



High Country Rail Trail Masterplan

Shelley To Corryong
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The High Country Rail Trail Masterplan was prepared by Terrain Trails for Towong Shire Council.

Researched and prepared by:

- Leigh Hollands
- Tony Hollands
- Scott Gigliotti

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www.terraintrails.com.au
leigh@terraintrails.com.au



www.towong.vic.gov.au
info@towong.vic.gov.au

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Introduction

The delivery of the final 46km Shelley to Corryong section of shared use trail will complete the 128km Wodonga to Corryong 'High Country Rail Trail'. From the water's edge of Lake Hume, the trail climbs 580 meters over historic trestle bridges into the mountains, passing Victoria's highest station before descending into the upper Murray *Man From Snowy River* country. The completed High Country Rail Trail will be like no other. This unique rail trail experience, offering arguably the most diverse scenery of any rail trail in Australia, will strengthen North East Victoria's nature-based tourism offering. This will ensure the High Country continues as 'Australia's premier cycling destination'. It will provide additional jobs and business opportunities ensuring vital sustainable economic stimulus in a region devastated by drought, the Black Summer Bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic.



Background

On the 30 December 2019 Towong Shire was faced with one of its biggest natural disasters as a bushfire engulfed the Upper Murray region. In total, nearly 600 properties were impacted by the fires with 40 places of primary residence destroyed, hundreds of properties and buildings directly impacted, kilometres of fencing ruined and nearly 6,000 livestock killed or missing. The fires burnt through more than 225,717 hectares (34%) of the Shire's land.

As a result, the Shire has suffered huge personal and business losses, especially within the agricultural sector. The primary and secondary economic, social and health impacts on the broader community and businesses have been enormous.

In response to the Black Summer Bushfires impact, the Federal Government developed the Regional Tourism Bushfire Recovery Program. Through the program, Towong Shire was successful in receiving funding for the development of a strategic plan for the future development and governance of the High Country Rail Trail. Funding was also received to review and replace en-route signage and initiate a marketing and promotional campaign.

North East Victoria is recognised as Australia's 'number one' cycling destination, attracting over 160,000 cycling visitors annually. Cycling in the region is supported by the comprehensive marketing and promotional campaign 'Ride High Country'.

In region cycle tourism spend is worth an estimated \$131 million annually. This spend trend is expected to continue to grow by 5.5%, compared to 1.2% growth for total visitors.



Three cycling segments commonly visit the high country: mountain biking, road cycling and rail trail.

The High Country Rail Trail (HCRT) is one of three key rail trails in the region, the other two being the Murray to Mountains Rail Trail and the Great Victorian Rail Trail. The 116km Murray to Mountain Rail Trail is the longest sealed rail trail in the country, whilst the 134km unsealed Great Victorian Rail Trail is favoured by mountain and hybrid bike cyclists.

The 95km HCRT is the lessor known of the three trails and is still in the development phase.

In 2002 the HCRT Advisory Committee formed. In partnership with Towong Shire Council, they were successful in seeking funding to develop the HCRT between Wodonga to Old Tallangatta. Since then, the cycling and walking trail has been extended to Shelley.

The HCRT Advisory Committee, along with the community at large, would like to see the next stage of development continue along the original rail line to Cudgewa, with a further link developed to connect the townships of Cudgewa and Corryong.

Corryong provides a gateway to the nearby Snowy Mountains and Kosciuszko National Park. Also, the recently opened Tumbarumba to Rosewood Rail Trail, a picturesque hours' drive away.

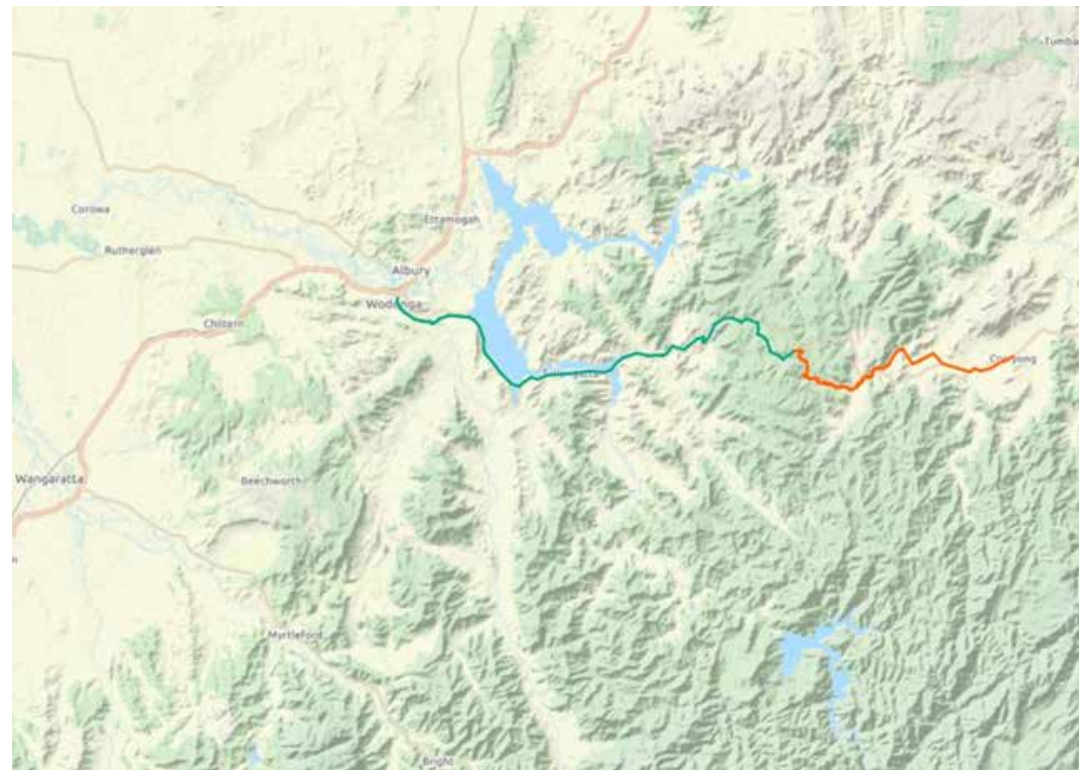
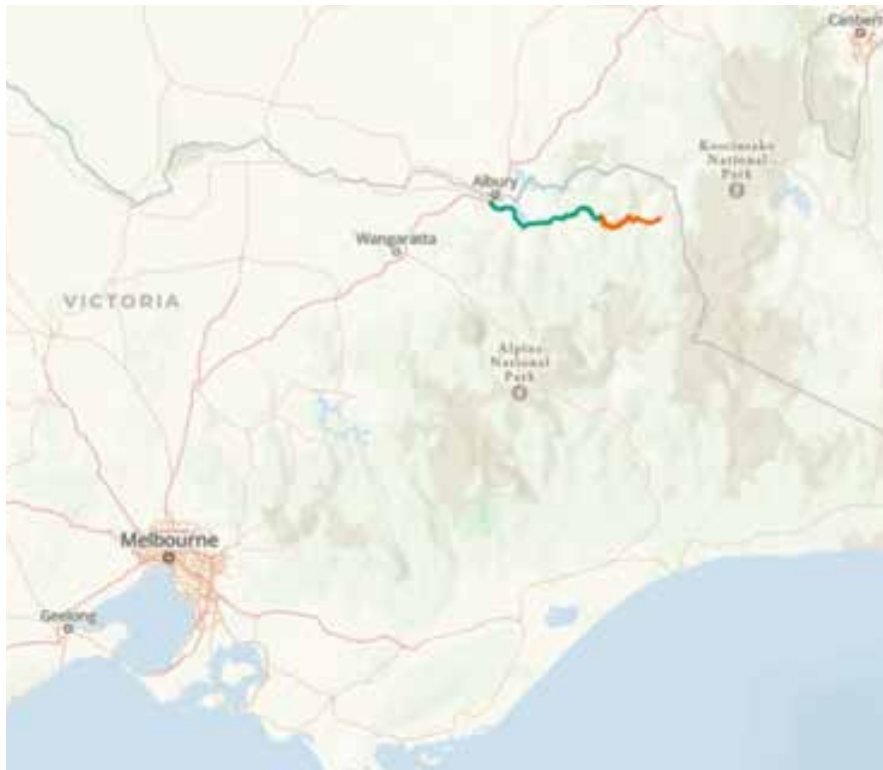


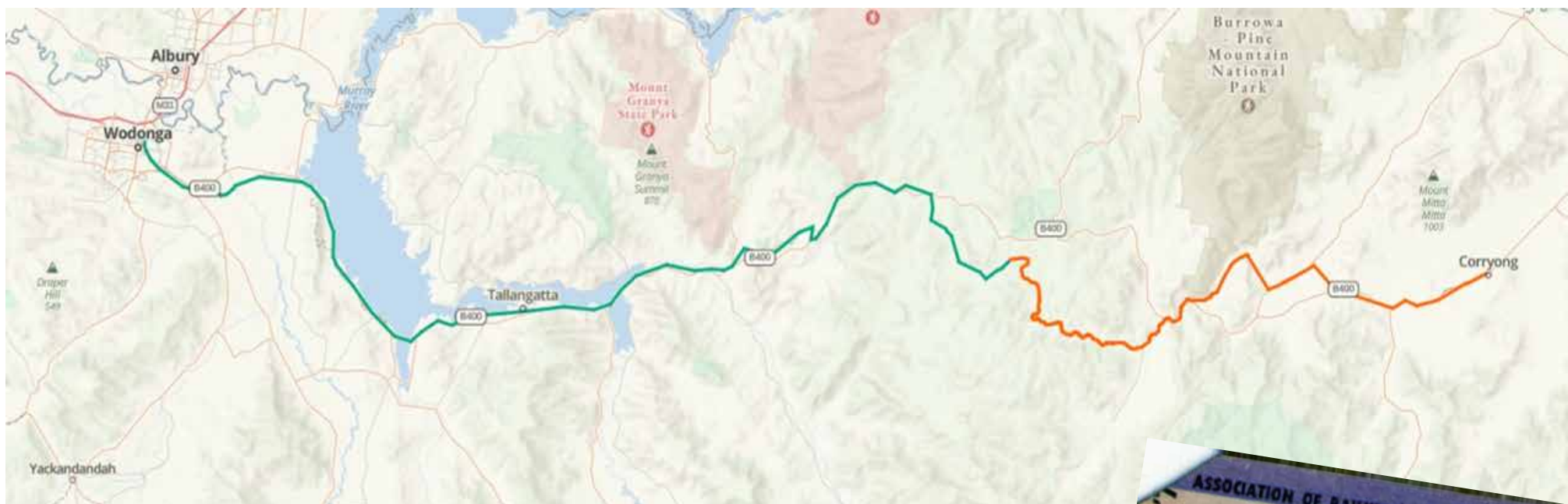
Australian bush poet Banjo Paterson wrote *The Man From Snowy River* which captured the heart of the nation and tells the story of a horseback pursuit in the mountains of the Great Dividing Range. It is claimed that the inspiration for the character in Paterson's poem was local stockman Jack Riley (born in 1841). His grave can be found in Corryong's cemetery via the entrance off Parish Lane. The Man From Snowy River Museum, situated in the old shire offices, provides further insight into the life of this legend and the history of the area.

