a backdrop of vegetated ridgelines. The limited settlement and lack of high volumes, regular or heavy traffic means the acoustic landscape is that of a quiet and peaceful rural character with a backdrop of local wildlife. It provides a peaceful, ambient noise but an environment in which sound (voices, machinery etc.) will travel across the landscape.

Potential acoustic impacts of the trail on the local character must be fully assessed as introduced noise sources will substantially change the acoustic environment and affect the local amenity. To the maximum extent possible, noise impacts must be minimised in order to retain the character and setting.

# Trail Impacts

The Richmond Vale Rail is disused and its infrastructure largely in disrepair. Until recently we understand the rail corridor was held in private ownership. These measures limited access to and use of the trail. Only occasional walkers or mountain bike riders traverse the route through Stockrington and generally only on weekends or during holiday periods. The limited number and infrequent nature of use means there is little impact on the character and amenity of Stockrington. The transformation of the trail into a fully constructed shared pathway will result in an extensive and rapid increase in the type, number, frequency and duration of use. This will dramatically impact the character and amenity of Stockrington and every effort must be made to mitigate these impacts and protect local amenity.

A constructed trail, as well as improving access for recreational riders, cycling enthusiasts, families groups etc., may attract anti-social and potentially unlawful use by motor powered vehicles (bikes, skateboards, thumpsters, trail bikes etc.) This latter group, in particular, will have a significant, negative impact on local amenity. Α constructed path, that is likely to be marketed for tourism, will significantly increase the volume of users and extend the duration that the trail is used. Whereby existing conditions restrict use by virtue of damaged infrastructure, uneven terrain, no lighting etc., a constructed shared pathway will extend the hours during which people access the site. In particular there is likely to be more morning and evening use, particularly by people using the facility for fitness training. These early morning and evening times are those that have the most detrimental impact on local residents as the trail is not currently used at these times, and they are also the times residents are more likely to be home and affected by the intrusion on visual and acoustic privacy. It is also likely people will access the trail throughout more months of the year. These impacts will all contribute to a significant loss of privacy and reduction in amenity, especially for those owners who adjoin the trail.

An increase in the volume of users will significantly reduce the visual privacy, security and hence amenity of residents adjoining the trail. As depicted in the following images, the alignment of the trail along property boundaries results in direct overlooking of the private open space of a number of homes. This reduces visual privacy of residents, while the increase in awareness and visibility of these home may increase the potential for criminal activities against these properties. Such crimes may include but not be limited to malicious damage, littering, theft, break and enter, all of which are undesirable and should be appropriately mitigated.



The magnitude of impacts needs to be established, assessed, and mitigated. Potential mitigation measures include visual and acoustic screening and no lighting so as to discourage access during the dusk/dawn period. Given the context and setting, the most appropriate visual and acoustic screening that should be provided are landscaped mounds along the edge of the trail where there is an interface with adjoining homes.



## <u>Carpark</u>

The proposed carpark at the intersection of Dog Hole Rd and Seahampton Rd generates significant negative environmental impacts and is considered to be entirely inappropriate. As described above, Stockrington has little to no through traffic with residents being the only regular users of Dog Hole Rd and Cedar Hill Dr. They are familiar with local road conditions and considerate of the impacts of driving behaviour on neighbouring residents. The introduction of the proposed carpark will increase nonresident traffic which is considered undesirable and inappropriate given the impact it will have on local character and amenity. Increased traffic will result in greater traffic conflict and hence potential for vehicle collisions at the Lenaghans Dr intersection. An increase in vehicle movements from external traffic will further reduce safety due to the lack of familiarity with local road conditions. Visiting drivers are also likely to be less considerate of the impacts of driver behaviour on the amenity of the local residents with associated road safety and noise impacts. Increased traffic volumes will increase wear and tear on Dog Hole Rd which is also unacceptable as any accelerated deterioration in road conditions has a daily impact on residents. A further, but no less significant impact of greater traffic volume and frequency will be an increased risk of wildlife strike.

The proposed carpark is also likely to require an increase in heavy vehicle access associated with servicing and maintaining the facility (water, sewage, garbage collection etc.).

The amenities block is proposed to be off the grid as there are no existing utility services. The use of tank water is not ideal as users of the trail are likely to require, or at least desire, access to clean potable water. The impact of sewage is another particular concern. Aside from potential odour issues, given the proximity to Blue Gum Creek the impacts of a non-reticulated system on water quality would need to be thoroughly assessed because of potential ground and surface water contamination.

It is expected the carpark would require lighting which would increase ambient light and potential light spillage on adjacent properties. Headlight glare and increased vehicle noise will have a detrimental impact on resident amenity, especially those homes in close proximity such as the one depicted in the adjoining image.

There is no information about measures to limit the potential for the facility to be a focal point for anti-social behaviour. Any gathering of people engaged in anti-social behaviour is a safety concern for residents, particularly given the number of young families.



The potential use of the carpark for the gathering or loitering of people engaged in such activities will directly impact local amenity. The area is isolated and may be difficult to find should it require emergency services to respond to any incident at the proposed carpark.

Given the concerns detailed in this letter, it is suggested the carpark be relocated to a more suitable location that will not detrimentally affect the character and amenity of Stockrington. By way of example, the carpark could be delivered with fewer negative environmental impacts, at the intersection of the Richmond Vale Trail with Lenaghans Dr and the M1 Motorway. This location is highly accessible given the role of Lenaghans Dr in distributing local traffic. There are no immediately adjacent homes that will be affected by light spillage, vehicle movements, noise, odour etc. The site is adjacent to the highly trafficked Lenghans Dr and M1 motorway and does not require the introduction of traffic to a quiet, secluded, no through rural road network. The proximity to these highly trafficked roads provides passive surveillance. It is easier to access for people not familiar with the local area and for emergency services. A carpark in this location provides good access to the proposed Richmond Vale Trail and occurs at a landmark piece of infrastructure, being the tunnel under these roads. Although it has not been investigated, this site may have utility services available that would mitigate environmental impacts (servicing, odour etc.) and provide better facilities (potable water, power).

# **Conclusion**

While the Richmond Vale Rail Trail is a significant and exciting regional project, the introduction of this recreation facility will have a negative impact on the seclusion, character and amenity of Stockrington. While some impacts may be counterbalanced by broader social advantage, the introduction of a carpark on Dog Hole Rd is an undesirable and unnecessary impact that compounds the direct impacts on visual and acoustic privacy and general amenity of the area. If the Richmond Vale Rail Trail project proceeds, the following actions are required to mitigate the potentially devastating effects of the character and amenity of Stockrington residents:

- The proposed carpark should be relocated outside of Stockrington, preferably to a location east of the M1 motorway;
- A landscaped mound should be provided the length of boundary with Stockrington properties to provide visual and acoustic privacy to the residents and preserve the existing quality of life that exists in this secluded area;
- Lighting should not be provided along the shared path to mitigate spillage impacts and discourage use of the facility outside of daylight hours; and
- Appropriate measures should be applied to discourage anti-social / illegal behaviour on the shared pathway.

Given the early stage of design and consultation, it is an appropriate time to make adjustment to the concept. This will ensure appropriate effort to minimise the project's environmental impacts. It will help engage support from Stockrington residents who are alarmed at the negative impacts of the current design. The local community would prefer to work with the project team to ensure a successful project rather than have to muster their efforts to rally against those undesirable elements as currently proposed.

Kind regards,

Hello,

We would like to add that we fully support Cessnock Council's efforts to bring the trail to reality.

Thanks,





The General Manager Cessnock City Council PO Box 152 CESSNOCK NSW 2325 By email: council@cessnock.nsw.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam,

# Re: Richmond Vale Rail Trail - Stockrington to Kurri Kurri – Review of Environmental Factors

I refer to Council's public exhibition of the Review of Environmental Factors (REF) for the Stockrington to Kurri Kurri section of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail (RVRT). It is noted that National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) provided comment on a draft version of the REF in 2020.

The majority of comments provided by NPWS on the draft REF do not appear to have been taken into account prior to finalising the REF. Many of the matters raised below are consistent with those raised in 2020.

The section of the RVRT covered by the REF traverses or is proximate to lands managed by NPWS ('NPWS estate' or 'park') as follows:

- The eastern section of the trail's alignment traverses land acquired under Part 11 of the NPW Act (transferred to NPWS ownership on 27 August 2020) and traverses Pambalong Nature Reserve
- 14.5 kilometres of the alignment traverses Stockrington State Conservation Area (SCA) from the western most boundary of Pambalong (Ch12650) to almost Richmond Vale Road at Stockrington's western most end (Ch23700)
- The alignment goes through Werakata SCA at Stanford Merthyr on Crown Road, and has potential to encroach into the SCA.

As a landowner subject to the proposal, NPWS has an **approval** role for this development. The proposal's development on any lands reserved or acquired under the NPW Act will be subject to an appropriate NPWS approval mechanism, likely to be a licence. The licence will require conditions to mitigate and manage impacts.

The primary focus for NPWS is to protect the natural and cultural values of NPWS estate and to ensure the RVRT does not significantly impact NPWS's ability to manage its lands consistent with the objectives of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* (NPW Act).

NPWS retains in-principle support for the RVRT and acknowledges the project's potential to provide a high-quality nature-based tourism and visitation experience for the Hunter. NPWS has made

PO Box 351, Jesmond NSW 2299 1 Wetland Place, Shortland NSW 2307 Tel: 02 4946 4100 ABN 20 770 707 468 www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au previous submissions to City of Newcastle (CoN) regarding DA2020/00641 (covering the sections of RVRT within NCC's area) and to Cessnock City Council (CCC) regarding DA 8/2020/20463/1 (the extent of the RVRT across lands mapped as Coastal Wetland within CCC's area). NPWS submissions on these components identified several key matters that require detailed operational discussions, additional information and/or assessment before the proposal could be comprehensively assessed and supported by NPWS. NPWS also provided comments to CCC in 2020 on a draft REF covering this section of the RVRT.

Detailed comments on the exhibited REF are provided in Attachment 1, along with conditions recommended by NPWS should the DA be assessed favourably. These conditions are consistent with those NPWS will likely apply to separate approvals required under the NPW Act.

A summary of NPWS's key issues is provided below. Given there has been limited changes to the original REF since NPWS made its previous submission, many of the points remain the same:

- Tenure and land ownership details in the REF and maps do not clearly and consistently identify all NPWS managed lands in the project's study area.
- The REF currently does not clearly identify where vegetation (including total vegetation and native vegetation) will be removed from NPWS managed land – NPWS requires an assessment of the extent and impact of clearing on park.
- Survey methodologies supporting the flora and possibly fauna assessment have not complied with standard guidelines and may need to be repeated.
- Given the extent of impacts to threatened species habitat, more detailed justification is required in the '5-part test of significance' to support the conclusion that the proposal is not likely to significantly affect threatened species – further assessment via either a Species Impact Statement (SIS) or Biodiversity Development Assessment Report (BDAR) may be required in the absence of this justification. NPWS would support, in-principle, the establishment of a stewardship site under a biodiversity stewardship agreement, if required. NPWS would be willing to work with the proponent to develop a stewardship site agreement and management plan detailing how such an agreement would operate.
- Detailed flood assessment should be carried out in line with best practice. Assessment should give consideration to water discharges, construction impacts, infrastructure upgrades and emergency management. Various minor modifications to the RVRT will be required at the detailed design stage to ensure compliance with NPWS policies or standards.
- Operational difficulties are presented by allowing dogs on parts of the RVRT, given dogs are
  required to be excluded from NPWS managed lands and have been excluded from the section of
  the RVRT on City of Newcastle estate, as conditioned in the determination notice for that
  Development Application (DA2020/00641). NPWS recommend dogs are excluded from the
  entirety of the RVRT to ensure a consistent management response along the entire RVRT, to
  minimise impacts to wildlife and to support promotion of the trail as a nature-based tourism
  experience.
- The potential impacts for the RVRT to impact on NPWS access, management and operations during construction and operational phases.
- Suitable management plans and agreements that clarify how Council intend to operate and maintain the RVRT on NPWS estate will also be required and developed in consultation with NPWS.

NPWS requests these matters be addressed by Council and that an amended REF and appendices be prepared with input from NPWS and other key stakeholders. I am confident Council and NPWS can work collaboratively to resolve these issues with a view to developing conditions of consent that will be consistent with the conditions NPWS will apply in separate approvals required under the NPW Act.

It is noted this is one section of the RVRT and the development in its entirety crosses 3 local government areas. NPWS currently hold concerns over a lack of a coordinated approach to the project between Councils which has led to inconsistency in communications, consultation, environmental assessment and planning approvals. The approach has also led to significant inefficiencies for NPWS to review multiple assessments for the same project at various stages of drafting between Councils.

NPWS also hold concerns over a lack of detailed discussions regarding planning for future licencing and authorisation of sections of the trail that traverse National Park. Potential licencing under the NPW Act will involve separate approvals and require more operational details regarding how Council plan to construct, maintain and operate the RVRT adjacent to National Park estate.

NPWS suggest CCC, Hunter Joint Organisations and City of Newcastle, meet with NPWS to discuss how a coordinated multi-jurisdictional approach could benefit the project.

Yours sincerely,



1 July 2022

# Attachment: NPWS submission (including request for additional information) on Cessnock City Council Richmond Vale Rail Trail (RVRT) - Stockrington to Kurri Kurri – Review of Environmental Factors (REF) and appendices

The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) has identified several key matters that require detailed operational discussions, amendments to the REF and supporting documentation before the REF can be comprehensively assessed and supported by NPWS. These are listed in the following table, along with conditions recommended by NPWS should the DA be assessed favourably. These conditions are consistent with those NPWS will likely apply to the separate approvals required under the NPW Act.

NPWS request that, once the recommended additional details are obtained, the revised REF be provided to NPWS for further review and discussion with Council.

NDWS comments on CCC proposed Dichmond Vale Boil Troil DEE and enpendices

NPWS also requests the opportunity to work with Council at the appropriate time to draft conditions for determination to ensure consistency between potential conditions imposed by Council and the conditions set by any potential NPWS approval for sections of the proposal that traverse NPWS-managed lands.

		NPWS comments on CCC proposed Richmond Vale Rail Trai	I REF and appendices
REF section	Page	Issue – including details as to why this is an issue for NPWS	Changes and/or conditions recommended by NPWS
Tenure and	land owner	rship	
Figure 1-1	4	Lands acquired under Part 11 of the <i>National Parks and Wildlife Act</i> 1974 (NPW Act) for future reservation as Stockrington SCA are not shown on Figure 1-1 or maps and plans throughout. The true extent of NPWS-managed lands needs to be clearly presented as it forms an important part of the RVRT's context.	Amend figure and any other maps/plans to accurately depict tenure/classification of this land. Assessments will need to consider these additional parcels as NPWS estate.
3.2.9	25-26	Table 3-5 lists Coal & Allied Industries Limited as the landowner of Lot 21 DP1195619. This land was transferred to the ownership of the Minister administering the (NPW Act) on 27 August 2020. As such, it is now land acquired under Part 11 of the NPW Act and is under NPWS management.	Amend land ownership of Lot 21 DP1195619, Lot 125 DP755260 and Lot 1 DP155446 to National Parks and Wildlife Service.
		Table 3-4 lists The State of NSW – Crown Lands as the landowner of Lot 125 DP755260 and Lot 1 DP155446. This land was acquired under Part 11 of the NPW Act and is under NPWS management.	
Biodiversity	and veget	ation removal	
3.3.7 and throughout	31	The REF states "removal of approximately 13.64 hectares of vegetation would be required." Of this, approximately 3.59ha would be native vegetation (see p. 79).	NPWS requests that it be highlighted where vegetation (including total vegetation and native vegetation) will be removed from NPWS managed land, with an assessment undertaken of the extent and impact of
		NPWS is concerned that the REF lacks detail of the proposal's impacts on NPWS-managed lands. NPWS seeks information on how	clearing on park.

