

North East Tasmania Rail Trail Consultation Summary

DOC/24/13281

CONSULTATION OVERVIEW

On 22 July 2024 Council resolved to receive written submissions from the community regarding the North East Rail Trail Revised Business Case.

The public consultation period opened for 28 days from Wednesday 24 July 2024, concluding on Wednesday 21 August 2024. Notification and distribution channels were as follows:

DATE	METHOD	DETAILS
17 July 2024	Public Notice	North East Advertiser: Notification of upcoming agenda item
24 July 2024	Newspaper article	Project update – Front page and page 4
24 July 2024	Social Media	Post: Consultation open
24 July 2024	Letter	Sent via Australia Post to adjoining landowners advising of consultation period
24 July 2024	Website updated	Alert on home page, project page updated, Community Information Brochure and Frequently Asked Questions Document uploaded.
25 July 2024	Direct email	Previous project stakeholders/interested parties advising of consultation period
30 July 2024	Letter	Sent via email to L&NER – potential to collaborate
14 August 2024	Public Notice	North East Advertiser: Consultation close date
10 August 2024	Public Notice	Examiner: Consultation close date
17 August 2024	Social Media	Post: Reminder - consultation closing soon
19 August 2024	Social Media	Post: Reminder - last chance to provide feedback
July/Aug 2024	Poster	Notice in Council Offices – Have Your Say – link to webpage

A total of 90 submissions were received during the consultation period with a further 3 submissions received after the consultation period ended. These have been included in the summary.

CONSULTATION SUMMARY

Of the submissions received a total of 14 commented directly regarding the business case. The most common themes associated with these submissions were as follows:

- Usage numbers and expected benefits were seen to be optimistic and/or without basis by responders #35, #53 and #85. In addition, responder #80 felt that the benefits were not relevant as they were believed to be based on Victorian figures and applied to riders rather than the community. (By contrast responder #60 felt that not enough mention was made of non-cyclist users)
- Costs, particularly construction, were seen to be understated by responders #35, #53, #60, #73, #77 and #85. Comments related to the need to include further explanations regarding cost items, and the need to include engineering as well as project risks and marketing costs. Responder #60 advised of the need to include additional contingencies such as maintenance increases and inclusion of higher durability surfaces for high traffic areas. This was felt to be necessary due to the risk for potentially higher than expected usage (as per the higher than anticipated Coastal Pathway actual usage numbers and other rail trails having user numbers

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- far exceeding expectations).
- Responders #48, #55, #80, #85 and #86 felt that benefits were not visible for ratepayers with capital costs and ongoing maintenance costs deemed unviable and Dorset's demographics (aged population) seen as key factors and the trail considered to be a potential burden to ratepayers. Submission #38 and #67, however felt that there are clear benefits and regional significance from the project, with Submission #38 commenting that failure to implement Stage 3 would actually have a harmful effect on Dorset, and Tasmania, with the many of the development opportunities only becoming apparent once the trail is built.
 - Responders #55 and #77 felt that inherent bias of the consultants influenced the business case.

There were a number of suggestions included for further development of the business case:

- Greater emphasis on non-cyclists (walkers, bushwalkers etc.) as key potential trail users
- Include impact assessment of similar developments
- Include project risk assessment
- Include statistics in relation to current trail usage
- Include value for the shadow costs associated with negative trail impacts e.g. Angst and stress associated health impacts of trail development
- Discount the reduced health benefits of e-bikes and e-scooters off the full benefits being applied
- Better clarification regarding the assumptions being made

Of the remaining submissions and elements of the above, the focus was on support or otherwise of the project. The submissions can be summarised as follows:

- A total of 48 were in support of the project proceeding
- A total of 39 were not in support of the project proceeding
- A total of 5 were in partial support of the project proceeding
- A total of 1 response was unclear in their support, or otherwise of the project

Of the total submissions 38 (41%)* were from Dorset Local Government Area (LGA), 22 (23%) were from City of Launceston LGA, 14* (15%) were from Intrastate, 1(1%) from Interstate and 19 (20%) need not identify their locale.

