



Newsletter April 2020

Our Mission Statement: We wish to put the disused Monaro rail way line to productive use as a recreational trail for cycling, walking and running and in doing so boost tourism, the economy and the wellbeing of the region. At the same time, we wish to preserve the old rail buildings, bridges and the Colinton tunnel that are part of the Monaro.

Hello rail trail supporters



It has been a long time since we were last in contact but a lot has happened in that time. The summer fire season was quite stressful for many on the Monaro as uncontrolled fires closed in from all directions. Thankfully it was only around Bredbo and Michelago that one of the fires (spotting from the Namadgi National Park fire) emerged onto the Monaro plains. The two beautiful rail bridges in the area were untouched. During February heavy rain, particularly on the eastern escarpment, extinguished all those fires and today the area is a much nicer shade of green as vegetation begins to recover from fire and drought.



In terms of rail trail business here is a quick summary. In August 2018, MRT with crowd funding support financed a scoping study on the feasibility of our proposal and in December 2018 presented the results to the Snowy Monaro Regional Council. Members of the council saw much merit in that report and agreed to fund a more detailed study of the proposal to be completed by October 2019. A draft report on results of that study was completed and presented to council several months later and in December 2019 released to the public for comment.



The consultants in their report confirmed that the MRT had the potential to be the best in Australia. Villages and towns along the route were located apart at appropriate distances of 35 km to 55 km. The landscape was variable and appealing. The cycling community of Canberra and Queanbeyan, right at the trail head would be major users and with time, residents of Sydney and other capital cities would be drawn in. In terms of the regional economy, the consultants estimated the rail trail would add \$25m annually. One item of concern to council was the estimated maintenance cost of \$800k per annum.



Comments closed at the end of February this year and staff at SMRC advised us that over 600 hundred submissions were received and 95% of these were positive. The MRT committee encouraged supportive groups, associations and businesses to comment and we especially thank the

Cooma Cycle Club, Cooma Chamber of Commerce, ACT Pedal Power, Canberra Runner's Club and the Jerrabomberra Residents Association.



Our MRT response to the report addressed several key items. The starting point of the trail, should it be Queanbeyan or Michelago (which is 35km south of Queanbeyan) and the surface type, should it be sealed or compacted gravel or a combination of those two? In addressing the issue of maintenance costs, we obtained data for maintenance of the top 22 cycle trails in NZ and specifically for the Central Otago rail trail which is very comparable to the MRT. This data suggested annual maintenance of the MRT could be in the order of \$400k, not the \$850k referred to in the consultant's report. We are also seeking further data from Australian rail trails and will present this to council.



One of the sticking points in our progress has been the call to reopen the rail line and even extend it to the Port of Eden on the far south coast. The NSW government prior to the last state election announced it would fund a feasibility study of the proposal, tenders were called and the report was due for completion in June 2019. But it seems this was extended as community consultation meetings were still being conducted in August 2019. To date the report has not been released and there have been some suggestions that it may never be. However, this matter needs to be clarified before we can proceed further.



Where do we go from here? Assuming the rail corridor is not reopened to rail and that SMRC endorses the consultants report on the MRT proposal, then we are hopeful of forming a working group to advance the proposal. Several people with experience and enthusiasm have come forward to help with this.

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Friends of Monaro Rail