		NPWS comments on CCC proposed Richmond Vale Rail Tra	il REF and appendices
REF section	Page	Issue – including details as to why this is an issue for NPWS	Changes and/or conditions recommended by NPWS
		much vegetation is proposed to be cleared on lands under its management. NPWS will require this information before it can grant approval for the proposal on the lands under its management.	
App F – Flora and Fauna Assessment report	-	The 'Flora and Fauna Assessment' (FFA) report implies that targeted searches for threatened flora were conducted but it appears they were not undertaken in accordance with the ' <i>NSW Guide to Surveying Threatened Plants</i> ' (OEH 2016). As such there are concerns threatened flora have not been adequately surveyed.	Targeted surveys should be undertaken for candidate threatened flora species. Surveys are to be conducted when a species is detectable, such as flowering or fruiting, given flowering material or fruits are often required for positive identification.
		parallel transects) utilised for the targeted flora surveys. It states that the following management guidelines were used to inform such	Any variation in the survey methodology or timing from that identified by the Threatened Biodiversity Data Collection (TBDC) or the ' <i>NSW Guide to Surveying</i> <i>Threatened Plants</i> ' (OEH 2016) should be justified in the FFA.
		<ul> <li>(i) Intermined and Management Guidelines,</li> <li>(ii) Lake Macquarie Tetratheca juncea Planning and Management Guidelines</li> <li>(iii) Bell, S.A.J. (2016) Volume 2: Vegetation Community Profiles, Lake Macquarie Local Government Area. Unpublished Report to Lake Macquarie City Council. March 2016, Eastcoast Flora Survey</li> <li>(iv) Biodiversity Planning Policy and Guidelines for (LEP) Rezoning Proposals. Lake Macquarie City Council 2015.</li> <li>This Section does not refer to OEH 2016 guideline; nor are the guidelines listed in the 'References' section.</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>The FFA must detail how each candidate threatened flora species was surveyed, including details on (but not limited to):</li> <li>which species are being targeted and why were other candidate species discounted?</li> <li>what specific habitats/niches were searched (if any)</li> <li>the location of linear transects (e.g. GPS tracked logs)</li> <li>transect widths and orientation</li> <li>survey effort per species.</li> </ul>
	guidelines listed in the 'References' section. It is a requirement (as per the ' <i>NSW Guide to Surveying Threatened Plants</i> ' (OEH 2016)) that spaced parallel transects for all threatened flora species across all suitable habitat are based on a species growth habit to determine suitable spacing widths for detectability. It is recommended that targeted surveys (not opportunistic searches) be undertaken for all candidate flora species across all suitable habitat, unless the species is assumed present or an expert report is provided (noting that some species not surveyed at their optimum	The OEH (2016) survey guidelines have now been updated with the <i>Surveying threatened plants and their</i> <i>habitats - NSW survey guide for the Biodiversity</i> <i>Assessment Method</i> (DPIE 2020) and this new standard should be used in the additional survey effort. If surveys are not undertaken, an expert report should be prepared justifying why candidate species have	

REF section	Page	Issue – including details as to why this is an issue for NPWS	Changes and/or conditions recommended by NPWS
		time were assumed present – Acacia bynoeana, Callistemon linearifolius, Pterostylis gibbosa and Rutidosis heterogama).	been excluded from consideration, or the species should be assumed to be present.
App F – Flora and Fauna Assessment report	-	<ul> <li>Pterostylis chaetophora is a potential 'candidate species' for the project area. Appropriate targeted surveying across all potential habitats and plant communities is required for this species.</li> <li>Pterostylis chaetophora is a widespread threatened orchid known from a variety of habitats, including dry sclerophyll forests / woodlands inhabited by box and ironbark. It is known from the Upper Hunter to Lower Hunter, and also the Mid North Coast; in recent years, it has been located at Rothbury, Maitland and Beresfield. Suitable habitat occurs within the development footprint and the subject area is within the species' known geographic distribution. Flowers are required for the positive identification of this species. The species flowers between September and November, however, it is recommended that a known reference population is utilised to refine survey timeframes.</li> </ul>	Targeted surveys for <i>Pterostylis chaetophora</i> are required in accordance with the 2020 <i>Surveying</i> <i>threatened plants and their habitats - NSW survey</i> <i>guide for the Biodiversity Assessment Method</i> (DPIE 2020) or an expert report is provided, or the species is assumed present.
App F – Flora and Fauna Assessment report	-	<ul> <li>It is uncertain whether suitable fauna surveys have been undertaken, particularly in relation to survey effort and the methodologies used as the information not clearly presented.</li> <li>The FFA does provide extensive details of the fauna surveys undertaken, including targeted surveys, but a single summary table outlying the details of the fauna surveys would provide further clarity.</li> <li>It would benefit the reviewer, for the information to be contained in a single location, with all the relevant fauna survey details summarised in a tabular format.</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>It is recommended further information is provided on how the fauna surveys were undertaken and this should be presented in a summary table that provides the following details:</li> <li>specific vegetation types or habitats targeted</li> <li>species or guilds (e.g. forest owls/micro-bats where appropriate) targeted</li> <li>size of sampling/stratification unit</li> <li>timing of surveys and prevailing climatic conditions at time of survey</li> <li>recommended methodologies verse methods used</li> <li>survey effort</li> <li>how the survey effort meets the minimum standards outlined in '<i>Threatened Biodiversity Survey and Assessment: Guidelines for Developments and Activities</i>' (DEC 2004), '<i>NSW survey guide for threatened frogs – a guide for threatened frogs</i></li></ul>

REF	Page	NPWS comments on CCC proposed Richmond Vale Rail Training Issue – including details as to why this is an issue for NPWS	Changes and/or conditions recommended by
section App F –		NPWS review of 'Appendix C – Tests of significance (BC Act)' within	NPWS         survey of threatened frogs and their habitats for the Biodiversity Assessment Method' (DPIE 2020), and 'Species credit threatened bats and their habitats: NSW survey guide for the Biodiversity Assessment Method' (OEH 2018) or other recognised best practice methods (e.g. infra-red cameras).         It is recommended that the REE recognises that
App F – Flora and Fauna Assessment report (Appendix C)		<ul> <li>NPWS review of Appendix C – Tests of significance (BC Act) within the FFA, suggests the proposal is likely to result in a significant impact on all threatened flora.</li> <li>Appendix C indicates the following: <ul> <li>The removal of 3.41 hectares out of 29.1 hectares of locally available habitat will result in a 11.71% loss of the overall local habitat for of <i>Acacia bynoeana</i>, <i>Callistemon linearifolius</i> and <i>Tetratheca juncea</i>.</li> <li>The removal of 0.59 hectares out of 7.87 hectares of locally available habitat will result in a 7.49% loss of the overall local habitat for of <i>Angophora inopina</i>, <i>Eucalyptus parramattensis</i> subsp. <i>parramattensis</i>, <i>Grevillea parviflora</i> subsp. <i>parviflora</i> and <i>Rutidosis heterogama</i>.</li> </ul> </li> <li>It is suggested that the extent of impact to the local habitat areas could be considered significant under the '5-part test of significance', as they represent relatively large areas of habitat in relation to what is available locally.</li> </ul>	It is recommended that the REF recognises that impacts to threatened flora are likely to be significant and the project should either be assessed via a Species Impact Statement (SIS) or under the Biodiversity Assessment Method (BAM) via a Biodiversity Development Assessment Report (BDAR) in accordance with the <i>Environmental Planning and</i> <i>Assessment Act 1979</i> . The choice to use a BDAR or SIS lies with the proponent (Cessnock City Council). The preferred alternative is to avoid, minimise or mitigate the impacts so that the proposal is not likely to significantly impact threatened species or their habitat. Unless this is done and the level of habitat loss is drastically reduced, better justification will be required to support the conclusion that the proposal will not have a significant effect on threatened species. Reference to "negligible" loss of habitats and impacts within the REF are also recommended to be updated to reflect any additional assessments undertaken in accordance with the above advice.
<b>Detailed des</b>			
3.2.1	19ff.	Section 3.2.1 of the REF has been updated to mention the fact that where facilities are proposed on park, they will be required to be designed in accordance with relevant NPWS standards and policy, and that the final design will be subject to the NPWS Park Facilities Manual and to input and approval by NPWS where it is on park.	Confirming that facilities proposed on NPWS lands will have to be of a design that is agreed by NPWS and that the final design and management of the RVRT on NPWS-managed lands will be required to comply with NPWS standards and policies.

REF	NPWS comments on CCC proposed Richmond Vale Rail Trail REF and appendices			
section	Page	Issue – including details as to why this is an issue for NPWS	Changes and/or conditions recommended by NPWS	
		<ul> <li>The final design and management of the RVRT on NPWS-managed lands will also be required to comply with the following NPWS policies, as relevant: <ul> <li>Boundary fencing policy</li> <li>Cycling policy</li> <li>Events, functions and venues policy</li> <li>No smoking in parks policy – smoking in parks is an offence under the NPW Regulation</li> <li>Pets in parks policy</li> <li>Tree risk management policy</li> <li>Vehicle access policy</li> <li>Visitor safety policy.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Parks policies are available <u>online</u>.</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Recommended conditions:</li> <li>Prior to the commencement of works, the Applicant must obtain the necessary licence(s) to authorise the development under section 151 of the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 (NPW Act)</li> <li>Prior to the issue of any Construction Certificate, the Applicant must obtain approval from the National Park and Wildlife Service (NPWS) for any rest areas located within lands managed by the National Park and Wildlife Service (NPWS)</li> <li>Prior to the commencement of works, the applicant must obtain the necessary licence(s) to authorise the development under section 151 of the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 (NPW Act).</li> </ul>	
3.2.7	23ff.	In Section 3.2.7 (p. 24), the REF states that signage will be located approximately every 500m along the RVRT, however minimal details of that signage are provided apart from the examples in Figures 3-4 and 3-5. This section has been updated to refer to a signage and interpretation plan, and the need to develop instructional signage with NPWS.	<ul> <li>Recommended conditions:</li> <li>A signage and interpretation plan is to be developed for the RVRT. Instructive signage is to be developed in consultation with NPWS regarding style and content.</li> </ul>	
2.2.3	11	The REF provides the following preferred option for Surveyors Creek: "Construction of a 15 metre two-span concrete bridge at Surveyors Creek and demolition of the existing timber bridge at this location."	NPWS agrees with the preferred approach to demolish the wooden trestles at the bridge crossing Surveyors Creek due to safety, however it is suggested that the bridge abutments could be retained and interpreted with historical images.	
Figure 3-1c	15	<ul> <li>Potential carparking and picnic site noted at chainage 23000 on figure.</li> <li>NPWS recognises that, while this may be an appropriate car parking area, it would offer limited amenity as a picnic area. It is noted that the construction compound and future car park/rest area is no longer shown at chainage 22800 on Drawing C1132 in Appendix A.</li> </ul>	NPWS recommends the use of the Clay Pan Area (at chainages 20200 to 20400) for parking and day use might be a more appropriate location.	

REF section	Page	Issue – including details as to why this is an issue for NPWS	Changes and/or conditions recommended by NPWS
Figure 3-1e	17	Potential carpark site noted at chainage 18000 (car park and amenity area shown at this location on Drawing C1125 in Appendix A) and turning area at chainage 15600 on figure 3-1e.	NPWS recommends further examination into suitability of chainage 15600-16000 as an appropriate location for a central carpark, day use facility and construction compound.
		NPWS supports a carpark at chainage 18000 noting it may only be suitable for a small accessible parking space only. NPWS supports a turning area at chainage 15600 and notes that the area at chainage 15600-16000 could also be considered for a central carpark, day use facility and construction compound. This would be subject to consultation with other stakeholders including neighbours.	
Figure 3-1f App A – Design Drawings	18 Drawing C1119	Potential carpark site and compound/stockpile area noted at the intersection of Dog Hole Road and Seahampton Road between chainages 13600 and 13800 on figure 3-1f of the REF. The infrastructure is also shown on Drawing C1119 of Appendix A.	NPWS recommends further consideration and discussion about components proposed at the intersection of Dog Hole Road and Seahampton Roa Feasibility of more appropriate locations to be investigated.
		NPWS does not currently support the location of any permanent infrastructure (e.g. a carpark) at this intersection due to concerns over potential anti-social behaviour and impacts to neighbouring landowners. It is suggested that an alternate site (perhaps the "Mid Trail Precinct") would allow for more parking, a day use area and would be further removed from the park entry and neighbouring properties.	
Figures 3- 1a to 3-1f App A –	13-18 Drawing	"Proposed rural style fencing" shown adjacent to areas of park (e.g. adjacent Werakata SCA on Fig. 3-1a). Sections also show: "1800 HIGH TYPE I-R-L/B-T (RAIL-LESS/BARBED TOP) MAN PROOF FENCE IN ACCORDANCE WITH AS1725.1"	Alternative measures to prevent impacts of the RVRT encroaching onto neighbouring lands (e.g. through trespass), such as advisory signage and exclusion of domestic animals, should be incorporated into the
Design Drawings	C1015	Section 3.2.7 (p. 23) also mentions new rural style fencing but provides that "The exact fencing types and gating arrangement would be confirmed with adjacent landowners during the detailed design process." Section 7.1.1 (p. 91) of Appendix F, the Flora and Fauna Assessment report, states that: "Fence design [is] to be of suitable	REF's mitigation measures. A fencing plan is recommended to be produced as part of landscape plans in consultation with NPWS. NPWS recommends that the fencing plan excludes use of barbed wire in fencing (at least on top and bottom strands), given its impacts to fauna and associated

REF section	Page	Issue – including details as to why this is an issue for NPWS	Changes and/or conditions recommended by NPWS
		It is unlikely that rural style or "man proof" fencing would enable fauna movement and NPWS urges a change in design to exclude barbed wire. It is also noted that "man proof fencing" has been added to some of the design drawings since NPWS commented on the draft REF in 2020 and raised this same matter as a concern. Having barbed wire on the top strand is known to entangle and injure nocturnal wildlife including bats, owls and gliders. Other birds may also be at risk, including migratory and threatened shorebirds. Having barbed wire on the bottom strand is known to cause injury to small ground-dwelling mammals.	<ul> <li>Recommended conditions:</li> <li>No barbed wire fencing is to be used along the extent of the trail.</li> <li>All fencing within National Parks &amp; Wildlife Service's lands is to be subject of a final fencing plan. The final fencing design within the plan is to be undertaken in consultation with the National Parks and Wildlife Service.</li> </ul>
		NPWS notes RSPCA and WIRES advocate complete avoidance of barbed wire. Barbed-wire fencing has been removed by NPWS from nearby Hunter Wetlands National Park due to its potential impacts on birds and other wildlife.	
3.2.5	21	The REF states that: "Further locations for carparking are being investigated within the Stockrington State Conservation Area, particularly within a proposed 'midway precinct' off the trail. This will be addressed further through detailed design in consultation with relevant stakeholders."	NPWS requests that the proponent continues to work with NPWS to achieve an appropriate outcome for the development of a 'midtrail precinct'. This should be done in consultation with park neighbours.
		NPWS supports consideration of a "Mid Trail Precinct" and will (as a relevant stakeholder) continue to work with the proponent to achieve an appropriate outcome.	
3.3.2	27	<ul> <li>The REF states: "A carpark and drop off area would be constructed at Dog Hole Road (see Figure 3-1)."</li> <li>NPWS believes the siting of these facilities at the location currently proposed has the potential to disturb neighbours and suggests that there is a more appropriate alternative nearby at the "Mid Trail Precinct" (see comments above) that can replace the provision of the car park and drop off area at Dog Hole Road.</li> </ul>	Remove carpark and drop off area at Dog Hole Road and consider the placement of similar infrastructure at the "Mid Trail Precinct"
Figure 3-6	27	The bridge in Figure 3-6 has collapsed further since the photo was taken. NPWS suggests that the abutments could be assessed as to their suitability to be retained and interpreted.	Undertake an assessment of the suitability of bridge abutments to be retained and interpreted.

REF section	Page	Issue – including details as to why this is an issue for NPWS	Changes and/or conditions recommended by NPWS
App A – Design	Drawing C1119	NPWS highlights that fencing with gates would be required in this section to allow for stock movement across the trail.	Need to accommodate gates in this section for stock movement across the trail.
Drawings			Need to consider the potential for stock movement across the RVRT to pose a safety hazard and operational management consideration.
App A – Design Drawings	Drawing C1121	A sheltered rest area is shown at chainage 15000. NPWS understands this location has cultural significance. NPWS suggests that this rest area would not be required if a day use area was	Consultation with LALCs and Aboriginal community to ensure infrastructure is not inadvertently placed on/near significant aboriginal sites.
		provided a short distance away at the "Mid Trail Precinct."	Remove sheltered rest area (labelled "SRA") at chainage 15000 from design drawings, subject to input from Aboriginal community.
App A – Design Drawings	Drawing C1122	An open rest area is shown at chainage 16000. NPWS suggests that this rest area would not be required if a car park/day use area was provided a short distance away at the "Mid Trail Precinct."	Remove open rest area (labelled "ORA") from design drawings.
App A – Design	Drawing C1123	The design drawings show a steel tube cycleway fence at the embankment.	NPWS requests additional details on the design and components of the steel tube cycleway fencing as
Drawings		NPWS requests additional details on the design and components of such a fence (including installation methods). NPWS also notes there is a limited area only on the embankment for installation of any fencing.	shown on the design drawings.
App A – Design Drawings	various	Throughout Stockrington SCA, NPWS has concerns about the stability of the slopes in the cuttings and embankments (e.g. from chainages 16800 to 17000) and some areas where there are erosion gullies through embankments with evident undermining (e.g. chainages 23000-23100	The REF should include a geotechnical report addressing each issue (e.g. confirming the stability of the cuttings and embankments) and this report should consider the requirements of the NPWS Landslides and Rockfalls Policy and Procedures. It is expected that the geotechnical report would identify appropriate mitigation measures to manage user safety.
App A – Design Drawings	Drawing C1124	Steel tube fencing is proposed at chainages 16800 to 17000. NPWS notes that this area, including the trail, is undermined and prone to erosion.	NPWS suggests that additional investigation be undertaken into the current condition of this area to assess its suitability to accommodate such fencing and

REF section	Page	Issue – including details as to why this is an issue for NPWS	Changes and/or conditions recommended by NPWS
			any works that would be required to prevent the trail from eroding further.
App A – Design Drawings	Drawing C1125	"Visual screening in consultation with OEH" is shown at chainages 17950 to 18000. NPWS requests additional details on the design and components of visual screening.	NPWS requests additional details on the design and components of the visual screening as shown on the design drawings.
App A – Design Drawings	Drawing C1125	There is limited space at chainages 17950 to 18000 and so a major car park area at this location is unlikely to be suitable. NPWS suggests that a small accessible only carpark with limited facilities would be appropriate here because elderly access is limited for the RVRT as a whole. This area would allow a small 2-3 accessible car park with easy, wheelchair access to both tunnels, their cuttings and embankments. A picnic table and single facilities block would be required ensuring disabled access could be accommodated comfortably.	Amend current carpark proposal to a small accessible only carpark with limited facilities.
App A – Design Drawings	Drawing C1128	The proposed open rest area shown at chainage 20250 is not appropriate. The site is more appropriately used for a major day use precinct for car parking, toilets, picnic facilities and potential walking tracks, particularly as this area was left from the construction of the Hunter Expressway specifically for this purpose.	Remove open rest area (labelled "ORA") from design drawings. Consider provision of a day use precinct in this locality.
App A – Design Drawings	Drawing C1128	The trail appears to deviate away from the existing cutting for sections on this design drawing. NPWS requests additional details are provided as to the proposed alignment of the trail in this area, noting that the northern top edge of the trail is not a hardened trail, only a recently formed trail due to informal dirt bike use. NPWS notes the cutting is quite deep but NPWS believes that, unless dangerous, the cutting could be retained as existing as it is quite spectacular. NPWS suggests the use of the trail alignment in this location (rather than deviation away from the alignment) could be suitable.	NPWS requests additional design details are provided regarding the proposed alignment of the trail where it deviates from the existing cutting as well as explaining the justification for this deviation in the REF.
App A – Design Drawings	Drawing C1128	The site of the proposed car park on the Hunter Expressway Alliance (HEA) road has the potential to impact two existing easements (understood to benefit a private landowner and Ausgrid) and so NPWS suggests an alternative location to be investigated. NPWS	NPWS suggests the proposed car park on the Hunter Expressway Alliance (HEA) road be removed and that the Clay Pan Area (at chainages 20200 to 20400) be investigated as a suitable alternative location.