The existing and future High Country Rail Trail traverses picturesque rural landscapes, pine plantations, trestle bridges and bushland. It offers a diverse and authentic back country experience.

The High Country Rail Trail is currently maintained by a Committee of Management, Parklands Albury Wodonga, and several volunteer groups.

Location and Project Area

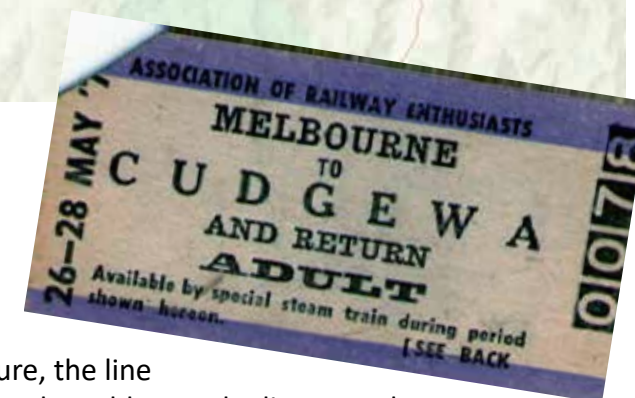




Wodonga to Cudgewa Line

Wodonga is located where the Hume highway crosses the Murray River in Victoria's North East. It is at the original Wodonga station that passengers would change from the Melbourne to Sydney line to embark on their journey into the High Country via the Wodonga-Cudgewa line. Used initially for timber and agriculture, the line became an important part of the construction of the Snowy Mountains Hydro-electric scheme after the Second World War. The line was also used to serve the Bonegilla Army Camp which was later used as accommodation for immigrants.

Shortly after the Bonegilla station, the line skirts the waters of lake Hume, crossing Sandy Creek Bridge to pass through Tallangatta. In 1956, as part of the Lake Hume project, it was necessary to divert the line around the old town of Tallangatta as raising water levels would flood the old railway alignment. A brand-new station was built at the relocated township of Tallangatta. After passing through Tallangatta and Bullioh, the line starts to climb some 580m in vertical elevation at the maximum grade a train was capable of climbing/descending. The climb takes in several impressive historic trestle bridges and the now Mount Lawson State Park before arriving at Shelley station. At 792 m above sea level, Shelley Station was once the highest station in Victoria. Shelley regularly sees snow in the winter months, once adding to the sometimes-treacherous journey through the mountains.



From Shelley station it was all downhill utilising several more trestle bridges to Beetoomba where the line picks up and follows the picturesque Cudgewa Creek. After skirting the now Burrowa – Pine Mountain National Park, the line passes through Berringama climbing slightly before making its final descent to Cudgewa Station, 410 km from Southern Cross Station. Although Cudgewa was historically the end of the line, it is intended to complete a cycle link to Corryong to deliver economic and social benefits to the Bushfire impacted communities of the Upper Murray.

The High Country Rail Trial passes through three Victorian Local Government Areas: the City of Wodonga, Indigo Shire and Towong Shire. The proposed HCRT extension is located in Towong Shire.



Project Objectives and Methodology

The project objectives have been developed to ensure the strategic delivery of a community asset and world class tourism drawcard that will assist Towong Shire residents and businesses overcome the devastation brought upon the region by the recent Black Summer bushfires and COVID-19 pandemic.

Project objectives include:

- Holistic plan for the entire HCRT (existing and proposed) to ensure continuity of signage and user experience to see it recognised as one of Victoria’s premier rail trails
- Key access points for cyclists, parking and trailheads and associated infrastructure
- Identification of bridge crossing, fencing, gateway and culvert requirements
- Identification of clear emergency access points
- Development of a strong brand for signage, marketing and promotion
- Alignment of proposed extension, Shelley to Corryong
- Cost estimates and staging of project components
- Suggested management model
- Creation of ancillary business and tourism opportunities, including the development of suitable food, beverage and accommodation products to meet market needs and user group expectations
- Utilise local culture and business to best incorporate existing region assets.

These objectives are designed to be in alignment with the targets set by the North East Victoria Cycling Optimisation Masterplan (NEVCO) which aim to increase cycle tourism and visitation to the region.



Project Methodology

The methodology utilised by the project team in the preparation of this masterplan involved a number of elements to establish a robust planning process. The key elements were:

Review of current and previous strategies

The review of relevant strategies and plans regarding tourism, cycle tourism and economic development to provide an understanding of current and future product offerings, user demand and expectations.

Initial site analysis

Assessment of potential opportunities and challenges for the trail development including access points and trailhead locations.

Desktop conceptual mapping

Following the initial site analysis, a desktop concept of the proposed Shelley to Corryong section was developed.

Community and stakeholder consultation

A comprehensive community and stakeholder consultation process was undertaken. This involved an online survey, pop up information sessions and direct contact. This provided a depth of understanding of opportunities, challenges and concerns.

Field exploration

Subsequent visits to the study area were conducted for assessment of the trail corridor, highlighting opportunities that would enhance the trail experience and identify/quantify bridge crossing, fencing, gateway, signage and culvert requirements.

Amendments to the initial concept following consultation feedback were also assessed.

Management and maintenance model identification

Exploration of various management and maintenance models for the ongoing operation of the HCRT.



Strategic Alignment and Review

In this current climate of rapid growth in cycle tourism, competition for this tourism market and user expectation is increasing. Market analysis and identification of current and future needs, trends and strategic alignment is therefore critical to ensure the highest potential for success of a cycle tourism product. The literature listed below was identified as relevant to the development of this plan:

- *Towong Shire Council Mountain Biking Strategy 2021*. Towong Shire Council
- *Towong Shire Destination Management Plan 2021-2025*. Towong Shire Council
- *Towong Shire Economic Development Plan 2021-2025*. Towong Shire Council
- *North East Victoria Cycling Optimisation Masterplan (NEVCO)*. Tourism North East, Regional Development Victoria
- *Victoria's High Country Destination Management Plan 2013-23*. Tourism North East
- *Cycle Tourism Investment Opportunities in Victoria's High Country 2019*. Regional Development Victoria
- *Hume Region Significant Tracks and Trails 2014-23*
- *Victoria's Trails Strategy 2014-24*. The State of Victoria
- *Guidelines for Trail Planning, Design and Management*. TRC Tourism
- *Active Victoria – A strategic framework for sport & recreation in Victoria 2017-2021*. The State of Victoria
- *Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2019-2023*. The State of Victoria
- *Victorian Visitor Economic Strategy 2016*. The State of Victoria
- *Victorian Trails Strategy 2013-2023*. The State of Victoria
- *Towong Healthy Communities Plan 2018-2021*. Towong Shire Council
- *Upper Murray 2030 Vision Plan*. Towong Shire Council, Snowy Valleys Council
- *Hume Strategy for Sustainable Communities*. Regional Development Victoria, Hume Regional management forum
- *Rail Trail Establishment Guidelines*. Rail Trails Australia.



Field Exploration and Site Analysis

The full length of the existing Wodonga to Shelley HCRT was ridden and assessed from a user group perspective. The location and condition of signage/wayfinding, access points, bridge crossings and public amenities were photographed and marked via GPS. Additionally, surface treatment and condition was assessed noted. General user experience quality and continuity was also considered.

The proposed extension between Shelley and Cudgewa was ridden or walked to assess the current condition of the rail corridor and construction requirements. Key infrastructure requirements such as bridge crossings, fencing, access points, gateways and culverts were logged via GPS. Full site surveys of all bridge crossings were undertaken accompanied by an engineer. Proposed bridge solutions and estimated costings were documented.

The options to provide a shared path link from Cudgewa to Corryong were explored. Again, key infrastructure requirements such as bridge crossings, fencing, road crossings and culverts were logged via GPS.

Community and Stakeholder Consultation

Extensive community and stakeholder consultation was undertaken to inform this document. The methodology and findings are presented and explored in section 6.