**Note that one responder identified as being from both City of Launceston and Dorset Council.*

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The majority of those in support were existing rail trail users (mostly cyclists) with experience on rail trails and similar, both interstate and overseas. 12 responders were representing organisations/businesses ranging from farmers to accommodation providers, and service clubs, and 4 were adjoining landowners with at least one planning on developing a complimentary business if the project proceeds. The common theme was of having first-hand experience in seeing the benefits of rail trails on regional communities and the belief that the North East Rail Trail has the potential to be one of the best in Australia. The additional length was seen to open up the opportunities for the trail to be a standalone attraction to individuals and groups, as well as a 'bucket list ride/activity' for many. A number of the responders identified themselves as being in their 70's, others as families or couples. 12% of those that identified as being within City of Launceston municipal boundaries were stated as being from Lilydale. Their support for the trail centered on having no off-road travel options currently available and consequently nowhere safe away from traffic for families and older people to exercise. Of the total submissions who identified their location as the City of Launceston, 59% were in support of the project, and Dorset Council had 26%. The remainder of submissions (including intrastate and interstate) had 74% support towards the project.

A common theme amongst those not in support of an extended rail trail, supported a vision for a reintroduction of trains, with 18 responders commenting that they would like to see trains return to the North East line. An additional 5 responses were against removing the rail line generally. Other common themes for those not in support included the following:

- No benefits for ratepayers – trail would be an ongoing burden, aging population that doesn't utilise this type of infrastructure and that Council should concentrate on its core function of roads, rates and rubbish;
- The existing trail was believed to be underutilised;
- Some responders felt there were enough trails in the North East and bikes "should be kept at Derby";
- Some responders felt that bike riders don't spend significantly enough to justify the project;
- Some responders felt that the cost of the project was too expensive, and that money should be spent elsewhere on health and recreation;
- Ratepayers felt they should not be responsible for City of Launceston areas of the trail;
- A number of responders felt that the trail should instead be extended to Legerwood.

Of the 12 identified adjoining landowners not in support of the project, the main concerns were regarding:

- Perceived lack of privacy;
- Concerns that litter (including toilet waste) would be increased on or near their property;
- Concerned that they would lose their accreditation due to biosecurity;
- Perceived contamination from construction works into waterways and onto their property;
- Concerns in regard to perceived potential for increased unauthorised access and vandalism/theft;
- Concerns in regard to perceived increased risk of bushfire and noxious weeds.

Adjacent landowners who have identified concerns or suggestions in relation to the proposed trail have been noted in the Issues Register. On site visits will be conducted as required if/when the project progresses.

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4 responses were identified as organisations/businesses – 3 of these from Launceston and North East Railway (L&NER) and North East Residents and Farmers (NERAF).

Partial support: 5 responders were in partial support. 2 commented regarding the numbers on the existing trail being low and a need for monitoring. 1 agreed with the rail trail but only as far as Lebrina at most (leaving the tunnel for a future train project). Another also commented that a shorter version would be more preferable. Opposition was clear for any of Dorset Council funds to be spent in City of Launceston. 1 responder felt that an extension to Legerwood would be better as it was felt that a reliance on tourism would lead to community sterility and housing issues. Further consideration was felt to be needed for rail and trail collaboration and for the trail to be built over the rail line rather than removing them.

Unclear: 1 response focused solely on suggested updates to the business case.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

The consultation process highlighted a number of elements to be considered as part of the projects ongoing development. Suggestions were centred around inclusion of art installations and interpretive signage showcasing the history and culture of the region, management and revenue options for the trail, effective marketing (including a dedicated online presence), and consideration for higher maintenance costs/more durable trail surface in high traffic areas. (This was a suggestion from key cycling organisations as well as individuals due to the North West Coastal Pathway and other Rail Trails across Australia consistently seeing higher than anticipated usage numbers.)

Additional funding for these value-adds would need to be sourced.