REF section	Page	Issue – including details as to why this is an issue for NPWS	Changes and/or conditions recommended by NPWS
		suggests that the Clay Pan Area (at chainages 20200 to 20400) might be suitable as an alternative location.	
Construction	n		
7.1	118	The REF provides that a construction environmental management plan (CEMP) will be prepared by the contractor and approved by Council prior to construction commencing. There is no mention of who else will be involved in the CEMP's preparation.	NPWS requests the CEMP be developed in consultation with NPWS, noting that the CEMP for the sections of the RVRT on NPWS-managed lands will be subject to NPWS approval.
Figure 3-1a	13	The truck turning area proposed on this sheet (at chainage 27600) is largely unsuitable as it is very waterlogged. It is also unnecessary due to the loop opportunities provided by truck access to Connexion Trail by following Pelaw Main Loop and returning via Pelaw Link Trail at chainage 27400, which is considered a preferable truck turning area. The truck turning area as currently proposed would also be incompatible with ongoing NPWS efforts to rehabilitate this area.	Another, more suitable truck turning area should be identified in the REF, noting that existing roads should be prioritised for truck turning/construction access. NPWS suggests chainage 27400 where trucks could access the Connexion Trail by following Pelaw Main Loop and returning via Pelaw Link Trail.
Figure 3-1c	15	An access road and small stockpile site are noted at chainage 21400. NPWS supports this area as a stockpile site however notes that the existing fence in this locality will have to be removed to enable access to the site. This fence will then need to be replaced at the end of works.	The CEMP will need to incorporate the removal of the existing fence and its replacement at the end of the construction stage in this location.
3.3.2	28	Daracon Quarry access road is no longer used by Daracon. This road lies on NPWS estate. NPWS suggests construction access could be achieved at Clay Pan as it has been set aside for the RVRT as its future use.	Amend reference to Daracon Quarry access road being a private road and identify that construction access will be at Clay Pan.
Ongoing ma	nagement o	of the RVRT	•
3.4	33	Section 3.4 of the REF has been amended to identify NPWS as a key stakeholder that will be involved in the development of an	Recommended conditions:
7.1	118	operational management plan. NPWS supports this statement and notes that an operational management plan prepared to the satisfaction of NPWS will be a condition of NPWS authorisation for the sections of the RVRT on NPWS-managed lands. It is envisaged that, under the operational management plan, NPWS will not be required to undertake	<ul> <li>An operational management plan for the cyclew is to be prepared in consultation with National Parks and Wildlife Service which identifies the management and maintenance considerations (e.g. weed control, restriction on domestic anim including dogs and horses) for the cycleway an allocates responsibility for each of these matten ensure the cycleway is managed and maintained</li> </ul>

<u></u>		NPWS comments on CCC proposed Richmond Vale Rail Trai	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·
REF section	Page	Issue – including details as to why this is an issue for NPWS	Changes and/or conditions recommended by NPWS
		management activities or maintenance works on the RVRT as a result of the proposal.	appropriately. Full details are to be submitted prior to the issue of any Construction Certificate.
3.2.7 6.7.4	24 88	<ul> <li>The REF provides that "Where the proposal traverses conservation areas, signage would be provided stating that dogs (and other domestic animals) are not permitted."</li> <li>The REF also states that "Appropriate signage would be installed which states that dogs should be kept on a lead or are prohibited."</li> <li>While NPWS is pleased to see the prohibition of dog walking on NPWS lands has been recognised, NPWS considers prohibiting dogs on certain components of the trail only (e.g. conservation areas) would be impractical given, over its entirety, the RVRT will traverse several disjunct areas of NPWS land (namely Hunter Wetlands National Park and land acquired for reservation as a state conservation area (Stockrington SCA) and nature reserve (Pambalong NR)).</li> <li>Domestic animals pose a significant threat to native animals and ongoing park management has the potential to impact domestic animal health if they enter the trail, such as through poisoning (e.g. where 1080 baiting for foxes is provided as part of a management program).</li> <li>It is considered unlikely that mitigation measures outlined in the REF (such as erection of "no dogs" signs at park boundaries) would be effective in protecting park values from potential impacts. Rather, it is likely that if dog walking were to be permitted on any part of the RVRT it would lead to significant compliance issues arising from dog walking (and other domestic animals) on NPWS managed land.</li> <li>It is noted that the section of RVRT on Newcastle City Council land (DA2020/00641) was subject to a condition whereby domestic animals are to be excluded for the full extent of the RVRT to which that DA applied, and the same condition is recommended for this (and each other) section of NPWS lands are not impacted.</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Recommended conditions:</li> <li>Domestic animals (including, but not limited to horses and dogs) are to be excluded along the full extent of the cycleway at all times.</li> <li>The operational management plan is to detail the methods of exclusion for these animals, including but not limited to signage at all trailheads to the cycleway.</li> <li>The use of the cycleway shall occur in accordance with the operational management plan for the cycleway, prepared to the satisfaction of National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), for the sections of the cycleway on NPWS managed lands.</li> <li>The proponent is required to manage and maintait that part of the cycleway on NPWS managed lands.</li> <li>All events proposed to occur on the cycleway which traverse National Parks and Wildlife Service lands will require a consent under the NPW Regulation and are to be undertaken in accordance with the NPWS Events, functions and venues policy at all times.</li> </ul>

		NPWS comments on CCC proposed Richmond Vale Rail Tra	il REF and appendices
REF section	Page	Issue – including details as to why this is an issue for NPWS	Changes and/or conditions recommended by NPWS
6.5.3	72	<ul> <li>The REF provides that "Waste receptacles would be provided at carparks and signage would encourage all users to take waste with them from the trail."</li> <li>A "no bins" operational management policy exists across all NPWS estate, discouraging littering, birds and scavengers eating dropped food and the spread of rubbish into wetlands.</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>NPWS requests that no bins be provided along the sections of the RVRT that traverse NPWS land.</li> <li><i>Recommended conditions:</i></li> <li>No waste receptacles are to be provided on NPWS-managed lands.</li> </ul>
6.8.3	94	The REF states "The use of motorised cycles/scooter/chairs and hiring facilities for these at some access points would be considered." The major concern is not with the use of motorised cycles/scooters/chairs but with the argument that will arise about motorised 'aid' vehicles vs. the use of trail bikes on the RVRT.	NPWS requires more information from Council on the potential use and management of proposed motorised cycles/scooter/chairs and hiring facilities on the RVRT. A strong management policy will be required to ensure safety and considerate use of motorised vehicles whilst preventing trail bike entry to the trail or its ancillary facilities.
		If the use of any motorised forms of transport is to be permitted on the RVRT such use would have to be in accordance with relevant NPWS policies, where applicable, for sections of the RVRT that traverse park.	
		However it should be noted that, if provided on park, the provision of facilities to hire out these forms of motorised transport would be subject to licensing requirements under the NPW Act.	
	NPWS man	agement and operations	
Throughout	-	NPWS notes that, while the NPWS land to be reserved as Stockrington SCA is currently closed to the public, it is planned to be opened to the public in the long-term. The potential changes to NPWS operational and management needs as a result of this opening of the park to the public has not been acknowledged in the REF, nor have potential impacts this could have on the future operations of the RVRT.	Amend the REF to reflect the current status (closed to public access) and future status (open for public use in the short- to mid-term) of the proposed Stockrington SCA.
Throughout App A – Design Drawings	- Drawing C1119	<ul> <li>The following sections of the proposed alignment are (or are planned to be) used for NPWS management purposes:</li> <li>The RVRT alignment through Werakata SCA on Crown Land (Pelaw Main Loop Trail north from Honey Trail to Mindaribba</li> </ul>	Revision of the REF to recognise the need for ongoing vehicular access along sections of the RVRT by authorised vehicles for NPWS and emergency services management purposes. NPWS and emergency access

REF section	Page	Issue – including details as to why this is an issue for NPWS	Changes and/or conditions recommended by NPWS
		<ul> <li>land) is classified as a Strategic Category 1 fire trail and NPWS management trail.</li> <li>The portion of Seahampton Road that the RVRT traverses is currently used for NPWS management purposes and is planned to be used for public access once the proposed Stockrington SCA is opened to the public. It also houses a water pipeline easement.</li> <li>The portion of Haul Road (referred to in the REF as Quarry Access Road) that the RVRT traverses is currently used for NPWS management purposes and is planned to be used for public access once the proposed Stockrington SCA is opened to the RVRT traverses is currently used for NPWS management purposes and is planned to be used for public access once the proposed Stockrington SCA is opened to the public.</li> </ul>	should also be considered in the operational management plan developed for the trail.
		The REF has not taken these current or future management needs into consideration.	
		onsiderations	1
Exec Summary	iii	The third objective of the proposal is to "Provide better recreational access to Pambalong NR and Werakata SCA". Provision for visitor or tourist use is not a management principle of nature reserves unlike other types of reserve managed by NPWS (see Part 4 [Division 2] of the NPW Act). The promotion of public appreciation, enjoyment and understanding of the nature reserve's natural and cultural values is however a management principle of nature reserves.	Amend this section to acknowledge the access benefits to Stockrington SCA that the proposal could provide, and assess whether the proposal aligns with the management principles of nature reserves (specifically, "the promotion of public appreciation, enjoyment and understanding of the nature reserve's natural and cultural values").
Exec summary 4.2.1	iv 40	The REF states the proposal is a "road infrastructure facility" as defined in Clause 2.107 of State Environmental Planning Policy (Transport and Infrastructure) 2021 (TISEPP). This is not correct – the TISEPP definition (as quoted below) does not cover cycleways.	Correct the REF to remove references to the RVRT as being a road infrastructure facility.
		<b>"road infrastructure facilities</b> includes— (a) tunnels, ventilation shafts, emergency accessways, vehicle or pedestrian bridges, causeways, road-ferries, retaining walls, toll plazas, toll booths, security systems, bus lanes, transit lanes, transitways, transitway stations, rest areas and road related areas (within the meaning of the Road Transport Act 2013), and	

NPWS comments on CCC proposed Richmond Vale Rail Trail REF and appendices           REF         Page         Issue – including details as to why this is an issue for NPWS         Changes and/or conditions recommended by				
section	Fage	issue – including details as to why this is an issue for NFWS	NPWS	
		<ul> <li>(b) associated public transport facilities for roads used to convey passengers by means of regular bus services, and</li> <li>(c) bus layovers that are integrated or associated with roads</li> <li>(whether or not the roads are used to convey passengers by means of regular bus services), and</li> <li>(d) bus depots, and</li> <li>(e) bus stops and bus shelters, and</li> <li>(f) traffic control facilities (within the meaning of Part 6 of the Transport Administration Act 1988), TfNSW road safety training facilities and safety works, and</li> <li>(g) premises used for the purposes of testing and inspecting heavy vehicles (within the meaning of the Road Transport Act 2013) under the TfNSW Heavy Vehicle Authorised Inspection Scheme."</li> </ul>		
Table 4-1	34	The REF states the following (underline added):         "Approval must also be sought for any activity on national park estate under this Act, unless in accordance with an adopted plan of management. The proposal would impact on the Werakata State Conservation Area (SCA) reserved under the NPW Act (see Figure 4-2) and several other land parcels owned by NPWS (including the yet to be gazetted Stockrington SCA)."	Replace the underlined part of this statement with a statement that all works on lands managed by NPW are subject to NPWS approval and authorisation.	
		The underlined part of this statement is incorrect – <b>all</b> works on lands managed by NPWS are subject to NPWS approval and authorisation. A plan of management is one consideration in determining whether it is permissible for NPWS to grant such an approval but does not turn off the need for such approval.		
Fable 4-5	45	The REF states that a licence is required by NPWS "Prior to any works on NPWS estate". This is correct and it is anticipated that the proposal would require a licence under s.151 of the NPW Act for the sections of RVRT that traverse NPWS estate. Before granting such a licence, a detailed assessment against the sustainability criteria adopted under s.151B	<ul> <li>The REF should include an assessment against the sustainability criteria adopted under s.151B of the NPW Act. No lease or licence under s.151 of the NPW Act may be issued in the absence of this assessment.</li> <li><i>Recommended conditions:</i></li> <li>Before a licence under section 151 of the NPW Act and be granted, the applicant must provide the</li> </ul>	

REF section	Page	Issue – including details as to why this is an issue for NPWS	Changes and/or conditions recommended by NPWS
section		of the NPW Act must be completed <sup>1</sup> . The REF currently does not explicitly consider these criteria. NPWS will use the licensing process as an opportunity to establish certainty over how Council will manage and maintain the RVRT while not compromising NPWS's ability to manage its lands in a manner consistent with the NPW Act.	<ul> <li>NPWS</li> <li>this the applicant is to liaise with NPWS in the development of these items: <ul> <li>detailed design plans</li> <li>an assessment against the sustainability criteria adopted under s. 151B of the NPW Act</li> <li>an environmental management plan</li> <li>an operational management plan</li> <li>an emergency response plan</li> <li>a stormwater, erosion and sediment control plan</li> <li>an acid sulfate soil management plan</li> <li>a vegetation management plan</li> <li>a soil and water management plan</li> <li>a flora and fauna management plan</li> <li>a flora and fauna management plan</li> <li>a theritage management plan</li> <li>a heritage management plan</li> <li>a waste management plan</li> <li>a waste management plan</li> </ul> </li> <li>The proponent must ensure that the works proposed for those sections of the cycleway on National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) land, or NPWS tenured land, are certified to comply with the Building Code of Australia (BCA) or relevant Australian Standards. Evidence of compliance with the BCA, Disability (Access to Premises -</li> </ul>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> These criteria and guidelines are available at: www.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/parks-reserves-and-protected-areas/development-guidelines/sustainability-assessments

REF section	Page	Issue – including details as to why this is an issue for NPWS	Changes and/or conditions recommended by NPWS
			must be submitted to the satisfaction of NPWS and in accordance with the NPWS Construction Assessment Procedures (OEH 2011) <sup>2</sup> prior to the commencement of works.
Table 4-2	42	The REF provides the following assessment of cumulative effects:	The REF should consider additional cumulative
		"The proposal is not likely to result in cumulative impacts due to it coinciding with other activities in the locality. Construction planning would consider other relevant activities in consultation with stakeholders."	environmental effects of the other sections of the RVRT proposal that have not been assessed as part of this current REF and are subject to other environmental impact assessments.
		Given the RVRT has been assessed across 4 separate forms of environmental impact assessments (this current REF, 2 Environmental Impact Statements and another REF by Newcastle City Council), NPWS would consider that the cumulative environmental effects of those other components of the proposal should be considered in this regard.	
Flooding			1
2.2.2 and Figure 2-3 App B – Hydrology and Hydraulics Assessment	7-8	The REF does not adequately assess risk of flooding to trail users, infrastructure or the level of service provided. The basic hydraulic calculation of catchment runoff and culvert capacity does not assess flood risks to path users, potential for flood damage to infrastructure or for development of emergency procedures for path closure.	A detailed flood assessment should be carried out for the RVRT in line with current best practices. Existing Cessnock City Council Flood information should be examined as part of this. Where flood risks are identified, upgrade of infrastructure should be
		The REF indicates levels of service as low as 1 in 1 year for the RVRT. Very low levels of service are provided in locations 68, 82, 90. The REF's hydraulic assessment only examines culvert capacity. It is not known if riverine flooding, backwater flooding or flash flooding will affect the RVRT. It may be necessary to close the RVRT when flood conditions render it unsafe. The REF provides insufficient	considered, and emergency management procedures should be developed.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/parks-reserves-and-protected-areas/development-guidelines/construction-assessment-procedures
	NPWS comments on CCC proposed Richmond Vale Rail Trail REF and appendices						
REF section	Page	Issue – including details as to why this is an issue for NPWS	Changes and/or conditions recommended by NPWS				
		information to outline how flood risks to users of the track will be mitigated or managed.					
		Drain blockages and the impacts of climate change have also not been assessed. For example, it appears that the track will be overtopped with the 770 mm of water at Back Creek near Woodford Street during a 1% annual exceedance probability (AEP) event, although no mitigation measures are proposed.					
		An assessment of RVRT bridges should also be undertaken to examine the potential for blockage of these structures. Where changes to bridges, embankment heights or drainage patterns are proposed, flood impacts should also be assessed.					
		The REF includes flood mapping provided by NCC for its Local Government Area, however no reference is made to existing Cessnock Council Flood Studies or maps. Cessnock City Council has a number of existing flood studies which may cover the RVRT.					
2.2.2 and Figure 2-3	7-8	The impact of concentrated discharge from diversion drains for embankments has not been assessed. The proposal includes installation of diversion drains at the tops of cut embankments to improve bank stability, however, no details are provided regarding how or where the concentrated flows from these drains will occur and if this will cause impacts.	The REF should consider impacts associated with the discharge of water from diversion drains and provide further details about where discharges will occur.				
		Large sections of the RVRT follow an existing disturbed rail alignment and water main easement. Due to this, the REF has assessed construction impacts as minor. However the REF has not fully considered construction impacts in a number of areas where works may occur outside existing disturbance limits. Examples of this include the demolition and replacement of two large bridges (Wallis and Surveyors Creek bridges). Significant stabilisation works are also proposed around Tunnel 3. Significant construction works will occur in these areas and likely involve the use of large earthmoving machinery, piling rigs, concrete trucks and cranes. The need for a 27-tonne crane is mentioned for example in the heritage report.	Additional consideration should be given to construction impacts of the RVRT, particularly for major infrastructure components such as Wallis Creek Bridge, Surveyors Creek Bridge and Tunnel 3 stabilisation works.				

