



Monaro Rail Trail Newsletter



October 2022

So, what's the news?

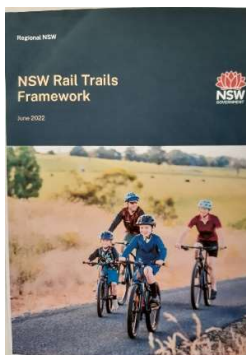
As the year rolls on the MRT committee continues to engage in community consultation, particularly with the key stakeholders. This includes the fortnightly meetings with the working group of MRT Inc and the two councils Snowy Monaro Regional Council and Queanbeyan Palerang Regional Council.

MRT Inc has proposed that Stage 1 of the MRT involves a northern section from Queanbeyan to Michelago and a southern section from Jincumbilly to Bombala. However, our planning for the southern section has been delayed because the Cooma Monaro Rail group have recently proposed running a tourist train from Cooma to Bombala.

Some good news from the NSW Government was the release of guidelines on developing rail trails and the passing of legislation that allows for an easier and speedier transfer of a lease of the rail corridor from Transport NSW to the council(s) managing the proposed rail trail.

A key issue for the Councils is to accept the operational and maintenance costs of the rail trail and to make provision for depreciation of the assets. This is a challenge for many rural councils and we continue to work with SMRC and Q-PRC to find solutions.

NSW Government Rail Trail Framework



Rail Trail groups across NSW have been waiting a long time for guidance on what it is that the NSW Government looks for when assessing rail trail proposals. The NSW Department of Regional NSW recently released the document "NSW Rail Trails Framework June 2022". This outlines the process for establishing a rail trail and clarifies three criteria that must be addressed in preparing any proposal. Rail trail proposals must offer evidence of - a viable business plan, community support and they must review potential environmental impacts on areas such as heritage and biosecurity.

How does the MRT proposal stack up against those criteria? We believe quite well,

- The MRT business case outlines a project that aligns with government, state, regional, and council strategic planning.

- The business case has a benefit cost ratio exceeding 4 and we have a plan to significantly offset maintenance costs. Strategies successfully implemented on NZ rail trails have guided our thinking on this.
- Community engagement and consultation has been in place since MRT Inc began in 2015 and has resulted in; memberships both individual and corporate and letters of support from individuals, community resident groups, business owners and landholders.
- An initial report into biosecurity matters reveals no major concerns but a more detailed report may be needed and we seek funding for that.

We continue to meet with senior staff from the NSW government Department of Regional NSW to discuss matters such as the transfer of the lease of the rail corridor from Transport NSW to the councils. A recent meeting with two Deputy Secretaries of Regional NSW, the SMRC Mayor and CEO as well as MRT Inc gave some guidance. Once a rail trail proposal has attracted funding for construction then the involved council(s) can commence corridor lease negotiations with Transport for NSW. The NSW government recently outlined the basics of these leases which will initially be given for a 30 years period.

Dealings with Councils

The two councils, Q- PRC and SMRC, will take the lead role when applying for funding to continue development of the MRT proposal. Consequently, we continue to keep councillors and council staff up to-date with information on matters such as costs and benefits and community support. In September, both councils gave formal approval to continue supporting development of the MRT. A key part of this support will be applying for funds to begin construction of a “shovel ready” section.

The first section likely to get that status will be Queanbeyan to Michelago, a distance of 49km. Until recently, there was some thought that the 6km of rail line from Queanbeyan station to Tralee would remain as part of bimodal freight interchange. Staff at Q-PRC now advise this is no longer the case and that the 6km rail corridor can be assessed for inclusion into the rail trail. Completion of that assessment will mean a trail development plan exists from Queanbeyan station to Michelago.

Grant applications



**Regional
NSW**

The NSW Government has committed \$24 million for a new program to support local councils, joint organisations of councils, not-for-profit, industry and Aboriginal community groups develop business cases or strategies for projects delivering significant economic or social benefits to regional communities. Priority will be infrastructure projects. The aim of this grant is to develop a stream of shovel ready projects that are suitable for future funding.

In August, MRT Inc assisted the two councils to apply for funds to finish the Trail Development Plan for the sections Queanbeyan to Cooma. The short section Queanbeyan to Tralee remains without a trail development plan as does the longer section Michelago to Cooma. Results of our application should be known by November.

Cooma Monaro Rail Inc



Is a joint tourist train and cycle corridor possible on part of the rail corridor? This option is being explored with Cooma Monaro Rail (CMR) and Bombala Rail History, both are key stakeholders in the development of the rail corridor. Early discussions with CMR revealed their strategy was to establish a tourist train between Cooma and Rock Flat, a distance 16 km south of Cooma. Based upon this, MRT Inc agreed to incorporate this desire into the MRT, since the two projects would complement each other.

However, in more recent discussions CMR advised they wished to run a tourist train from Cooma to Bombala, 100 kms, but they have no feasibility studies or business plan to support their proposal. The Mayor of SMRC has facilitated meetings involving CMR and MRT Inc and has encouraged CMR to prepare a feasibility report. This will take some time and means MRT plans for any part of the southern section are deferred. In the meantime, planning for the MRT on the northern section Queanbeyan to Cooma will continue.

Bombala Precinct Trail



Part of the vision for the MRT is to have a small trail within each of the communities along the rail corridor. These trails, linked to the MRT, will enable and encourage visiting cyclists or walkers to explore the village or town precinct and see some of the local points of interest. Last year, MRT Inc received a grant of \$58,858 from the Boco Rock Community Enhancement Fund to begin the first precinct trail which will be in Bombala. A committee of Bombala representatives and MRT members is delivering the project, due for official opening 18 October. Evidence of work progress is a new town map showing the cycle trails. The pic has Dale Coyte of South East Printing and MRT committee member Frank Bakker with the map.