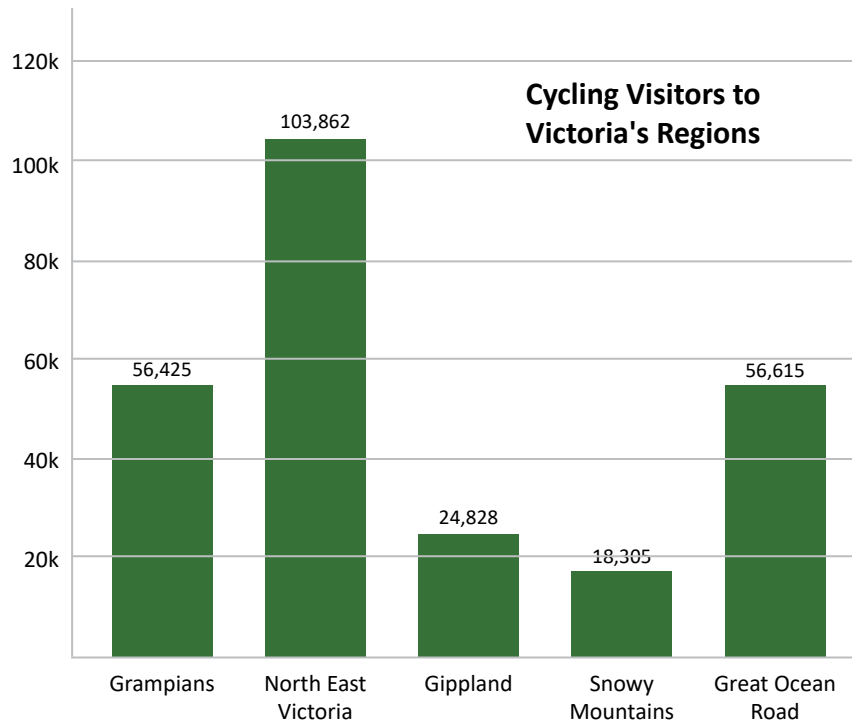
Situation Analysis

North East Victoria's Cycle Tourism Landscape

In September 2017 Tourism North East released their North East Victoria Cycling Research conducted by BDA Marketing Planning. This comprehensive document showed that Victoria's North East was attracting more cycle tourists than any other regional destination with 105,000 dedicated cyclists who generated \$49 million in visitor spend. It also stated that cycle tourism was growing at twice the rate of general tourism, with cycle visitor numbers forecast to increase by 155% by 2025.

The latest figures reported by Tourism North East substantiates these projections. Victoria's North East now attracts – 160,000 dedicated cyclists, which is an increase of over 55,000 with in region spending for cycle tourism now worth more than \$131 million annually. The High Country continues to attract more cycling visitors than any other region nationally (against benchmarked State leaders) making it 'Australia's premier cycling destination'.

With current restrictions on international travel due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the predicted boost in domestic tourism will undoubtedly increase visitor numbers and accelerate demand for product.



Victoria's North East now attracts 160,000 dedicated cyclists. In region spending for cycle tourism is worth more than \$131 million annually, making it 'Australia's premier cycling destination'.

Tourism North East’s cycle tourism data is broken into 3 key segments: Rail Trail, Mountain Bike and Road. There is considerable crossover between these types of cycling with core mountain bikers and road cyclists utilising rail trails. In addition to these three key disciplines there are two other growing segments traveling to experience North East Victoria’s cycling offerings. These segments are:

Gravel Riding

Gravel riding, aka gravel grinding or adventure riding, is an increasingly popular form of cycling that combines elements of road and mountain biking, consisting mostly of distance riding over unpaved roads. This can include dirt roads, rail trails, or gravel and non-technical single track trails. As gravel riding trails are not usually available in cities, these riders have to travel to rural areas to experience this discipline. This provides opportunity to discover some incredibly scenic rides that can only be experienced during an adventure off the beaten path.

Gravel bikes are essentially a robust road bike with larger, stronger wheels and tyres.



Bikepacking

Bikepacking is a multi-day tour by bike, completed on mixed terrain or entirely off-road. Riders carry the necessary equipment with them.

This discipline of cycling has started to surge in popularity in recent years, aided by spectacular images of such adventures on Instagram. There are even races for the most committed riders.

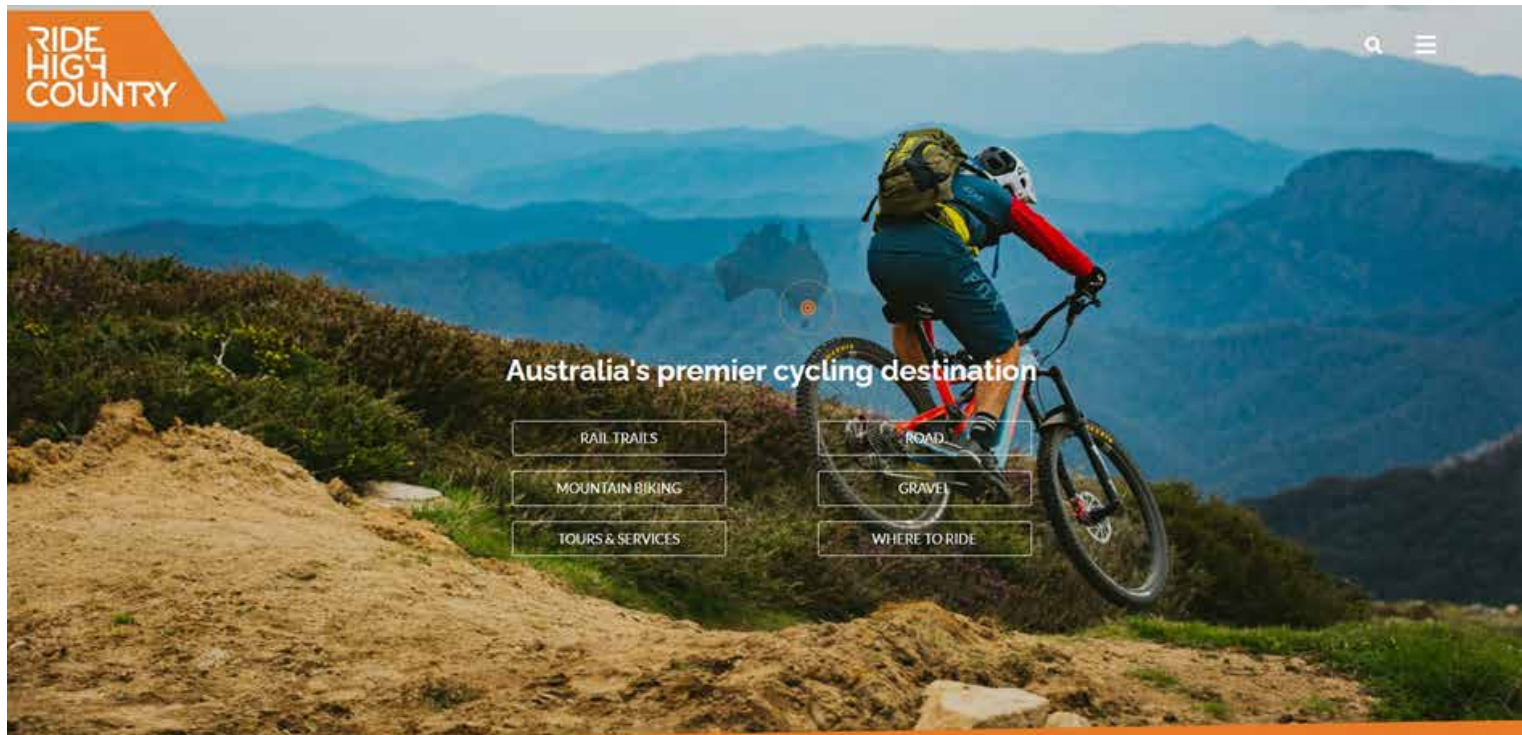
A range of bikes can be used for bikepacking. The type of bike usually depends on the terrain ridden.



The NEVCO Masterplan states that cycle visitation growth has been fuelled by substantial investments made in cycle infrastructure, developed to a high standard across the three cycling disciplines. This combined with excellent food, wine and beer products, a strong supply of accommodation and an iconic Victorian High Country backdrop, has created a regional destination with great appeal across national and international cycling markets.

The broad crossover appeal to differing cycling disciplines, is key to understanding the strength of attraction to North East Victoria. This is one of the very few cycling destinations in Australia that offers a strength in all three cycling typologies. As a result, the North East has a greater potential for attracting cycling enthusiasts than any other region. Many visiting cyclists look to undertake multiple types of riding and arrive with both road and mountain bikes.

Marketing and promotion of North East Victoria's cycle tourism products are championed by Tourism North East. Under their 'Ride High Country' branding, they have developed a strong targeted social media presence, including a creative and intuitive website, along with printed promotional material. Tourism North East is in prime position to capitalise on the region's cycling assets to attract the maximum in cycling tourism dollar income.





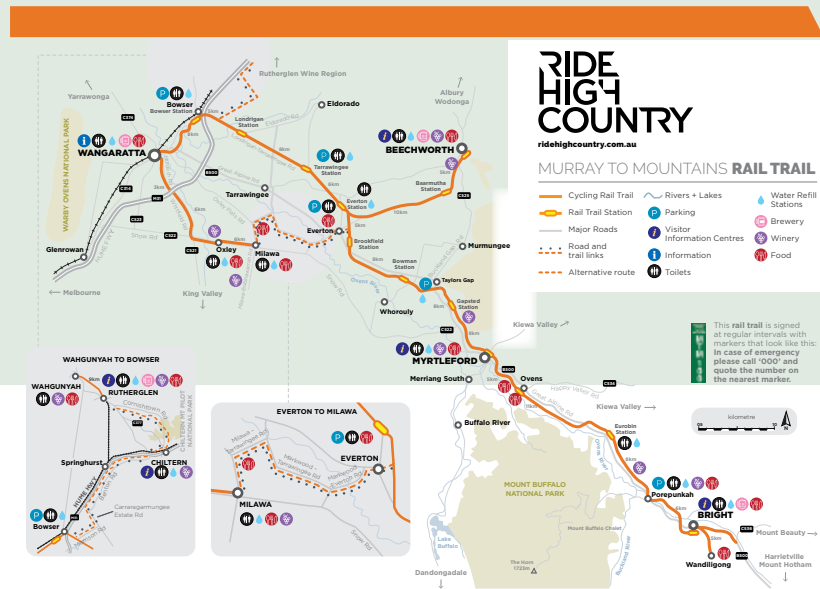
The Competition

There are currently two other rail trails in North East Victoria, and a ground breaking new rail trail recently opened in Tumbarumba, NSW, approximately one hour drive from Corryong.

Murray to Mountains Rail Trail

Offering 116km of sealed surface, the trail takes in the towns of Wangaratta, Rutherglen, Bright, Myrtleford and Beechworth. An extension from Beechworth to Yackandandah is currently under construction which will add approximately 30 kms. The Murray to Mountains is considered the premier rail trail in Victoria. The sealed surface and gentle gradients make it accessible to all ride types and popular with all age demographics, from young families to seniors. Also, the towns spread along the trail create options for half day to multi-day itineraries. Complementary activities are to be found around the major townships. Several operators provide guided tours ranging from family friendly through to gourmet cycle escapes.