NPWS comments on CCC proposed Richmond Vale Rail Trail REF and appendices						
REF section	Page	Issue – including details as to why this is an issue for NPWS	Changes and/or conditions recommended by NPWS			
		Access roads may be required at each side of creek crossings for bridge works. The REF does not give any details of how construction equipment will access locations and whether disturbance will coccur outside of existing disturbed areas.				
General con	nments					
Арр С		Appears Geotechnical assessment for the Shortland to Tarro portion (CoN) of the RVRT has been uploaded to Council's exhibition website.	NPWS requests the Geotechnical assessment for the Stockrington to Kurri Kurri portion of the RVRT and recommends this assessment also be uploaded to Council's exhibition website.			
summary walking experience between Kurri Kurri and Newcastle that does not Ho		walking experience between Kurri Kurri and Newcastle that does not	Amend statement to consider Seahampton Road, Dog Hole Road and any other existing road networks the RVRT appears to traverse.			
3.2.5	21 and throughout	The area referred to as the "midway precinct" in the REF has been agreed to be named the "Midtrial Precinct", as stipulated in an agreement Project Funding Agreement: Mitdtrail Precinct (Stage 1) 4 April 2019 between NPWS and the Donaldson Coal Trust.	Reference to the Midway Precinct throughout the REF should be amended to refer to the Mid Trail Precinct.			
References	136	Reference list contains draft Hunter Wetlands Plan of Management (PoM).	NPWS advises that the <u>Hunter Wetlands National Park</u> <u>Plan of Management</u> has recently been adopted and identifies the proposal within that park.			

The General Manager, Cessnock City

I give my total support to this great initiative to develop the Richmond Vale Rail Trail (RVRT). I have been following the progress over many years and admire the dedication of the volunteers.

To have infrastructure as the RVRT would be advantageous for the Hunter Region. Connecting areas enabling users a safe commute and enjoy a pleasant ride. Using the trail as a commute would reduce congestion on the roads and help towards reducing the carbon footprint.

There are numerous benefits to cycling and to have good safe infrastructure will encourage more people outdoors to participate in an healthy activities such as walking and cycling. All ages groups can cycle and with the increased popularity of ebikes people who have never cycled are now enjoying cycling.

The RVRT has a unique history and would interest both locals and visitors to the area. Ecotourism is growing more popular and to have RVRT along with what is on offer throughout the Hunter regions will only encourage more visitors to the region.

With more visitors and locals using the RVRT would be a positive impact on the local economy in particular the small businesses and new business would be catering to the demand such as bike hire, transport, cafés, restaurants and accommodation.

The benefits have been seen in other regions with the development of rail trails. Brisbane Valley Rail Trail, Central West Cycling Trail, Tumburrumba, Rosebrook Rail Trail and a soon to be open Tweed Rail Trail. Having recently cycled the CWC and seen the positive outcomes from the cyclists visiting these small villages. I was part of a group of 8 cyclists each had accommodation, food and drink spending \$150 plus a night in each town for 6 nights. We were not the only cyclist doing the ride this particular week there were twenty on a day stopped for break for morning tea at a farm that has offered morning teas to fill the demand. I also have enjoyed cycling rail trails in South Australian. Closer to home the positive impact cycling has on a town is Dungog being a cycling destination, the town has come to life with new shops opening it offers not only MTB but other rides in the area.

I am looking forward to enjoy riding the Richmond Vale Rail Trial in the very near future. King regards

To the General Manager,

I am writing to give my full support for the creation of the Richmond Rail Trail REF.

My family are avid cyclists, often riding in the bush. Riding on the roads is sympathetic too dangerous. We often travel to Newcastle with the bikes to ride the established rail trails in Newcastle, such as the Fernleigh Track and Tramway, or around Warners Bay area.

Our family also plan holidays around rail trails across NSW, VIC, and QLD. Hence the trail potentially will be established as a tourist destination, bringing financial gains to the area.

The planned trail has significant historical value, and is abundant in birds and other wild life. A shared path benefits people with a wide range of interests... but all sharing a love of enjoying the outdoors.

I live in Cessnock. The cycling community is growing, one just has to look around and see the amount of people getting around on bikes in our beautiful vineyards.

Looking forward to seeing you on the trail

To the General Manager,

I am writing to give my full support for the creation of the Richmond Rail Trail REF.

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The cycling community is growing, one just has to look around and see the amount of people getting around on bikes in our beautiful vineyards.

Looking forward to seeing you on the trail

Attention: The General Manager, Cessnock City Council

I strongly support current plans for the 17 kilometre western section of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail.

In particular, my family looks forward to being able to actively explore new areas in the Lower Hunter, including beautiful bushland settings and historic railway tunnels. The RVRT will benefit cyclists, walkers and runners, promote healthy active lifestyles, and provide safer off-road connections between communities.

The RVRT is long overdue and approval for this western section by Lake Macquarie and Cessnock Councils is critical. I also call on the local Councils to actively pursue funding to construct the trail.

Sincerely,

I would like to support the proposed development for mountain bike track as it promotes physical activity in both children and adults and also economic benefit of bring visitor to the region. Regards,

To: The General Manager

Cessnock City Council

I would like to express my strong support for the approval of the 17km western section of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail (RVRT) by Cessnock and Lake Macquarie Councils. I also strongly support the establishment of the 32km Trail as a whole.

As a resident of the Cessnock LGA at Black Hill for nearly 40 years (now recently living in Newcastle) I remember regularly hearing the Richmond Vale train and it's whistle from our property.

It seems somehow right that this historic railway track that served it's community so well in the past can now continue to serve the next generations of our community.

It will become such a valuable community asset - a shared pathway for walkers, cyclists and wheelers. It's establishment will not only benefit the residents of the Cessnock LGA but also all of the Lower Hunter Valley.

The 32km trail from Newcastle to Kurri Kurri would attract visitors from near and far. This would generate economic activity for businesses large and small in the Cessnock LGA. Visitors to the vineyards, for example, could consider staying an extra night or two in order to experience the trail either by walking sections of it or cycling it.

The RVRT would become known as a large scale recreational asset with unique features to interest people of all ages and mobility:

- those seeking the physical and health benefits of walking, cycling or using wheelchairs

- those seeking to enjoy the natural environment, making their way through many different ecosystems and habitats

- birdwatchers

- those seeking to experience an historic rail track and heritage tunnels of architectural and engineering significance.

- those seeking to experience the mining history of The Coalfields.

I urge Cessnock and Lake Macquarie Councils to approve the development of this 17km section of the RVRT and to actively pursue the funding needed to construct it.

Making this trail a reality is long overdue.

It will bring so many benefits to the

community and I am very much looking forward to it's construction.

# Submission: Richmond Vale Rail Trail REF

Date: 28-June-2022

Attn: Kate Harris, Principal Recreation Planner

The General Manager Cessnock City Council PO Box 152, Cessnock NSW 2325, Australia recreation@cessnock.nsw.gov.au Phone: 02 4993 4100 Ref: https://www.cessnock.nsw.gov.au/Council/Have-your-say/Richmond-Vale-Rail-Trail-Review-of-Environmental-Factors

Dear Sir/Madam

I am writing in support of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail. The major segment of the trail being within the Cessnock LGA and addressed in the Review of Environmental Factors (REF) referenced above. Although residing in Tasmania I have a long personal and family connection with the area and envisage using the rail trail, on our regular visits.

My great grandfather and grandfathers rode their bikes to work, from Kurri Kurri to Stockrington, along the line circa 1930s, as did I in the 1980s. With this direct connection, I now look forward to sharing the same experience with my own grandchildren, and having that experience, made available to the broader public.

This rail trail presents an ideal opportunity to provide safe recreational cycling over an extended distance, traversing multiple ecosystems from mountains to coast, while preserving a window into the area's mining heritage, providing a positive legacy for coal mining.

As a rail trail, the RVRT opportunity is comparable to the best in Australia and around the world. Its proximity to a large urban population and its uniqueness in providing long safe stretches of cycling (without on-grade vehicle crossings) in the Hunter Valley further enhance the potential of this rail trail.

The recreation, health and lifestyle benefits, broad appeal (catering for a wide demographic and wide range of skills) is obvious, as are the potential economic benefits. The potential and the benefits have been well articulated and documented for many years and it is imperative that this project be brought to fruition as soon as practicable. There is an immediate need for local jobs (design and construction) and local active recreational opportunities, recovering from the COVID-19 crisis.

I support the Richmond Vale Rail Trail and encourage its rapid approval and construction. This has been an unrealised opportunity for far too long and is needed to support the Newcastle and Coalfields communities now, more than ever.

### Supporting notes:

In support of the project, it is noted that the aim and key objectives of the project are met:

- The aim to "enhance active transport and create connectivity between communities" will be realised by this project, effectively connecting the Coalfields communities to the city of Newcastle with a safe (minimal vehicle interaction) via an efficient route (minimum distance, gentle grades, cycle friendly surfaces, inclusive in terms of capability requirement) through spectacular country (attractive for the physiography of the route and the country it traverses, promoting its use)
- The objective "to support future growth by connecting local and regional users at key access points including Kurri Kurri, Buchanan and Stockrington" will be met with the access points logically segmenting the route in terms of distance while coinciding with the regional communities of Buchanan and Stockrington.
- As regional roads have become busier and congested, they have become less safe and less attractive for cycling. The RVRT will "provide commuters and recreational users with" a much needed "safe alternative route to the local road network, including the New England Highway and the M1 Pacific Motorway"
- The trail will "provide better recreational access to the Pambalong Nature Reserve and the Werakata and Stockrington State Conservation Areas", directly from the population centres of Kurri Kurri and Greater Newcastle / Lake Macquarie without the necessity of using motor transport
- The RVRT will "protect and maintain natural conservation values of adjacent lands including conservation areas", providing a sustainable transport route, without the impact on wildlife corridors incurred by linear infrastructure such as freeways
- The provision of "healthier, more active lifestyles and opportunities for public appreciation and enjoyment of the local natural environment" is self-evident and embodied in this proposal

The proposal also protects significant mining heritage, which otherwise risks destruction or continuing degradation, negatively impacting both the heritage value and the surrounding environment.

### **Questions:**

Geology: Has the geology been adequately considered? Given that the Geology component in Sect 6.3.1 of the GHD report, uploaded for exhibition "Richmond Vale Rail Trail -Stockrington to Kurri Kurri, Review of Environmental Factors, March 2022", notes the Newcastle and Tomago Coal Measures without reference to the Greta Coal Measures. The Greta Coal measures are central to this proposal in terms of context, this being the route of the rail line that connected the Greta Seam mines to the port of Newcastle. The physical extent of the Tomago and overlying Newcastle Coal Measures are bounded to the east of Wallis Creek. It should be ensured that the extent to which the route traverses the Greta Coal Measures, the nature of Greta Seam coal and historic mining, has been considered. Fall-in/pot-hole (subsidence) adjacent to the easement and the high sulfur nature of Greta Seam coal (acid forming and spontaneous combustion potential) requires consideration. Although there are minor references made in "C.5. Shallow mine workings", Appendix-C-Geotechnical-Investigation-Report GHD, a greater level of comfort that the Greta Coal Measures have been adequately considered, is prudent. e.g., danger / adjacent subsidence potential and potential for environmental impacts from Greta Seam material (coal, chitta, ballast, insitu or re-mobilised).

**E-bikes:** Have e-bikes, scooters and mobility scooters been addressed in the design and trail operation? It is noted that the uptake of e-bikes has been rapid and is likely to be ongoing and has the potential to rapidly constitute a significant proportion of trail traffic volume.

To: The General Manager, Cessnock City Council (recreation@cessnock.nsw.gov.au)

Re: Richmond Vale Rail Trail REF

Dear Mr Maginnity,

I strongly support current plans for the 17km western section of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail and this project has such obvious merits, it should have already been built.

My personal reasons for supporting this project are :

1. As a novice cyclist (neither a cycling club member nor group rider), I can't wait to ride both the eastern and western sections of the RVRT, which will provide an off-road round trip exceeding 50-60km; and

2. My family looks forward to being able to actively explore new areas including beautiful bushland settings and historic railway tunnels.

Major benefits I see from this project include:

### Health and Lifestyle Benefits

- increases safety via alternatives to road network usage;
- promotes active lifestyles, which will have positive physical and mental health benefits;

• encourages locals and visitors to actively explore an array of Hunter Valley landscapes and attractions;

### **Community Access and Connection Benefits**

- provides a safe, pleasant pathway between communities;
- facilitates daily bicycle commuting, reducing emissions and road congestion;
- strengthens Hunter recreational opportunities and promotes connections between metropolitan and rural communities;
- thoughtfully considers users with reduced mobility;

### **Environmental and Heritage Benefits**

• improves accessibility to a host of environmental attractions adjacent to the RVRT (e.g., coastal wetlands, nature reserves, and national parks);

• minimises potential negative impacts on the local environment, by using previously cleared areas;

### **Economic, Tourism and Other Regional Benefits**

• will foster precinct development and a mixture of cycling and other activities for families (encouraging return visits);

• will improve the Hunter's image as an active lifestyle and cycling destination;

- will add to the other dedicated local cycleways (e.g., Fernleigh & Tramway Tracks), encouraging multi-day regional cycling visits;
- will further stimulate local economic growth and diversity and support local businesses and new initiatives (e.g., trail side coffee shops, bike hire, fun-runs, guided walks);
- will provide the spine for future regional network connections (e.g., to the Newcastle Cyclesafe Network, BGH Regional Park, other Maitland and Cessnock trails);

### **Cycling-specific Benefits**

• will promote increased recreational cycling by casual riders, as well as those who enjoy a longer group ride; and

• will expand the Australian rail trail network, which already contributes positively to many communities.

Safety is one of my main concerns. So, having a major new trail that is totally separated from cars is exactly what I want in my local area. The RVRT will also benefit a broad range of other user groups, promote healthier lifestyles, attract cycling groups to the area, and encourage local Hunter businesses and tourism initiatives.

My only negative view is the trail should have been designed as 4 meters wide where possible to cater for future growth as I have often seen bottlenecks on the Fernleigh track due to congestion (thanks to it being used by so many people) which is of similar width to the RVRT plans.

Approval for this 17km western section by Lake Macquarie and Cessnock Councils is critical and I strongly support the current plans outlined in the REF. I strongly encourage the local Councils to seek trail funding as soon as possible and to commence trail construction.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions about my personal views of this project.

Cheers

Dear General Manager,

I write in support of the development of the rail corridor in the Cessnock LGA for public use. This will provide a valuable recreational opportunity to residents and tourists alike. It will also offer the opportunity to educate and celebrate the contribution that mining has made to the European History of the Hunter Valley.

