President Frank Bakker

Monaro Rail Trail Inc
1149 Old Bega Road
Steeple Flat NSW 2631

Our mission is to create Australia's greatest rail trail where people of all ages and abilities can cycle, walk, and run. It will see the wellbeing of local economies flourish through tourism that brings new business opportunities and preserves the Monaro's rich rail heritage.

President's Report presented at the 2025 AGM.

This year has been another busy one but perhaps one noted for the slow and incremental progress.

The year began with the funding of the first section of trail at Bombala. While this is limited to $1M, it shows the way for work on future sections. To date the environmental and contamination reports are completed and the Review of Environmental Factors has been submitted to the Snowy Monaro Regional Council Planning Dept. The Development Application should be tabled to Council soon. All documents required for the NSW Government Framework for Rail Trails have also been submitted to Transport for NSW, so the lease should be finalised in a few months. The project team at SMRC has delivered a site briefing to the community in response to contamination concerns. This was generally well received but there are still some people who oppose lifting any of the steel rails on the corridor for several reasons and are using the prospect of contamination as a stalling tactic.



With support from Local State Member, Minister Steve Whan, the Queanbeyan - Palerang Regional Council submitted a grant application in February 2025 for the Regional Economic Development and Community Infrastructure Program. The section in the application was for 20km from Queanbeyan to near Royalla, which will one day make a great start to the northern part of the MRT. QPRC formally agreed to apply for the grant for the section of the MRT within their shire boundary and in doing so adopted the MRT business case as their own. Unfortunately, the grant application was unsuccessful but QPRC are investigating other grant opportunities and will again apply if something suitable is identified. I would point out that the lack of success was not due to the merits of the proposal.

In February, we had a session to commence the design of a marketing plan. This was facilitated by Richard Everson of Destination NSW - Southern and supported by the Economic Development team at QPRC and the preliminary thinking will be most helpful later when a trail has been constructed and marketing is required.

SMRC has been reviewing if a new independently prepared report for the MRT business case is needed. We have since met with the incoming new CEO at SMRC and it has been proposed that we should finalise and review the business case once all costs for establishing the trail beside rails for where it is agreed to be feasible. This will require a settlement of options between us and Cooma Monaro Rail (CMR). SMRC has kindly agreed to facilitate these meetings and once a settlement is reached, we understand that the SMRC Councillors will support future grant applications.

We have also had a meeting with a representative from the Cooma Monaro Progress Association to discuss the interaction of our project with the potential freight line from Eden to Canberra. It was concluded that the MRT project does not impact on the freight line proposal as the new line will not utilise existing rails or sleepers, and that if it is developed in the distant future, a "trail beside rails" will be incorporated at small incremental cost.

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A presentation was also given to the Cooma Chamber of Commerce recently, and I would also like to acknowledge the terrific support from the Bombala Chamber of Commerce.

Our dealings with stakeholders including Regional NSW, Destination NSW, Regional Development Australia and local members, Steve Whan and Kristy McBain have been productive and are ongoing. They remain interested and supportive of our project.

In the background, Rail Trails Australia with Peter Coumbis and Geoff Cahill leading the charge have been successful at getting meetings with senior staff at Transport for NSW and the NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, and with the help from Steve Whan, a meeting with the relevant ministers. This will hopefully stimulate them to" think big" for developing and funding rail trails in NSW.

Our joint meetings with both regional councils, Queanbeyan -Palerang and Snowy Monaro, continue to be held monthly and I thank the staff at QPRC for hosting these meetings.

Finally, I would like to sincerely thank all the committee members for their contributions over the past year. I feel we have been working well as a team and your continued enthusiasm and contributions are much appreciated.

Frank Bakker
President – MRT Inc.
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