



**BICYCLE
NETWORK®**

Bicycle Network Tasmania submission

**Legislative Council inquiry into Tasmania's
North-East Railway Corridor**

November, 2018



About Bicycle Network

With nearly 50,000 members, Bicycle Network is one of the biggest bike riding organisations in the world. With a proud history reaching back more than 40 years, we are committed to improving the health and wellbeing of all Australians by making it easier for people to ride a bike.

We have a measurable and large-scale impact in community participation and the promotion of healthy lifestyles through bike riding.

We achieve this through:

- improving the bike riding environment by working with government at all levels to provide better infrastructure, data, policies, legislation and regulations
- delivering successful behaviour change programs such as Ride2School and Ride2Work
- providing services that support bike riders through membership
- being a key spokesperson on issues related to cycling and physical activity.

In Tasmania, we also have an active volunteer committee who organise regular social rides, events such as the E-bike Expo, festival stalls and bicycle valet parking.

We promote bicycle riding for recreation and transport because it's a healthy, low-cost, convenient, non-polluting way to stay active and get around.

Tasmania's health challenges

For Tasmanians to prevent diseases such as diabetes, heart disease and some cancers they should be getting 30–60 minutes of moderate exercise five times a week. About two-thirds of Tasmanian adults do not get this recommended level of exercise.ⁱ

It's the role of governments at all levels to help provide the infrastructure that makes it easier for people to be physically active. The relatively small cost of providing trails and paths saves the health budget many more dollars later on if physical and mental illnesses can be prevented.

Bicycle riding is an ideal way for people to get exercise because it's low impact, so suitable for a wide range of ages, and when used as transport can be incorporated into daily habits.

About one-third of Tasmanians ride a bicycle, whether it's everyday or just once a year.ⁱⁱ

Trails through natural areas, separated from motor vehicle traffic, are preferred routes for people riding for pleasure.

But as well as recreational riding, trails can provide locals with a safe, separated route for cycling or walking to nearby towns so they don't have to drive a car.

The majority of the population is open to the idea of riding for transport, but only if they can be separated from vehicles, which is the main danger for bike riders.ⁱⁱⁱ



Cycling Tourism Strategy

In 2017 the Tasmanian government released a Cycling Tourism Strategy in which the Premier said the state could become the cycling tourism capital of Australia because of our unrivalled natural scenery.^{iv}

The government also dedicated \$6 million to promoting cycling tourism across the state.

While Tasmania has surged ahead with mountain biking opportunities the touring opportunities, of which rail trails form a part, have been left behind.

Only one non mountain biking project was awarded money from the \$6 million fund, the Snug to Margate cycleway, which received \$174,849.^v

The state is well overdue for more longer easy-riding trails to boost tourism in regional areas.

In the past year there was a 21.5% increase in the number of visitors to the state who rode a bicycle while they were here, with standard bikes slightly ahead of mountain bikes. Although the number of people who had ridden a mountain bike has doubled in just the past four years.^{vi}

The North-East Rail Trail was identified in the 2011 Northern Tasmania Development report into mountain bike tourism potential. That report identified the opportunities to package food and wine tourism with cycling and the potential to tie into road cycling tourism to market the area as a cycling destination.^{vii}

Promoting cycling events are also part of the strategy as they bring riders to a region and promote a trail to people may not otherwise have known about it. This year the first Rail Trail Run and Ride event was held over the weekend 18–19 August on the existing trail. A longer rail trail will give the organisers more options to expand the event and attract more people to the area.

Cycling tourism benefits

While Tasmania already has a number of rail trails they are all relatively short, with the longest being the current section of the North-East Rail Trail between Scottsdale and Billycock Hill.

In contrast, Victoria, Queensland and Western Australia all boast rail trails over 100 km, which lend themselves to multi-day rides that offer tourism benefits for accommodation, food and transport businesses.

Cycling visitors tend to stay longer and spend more than the average visitors, and more so if they are from overseas.^{viii} New Zealand research found that rail trails attracted tourists aged 40–65 from interstate and overseas who liked to stay for 2–5 days.^{ix} These tourists typically wanted attractions other than just the bike riding and liked rail trails which also incorporated other activities, such as wine tasting, art studios, etc.

Professor Sue Beeton in 2010 estimated that the Murray to Mountain rail trail in Victoria injected \$200 into the economy, per visitor, per day.^x



The two longest rail trails in north-east Victoria attract about 100,000 riders per year, with that number rising.^{xi} These trails boast mountain views, farmland, forests and access to built heritage. A basis on which Tasmania can easily compete.

New Zealand's well known Otago rail trail in 2015 had 17,164 visits and brought in \$1.35 million in revenue from people riding the full trail.^{xii} Many more people walked or rode sections of the trail.