My partner worked in this area, as did his father and grandfather. They recount fascinating snippets of history including the use of pit ponies and the arduous process of having to get to the Stockrington colliery to start work. Interpretation of this history would be valuable, and could include not just written information, but verbal histories available on phones.

Hopefully interest generated in this project and increased visitation will have flow on effects to assist the Rail Museum and Kurri local business for starters.

The COVID lock downs made me explore the local area and appreciate the vast open spaces we have. I enjoy cycling, but am nervous about using many of the road systems, so an off road shared pathway would be of great value.

Having links to some dedicated mountain bike trails would also be useful. This could provide mountain bikers the opportunity to break off and rejoin the track and hopefully limit unplanned and informal trails being created.

Dogs should be allowed (under control) on the pathway.

Trail bikes should not be allowed. The use of e scooters and e bikes needs careful consideration but in general I would support their use.

Yours sincerely,

To: The General Manager, Cessnock City Council

I strongly support current plans for the 17km western section of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail.

In particular, my family looks forward to being able to actively explore new areas in the Lower Hunter, including beautiful bushland settings and historic railway tunnels. The RVRT will benefit cyclists, walkers and runners, promote healthy active lifestyles, and provide safer off-road connections between communities.

The RVRT is long overdue and approval for this western section by Lake Macquarie and Cessnock Councils is critical. I also call on the local Councils to actively pursue funding to construct the trail.

Sincerely,

To: The General Manager, Cessnock City Council

#### Good Afternoon

I would simply like to express my strong support for the planned 17km western section of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail.

I have lived in Black Hill for 38 years and have had to endure an almost constant barrage of development proposals that threaten our community's lifestyles and character – including proposals for gravel quarries, coal mines, waste facilities and industrial estates.

The Rail Trail breaks that trend and will be a wonderful, positive community resource, both for locals and visitors – for people of all ages, and for current and future generations.

The Rail Trail will promote healthy active lifestyles, and safe off road connections between communities.

We just need to get the Rail Trail built – it has been a long time in the making.

Kind Regards,

**General Manager** 

**Cessnock City Council** 

#### Re: RICHMOND VALE RAIL TRAIL REF

I enthusiastically support the approval of the 17km Western Section of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail (RVRT) currently on exhibition. Approval of this section by Cessnock and Lake Macquarie Councils is essential so that it can link with the already largely approved Eastern Section. This would allow the whole 32km of the RVRT to become a reality.

The Western Section of the RVRT offers great variety - from the enjoyment of nature to the appreciation of beautiful historic railway tunnels and bridges. This shared pathway will attract a great variety of users including walkers, cyclists, runners and wheelers. The safety of extensive off-road cycling will be very attractive for locals and visitors alike. All those individuals, groups and families pursuing healthy activity over various durations and distances, from 100metres to 60km, will benefit from this new shared trail.

In fact, I believe that the RVRT shared pathway will become not only a Cessnock but also a Lower Hunter active lifestyle destination. The new attraction of the RVRT will add variety for visitors to Kurri and to the Cessnock vineyard areas. Visitors who like an active and healthy lifestyle in a beautiful natural environment will be attracted to it. So, wine and food lovers can have all of that AND express their active lifestyle choices on this new shared pathway!

I believe the economic benefits to the Cessnock and Lower Hunter will be significant. The social and economic analysis document supporting the RVRT found a Benefit Cost Ratio of 2.4 meaning that for every dollar spent on this project there will be a two dollar forty benefit to the community. Short stay Australian travel is booming and Cessnock is ideally placed to take advantage of that. Small businesses would benefit and new ones would be created such as bike hire and additional food shops for Kurri. Accommodation businesses are sure to benefit. For example visitors to the vineyard area, staying for an extra night or two to experience the rail trail, would greatly increase economic activity.

Covid and lockdowns have brought into focus the critical importance of green open public spaces and how all of us can benefit greatly from being active in them. In addition, the latest census shows that our biggest health concern is our mental health with over two million Australians reporting that issue. A recommended treatment for many mental health conditions is to actively engage with nature. The RVRT exactly fits the bill for locals and visitors alike.

I believe that accessibility is the key to unlocking all the benefits of the trail. However, unfortunately at this point in time, none of the 32km trail is accessible for use. The design of the trail has four entry points in the Western Section which will accommodate visitors with varying interests and timeframes and will attract greater use of the trail and more return visits. These would provide users who have differing needs, interests and time frames with flexibility. Cyclists, hikers, casual walkers, family groups and the less mobile will all be catered for by the strategic location of the access points.

I lived in the Cessnock LGA at Black Hill for nearly forty years (recently moved into Newcastle) and I consider myself extremely fortunate to have had the opportunity to explore and become familiar with the varied local landscapes. I have enjoyed hiking and cycling through the beautiful forested ridgelines near Mount Sugarloaf and the nearby Pambalong Wetlands in the area of the RVRT. I still clearly remember the feelings of excitement and wonder at discovering for the first time the historic brick tunnels and bridges. I have come to know and love them and I am passionate about telling others about what needs unlocking to make it accessible for us all.

For the last 10 years I have been actively involved in the movement to promote the RVRT and to bring this wonderful RVRT project to fruition. I would like everyone to have the opportunity to access and experience this engaging area in some way. As a member of the Donaldson Conservation Trust we commissioned the book 'Towards the Richmond Vale Rail Trail' and initiated a public seminar on Active Transport and the RVRT both in 2016 by the Tom Farrell Institute at Newcastle University. I am also actively working in RVRT Inc. which is the major community supporters group.

It is very frustrating for people like me who, for year upon year everyone we describe the project to says, yes it is a no brainer. It is no reassurance to hear that yes, someday, it will happen. Hunter communities deserve and expect nothing less than action. Everyone wants it and wants it now.

Other funding decisions demonstrate that both levels of government do have 'pots of money' for major regional infrastructure like this and for rail trails because they are fully aware of their many benefits. However this funding can only be accessed once all the approvals for the trail are finalised

So, I call on Cessnock and Lake Macquarie Councils to urgently approve these current REFs and give high priority to seeking out funding opportunities to the State and Federal Governments for detailed design work and construction.

Regards

The General Manager,

Cessnock City Council.

Th RVRT will provide many benefits to the Lower Hunter as a drawcard for cyclists and walkers and picnicers and families. It has scenery, history, and recreation. It dovetails with the wine country one end and Newcastle and the sea at the other end. It is an exciting project.

I strongly support current plans for the 17km western section of RVRT.

Regards

3<sup>rd</sup> July, 2022

### Attention: Mr. Robert Maginnity (*Acting General Manager*), and Ms. Kate Harris (*Principal Recreation Planner*), Cessnock City Council.

Email: <u>recreation@cessnock.nsw.gov.au</u> Post: PO Box 152, Cessnock NSW 2325.

Sent by Email

### Re: Richmond Vale Rail Trail REF (for Western Section of RVRT) Personal Submission in Support of the Current Proposal

Thank you for providing this opportunity to comment on the *Review of Environmental Factors* (REF) currently on public exhibition, and for all of the RVRT-related work undertaken by Council and its staff during the past few years.

## 1. Personal Context (... and Disclosures)

I have contributed to local community and environment protection groups for over 30 years. I have also been a representative on several Community Consultative/Liasion Committees, including Daracon's Buttai Quarry, Black Hill Quarry, and the Abel underground coal mine, together with associated welfare and conservation trusts, such as the Donaldson Conservation Trust (DCT).

With respect to the DCT, during the past decade we progressively allocated approx. \$750k of the available Trust funds to RVRT and related projects, including a \$175k contribution to the City of Newcastle, as co-ordinating Council for the initial design and environmental assessment components of the RVRT project, and \$257k to the National Parks and Wildlife Service to facilitate future development of a Mid-trail Precinct.

While I fully support the detailed submission from our community group, this current brief submission presents my own personal views.

Given the various community-based activities outlined above, associated discussions and submissions, and multiple visits to sections of the trail, I have a relatively broad knowledge of the RVRT and its history. I also **fully support approval of the REF in its current form by Cessnock City Council and Lake Macquarie City Council**. However, I have decided to focus this personal submission on just a few aspects of the current proposal for the Western Section of the trail.

## 2. General Comments

Rail Trails are potentially a wonderful community asset – they re-purpose disused rail corridors and turn them into engaging, productive spaces that can be enjoyed by a wide variety of users.

If local environments surrounding the trail can be adequately protected, and adjacent landowners are not unduly impacted, then there should be relatively few impediments to the development of increasing numbers of Rail Trails – particularly in NSW, which currently has only a relatively small number of trails.

With respect to the RVRT, there are a host of unique features that it possesses which should lead to it becoming a highly successful Rail Trail, including: traversing a wide variety of landscapes; linking metropolitan and rural areas; providing access to previously inaccessible conservation areas; and having a rich, multi-layered history that can still be actively explored via visits to historic brick railway tunnels, examination of mining remnants, and trips to nearby communities and attractions.

## 3. Some Comments about the RVRT and REF

I have thumbed through the current REF for the Western Section of the RVRT and all of the supporting Appendices, most of which were exhibited previously (in August/September 2020). They identify the RVRT's key features and benefits, likely impacts, and required mitigation strategies.

The RVRT will provide a broad range of benefits for Hunter residents and visitors, including all of the health, lifestyle, social and community connection benefits that typically accompany developments such as shared pathways. The RVRT will also support local businesses and stimulate economic growth and diversity.

From my perspective, opening up access to previously inaccessible conservation areas is also a major, regionally significant benefit of the trail.

The RVRT enjoys strong community support, has undergone appropriate levels of consultation, and is demonstrably cost-effective. The current proposal, as outlined in the REF, is also clearly in the public interest, as well as being consistent with regional strategic plans and more recent walking and cycling plans developed by local Councils.

The REF demonstrates that a reasonable balance can be achieved between protecting local environments, minimising impacts on affected stakeholders, and developing a unique, shared community pathway.

Indeed, based on the REF's findings, there appear to be no major impediments to finalising Concept-level approvals for this section of the RVRT.

Moreover, any matters still requiring resolution can be adequately dealt with during the detailed design stage, including further negotiation with affected landowners and additional RVRT design and management consultation with agencies such as NPWS.

## 4. Next Steps

Required approvals for the remaining RVRT segments need to be secured as soon as possible – so that co-ordinated applications for external trail funding can be pursued.

Together with some of my RVRT Inc. colleagues, I have been advocating strongly for a Mid-trail Precinct within Stockrington State Conservation Area – adjacent to Seahampton Road – to be progressively developed as a valued destination in its own right. Relocation of two of the RVRT access points to more optimal locations has also been requested.

We also strongly recommend that some additional funding is sought within the major RVRT-related external funding applications to support planning for, promotion, and further development of some of the identified (future) 'destination points'.

I also urge the participating Councils not to cut corners during the detailed design and construction phases – just to make any available funding go that little bit further. For example, reducing trail surface quality, rest points, access points, signage, and so on, will ultimately compromise trail safety or accessibility. In the end, this will only serve to decrease RVRT patronage, and generate higher maintenance costs. Universal access design principles also need to be retained, to allow everyone to enjoy the trail's benefits.

It is also patently obvious that opportunities for increased community connections, safe cycling, access to varied landscapes and regional attractions, tourism and economic growth, will all be substantially greater when the trail is actually fully completed. So, some innovative ways to accelerate the RVRT's development would also be appreciated!

Let's also do what we can to avoid trail fragmentation – during the detailed planning, funding, construction and operational stages. Ongoing stakeholder and community consultation, and establishing a representative Regional RVRT Planning and Management Committee, are also central to optimising the trail's benefits and making the RVRT something about which the Hunter can be truly proud.

Thank you for considering these issues and suggestions.



## Richmond Vale Rail Trail (RVRT) *Review of Environmental Factors (REF)* for Western Section of RVRT ("Stockrington to Kurri Kurri") – Lake Macquarie and Cessnock LGAs

## Submission in Support of the Current Proposal by Richmond Vale Rail Trail Inc. (the RVRT Supporters' Group)

(To Cessnock City Council: <a href="mailto:recreation@cessnock.nsw.gov.au">recreation@cessnock.nsw.gov.au</a>)

July 2<sup>nd</sup> 2022

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## Richmond Vale Rail Trail (RVRT) *Review of Environmental Factors (REF)* for Western Section of RVRT ("Stockrington to Kurri Kurri") – Lake Macquarie and Cessnock LGAs Submission in Support of the Current Proposal by Richmond Vale Rail Trail Inc. (the RVRT Supporters' Group) (To Cessnock City Council: recreation@cessnock.nsw.gov.au) July 2<sup>nd</sup> 2022

Thank you for providing an opportunity to comment on the *REF* for the Western Section of the RVRT, which is currently on public exhibition (May 12<sup>th</sup> to July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022).

## 1. RVRT Inc.

This submission has been prepared by members of Richmond Vale Rail Trail (RVRT) Inc., the RVRT Supporters' Group. Our members have long-standing interests in developing the RVRT as a key Hunter Region shared pathway and resource, promoting a broad range of lifestyle, recreational, environmental, cultural/heritage, business and tourist activities.

Collectively, we have detailed knowledge about the RVRT, other cycleways and trails, their associated benefits, and the community's views and expectations. RVRT Inc. is committed to working with local communities, other organisations and stakeholder groups, to help promote and deliver this important regional initiative.

## 2. The Current Proposal

The 32km RVRT (40km with connections) will be a continuous **off-road shared pathway** running from Shortland (near the *Hunter Wetlands Centre*) to Kurri Kurri (*Log of Knowledge Park*), connecting four LGAs (Newcastle, Lake Macquarie, Cessnock and Maitland). The trail runs primarily along the former Richmond Vale railway alignment, as well as utilising Hunter Water Corporation pipeline corridors (e.g., Shortland to Tarro segment and Fletcher connection). It will be a multi-purpose trail, supporting a **broad range of user groups**. The Hunter and Central Coast Regional Planning Panel (PPSHCC-55) granted planning approval in December 2021 for the initial 13km (*coastal wetlands*) Eastern Section of the RVRT within Newcastle LGA (*'Shortland to Hexham Junction and Minmi/Fletcher'*) – see Figure 1.

<u>Current Proposal for Western Section</u>: The 17km Western Section of the RVRT within Lake Macquarie and Cessnock LGAs (*'Stockrington to Kurri Kurri'*) is identified as a 'road infrastructure

Figure 1. Western Section of Richmond Vale Rail Train (RVRT) [Brown line] and recently approved 'Legs' within Eastern Section (December 2021)



facility' under clause 2.107 of the State Environmental Planning Policy (Transport and Infrastructure SEPP, 2021) – see **Brown Line** in Figure 1. Consequently, a Development Application is not required, with a comprehensive *Review of Environmental Factors (REF)* considered to be appropriate, under Division 5.1 of the EP&A Act.

The *REF* [March 2022] that is currently on exhibition presents Concept Design Plans for the Western Section (<u>Appendix A</u>), together with key trail features and benefits, environmental assessments, legislative and management considerations, and potential mitigation measures. Based on the feedback received and other considerations, the two Councils need to separately determine whether this current RVRT proposal should proceed largely as outlined in the *REF*.

### Western Section Trail Features (Preferred Options):

- Typically, the path within the Western Section will have a 3m wide flexible sealed pavement (e.g., granular material overlaid with asphalt or concrete), primarily following existing disused rail alignments (Lake Macquarie LGA: 2.7km; and Cessnock LGA: 14.4km).
- Restoration and repair of **three Historic brick Railway Tunnels** (two in Lake Macquarie LGA).
- Improved access to conservation areas As the majority of the trail is on publicly owned land (Crown Lands, NPWS), over time, there will be enhanced public access to Pambalong Nature Reserve, Stockrington & Werakata State Conservation Areas; appropriate access agreements and operational plans will also be negotiated with all landowners, together with mitigation measures, where required (e.g., fencing, screening, signage, management measures).
- Construction of new concrete bridges and demolition of existing dilapidated timber bridges (and possible repurposing): 15m two-span bridge at Surveyors Creek; 70m single-span bridge at Wallis Creek; and diverted short culvert crossing at Werakata Creek.
- Four at grade local road crossings: Dog Hole Road, Stockrington; Quarry Access Road and Hunter Expressway construction yard (off George Booth Drive), Richmond Vale; and Pokolbin Street, Kurri Kurri.
- Provision for new car parks, other amenities (e.g., toilet and shelter areas, bike facilities, water fountains, potential picnic sites), and construction related facilities (e.g., compound and stockpile areas) at various access points (illustrated in *REF* Figure 3-1), together with some exploration of additional access locations within Stockrington State Conservation Area (e.g., Mid-trail Precinct).
- Plans to build a high quality shared trail will also be advantageous from a variety of perspectives: minimising ongoing environmental impacts; encouraging a wide range of users, including those with reduced mobility; and reducing longer-term maintenance costs to Councils and other stakeholders.
- Potential negative impacts on the local environment and adjacent properties are also considered to be relatively minor and manageable, mainly because the RVRT uses existing embankments and previously cleared areas.
- Importantly, initial development approval for this trail section will add to previous approvals within Newcastle LGA, helping to facilitate integrated trail development across the Hunter Region; after all, the many regional benefits of the trial will only be fully realised when all of the key segments are in place.
- A trail **construction timeline** of approx. 12-18 months is currently anticipated (after receipt of required funding).