For self-guided riders, a dedicated bike shuttle provides pick-up and drop-off services, which can include bike hire.



The Murray to Mountains Rail Trail is currently considered the premier rail trail in Victoria.

Great Victorian Rail Trail

The Great Victorian Rail Trail is currently Australia's longest continuous rail trail, featuring Victoria's longest rail trail tunnel at Cheviot. The gravel surface trail spans 134 kilometres from Tallarook, through Trawool, Yea to Molesworth and Yarck to Cathkin and Alexandra. The trail covers a wide geographic area, encompassing three different municipalities - Mansfield, Murrindindi and Mitchell shires. Council partners associated with the trail are intending to increase support in order to realise the trail's true tourism potential. As a result, the Great Victorian Rail Trail Strategic Development Plan has been created. This plan sets out the actions necessary to transition the trail from being an asset into a signature tourism experience.



Tumbarumba - Rosewood Rail Trail

Tumbarumba is on the edge of the NSW Riverina and South West slopes, situated one hour drive from Corryong. The recently constructed Tumbarumba to Rosewood Rail Trail was opened in April 2020 and offers 21km of high-quality sealed trail. This is NSW's first rail trail on a Government owned corridor and regarded as a 'pilot' project. This will enable the NSW Government to assess the legislative and administrative processes and procedures to enable further rail trail conversions to take place.

The Tumbarumba Rail Trail Committee, continue to advocate for the extension of the trail from Rosewood to Tarcutta. This will add approximately 52km of trail. Since the trail's opening, significant economic benefit is already being reported.



International Benchmarks

The Otago Central Rail Trail

The Otago Central Rail Trail (OCRT) in New Zealand is a 152km recreational trail that follows the former Otago Central railway line between Middlemarch and Clyde. The Trail traverses the region's isolated, unique heartland and takes people to places preserved by the dry climate and distinct seasons, not easily accessible by any other means. It also offers connections with the rich 85-year history of the former railway line, which has significant appeal to today's visitors. Townships are spread along the trail with distances between rest stops ranging from 7km to 27km, providing natural hubs and service centres.

Trail users are mostly cyclists along with some walkers and horse riders. Over 15,000 complete the entire trail per year, with an additional 80,000 users either commuting or using the trail for short-ride recreation.

The OCRT contributes more than \$12 million to the Central Otago economy annually, creating business opportunities and revitalising small communities. The popularity of the Trail has led to substantial tourist business development in the Central Otago region providing an extensive range of cyclist support and services, catering for their accommodation, meals and transport needs. As such the OCRT significantly contributes to the improved economic well-being of the area and the communities along and near the Trail.



The features of the OCRT held in high regard by users include:

- Easy Access - The multiple access points and availability of services along the Trail increases accessibility for a wide range of users.
- Wide open vistas - The Trail meanders through “Big Sky” country, dotted with rocky peaks, creating a sense of space and freedom, complemented by panoramic views and spectacular landscapes.
- Rail heritage - The original supporting rail structures remains today. In particular, the Trail allows a close look at the skilled work of stonemasons who used the local Otago schist rock, shaping it into bridge abutments, piers, tunnel entrances and culverts.
- Land and climate - Landscapes throughout the Trail change with each season. The Otago block mountains shelter Central Otago, creating a rain-shadow producing distinct seasonal changes and experiential differences for Trail users.
- Host communities - Small communities that were once the heart of the railway line, still remain dotted along the length of the Trail. These revitalised communities have lost none of their charm. Old pubs, local characters with local knowledge are greatly valued and add significantly to the experience for trail users.
- Tour operators - A range of tour operators service the trail, offering ‘one stop shop’ cycle adventures that are complemented by a choice of accommodation providers at each township.

In addition, the OCRT has an official website www.otagocentrailrail.co.nz that provides an array of detailed itineraries - from half day through to five day adventures.



Great Allegheny Passage

Touted as ‘America’s friendliest long-distance rail trail’, the 241km Great Allegheny Passage (GAP) soars over valleys, snakes around mountains, and skirts alongside three rivers - the Casselman, Youghiogheny, and Monongahela - on its almost level path.

Much of the GAP is built on the abandoned grades of the Western Maryland Railway and the Pittsburgh and Lake Erie Railroad. They join at Connellsville and make up the majority of the trail between Cumberland and Pittsburgh. The trail showcases the rail heritage of the area, providing users with a mix of restored historical infrastructure like tunnels and bridges.

The GAP trail system is well-used, with total trail usage estimates ranging from 957,800 to 1,085,507 in 2017, with a mid-range estimate of 1,017,662. Economic impact studies have found that the contribution of these trail users is substantial. On average, operators estimate that nearly one-quarter (23%) of the business that they receive can be directly attributed to the existence of this biking/hiking trail.

Trail towns are spaced between 6-40km apart, with several road crossing and parking areas between each of these points. While there are other places along the trail with amenities, the 12 towns function as primary visitor stops, complete with a range of food and beverage options. These trail towns have taken advantage of the economic opportunity associated with trail visitation, transforming to provide a more inviting and memorable tourist destination.

The GAP has both general and dedicated transport and shuttle services along its entire route with a myriad of accommodation options catering to all budgets and styles. Information on booking trips or packages is all available on the GAP website (www.gaptrail.org).



Rail Trails







What is a Rail Trail?

A rail trail is the conversion of a disused railway track or corridor into a multi-use trail, typically for walking, cycling and sometimes horse riding. The typical characteristics of abandoned railway corridors are flat or gentle grade which frequently run through towns and historical areas. They lend themselves perfectly to this type of recreational trail. Usually managed by local councils and volunteer groups, rail trails provide enjoyment as well as valuable social and health benefits to the local community and general public. Rail Trails can be found in many countries around the world including America, New Zealand and the UK. In the USA, the concept of using abandoned rail corridors for public recreation began as early as the mid-1960's, now resulting in over 2,100 rail trails totalling over 38,000km. There are currently over 100 established rail trails in Australia, with The Victorian Trails Strategy 2014-2024 reporting that there are currently over 800 kilometres of rail trail within the state. Rail trails provide safe, accessible trails for people of all abilities to experience diverse urban and natural landscapes.

Rail Trail Users

Rail trails are predominantly used by cyclists of all ages and genders, with smaller numbers of walkers/hikers, runners and horse riders. Additionally, rail trails that have good quality surfaces are used by people in wheelchairs and mobility scooters, children on skateboards and balance bikes, along with parents pushing prams.

Tourism North East's cycle tourism research revealed the following rail trail cyclist segment break down:

Segment (% of market)		% Value	Summary
Cycling All-rounders (54%)			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mostly males under 45 • Rail trail riding one of the types of cycling enjoyed, though other types more frequent (& generally more preferred) • Rail trailing is for fitness, enjoying nature & doing something different to the routine • Take ~3 overnight trips per year on which they go Rail trailing
Rail Trail Families (16%)			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More even gender spread with an average age of ~40 • Key motivations for rail trail riding are spending time with the family & enjoying the natural environment • Take an average no. of trips per year, but larger travel party leads to higher spend
Rail Trail Only (31%)			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 60% male, 40% female, majority below 35 years • Rail trailing allows them to enjoy nature & try something different whilst exercising • Rail Trail the preferred type of cycling, though other hobbies more important • Fewer than average trips per year, below average spend

The key motivators for cyclists to use a rail trail are:

Most Important Motivation for Rail Trail Cycling

% of Rail Trail participants



Motivation Aggregations
Nature & Outdoors: To enjoy nature and the environment; To get outside. **Fitness:** For fitness.
Challenge: To challenge myself; For the adrenalin rush; To try something different. **Social:** To socialise; To spend time with my family; To spend time with friends; To spend time with my partner; To be part of the cycling scene.
Time out: To spend time by myself; To take a break from busy day-to-day life. **Other:** Just to get from A to B; Other

Successful Rail Trails and User Expectations

With the proven and predicted growth in all segments of cycle tourism, the user expectations of the trail experience are also growing. If the rail trail is intended to drive economic growth of a region it must be of a certain standard that will attract tourists and encourage return trips.

Although some points are arguably subjective, the key factors of a successful rail trail are, but not limited to, the following:

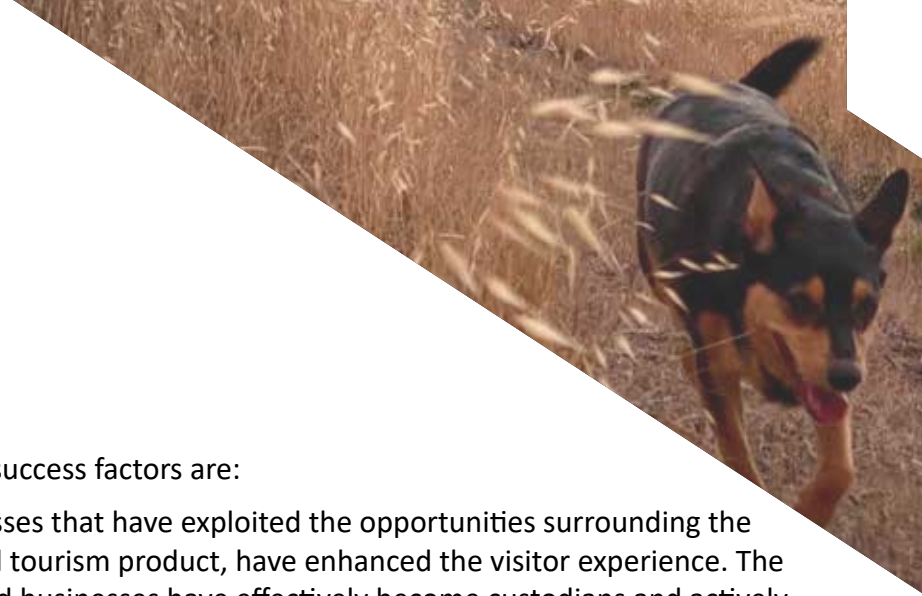
- Offer diverse and highly scenic landscapes
- Include heritage infrastructure such as stations, bridges, goods sheds, sidings, platforms, turntables, signals and distance posts
- Showcases the culture and history of the region through interpretive signage
- Connects bike friendly townships or hubs that provide a place to eat, drink and stay, providing an immersive authentic experience
- Start and finish in major towns
- Connection with natural environment, local flora and fauna
- Quality surface
- Comprehensive signage/maps
- Numerous access points to enable various length rides
- Well maintained with strong community support
- Offer a progressive challenge
- Emergency signage with good access/egress
- A point of difference.
-

Other key success factors are:

- Businesses that have exploited the opportunities surrounding the rail trail tourism product, have enhanced the visitor experience. The invested businesses have effectively become custodians and actively promote the trail, driving future visitations.
- Tourism operators that provide transport, hire and tour options. There is a growing demand for these services including all-inclusive packages. The reason for this trend being attributed to visitors taking shorter breaks more often, and as a result, wanting to maximise their experience in the short time they are away. Additionally, today's lifestyle sees peoples calendars more densely packed, particularly with longer working hours, which leaves little time for planning.
- Develop a strong, cohesive and recognisable brand that reflects and promotes the trails points of difference. The consistent branding of maps, signage, social media sites and websites creates consumer recognition of the product and confidence in the offering.