The 2014 economic benefit assessment for the North-East Rail Trail estimated that after five years close to 23,000 trips would be made on the trail and it would contribute about \$3.5 million to the local economy annually.

Since those estimates were made Tasmania's cycling tourism credentials have strengthened with the ongoing popularity of Derby, the new Maydena mountain bike park and new mountain bike trails planned for the north-east and north-west.

Northern Tasmania is easily accessible to big populations in Victoria and NSW and is easy to get to via ferry or plane for long weekends or short-break holidays.

The economic benefit assessment looked at direct impacts on the economy but didn't assess longer term benefits such as an increase in real estate prices. Anecdotally, it's known that stagnant property markets in Maydena and Derby have been reinvigorated due to the mountain biking infrastructure. This is because of people wanting to capitalise on overnight accommodation markets, but it could also be because these towns have become livelier places and more desirable for people looking to set up a home.

North-East Rail Trail

The North-East Rail Trail has the support of local, state and federal government as well as an active community committee set up for the ongoing maintenance of the trail.

The success of Derby's mountain bike trails and associated businesses has shown that people will travel intra- and inter-state to use good quality cycling facilities.

Two new mountain bike trails in the Blue Tier and St Helens are due to begin construction in early 2019, further cementing north-east Tasmania as a cycling tourism destination.

The North-East Rail Trail can add to the region's cycling reputation, providing a more relaxed option for a wider range of ages and abilities. All or part of it can also be walked, which again broadens the numbers of people who may be attracted to visiting the region.

The Rail Trail could also become a comfortable starting point for touring cyclists who fly into Launceston to ride down the east coast to Hobart.

The obvious business opportunities to arise from rail trails are accommodation for small to large groups, food and hospitality businesses, bicycle hire and servicing, and transport for bicycles and riders. However, a ready supply of relaxed holiday makers also provide potential custom for crafts people, artists and food and beverage producers.

The Northern Tasmanian Development Corporation has warned that northern Tasmania's working age population decline needs to be turned around. It is aiming to increase the working age population by 6000 over the next eight years.^{xiii} A rail trail can provide a steady flow of visitors, seven days a



week (although weekends will be busier), to keep tourism businesses viable, and may be the added extra they need to open more frequently or expand their numbers of employees.

The Central Otago Rail Trail in New Zealand has been credited with revitalising the local economy by giving businesses enough increased custom to expand. The Hayes Engineering Museum, for example, used to only open for phone bookings but now opens seven days a week thanks to the rail trail.^{xiv}

Cost effectiveness

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

Importantly, the development of a rail trail will not prevent freight or passenger rail being introduced in the future if businesses develop or population density requires it. This “land banking” is cost-effective because the rail trail removes the defunct infrastructure and leaves a blank canvas that can easily be retrofitted later.

Using volunteer labour, the community group that will manage the trail estimates maintenance costs will be about \$25,000 per year. This is not a significant cost to maintain an asset the could attract thousands of visitors a year and millions of dollars for the local economy.

ⁱ www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/wihpw/priority_areas/promoting_physical_activity_and_active_communities

ⁱⁱ Department of State Growth, *Tasmanian Cycle Tourism Strategy*, Tasmanian Government, p 7.

ⁱⁱⁱ Geller, Roger, “Four Types of Cyclists”, Portland Office of Transportation, 2009.

^{iv} Department of State Growth, *Tasmanian Cycle Tourism Strategy*, Tasmanian Government, p 2.

^v www.premier.tas.gov.au/releases/tasmanias_cycle_tourism_industry_continues_to_grow and www.tassietrails.org/news/snug-to-margate-cycleway-funding.

^{vi} www.tvsanalyser.com.au.

^{vii} Six Dot Consulting, *Mountain Bike Tourism Potential in Northern Tasmania*, Northern Tasmania Development, October 2011, p 7.

^{viii} *Ibid*, p 40.

^{ix} Tourism Resource Consultants, *The New Zealand Cycleway: Market Research*, New Zealand Ministry of Tourism, September 2009, p v.

^x Sue Beeton, “Regional community entrepreneurship through tourism: the case of Victoria’s rail trails”, *Int. J. Innovation and Regional Development*, Vol. 2, Nos. 1/2, 2010, p 134.

^{xi} www.indigoshire.vic.gov.au/Living-in-Indigo/Sport-and-recreation/Walking-and-cycling-tracks.

^{xii} Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, Ngā Haerenga NZ Cycle Trail Evaluation Report 2016, New Zealand Government, p 18.

^{xiii} www.abc.net.au/news/2018-04-22/launceston-population-drain-squeezing-economy/9680470

^{xiv} Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, Ngā Haerenga NZ Cycle Trail Evaluation Report 2016, New Zealand Government, p 29.