## 3. Unique Features (Whole Trail)

In evaluating the merits of the Current Proposal, consideration also needs to be given to the **unique features** of the whole trail, and to the **opportunities and benefits that will arise** from developing the **whole integrated 40km trail** – and for **all user groups** (not just cyclists) – both in the short- and the long-term.

As detailed below, there are several inter-related aspects of the RVRT that **set it apart from other rail trails and greenways** - and which, over time, are likely to contribute to increased patronage, return visits, and a stronger sense of community and regional ownership.

### Landscape Diversity:

The RVRT traverses a wide variety of landscapes and ecosystems, over a relatively short distance. Visitors will be able to travel from coastal wetlands, through nature reserves and conservation areas, visit historic tunnels in forested semi-mountainous areas in the vicinity of Mt. Sugarloaf, and then travel through rural locations to visit regional towns. According to Callum Vizer's research report in the 'Towards the Richmond Vale Rail Trail' book (2017, Tom Farrell Institute for the Environment [TFI], University of Newcastle), the trail '... passes through sixteen distinct vegetation communities, the majority of which are dominated by intact native vegetation', which add significant value to the RVRT through its '... scenic beauty, biodiversity values and provision of opportunities for conservation related recreational activities'. These features stand in marked contrast to many other Australian rail trails, which, while they might be longer, tend to travel through more uniform and cleared landscapes, often along disused public rail corridors that once connected relatively remote towns.

### **Conservation Conduit:**

Related to the above, and as noted in <u>Appendix G</u> (page vi), '... Establishment of the RVRT will provide a unique conduit for accessing the region's varied ecosystems, ... which will encourage longer-term development of other local walking trails, further social/recreational infrastructure investment, and associated educational and environmental programs. It will also stimulate long-term development of related recreational, educational and environmental programs'. The critical aspect of this conservation conduit is that '... the RVRT passes through or nearby to several high conservation value areas that have **previously been largely inaccessible to the general public**'.

Most of the Newcastle LGA section of the trail traverses land with high conservation value, including coastal wetlands, national parks and reserves; the only exception being the urban component within Shortland. Indeed, there are at least **five regional resources** in close proximity to the Eastern Section of the RVRT: Hunter Wetlands Centre; Hunter Wetlands National Park; Pambalong Nature Reserve; Stockrington State Conservation Area; and Blue Gum Hills Regional Park. The Western Section of the trail is equally as well endowed with high conservation value areas, including Stockrington, Mt. Sugarloaf, and Werakata State Conservation Areas.

### Corridor Blend, Community Connections and Other Linkage Opportunities:

Another unique aspect of the RVRT is its blending of railway alignments and pipeline corridors to **maximise potential community connections** and trail use opportunities. More importantly, as

noted in <u>Appendix G</u> (Section 2.2.8), the trail 'links both old and new suburbs with varying characteristics', providing '**equitable access** for residents with varied socio-economic status'.

Unlike most Australian rail trails, the RVRT also **links metropolitan and rural areas**. There are also substantial opportunities for the RVRT to become the hub (centrepiece or spine) within a **network of regional community pathways**. An extension along the Minmi alignment to the popular Blue Gum Hills Regional Park is proposed, together with connections to planned housing estates and onwards to Lake Macquarie LGA. To the southeast, future connections can be made to the University and the wider Newcastle Cyclesafe Network. To the northwest, a variety of connections can be made to locations within Maitland LGA. Westerly extensions further into Cessnock LGA are also contemplated. For example, the Cessnock Trails Strategy (May, 2020) includes a '*Cross-region Connectivity Map*' and a '*Trails Network Vision Map*'. The latter includes five overlapping zones: Heritage and Conservation (which the RVRT sits within), Hunter Gateway, Wine Country, Outdoor Adventure, and Wilderness Zones. Local connections from Log of Knowledge Park to Kurri Kurri town centre will also facilitate exploration of attractions such as the town murals, Col Brown Rotary Park, and the new Pit Pony statue. <u>Ten Points of Interest</u> within the Western Section of the RVRT are further highlighted in **Figure 2** on the next page.

### **Decades of Preparatory Public Infrastructure Spending:**

Preparation of the EIS and *REF* (for the Eastern and Western Sections of the RVRT, respectively), and the numerous supporting studies, have taken considerable effort over the past 5 years, and cost several hundred thousand dollars. However, as detailed below, this is only a fraction of the **tens of millions of dollars** of Federal and State monies that have effectively been spent on preparatory public infrastructure during the past three decades - just to **ensure that the trail and its environs were protected** and that the RVRT remained a real possibility.

- The substantial tunnels under Lenaghans Drive and the M1 Pacific Motorway were expressly built to protect the Richmond Vale railway alignment; with that section of the M1 opening in November 1998. Likewise, Pambalong Nature Reserve (gazetted in December 2000) comprises 'former farmland acquired by the Roads and Traffic Authority' (Pambalong's Plan of Management 2006) and thoughtfully protected and improved.
- Extensive work was also undertaken during construction of the Hunter Expressway (opened in March 2014) to protect two of the Historic brick Railway Tunnels (Tunnels #1 and #2), including laser monitoring.
- Providing access to the eastern and western sections of the Stockrington State Conservation Area (SCA), and concurrently to the RVRT and its affiliated walking tracks and facilities, necessitated construction of a **bridge over the Hunter Expressway** at Seahampton Road (to access the eastern SCA section) and a **tunnel under the Expressway** to allow continued use of the ridge road off George Booth Drive (which previously serviced Daracon's Buttai quarry, but which will become a major entry point to the western section of Stockrington SCA).
- Twin viaduct bridges within the Mt. Sugarloaf range section of the Expressway (40m above the forest floor) also serve to protect flora and fauna, as well as **facilitating ongoing walking** access to these areas and to the RVRT.
- Recent State Government planning for the M1 Extension to Raymond Terrace and the Lower Hunter Freight Corridor (LHFC) has also actively protected the RVRT route (see next section).

With all of this preparatory public infrastructure spending, it is essential that we **draw on the decades of positive RVRT related planning** and finish the job off by making the RVRT a reality!

# Figure 2. Western Section of Richmond Vale Rail Trail (RVRT)

Ten Points of Interest (June 2022)

- **5**. Access point to ridges within western Stockrington State Conservation Area
- 6. Sugarloaf State Conservation Area
- Historic brick Railway Tunnels #1
   & #2 (Lake Macquarie LGA), The Jewboy Cave, Burrenjim Dam, and Hunter Expressway bridges (overhead)

- **8**. Stockrington State Conservation Area (2,2050ha) and proposed Mid-trail Precinct
- 9. Former Stockrington underground coal mines (mining and railway heritage)
- **10**. Pambalong Nature Reserve and access to eastern section of RVRT

Richmond Vale

Rail

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**Hunter Valley** 

Trail

- Log of Knowledge Park local history and mining heritage; access to Kurri Kurri murals and other attractions, and current and future Cessnock trails
- 2. Werakata State Conservation Area (NE) local Indigenous information/heritage
- **3**. Proposed Wallis Creek RVRT bridge (70m single-span)
- Historic brick Railway Tunnel #3 and proposed Surveyors Creek RVRT bridge (15m two-span)

REF for Western Section of RVRT – Submission by RVRT Supporters' Group

lichmond Vale



Seahamp

## 4. Assessment Findings

An array of assessments are reported in the main body of the *REF* and in the 11 Appendices. We briefly reviewed these assessments from a non-professional, community perspective. The *REF* and its supporting documents appear to be **well-crafted and sufficiently comprehensive** for this current approvals stage. In aggregate, they identify the RVRT project's key benefits, impacts and required mitigation strategies, as well as demonstrating that a **reasonable balance can be achieved** between protecting local environments, minimising impacts on affected stakeholders, and developing a unique, shared community pathway. We also strongly support the conclusion that '... the proposal as described in the *REF* best meets the proposal objectives. On balance the proposal is considered justified' (Executive Summary, page v).

Some brief information is provided below about selected assessments:

- Design Drawings (<u>Appendix A</u>, Lake Macquarie and Cessnock LGAs): The Concept Design Plans for the Western Section of the RVRT provide a good overview of where the trail segments will be located and associated key features, as does *REF* <u>Figure 3-1</u>. It is also acknowledged throughout the *REF* that, while this is a critical stage in RVRT approvals, it is only the beginning:
  - A broad range of trail features will be '*determined/confirmed during detailed design*' (e.g., pavement type, parking & amenities layouts/inclusions, fencing, landscaping); together with some exploration of additional access locations within Stockrington State Conservation Area (e.g., Mid-trail Precinct);
  - 'Extensive ongoing consultation is and will be undertaken during the future design, construction and operational stages of the proposal. This would include negotiation with affected landowners, other stakeholders and the community' (*REF*, page 48); and
  - 'The final design and management of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail on National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) managed lands will [also] be required to comply with relevant NPWS standards and policies' (*REF*, page 19).
- Hydrology and Hydraulics Assessment (<u>Appendix B</u>, whole trail): Recommends hydraulic modelling during the detailed design stage to help maintain 'the existing hydraulic response' along the trail (including provision of suitable scour protection measures to protect downstream environments), together with operational procedures to protect trail users during flood periods [although flooding is clearly less of a concern within the Western Section of the RVRT].
- Geotechnical Assessment (<u>Appendix C</u>, whole trail): Geohazards/opportunities are summarised in Table 5-3 and potential project constraints in Table 5-4. Drainage in and around the railway tunnels, and access constraints during the construction stage, appear to be the major constraints, due largely to the narrowness of the pathway corridor. Tunnel repair is 'likely to comprise repointing of brickwork, removal of overgrown vegetation and installation of stainless steel bars across cracks'.
- Phase 1 Contaminated Site Assessment (<u>Appendix D</u>, whole trail): '... the overall risk of significant contamination being encountered during works that disturb the ground surface or

by future site users is **considered to be low**'. A Contaminated Soil Management Plan (CSMP) is required to manage any contamination encountered.

- Traffic and Transport Assessment (Appendix E, whole trail): Recommendations include: investigation of some intersection upgrades (e.g., Woodford Street, Minmi; Blue Gum Creek access road off George Booth Drive); controls during construction to reduce impacts; and appropriate signage '... at all locations where the proposal interacts at grade with a road ... or school zone'. Approximately 2.1km of the Western Section of the trail will be located within the road reserve of Seahampton Road (at Stockrington, within the Stockrington State Conservation Area), which will necessitate consideration of some additional safety features. Likewise, the Quarry Access Road off George Booth Drive has previously been identified as a possible area of concern; however, Daracon's Buttai Quarry no longer uses this road for quarry haulage (with substantial upgrades currently underway along their Old Buttai Road northern haulage route). A Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) is required to guide any construction activities that impact on roads. It is also worth noting that State Government plans for the M1 Pacific Motorway Extension to Raymond Terrace (Major Projects -Application SSI-7319, exhibited: July 28th, 2021 to August 24th, 2021) and the Lower Hunter Freight Corridor (LHFC; Project No.: PS124841, exhibited: July 12th, 2021 to September 13th, 2021) were both exhibited during 2021. However, importantly, both of these projects actively take the RVRT into account, and do not impose any major external constraints on trail planning or construction. Cycleways and associated access routes are also considered in these plans, including recent revisions to fit better with future RVRT connections at Tarro (June 2022 Response to Submissions, Appendix C).
- Flora and Fauna (Appendix F, Lake Macquarie and Cessnock LGAs): The potential impact on coastal wetlands habitats within the Eastern Section of the trail (in Newcastle LGA) contributed to the requirement for a comprehensive Biodiversity Development Assessment Report – which was evaluated as part of that approval (DA 2020/00641). For the Western Section of the trail, a Flora and Fauna Impact Assessment was considered sufficient. Flora: 'Eight threatened flora species listed under the BC [Biodiversity Conservation] Act and seven under the EPBC [Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation] Act were assessed as occurring or having potential to occur within the proposal site', with the assessments undertaken leading to the conclusion that: '... the proposal was unlikely to result in significant impacts to these species' (REF page 94). Fauna: '... 44 threatened and migratory fauna species, including a range of threatened microbats and threatened and migratory birds, could potentially occur transiently in the proposal site on occasion'. However, '... given the disturbed nature of the vegetation to be removed, location along the edge of the existing cleared rail corridor, and transient nature of the species' occurrence', the proposal was '... considered **unlikely to result in any significant impacts** to these species or alter the suitability of the habitat' (REF page 94). A Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) is also required specifying environmental safeguards to be implemented.
- Socio-economic Impact Assessment (<u>Appendix G</u>, whole trail): Extracts from this comprehensive assessment are reported throughout this group submission.
- Visual Impact Assessment (<u>Appendix H</u>, whole trail): This assessment divided the trail into 10 visual zones, with zones 1 to 4 in Lake Macquarie and Cessnock LGAs. Of the 18 views

*REF* for Western Section of RVRT – Submission by RVRT Supporters' Group

assessed within the Western Section of the RVRT (Table 13 and also *REF*, page 102), 13 were low/negligible, 3 were moderate, and 2 had high visual amenity impacts, both of which were in Zone 2 – namely, on the Eastern approach to Wallis Creek (View point 2), and on the Embankment of Wallis Creek (View point 3). **Signage, vegetation retention, and screening** (if required) should help protect the privacy of rural dwellings in this area.

- Aboriginal Archaeological Survey Report (<u>Appendix I</u>, whole trail): 'Despite the high archaeological sensitivity of these natural landforms, ... the level of ground disturbance caused by construction of the former Richmond Vale Railway ... means that the level of archaeological potential across the whole of the study area is considered to be low'. Impacts on two sites of moderate archaeological potential should be minimised.
- Statement of Heritage Impact (<u>Appendix J</u>, whole trail): A variety of heritage listed items of local significance were identified. Recommendations and mitigation measures are presented in Table 8-1. Previously, we have also commented on the *Heritage Issues Response* (date August 27th, 2021) that was provided for the Eastern Section of the RVRT, which included some practical and achievable 'heritage treatments' (e.g., some re-usage of recovered materials from along the former rail line; and heritage interpretation strategies). A similar approach could be adopted for a representative component of the Western Section of the trail (*see below*).
- Strategic Options and Engineering Heritage Assessment Report (Appendix K, Cessnock LGA): As noted in this Appendix, the 'Surveyor's Creek and Wallis Creek Bridges are in very poor and dilapidated condition'. Moreover, '... ultimately, new bridges require significantly less ongoing maintenance than either the rehabilitation or renewal options which require costly and ongoing routine repairs and preventative maintenance'. Indeed, it was estimated that '... new bridge replacement options would be about one third the cost of rehabilitation and about half the cost of renewal [i.e., complete like-for-like reconstruction to today's standards]'. We support the conclusion that new bridges, using modern materials, provide the only viable solution - with the Wallis Creek Bridge still anticipated to cost approx. \$2.91m and the Surveyors Creek Bridge approx. \$2.02m. We also support the suggestion in the *REF* (page 115) that '... appropriate recognition of the timber and masonry elements of the bridges should be either incorporated into the new designs or developed as a standalone aspect, for example interpretive signage'.

As noted in the *REF* (Section 8): 'The potential impacts of the proposal are **considered minor when compared to the identified benefits**' (page 130) [these include minor (temporary or potential) impacts on visual amenity, water quality, water flows, vegetation, habitat, heritage, and landowners (*REF*, Executive Summary, page v)]. 'Mitigation measures are provided in the REF, which would avoid, reduce or mitigate any impacts' (page 130).

Notwithstanding, many of the **100 Conditions of Consent** associated with the initial Development Approval for the Eastern Section of the RVRT within Newcastle LGA (DA 2020/00641 approval, dated December 8<sup>th</sup> 2021) will have relevance here, as will the **32 Conditions of Consent** for the small coastal wetlands section of the trail within Cessnock LGA (DA 8/2020/20463/1 approval, dated April 26<sup>th</sup> 2021).

## 5. Likely RVRT Benefits: A Community Perspective

Based on long-term engagement with local communities, more recent discussions about the *EIS* and *REF* (for the Eastern and Western Sections of the RVRT, respectively), and our collective knowledge and experiences, we have compiled a list of 23 likely **RVRT benefits from a community perspective**, grouped into five categories. Our awareness of community sentiments and expectations, and RVRT opportunities and constraints, is drawn from multiple sources, including: over two decades of RVRT involvement; membership of various cycling, conservation, and other groups; numerous planning submissions; and experiences with other developments and rail trails.

## A. Health and Lifestyle Benefits

### The RVRT ...

- A1 ... **promotes active lifestyles**, which will have positive physical and mental health benefits;
- A2 ... will benefit a **broad range of users**, across all age groups including walkers, cyclists, runners, bird watchers, reduced mobility users, family & other groups; and
- A3 ... encourages locals and visitors to actively **explore an array of Hunter Valley** landscapes and attractions.
- It is the potential magnitude of these health and lifestyle benefits that needs to be highlighted – arising from the broad mix of potential trail users and the multiple and varied occasions on which people are likely to access the RVRT.
- <u>Appendix G</u> (Socio-economic Impact Assessment) notes that the region is likely to experience **significant population growth** in the coming decades. It also provides a profile of the Hunter's health, suggesting that the region has 'high rates of **behavioural health** risk factors' (Section 2.3). Consequently, there is a pressing need to develop and promote community-building regional infrastructure such as the RVRT.
- The estimated direct 'health benefits' in <u>Appendix G</u> (Table 6-9) equated to \$43.2m, or 56% of the estimated overall trail benefits (of \$76.6m).