The recommendations of this plan are based upon:

- Understanding of what makes rail trails successful
- The expectations of target user groups
- Identification and promotion of the trail's unique features (points of difference)
- Market competition.



Tourism North East's cycle tourism research identified key ancillary experiences desired by the rail trail cycle tourist:

An important element, relaxed vibe & quality produce are key

Stopping off at country cafés with local produce



"Breakfast & lunch at a quality cafe with local produce"
"Lovely cafes are a must for enjoying a coffee stop"

Relaxed brewery and pub style dining perfect for post-ride socialising



"You can't beat a country pub because of the beautiful food at good prices & friendly service"
"Country pubs would also be on the agenda"

Riding to cellar doors or local producers



"It was really enjoyable to be able to ride from cellar door to a farm where produce was available, and an easy way to explore and enjoy the scenery"

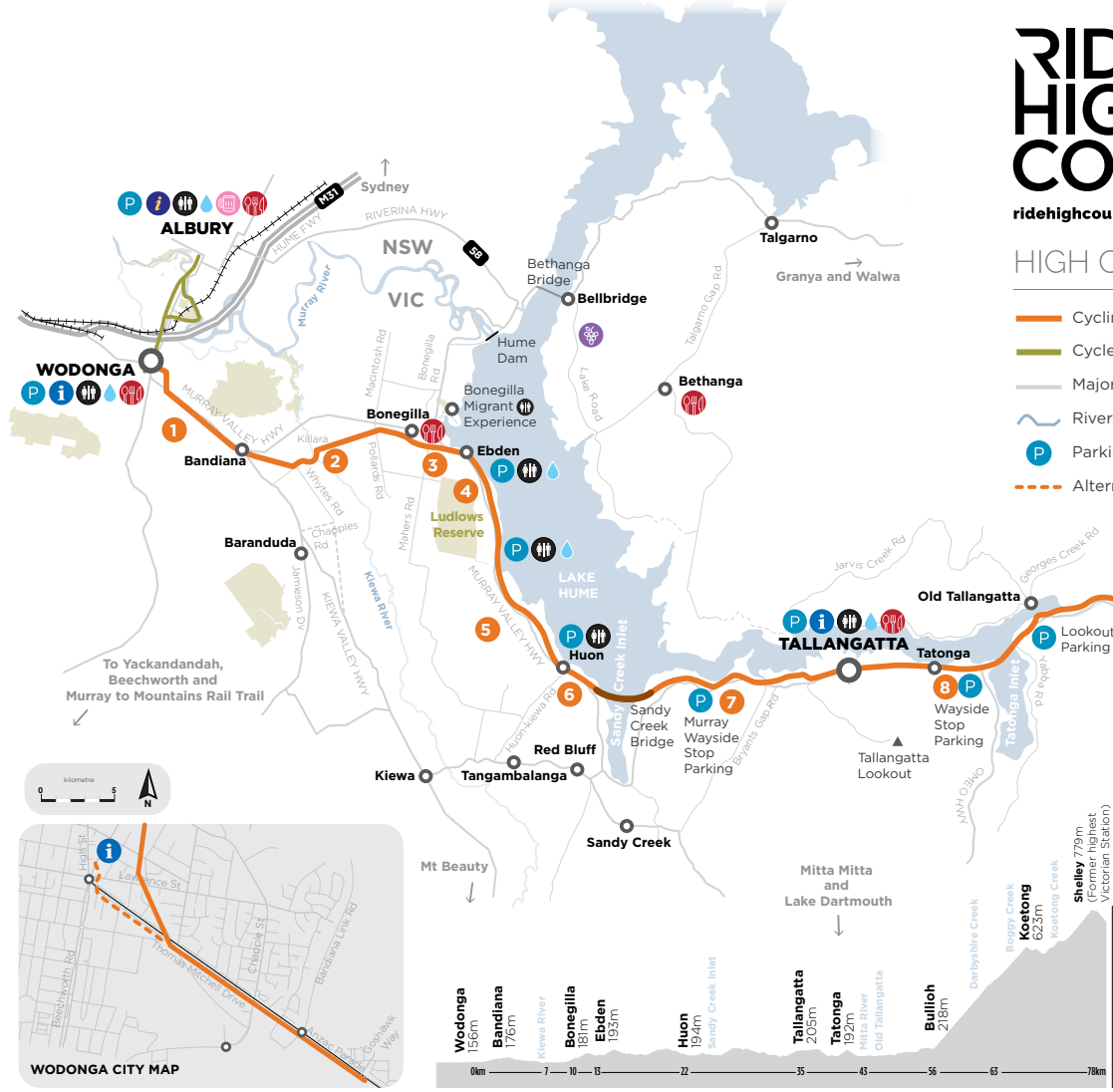
High end 'farm to plate' experiences desired



"Premium dining with delicious food made of fresh ingredients. A farm-to-table concept"
"Hatted restaurants are great for when we're not riding"



Existing High Country Rail Trail



RIDE HIGH COUNTRY

ridehighcountry.com.au

HIGH COUNTRY RAIL TRAIL

- Cycling Rail Trail
- Cycle Path
- Major Roads
- Rivers + Lakes
- Parking
- Alternative route
- Visitor Information Centres
- Information
- Toilets
- Water Refill Stations
- Brewery
- Winery
- Food
- See over for info

The High Country Rail Trail was proposed in 2000 to follow the closed Wodonga to Cudgewa railway line alignment. Much of the infrastructure including the rail lines and sleepers were removed, the alignment and timber trestle bridges were left.

The trail was proposed in two stages, the first stage from Wodonga to Shelley and the second from Shelley to Corryong. The last 20 years has seen the slow ad hoc development of the trail. This has been due to little or no funding, little understanding of cycle tourism assets by LGA's and landowner/manager pushback. Admittedly, cycle tourism didn't generate the economic benefits 20 years ago as it does today.

Huge credit and thanks need to go to a small group of dedicated locals who had the vision, passion and drive to give us the asset we have today. A phenomenal amount of volunteer hours and donations have built this rail trail so far. The majority of the first stage has been completed and is now managed by a committee of management comprising of Parklands Albury Wodonga and several local community groups.

The HCRT has its own website <http://highcountryrailtrail.org.au>, Facebook and Instagram pages. The website is old, some information is outdated, with many broken links. Fortunately, the Ride High Country branding and online presence help bridge this gap very well.



User Profile

Currently user information is limited. Improving data collection will help with future trail analysis. Trail usage information has been provided by Parklands Albury Wodonga.

Wodonga to Shelley:

- Annual 60,000 users
- Annual running and cycling events such as the Milk Run, Tall Trestle Treadle and Whistle Stop High Tea attract increasing numbers of participants
- Trail surface upgrade March 2019 resulted in 103% user increase
- Spring/Autumn maximum usage 6,500 per month
- A Super Saturday count indicates that the Sandy Creek to Old Tallangatta section of the trail has comparable usage to the most patronized sections of the Murray to Mountains Rail Trail at Beechworth and Bright.

Current User Experience

The full length of the existing Wodonga to Shelley HCRT was ridden and assessed from a user group perspective. The location and condition of signage/wayfinding, access points, bridge crossings and public amenities were photographed and marked via GPS. Trail surface treatment and condition was assessed and noted. General user experience quality and continuity was also considered. It was important to gain an understanding of the current HCRT strengths and weaknesses to provide context for the proposed extension. The fieldwork data sheets can be found in the appendices.



Access

Currently identifying the start of the HCRT in Wodonga is a challenge with different start points listed on different websites. This is largely due to no official trailhead location being identified and developed.

- www.railtrails.org.au - “Wodonga: Many access points though parking is on side roads”.
- www.ridehighcountry.com.au - the download version of the brochure states “Commencing at the Wodonga Visitor Information Centre in Hovell St”.
- www.highcountryrailtrail.org.au - “The first 6km leg of the journey from the Wodonga Visitor Information Centre situated in Hovell Street, will take you to the beginning of the High Country Rail Trail in Bandiana”.

The confusion has now been identified by the City of Wodonga who is currently working on an appropriate solution. This will result in safe access to the trail along with changing rooms, bike lockers, signage and parking.

There are many access points to the trail from the Murray Valley Hwy, particularly between Wodonga and Tallangatta. The Murray Valley Hwy is controlled by Vic Roads. Feedback from the volunteer groups and councils is that obtaining approval for trail access signs has been a difficult and drawn-out process. So far, they have successfully lobbied to have brown High Country Rail Trail intersection signs installed at Ebdon Reserve, Ludlows Reserve, Huon Reserve and Tallangatta Township. HCRT advisory groups are currently lobbying to obtain additional trail access signs for the Bullioh to Shelly trail section.

Access points are key to breaking the trail up into sections that allow users to choose the length and type of ride they wish to undertake. Development or embellishment of existing access points should be approached strategically to cater for this. The Whytes Road access point has recently been developed with good signage, parking, shelter, table setting, and a tool station. This should be considered the benchmark for all other key access points along the HCRT with the addition of water refill station if potable water is available.