## B. Community Access and Connection Benefits

## The RVRT ...

- B1 ... provides a safe, pleasant pathway between communities;
- B2 ... thoughtfully considers users with reduced mobility;
- B3 ... strengthens Hunter recreational opportunities and promotes connections between metropolitan and rural communities; and
- B4 ... will foster **precinct development** and a **mixture of cycling and other activities for families** (encouraging return visits).
- Improved cycleway connections between and within local communities will benefit individuals, families and a variety of groups, including local schools.
- The range of potential RVRT 'trip types and users' is well illustrated in <u>Appendix G</u> (see Table 5-2). Twenty-one potential RVRT experiences are presented, including sample trips for people with reduced mobility [... and many other trail exploration opportunities await].
- Opportunities for community connections, and links to varied landscapes and regional attractions, will also be substantially greater when the RVRT is **fully-completed**.
- In addition to providing safe, pleasant connections between local communities (e.g., Tarro and Shortland; Fletcher, Minmi and Stockrington), the RVRT will enhance the attractiveness of the Hunter Region and NSW as a rail trail tourism destination.

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## C. Cycling-specific Benefits

### The RVRT ...

- C1 ... increases safety via alternatives to road network usage;
- C2 ... facilitates daily bicycle commuting, reducing emissions and road congestion;
- C3 ... will promote increased **recreational cycling** by casual riders, as well as those who enjoy a longer group ride;
- C4 ... will improve the Hunter's image as an active lifestyle and cycling destination;
- C5 ... will add to the other dedicated local cycleways (e.g., Fernleigh & Tramway Tracks), encouraging **multi-day regional cycling visits**; and
- C6 ... will **expand the Australian rail trail network**, which already contributes positively to many communities.
- It is anticipated that the RVRT '... will draw much use from cyclists who are already very regular cyclists (daily or weekly) in the region' (<u>Appendix G</u>, Section 4.2.5). However, a 32-40 km off-road shared pathway (with a variety of distinct segments) will also facilitate safe recreational cycling for different groups of casual riders as well.
- There is also evidence that 'the disruption created by COVID-19 ... has significantly changed people's perception of walking and biking' (World Bank Group), with increased involvement in walking and cycling observed in many Australian cities and towns.
- The estimated benefits from 'improvement in cyclist safety' in the economic analysis (<u>Appendix G</u>, Table 6-9) equated to \$24.7m, which, when combined with congestion, vehicle operation, transport, pollution and emission savings and benefits (totalling \$3.8m), equated to **37% of the estimated overall trail benefits** (of \$76.6m).
- <u>Appendix G</u> also highlights a range of **other cycling related opportunities**, such as enhanced connections with local mountain bike networks, automated bike hire services, cycling events, and Ride to School Days.
- Rail trails and greenways are becoming important tourist attractions. In Australia, Victoria
  has a variety of well-developed trails, while NSW currently has a limited number, many of
  which are relatively short.
- National and international evidence also clearly shows that rail trails work providing a 'valued community amenity that promotes healthy exercise and well-being', whilst 'providing a platform to grow new businesses, create essential jobs and provide economic benefit' (Northern Rivers Rail Trail Association Inc.).

## D. Environmental and Heritage Benefits

## The RVRT ...

- D1 ... improves accessibility to a **host of environmental attractions** adjacent to the RVRT (e.g., coastal wetlands, nature reserves, and national parks);
- D2 ... includes well-constructed bridges and boardwalks;
- D3 ... promotes **biodiversity and habitat protection** (through education, specialised groups and community participation);
- D4 ... increases access to local environmental, **cultural and heritage features**, promoting **community appreciation** (including indigenous, mining and rail heritage); and
- D5 ... **minimises potential negative impacts** on the local environment, by using previously cleared areas.

- The RVRT will be a community resource that can be explored and enjoyed at many different levels, and by a wide variety of groups - both local and visiting.
- User-friendly resource materials will be needed, which can be referenced in funding applications and also serve promotional purposes. The 4 min. <u>TFI trail video from 2017</u> is a straightforward example of such a resource. Multi-layered RVRT educational and virtual resource materials should also be produced, which would enhance visitor experiences.
- There is substantial heritage value along the proposed route, including: indigenous, mining and rail heritage (e.g., the Pambalong clan lived in the local area, after whom the Nature Reserve north of Minmi is named; more recently, 100+ years of coal extraction/transport).
- By increasing access to local environmental and heritage features, the community's ownership and appreciation grows, contributing to greater long-term protection (which, for example, has happened at Blue Gum Hills Regional Park).
- Local facilities (such as the Hunter Wetlands Centre) may also benefit substantially and financially by combining the educational and experiential aspects of the RVRT.

## E. Economic, Tourism and Other Regional Benefits

## The RVRT ...

- E1 ... is clearly cost effective (BCR = 2.40), so the sooner we build it, the better;
- E2 ... will **support local businesses and new initiatives** (e.g., trail side coffee shops, bike hire, fun-runs, guided walks);
- E3 ... will further stimulate local economic growth and diversity;
- E4 ... will provide the **spine for future regional network connections** (e.g., to the University and Newcastle Cyclesafe Network, Blue Gum Hills Regional Park, other Maitland and Cessnock cycleways and trails); and
- E5 ... has such **obvious merits**, it should have already been built.
- As detailed in <u>Appendix G</u> (Section 6.5), the **benefit cost ratio** (BCR) for the project is **2.40**, which '... indicates that the level of expected benefits provided by the RVRT is close to two and a half times the level of expected costs'. This more than justifies the economic value of the proposal.
- The estimated net present value (NPV) for the project in March 2019 was \$44.7m (i.e., the amount that is generated [Benefits minus Costs] over the 30-year evaluation period calculated in today's dollars).
- We need to set the RVRT up on the right course from the outset. For example, the estimated infrastructure capital cost (<u>Appendix G</u>, Section 6.3) of \$33.2m equates to about \$830,000 per km, which is consistent with NSW IPART's (2014) guidelines for shared cycleway/pedestrian pathways.
- Compromising safety or accessibility (e.g., by reducing rest points, community access points, associated facilities, or surface quality, etc) will only decrease usage, and generate ongoing and maintenance costs, which local Councils may not be able to afford.

## Consistency with Regional Strategies and Council Shared Pathway Plans:

In effect, development approvals for the Eastern and Western Sections of the RVRT **implement key goals** from the *Hunter Regional Plan 2036* (HRP, 2016) and the *Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan 2036* (GNMP, 2018), and they also represent **'stage one' in the implementation sequence** for several Lower Hunter Council's longer-term walking and cycling strategic plans. The RVRT is **much more than a cycleway** and it will contribute to at least three of the identified strategic Actions within the HRP: creating **healthy built environments** (Direction 17); enhancing **recreational facilities** and connecting **open spaces** (Direction 18); and **growing regional tourism** (Direction 9). Likewise, within the GNMP, the RVRT is recognised as an important component of regional plans to expand the 'Blue & Green Grid' [waterways & open spaces links], with identified strategic Actions including: improved 'access to open space, **recreation areas & waterways**', enhanced 'nature based tourism through **protection and promotion of natural assets** such as ... the Hexham Wetlands' (Action 12.1); 'improvements to **active transport networks**', and provision of 'unobstructed well-connected pedestrian paths and a **network of off-road separated cycleways** to key destinations, including: schools, employment hubs, shops and services' (Action 20.1).

Several newer **local government plans also include the RVRT**, such as: the *Newcastle Cycling Plan 2021-2030* (2021); Cessnock City Council's *Cycling Strategy* (2016) and *Trails Strategy* (2020); and Lake Macquarie City Council's *Walking, Cycling and Better Streets Strategy 2031* (2021). Moreover, it is now much easier to see **where the RVRT fits within proposed regional cycleways networks** than it was when the original design work and documentation for the RVRT was produced.

Combining the recent Newcastle and Lake Macquarie City cycling plans and strategies, there are actually **three proposed** '*principal bicycle network*' regional routes that will access parts of the **RVRT**: the "*Fernleigh Track to Richmond Vale Rail Trail via Charlestown* (**R2**)" route (primarily within Lake Macquarie LGA, and which passes through Cameron Park and Minmi); the "*Newcastle City Centre to University (Callaghan) and Richmond Vale Rail Trail (Minmi Junction)* (**R6**)" route (via Maryland and Fletcher); and the "*University (Callaghan) to Maitland* (**R8**)" route, which will utilise the Hunter Water pipeline corridor between Shortland and Tarro. These proposed route connections with the RVRT are illustrated in Figure 3 on the next page.

## **RVRT Access from Lake Macquarie LGA:**

- At first glance, the 2.7km section of the RVRT within Lake Macquarie LGA may appear to be relatively remote and of limited interest to Lake Mac residents. However, that short section is packed with interesting features, including: two Historic brick Railway Tunnels (#1 and #2), The Jewboy Cave, Burrenjim Dam, and Hunter Expressway bridges (overhead) see Point of Interest 7 in Figure 2. It is directly accessible from the Blue Gum Creek access road off George Booth Drive which will also provide trail access for those with reduced mobility.
- The Seahampton Road bridge across the Hunter Expressway (at Seahampton) is also likely to provide future access to the Stockrington State Conservation Area, the Mid-trail Precinct, the RVRT, and to the other walking trails that will develop in that area.
- In the longer-term, Principal Bicycle Network Route R2 will probably provide a connection between the Fernleigh Track and the RVRT, via Charlestown, Cameron Park and Minmi (adjacent to Blue Gum Hills Regional Park) – see Figure 3.
- Likewise, in the longer-term, Principal Bicycle Network Route R6 will probably provide a connection between Glendale and the RVRT, via the Tramway Track, Wallsend, Maryland and Fletcher - see Figure 3.
- These future connections from Lake Macquarie LGA will enhance the appeal of both the RVRT and other shared pathways and attractions in Lake Mac. Indeed, it will even be possible to cycle or walk the 50+km distance from Murray's Beach to Kurri Kurri or Tarro (via the Fernleigh Track extensions, the R2, and the RVRT).

Figure 3. Proposed (future) 'Principal Bicycle Network' route connections with the RVRT at: Minmi (Route R2), Fletcher (Route R6) and Shortland (Route R8)


## 5. REF Endorsement

The RVRT presents a **unique opportunity for positive regional planning and co-operation** between communities, local councils, State and Federal governments. Moreover, it will be extremely wasteful if we do not **build on the decades of concerted effort** that has already gone into RVRT planning (as well as on the two recent RVRT approvals).

We also know that there is **strong community support** for the RVRT – from local residents, community groups, cycling and rail trail enthusiasts, small businesses, and government and tourist organisations. Indeed, at least 80% of the public submissions about the Newcastle LGA section of the RVRT in August/September 2020 were categorised as being 'in support' – although, unfortunately, subsequent documentation tended to focus solely on 'concerns raised'.

Given the **change in terrain** from the Eastern to the Western section of the trail (e.g., from coastal wetlands to the Mt. Sugarloaf ranges), and from largely **metropolitan to semi-rural/regional** communities, it was anticipated that there could have been some different issues and opportunities to consider and resolve. However, based on our assessment of the comprehensive *REF* and supporting documents, it is clear that there are **no RVRT 'show stoppers'** – that is, nothing that should impede or delay planning approval from both Cessnock City Council and Lake Macquarie City Council for the Western Section of the RVRT.

We firmly believe that the Current Proposal and associated *REF* assessments successfully **meet the primary goal** of providing 'a high quality rail trail facility' for the Hunter Region and we **strongly endorse** their approval by Council.

The matters that still require resolution (*see below*) can either be **addressed during the detailed design stage**, together with associated ongoing stakeholder and community consultation, or appropriate actions implemented during the construction stage.

Notwithstanding, we also feel the need to acknowledge that there is **considerable RVRT-related community frustration** – about whether community members' views are actually valued, about the lack of submissions feedback, and about **the long delays in RVRT project approvals**. It should be recalled, for example, that the initial 'Community Information Sessions' about the RVRT (and pending EIS, at that time) were held in November, 2016. So, to most community members, progress towards RVRT approvals appears to be painfully slow.

All we ask is that when decisions are being made about the Current Proposal, and in subsequent funding applications, it needs to be borne in mind that **most members of the local community are strongly supportive** and, ideally, would have liked the RVRT to have been built 'yesterday'!

## 6. Matters Requiring Resolution (After REF Approval)

As noted earlier (Section 4), the detailed design stage will **determine and/or confirm a broad range of trail features**, including: pavement type, parking & amenities layouts/inclusions, fencing, and landscaping, and any additional access locations/facilities (e.g., provided in conjunction with the proposed Mid-trail Precinct); and will involve: **further negotiation** with affected landowners, other stakeholders and the community; and final design and management **consultation with NPWS** (for the trail segments on NPWS managed lands).

We have some **specific suggestions below about access points and facilities**. However, we also have some general observations about **overall design principles and management strategies** that should preferably be followed during the detailed design phase:

- As broad a range of trail users as possible should be accommodated (when finalising each design decision), including those with reduced mobility;
- Practical, sustainable materials should be utilised (preferably from local sources), that minimise ongoing trail maintenance costs and also reduce impacts on adjacent landowners or other stakeholders;
- An overarching goal should be to simultaneously showcase and protect local environments and trail features (as usage will typically promote community ownership, appreciation and long-term protection);
- Priority should also be given to access points and facilities that are likely to develop as destinations in their own right and/or to those that are close to key trail features or other regional attractions (see <u>Destination Considerations</u> in next section);
- Engagement with stakeholders, community groups and other agencies should be ongoing, to optimise the trail's long-term benefits – including development of shared resources that are of mutual benefit to multiple agencies (e.g., trail users, Councils, NPWS, community groups, providers of educational and tourism resources, etc);
- As many connections as possible should be included/planned to local communities, schools, nearby attractions/facilities and other cycleways/shared pathways; and/or allowance made for future connections and upgrades.
- The former 'railway assets' that the RVRT utilises were privately owned and do not trigger the need for any NSW legislative amendments. However, lessons can nevertheless be learned from two recently released Rail Trail reports by Regional NSW (June 2022): <u>Rail</u> <u>Trails for NSW Evaluation Summary</u> and <u>NSW Rail Trails Framework</u>. For convenience, some 'operational guidance' from the latter document about Rail Trail surface design, staging, management, resourcing and branding is reproduced in <u>Table 1</u> on the next page.

## Mid-trail Precinct:

For some time, members of the RVRT Supporters' Group (including two members who were also community representatives on the Donaldson Conservation Trust) have **advocated strongly for a Mid-trail Precinct** – adjacent to Seahampton Road and within Stockrington State Conservation Area – to be **progressively developed as a valued destination** in its own right. If you walk or ride along the longest segment of the RVRT, from Shortland to Kurri Kurri via Hexham Junction and Minmi Junction, your journey would be approx. 29.8km in length (12.6km within Newcastle LGA and 17.2km within the Western Section). The **provisional location** for a Mid-Trail Precinct is approx. 15.3km to 15.8km along the RVRT from Shortland (i.e., at approx. mid-trail). <u>Figure 4</u> broadly illustrates the type of precinct that we are recommending.

The Donaldson Conservation Trust (DCT) provided a small grant (\$257k) to the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) to explore and plan for the development of a Mid-trail Precinct (Stage 1) adjacent to Seahampton Road "... to enhance and promote **integrated regional development** of

# Table 1. Some 'Operational Guidance' – Extracted from <u>NSW Rail Trails Framework</u> (Regional NSW, June 2022)

## Considerations for Rail Trail surface design

- Rail trail projects should incorporate universal design principles to ensure accessibility for people with disability and the broader community.
- Rail Trails with a sealed track are more versatile than other surface types as they are more suitable for prams, walkers, manual push and power wheelchairs.
- While they are initially more expensive to construct, sealed tracks require less ongoing maintenance than other non-sealed surface options.
- Sealed tracks provide a practical option for people with disability and those with limited mobility to participate in recreational and exercise activities while being able to connect across their broader community.
- A sealed track also has the added benefit of attracting a broader range of users and increasing community engagement. This supports the business case for investing in sealed infrastructure compared to nonsealed surface options, which have fewer health and community engagement benefits.
- Other considerations include the combination of sealed and gravel tracks and the use of sustainable materials. These should be suited to the terrain, conditions,

weather, proposed use, traffic volume and width of the Rail Trail.

# Taking a staged approach to Rail Trail design and delivery

- A staged approach to project delivery of a Rail Trail can allow more time to build community support and increase opportunities for the community to be involved in the construction.
- A staged approach also allows time for community conceptualisation and the creation of supporting trail attractions and experiences, such as sculptures, vegetation growth and place-making aesthetics to enhance the trail experience.
- Partnering with volunteer groups for major and minor works can also be cost-effective.
- The use of local contractors and subcontractors enables an agile approach to construction and helps reduce costs in many ways, including changes in the construction program not resulting in increased costs or fees, and local contractors can be resourceful in procuring equipment.