Gates

As with all rail trails that pass through farmland, there are a large number of gated crossing points. Most of the gates on the HCRT have been installed with a cattle grid beside them, enabling cyclists to ride through uninterrupted. The Darbyshire Hill section between Bullioh and the Murray Valley Highway underpass, has 11 gates without cattle grids within a 9km distance. The current solution is the provision of smaller spring-loaded pedestrian gate. These are difficult to negotiate with cyclists having to dismount. Often the spring-loaded gates snap back causing damage to the bike. This frustration can be compounded by the fact that on occasions the gates are locked, resulting in bikes having to be lifted over the gates. Aside from risking rider injury, this negatively impacts the user experience on this otherwise beautiful section of trail.



Trail Surface

A grant received in 2018 by the City of Wodonga resulted in significant upgrades to the HCRT, including surface upgrades to the sections of trail between Wodonga CBD and Ebden Reserve. Trail users can now enjoy a full asphalt seal from Wodonga to the Kiewa Valley Highway. The trail is then bitumen sealed to Ebden Reserve.

The City of Wodonga has recently acquired funding to extend the bitumen seal from Ebden Reserve to the Sandy Creek Bridge. There are two small gravel sections near the Kiewa River and Finn Creek. The first section from Whytes Road to the Kiewa River bridge is quite rough. The North East Catchment Management Authority (NECMA) is against sealing this section due to the possibility of it breaking up and contaminating the water way in a flood. A concrete 2.5 metre wide shared path has provided an acceptable solution in similar situations. From Ebden Reserve to the Sandy Creek Bridge is good quality gravel. The following section from Sandy Creek Bridge to the Mitta Mitta Bridge (Tatonga) is half seal.

The balance of the trail is generally a good quality gravel surface except for some rough sections between Koetong and Shelley. It was noted that sections of trail between Bullioh and Shelley are deteriorating due to poor drainage and the impacts of livestock where the trail is unfenced.



Elevated platform at Finn Creek

Bridges and Elevated Platforms

Constructing or refurbishing a bridge represents a large cost item in the development of a rail trail. The completed HCRT will include 33 bridges. The bridges do, however, provide valuable points of interest and are a historic asset that helps set the HCRT apart from other trails. Completed restoration work on some of the trestle bridges is absolutely first class. This is even more impressive with the knowledge that the works have been achieved largely by volunteers.

To improve user safety and to enhance the trail experience, several improvements are essential. The current road diversions at Tallangatta Creek and Boggy Creek are extremely dangerous. Alternatives to these road diversions should be addressed as a priority.

The bridge over Finn Creek is too low and narrow and should be replaced. The timber decking on the bridge over Finn Creek Annabranche, becomes treacherously slippery when wet and must be addressed. Between Finn Creek Annabranche and Finn Creek there are two sections of elevated platform that cross an area of floodplain. The design specification requires that these platforms are able to break away in sections in the event of major flooding. The current guide rope handrails are to facilitate this. There is minimal tension on the guide ropes, and as a result, cyclists stopping on the platform and grabbing the guide rope to steady themselves are in danger of toppling off the platform risking serious injury. Subject to expert advice, the installation of galvanised pipe top rails to the individual platform sections would provide a safer handrail whilst complying with design requirements.



Finn Creek Bridge



Finn Creek Annabranche Bridge



Tallangatta Creek Rd diversion



Boggy Creek Rd diversion

Road Crossings

The existing HCRT crosses many roads, particularly at the Wodonga end. Some of these crossings have been upgraded recently and work well, but there is a lack of consistency in the treatment of road crossings and safety signage. Many road crossings require additional barriers or signage such as the hoop signs recommended in the Ride High Country Regional Signage Strategy. Aside from the bridge road diversions there are two crossings noted as being particularly dangerous.

The first is located just past the Whytes Road access point. Here the trail veers downhill onto a floodway crossing, shared with road traffic including heavy vehicles, before re-entering the rail trail. This point is particularly dangerous, especially for children. There is a steep incline into the floodway creating the possibility of children veering in front of vehicles coming from behind. The City of Wodonga is aware of this and is working on a solution.

The second is just west of Koetong where the HCRT crosses the Murray Valley Hwy. At this point the road traffic is travelling at highway speed. The rail trail crossing is on a hillside with a curve in the road. From both highway approaches visibility is limited and there are no *Cyclist Crossing* signs at this location. Whilst signs have been erected to alert cyclists that they are approaching a major road, it is difficult for motorists to spot riders approaching the crossing. A near miss was witnessed at this location during the fieldwork for this Masterplan.



Whytes Rd Spillway



Murray Valley Hwy near Koetong

Signage

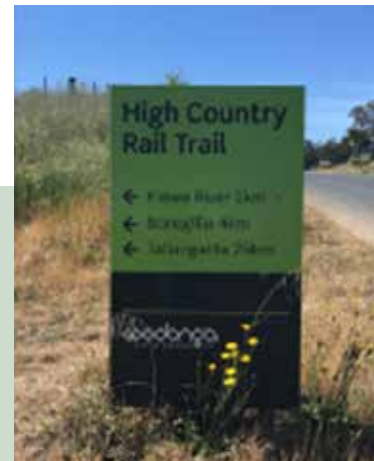
Considering the lack of an adopted signage strategy and minimal funding, generally the signage is quite good. The legacy of the protracted delivery of the HCRT, as with a lot of rail trails, has resulted in inconsistent signage style and placement. It should be acknowledged that 10 years ago the existing signage would have been more than adequate.

The interpretive signage gives a fantastic insight to the rich history of the rail line and surrounding region. The placement and frequency of the interpretive signage should be considered carefully. Grouping signs at a point of interest or rest stop is more effective than dotted individually along the trail. Too many signs can be considered as sign clutter or visual pollution. This runs the risk of important information along with significant local history and stories going unread.

The more successful the trail is the more visitors it attracts, which is obviously the objective. This accentuates the importance of a clear and cohesive strategy for wayfinding, safety and interpretive signage. Aside from the trail surface and surrounding scenery, signage is a key sensory user experience. A visitor riding the HCRT for the first time will enjoy their experience far more if they feel safe (wayfinding, road crossing and emergency signage) and experience all the region has to offer through off trail attraction and interpretive signage. This is another example of how user expectations of the rapidly growing cycle tourism market are continually raising the bar of product benchmarks.

The same is being experienced in the mountain bike tourism segment. A mountain bike park or trail centre will be given a poor online review by a visitor if they struggle to navigate their way around the network due to poor signage. This is often irrespective of how good the trails or facilities are.

The development of a new contemporary brand and style guide, integrated with the Ride High Country Regional Signage Strategy will be key to the HCRT becoming one of Victoria's premier rail trails.



Off Trail Services and Attractions

Currently, off-trail services are clustered around the townships of Wodonga and Tallangatta. The City of Wodonga is currently developing a suitable solution that will provide a pedestrian crossing at the Murray Valley Highway – Bonegilla Road intersection. This is approximately 13km from Wodonga CBD and 6km from Whytes Road Access point. On completion this will provide a safe link to access the Kangaroo Store, Kookaburra Point Reserve, the Bonegilla Migrant Experience, and the Hume Dam Wall. Between Bonegilla and Tallangatta, the Ebden, Ludlows and Huon Reserves all offer toilet, BBQ and water facilities. From Tallangatta to Shelley there are currently very few amenities or off-trail services or attractions. The limited offering includes Tullimbar Log Cabins at Bullioh, Lazy Acres at Koetong, and the Koetong Pub. Lazy Acres and the Koetong pub are not signed from the trail.

The development and addition of essential facilities at key access points will help address the lack of amenities and break the trail into more manageable sections. The community consultation process identified private sector interest in the development of supporting businesses/ services. This was particularly strong between Tallangatta and Koetong.

The development of a historical and interpretive centre at the Tallangatta Station goods shed should be considered. This has been done extremely well at the Mansfield Station on the GVRT. The formalisation of a safe cycle route linking the triangles commercial area, foreshore and caravan park is also recommended. The historical and interpretive centre, complemented with a cycle loop through the town, will encourage rail trail users to stay longer and spend money in Tallangatta.

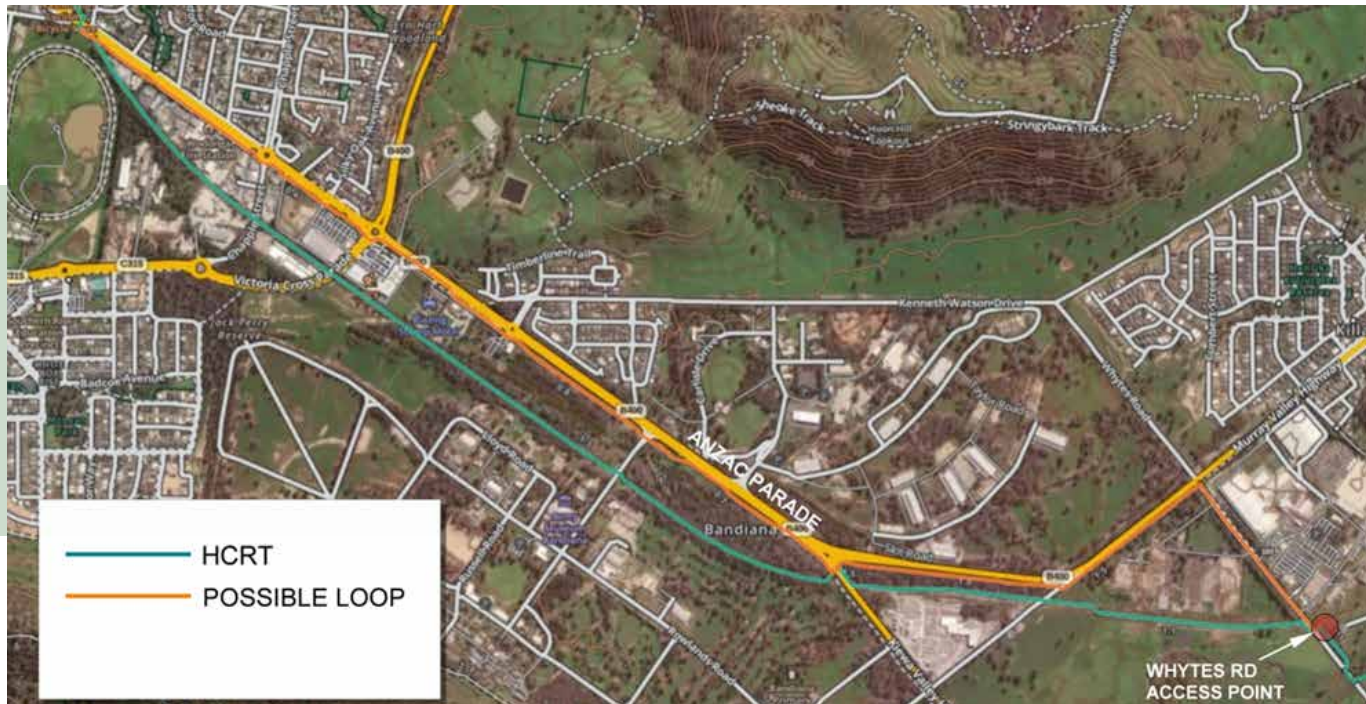


Cycle Loops

Tourism North East's cycle tourism research identified that 45% of rail trail users desire *'family friendly 10 – 20km trails, preferably loops'*.