## **Rail Trail planning and resourcing**

*Rail Trail Strategic Plan and/or Plan of Management* 

 The experiences of Australian and international operators shows a Rail Trail Strategic Plan or **Plan of Management** provides a useful blueprint for developing and operating a Rail Trail.

The plan should identify tourism, funding and marketing initiatives that can be used by all members of the operational entity (particularly when a Rail Trail covers multiple local government areas). A Strategic Plan or Plan of Management outlines the roles and responsibilities of all participating stakeholders and can provide a clear and transparent decision-making framework that can be communicated to the community and other stakeholders.

#### Brand Guidelines

- Brand Guidelines provide a consistent brand strategy that can be applied to all sections of the Rail Trail (this is particularly useful when the Rail Trail covers multiple local government areas).
- Brand Guidelines can outline the vision for the Rail Trail, the look and feel, and intended visitor experience. This can include guidance on signage and facilities, as well as information materials, marketing assets, public relations, social media and the promotion of community and fundraising events.

Figure 4. Illustrative Mid-trail Precinct within Stockrington State Conservation Area (SCA), adjacent to Seahampton Road – to enhance and promote integrated regional development of the RVRT and SCA



the Richmond Vale Rail Trail (RVRT) and the Stockrington State Conservation Area (SCA)" [Original Agreement: 29<sup>th</sup> March, 2019; Revised Agreement: 27<sup>th</sup> August, 2021]. This funding was for background planning and studies, and some 'on ground' works, but not for any RVRT related infrastructure, as such; with the overarching, longer-term goal of establishing "... a valued destination in its own right ... as a major transition point for accessing and exploring both the RVRT and Stockrington SCA". The timing of any Mid-trail Precinct 'on ground' works initiated by NPWS will now depend on broader RVRT approvals and detailed design work, as well as on ongoing consultation with Cessnock City Council.

More broadly, while longer-term timelines for development of the RVRT and the Stockrington SCA may differ, we would like to encourage all of the local Councils to work constructively with NPWS and other agencies to **maximise the joint benefits from co-located public facilities** such as the RVRT, SCA and Mid-trail Precinct; similar comments also apply to the interface between the Eastern Section of the RVRT and Hunter Wetlands National Park, which is also managed by NPWS.

## **Proposed Access Point Changes:**

On various occasions, we have discussed **relocating two RVRT access points to more optimal locations** (e.g., with staff from Newcastle and Cessnock Councils, and NPWS), to better protect proposed facilities, improve integration with the Stockrington SCA, and to help create additional attractive (future) destination points in their own right. Everyone has been **generally supportive of these proposed access point changes**, but they still need to be clarified and confirmed in future RVRT documentation [with the argument being put to us that such changes could be more efficiently made after public exhibition of the Western RVRT Section].

The specific access point changes that we propose/request are:

- From Dog Hole Road to Seahampton Road (Mid-trial Precinct) essentially moving the parking and other facilities currently shown in *REF* <u>Figure 3-1f</u> around the 13.70km point by approx. 1.5km to the west and **integrating them more fully** with (future) Stockrington SCA and related facilities – including a larger parking area;
- 2) Providing only a moderately-sized parking area near the former H.E.A. Entry Road (Surveyors Creek) - shown in *REF* Figure 3-1c around the 23.00km point [which would still facilitate exploration of Historic brick Railway Tunnel #3 and the Surveyors and Wallis Creek bridges]; whilst expanding the parking area and other facilities near the Quarry Access Road off George Booth Drive - shown in *REF* Figure 3-1d around the 20.30km point [near Survey Marker PM129959] – this is a larger and much more appropriate location for (future) picnic, sporting and playground areas, etc, and it would also effectively serve as the major access point for exploring western sections of Stockrington SCA, given its proximity to the Ridge Road (that goes under the Hunter Expressway). As noted earlier, Daracon's Buttai Quarry no longer uses this Ridge Road for quarry haulage.

We also continue to advocate strongly for a **drop-off parking area on the Blue Gum Creek access road** off George Booth Drive (with several Disabled Parking spots) - shown in *REF* <u>Figure 3-1e</u> around the 18.00km point, which would facilitate access to Historic brick Railway Tunnels #1 and #2 by individuals with reduced mobility, as well as by families with infants in prams.

As Stockrington and Werakata SCA's continue to develop, it is also anticipated that there will many more walking tracks and other facilities that become accessible via the RVRT.

# 7. Optimising the RVRT's Benefits

While we are all keen to see the RVRT constructed, building a workable Rail Trail is only one of the tasks that needs to be accomplished. **Optimising the trail's usage and longer-term benefits** will require **ongoing collaboration and careful attention to detail** – e.g., focusing on factors that: promote the trail, attract a broader range of users, increase visitor experiences, encourage return visits, value add to other Hunter region attractions and destinations (and *vice versa*), encourage tourism and multi-day stays, minimise maintenance costs, and encourage development of both on-trail and off-trail local businesses.

## Finalising Remaining Approvals and Preparing Funding Applications:

If approvals for the Western Section of the RVRT are obtained from both Cessnock City Council and Lake Macquarie City Council, there will still be at least three other sets of approvals that are required for the main segments of the RVRT: for the Hexham Junction to Tarro segment (involving additional opportunities for connections to the M1 Extension to Raymond Terrace); for the part of the trail that actually crosses Hunter Wetlands National Park; and, ideally, for the Tuxford Park end of the trail and related linkages to the Hunter Wetlands Centre. **Securing all of these approvals in the near future is highly desirable** – which will ensure that the whole of the RVRT is functionally '**shovel ready**' – at least from an external funding applications/opportunities perspective.

Ideally, from that point onwards, the participating Councils will need to pursue **joint funding applications for the detailed design work and construction stages**, building on the decades of RVRT effort. It is, of course, highly likely that the RVRT will actually be **constructed in stages**. Even so, if joint funding applications are not possible, the participating Councils will need to **pursue coordinated funding-related actions** that present a united front and **promote an integrated RVRT**.

#### **Destination Considerations:**

Business cases and funding applications for community-based developments such as Rail Trails are clearly enhanced by careful consideration of current and future '**destinations-related opportunities'**. Indeed, collaboration with local tourism organisations and agencies such as *Destination NSW* is now an essential component of such applications.

With respect to the RVRT, there are several locations that could potentially be developed as **destinations in their own right**, or are already becoming well known (largely by locals), including:

- The Tuxford Park area, Shortland, and potential links to the Hunter Wetlands Centre;
- Hunter Wetlands National Park and nearby coastal wetlands;
- Minmi/Fletcher links to Blue Gum Hills Regional Park, the Tank paddock, and Pambalong Nature Reserve;
- The proposed Mid-trail Precinct and associated links, heritage and other (future) walks within Stockrington State Conservation Area;
- Blue Gum Creek access road and exploration of Tunnels #1 and #2 and their environs;
- Longer walking trail linkages from the RVRT (and the western section of Stockrington State Conservation Area) to Sugarloaf and Werakata State Conservation Areas;
- Log of Knowledge Park, Kurri Kurri, and associated playground facilities and connections to local communities, as well as the wider trails network and other attractions within Cessnock LGA.

We strongly recommend that some additional funding is sought within the major RVRT-related external funding applications to support planning for, promotion, and further development of some of these identified 'destinations' – with the primary goal of optimising the regional benefits from the RVRT. Importantly, while there may be some opportunities for support from the commercial sector, most of the RVRT is on or adjacent to publicly owned lands, managed by agencies such as NPWS. Consequently, 'destinations' development in close proximity to the trail will also largely involve grant applications and public expenditure. Our preference would be to focus any additional 'destinations-related funding support' initially on the trail end points (i.e., upgrading the Tuxford Park area and Log of Knowledge Park) and on the Mid-trail Precinct.

## Local Cycleway/Trail Connections:

Related to the above, local Councils also need to **foster and actively pursue the various other proposed cycleways and trails connections** to the RVRT that have been suggested – again, with the major goals of optimising the RVRT's regional benefits and further promoting active lifestyles and transport. These include **direct connections** to: the University of Newcastle (and the wider Newcastle cycleways network); the M1 Extension to Raymond Terrace; shared pathways within the broader Maitland community; the proposed Winten subdivisions and other residential developments around Minmi; and Blue Gum Hills Regional Park; together with **safe local connections to adjacent communities** within the Western Section of the RVRT, including: Kurri Kurri, Pelaw Main, Stanford Merthyr, and Avery's Lane.

Similar sentiments were expressed in the *REF* (page 90), in which it was noted that there are a range of 'social infrastructure developments' near the proposed trail end point at the Log of Knowledge Park in Kurri Kurri, including Pelaw Main Public School and heated pool, the Kurri Kurri Sports Ground, and Pelaw Main Colliery (part of the Richmond Vale Rail Museum) – and '... there is potential for **further activation and use of this area by trail users**'. In this regard, Cessnock City Council's recent success in attracting funding to develop a **shared pathway between Bridges Hill and Wine Country Drive** in Cessnock (CPW-2022-004) may provide a useful template for similar **RVRT-related extension projects** in and around the Kurri Kurri district – including linkages to the recently upgraded Col Brown Rotary Park in Kurri Kurri.

## **Ongoing Community and Stakeholder Consultation:**

Ongoing engagement with Hunter communities and other stakeholders is **central to the success and sustainability of the RVRT**. Moreover, each public exhibition of an RVRT segment further heightens community expectations. We need to continue to **mobilise this momentum** in productive ways – to help resolve any remaining community or stakeholder concerns, to identify additional RVRT opportunities, and to support funding, promotional and educational activities.

Put simply, what the community actually wants to see is **orderly and timely progress** in the securing of the remaining required approvals and commencement of actual trail construction. However, it also makes sense to try to build into these refinements and funding processes the trail ingredients and management structures that will **optimise the RVRT's longer-term viability and regional benefits**.

## **Regional RVRT Planning and Management Committee:**

Given the progress towards RVRT approvals that has occurred in the last two years, and the desire to optimise the RVRT's longer-term regional benefits, **now is probably a very good time to** 

establish a representative Regional RVRT Planning and Management Committee. This should probably be co-ordinated through the Joint Organisation of Councils and include some representation from community groups and other stakeholders, together with all tiers of Government. Such a recommendation is also consistent with the 'Advanced or multi-council' operational entity governance structure and benefits outlined in the recent <u>NSW Rail Trails</u> <u>Framework</u> (Regional NSW, June 2022). Adding further weight to this suggestion, recent Mayoral Minutes from Newcastle City Council (Item 6, LMM 22/03/2022) and Cessnock City Council (MM8/2022, 20/04/2022) both highlighted the **regional importance of funding the RVRT** [whilst commenting on Federal Election priorities and funding priorities more generally].

# 8. Conclusion

- The Current Proposal for the Western Section of the RVRT is consistent with Regional Strategic Plans (e.g., Hunter Regional Plan 2036; Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan 2036) and Lower Hunter Councils' walking and cycling strategic plans and is overwhelmingly in the public interest.
- We are also aware that the RVRT enjoys strong community support from within the Hunter Region and elsewhere. Appropriate levels of community and stakeholder consultation have been undertaken during preparation of the *Review of Environmental Factors (REF)* and the RVRT is also demonstrably cost-effective (BCR = 2.40).
- Based on our detailed RVRT knowledge, experiences with other cycleways and trails, and our assessment of the comprehensive *REF* and supporting studies, we firmly believe that there are **no major barriers to finalising approvals for this section of the RVRT**. The *REF* also details multiple deviations from the original railway alignments, which will generally reduce environmental impacts, increase safety, and reduce both initial and ongoing trail maintenance costs.
- Furthermore, any matters that still require resolution can be appropriately addressed during the detailed design stage or during subsequent trail construction.
- Importantly, opportunities to build such a positive piece of public regional infrastructure do not come along very often.
- As we have demonstrated throughout this submission, the RVRT's benefits will occur at multiple levels, with direct benefits for trail users as well as economic and tourism benefits for Hunter businesses [e.g., trail side coffee shops, bike hire, guided walks, community events, local accommodation and eco-tourism businesses].
- Likewise, from an environmental conservation perspective, opening up controlled access to previously inaccessible State Conservation Areas and Nature Reserves will ultimately lead to greater community appreciation and environmental protection.

- Approval for the Western Section of the trail will also provide added momentum for future approvals and for other RVRT-related developments and initiatives.
- We expect that the three participating Councils will now begin to actively search for potential State and Federal funding opportunities and initiate co-ordinated RVRT funding applications for the remaining detailed design work and for the construction stages.
- Local community groups, such as ours, can also help to further mobilise community support and to lobby for these funding opportunities.
- We would also like to take this opportunity to encourage Cessnock City Council to take more of a regional leadership role in planning, developing and seeking funding for the RVRT – given its regional and long-term strategic value – how much of the trail actually falls within Cessnock LGA - and to maximise the value of the trail for Cessnock LGA residents and surrounding regions.
- Moreover, the Cessnock LGA would probably benefit from offering a wider variety of attractions, including ones that promote active lifestyles and transport, like the RVRT, which would complement the region's existing vineyards and accommodation related tourism, and promote longer stays.

10 August 2022

Kate Harris

Principal Recreation Planner

Cessnock City Council

By email recreation@cessnock.nsw.gov.au

Dear Kate

#### **OBJECTION RICHMOND VALE RAIL TRAIL REF**

#### LOT 18 AND 19 DP 1061633 AND LOT 193 DP 879813

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission in relation to the proposed Richmond Vale Rail Trail. I wish to object to the proposed development. I own Lots 18 and 19 DP 1061633 AND Lot 193 DP 879813 as identified hereunder.



Lot 18 DP 1061633

Lot 193 DP 879813



Lot 19 DP1061633



The proposed rail trail traverses through my property and in addition to not providing consent to the use of the lands I note that there are no legal easements in place to support access for the construction of a rail trail or the ongoing use of such facility.

In addition to the land tenure, I make the following further comments.

- The rail trail is likely to have a negative impact on the amenity of my property with numerous persons riding and walking through my land.
- The rail trail is likely to increase security issues particularly of a night time.
- I note that the REF incorrectly refers to Clause 2.108 under SEPP Transport and Infrastructure, the correct reference for permissibility is Clause 2.109.
- The proposed development does not appear to meet the definition of road infrastructure facility (see under) as there is no reference to pedestrian and bike paths. In addition, the reference to road related area under the Road Transport Act (see below) requires that any footpath be adjacent a road, which is not the case.

#### road infrastructure facilities includes-

- (a) tunnels, ventilation shafts, emergency accessways, vehicle or pedestrian bridges, causeways, road-ferries, retaining walls, toll plazas, toll booths, security systems, bus lanes, transit lanes, transitways, transitway stations, rest areas and road related areas (within the meaning of the Road Transport Act 2013), and
- (b) associated public transport facilities for roads used to convey passengers by means of regular bus services, and
- (c) bus layovers that are integrated or associated with roads (whether or not the roads are used to convey passengers by means of regular bus services), and
- (d) bus depots, and
- (e) bus stops and bus shelters, and
- (f) traffic control facilities (within the meaning of Part 6 of the Transport Administration Act 1988), TfNSW road safety training facilities and safety works, and
- (g) premises used for the purposes of testing and inspecting heavy vehicles (within the meaning of the Road Transport Act 2013) under the TfNSW Heavy Vehicle Authorised Inspection Scheme.

#### road related area means-

- (a) an area that divides a road, or
- (b) a footpath or nature strip adjacent to a road, or
- (c) an area that is open to the public and is designated for use by cyclists or animals, or
- (d) an area that is not a road and that is open to or used by the public for driving, riding or parking vehicles, or
- (e) a shoulder of a road, or
- (f) any other area that is open to or used by the public and that has been declared under section 18 to be an area to which specified provisions of this Act or the statutory rules apply.
  - The REF refers to the suggestion of forced acquisition (see below extract from described impacts) and inadequate social impact assessment has been made of this on those impacted landowners.

- Impacts to a small number of landowners due to temporary or long term use or acquisition of property for the proposal.
  - The length of the rail trail is subject to significant bushfire risk and an inadequate assessment has been made as to how people could safely escape from bushfire.
  - I note from the REF that in relation to ecology that site surveys are now approaching 5 years old, these should be redone to ensure a full and proper understanding of potential ecological impacts.
  - The EIS advises that the proposed development is in keeping with the relevant zones (see extract under), yet no assessment of the zone objectives has been made.

#### Land use

The proposal is situated on land E2 Environmental Conservation, E1 National Parks and Nature Reserve, SP2 Infrastructure, RU2 Rural Landscape and RE1 Public Recreation under the Cessnock and Lake Macquarie LEPs. The proposed shared pathway is in keeping with these land use zones.

- The REF concludes that no EIS is required on the grounds that the proposal does not represent a significant impact. This is not agreed with. The proposal is to introduce thousands of people a year into and across properties (including currently private property) that are zoned for rural and conservation use. It is considered that an EIS is required for this project and that SEARs should be obtained to inform this.
- No noise impact assessment has been presented for consideration.

In conclusion I do not support the proposed rail trail, I do not consent to the use of my land for the intended purposes and there are no legal easements that provide of its use. In addition, the REF makes an inadequate assessment for the reasons outlined above.

Kind Regards