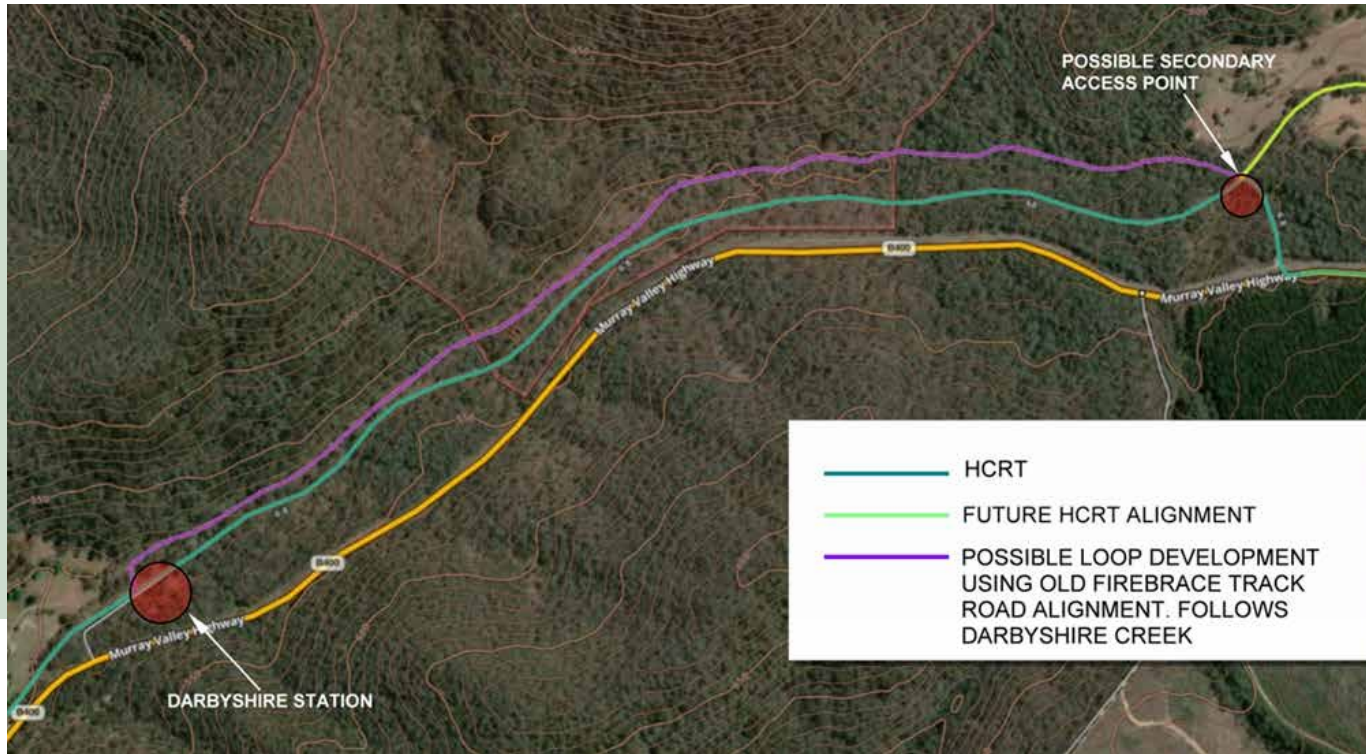
Possible family friendly cycle loops utilising the rail trail should be identified and included on maps and signage.

EXAMPLE 1



Example 1 shows an existing 12.5km loop that could be signed now. Wodonga CBD to Whytes Road car park. Return via Whytes Road and shared path along Anzac Parade and Thomas Mitchell Drive. This will make a great family loop ride into Wodonga from the Killara residential growth area.

EXAMPLE 2



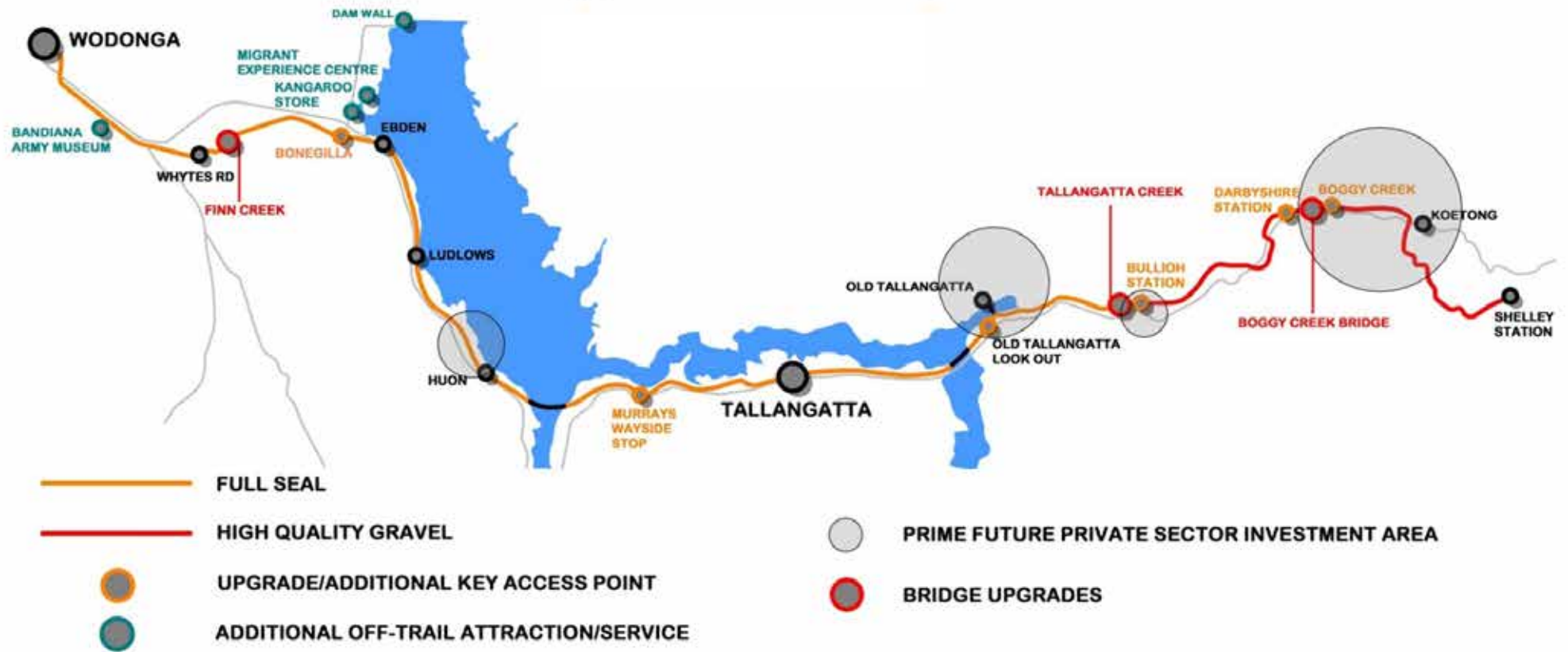
Example 2 shows a development concept between the proposed Darbyshire Station access point and Boggy Creek Bridge. The return trail would utilise the old Firebrace Track road alignment. The Firebrace track follows the particularly picturesque Darbyshire Creek. The construction of a gravel path on the old road alignment would create a beautiful 6km loop that gradually climbs and descends 75m of vertical elevation.



In collaboration with Tourism North East, Towong Shire are developing a number of gravel focused cycle loops. The loops will be promoted to the rapidly growing Melbourne gravel cycling market to encourage visitation to the region. The gravel loop user experience will be significantly improved by the suggested upgrades to key access points. The gravel loops will also offer additional ride options for the more adventurous rail trail user.



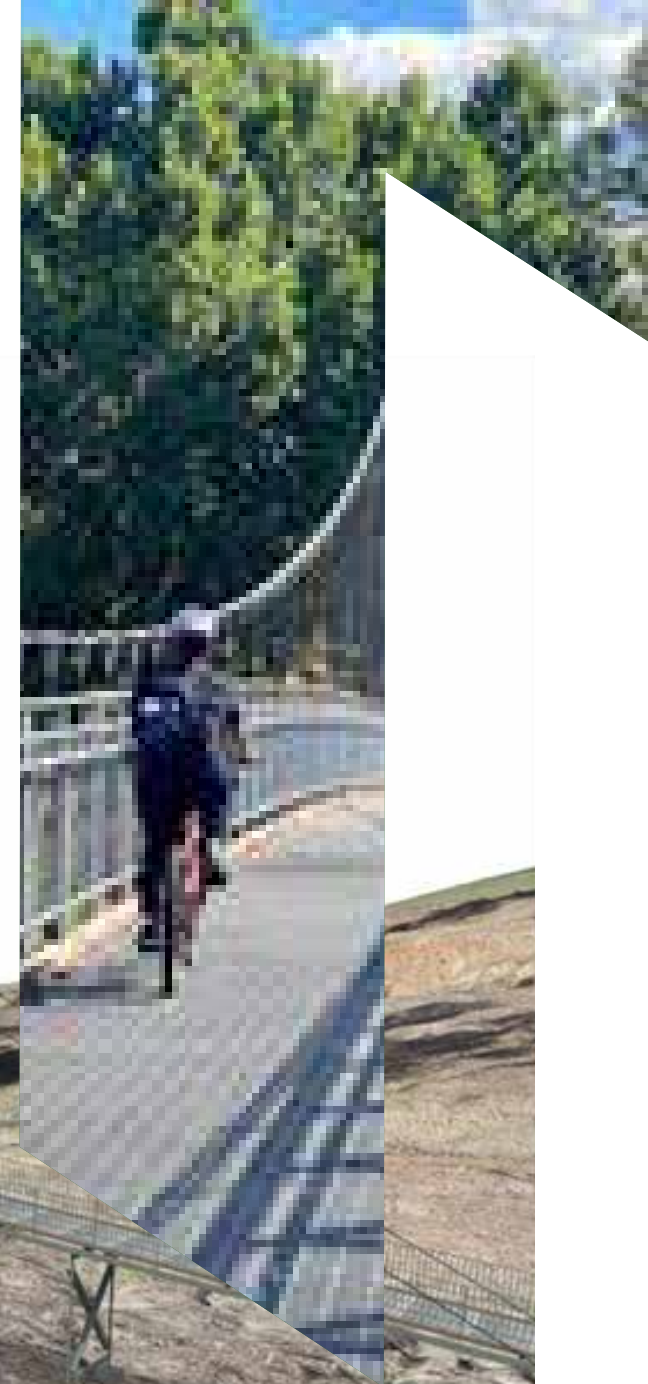
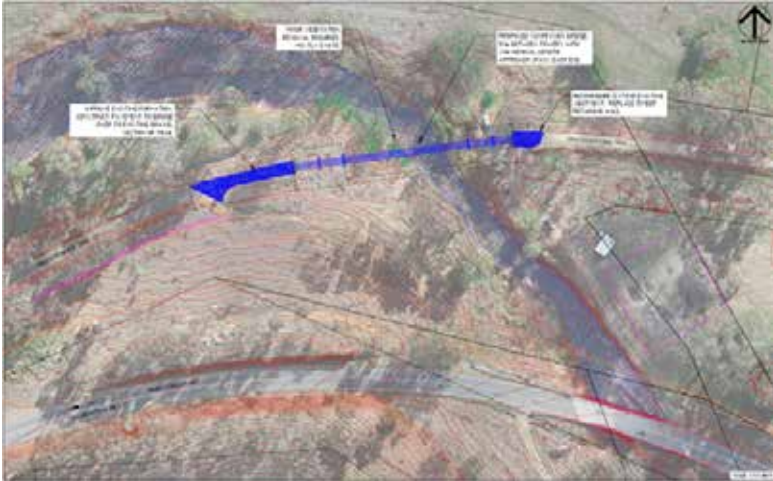
Suggested Additions and Improvements Map



Proposed Bridge Solutions

Tallangatta Creek

Construction of a suspension bridge on the existing rail formation. This will provide an iconic point of interest between Old Tallangatta and Bullioch Station.



Boggy Creek

Construction of a boardwalk diversion around the trestle bridge with cantilevered viewing platform. This will provide a cost-effective solution and a unique view of this historic asset.



Community and Stakeholder Engagement

A robust community consultation process was essential to gain valuable community input to establish concerns, opportunities and solutions. This process was also used to gauge community appetite for the extension of the rail trail and the many opportunities cycle tourism brings. The duration of the consultation process was extended significantly due to the many complications and challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, including several lockdowns.

Engagement methods consisted of:

- Numerous meetings with appointed Project Steering Group (PSG)
- Face to face meetings with various advisory groups
- Face to face landowner and stakeholder meetings
- Fact sheet with contact details
- Landowner mailbox drop – invitation to participate and fact sheet
- 2 x pop-up information and feedback sessions
- Online and paper survey.

Pop-up Information and Feedback sessions

Cudegwa

The first pop-up session was conducted at the Cudegwa Community Fun Day which was held at the Cudegwa School Park. This resulted in lengthy conversations with local residents. Meaningful discussions took place with 12 of the attendees. Of these, 10 were in favour of the overall benefits of having such an improved amenity offering somewhere safe to walk and cycle. Attracting enough visitors to the town to create new business opportunities, including making the local shop viable again, was viewed as major benefits. Of the 2 people not in favour, one was a concerned landowner and the other a resident who thought the project too expensive and unable to see the economic benefits. Fact sheets and paper surveys were available for attendees to read and complete at the sessions or take away and return at a later date.

Corryong

The second pop-up session was held in Corryong at the Easter weekend farmer's market, which happened to coincide with the Man From Snowy River Festival. This proved to be a very busy session with individual discussions taking place with 35 attendees. Everyone expressed support for the development of the HCRT extension and the link to Corryong.

Topics discussed included:

- Increase in tourism
- Business opportunities
- Missing out on cycle tourists who are currently passing through the town to other riding destinations
- Lack of bike riding facilities for local youths
- Connection to the Tumbarumba to Rosewood Rail Trail
- Possible shortage of accommodation options.

Fact sheets and paper surveys were available for attendees to read and complete at the sessions or take away and return at a later date.



Online and Paper Survey

A total of 70 responses were received.

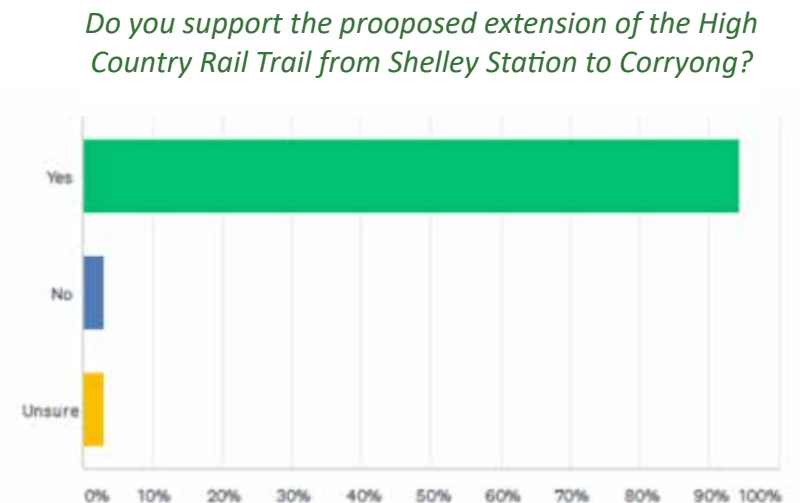
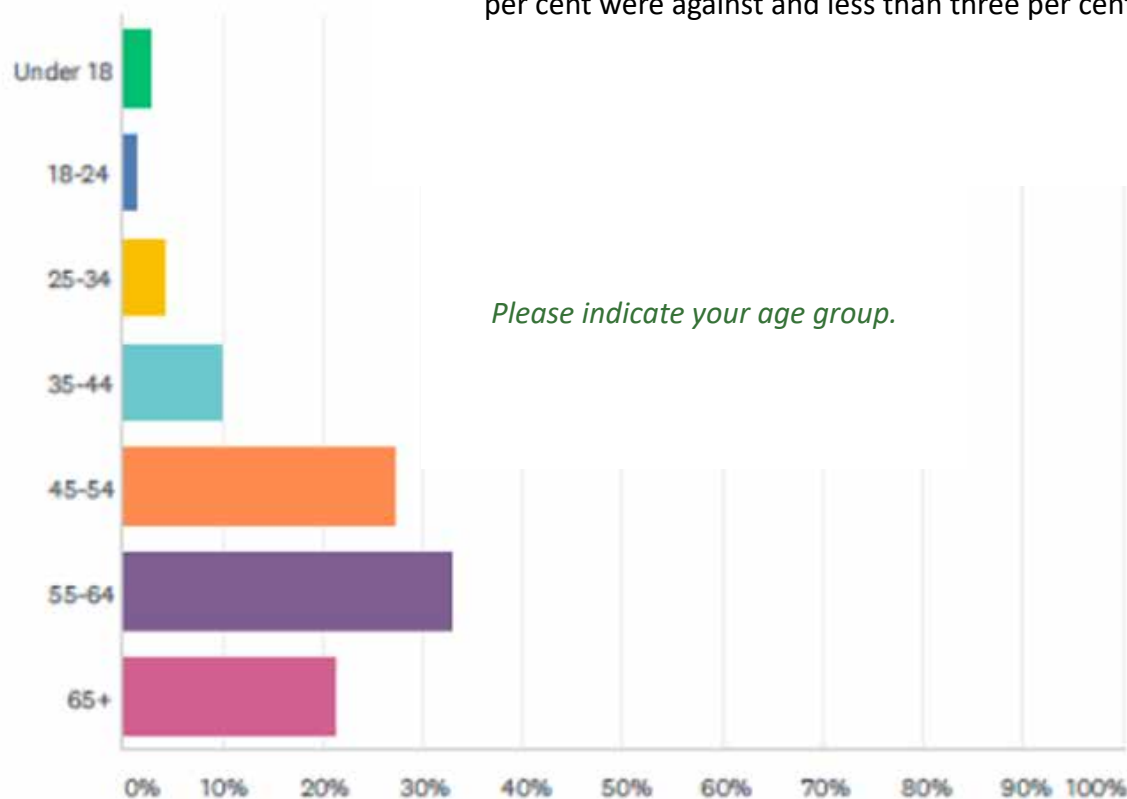
Of the responses, 23 were from Corryong, 9 from Cudgewa, 7 from Albury and 6 from Wodonga. The balance came from outside the region in Victoria, NSW and Queensland.

A breakdown of respondents by age group were as follows:

Over 65 (21%), 55-64 (32%), 45-54 (27%)

Responses from younger age groups were less well represented.

Respondents were largely in favour of the extension to the rail trail. 94.3 per cent were in full support. Less than 3 per cent were against and less than three per cent were unsure.





Most survey respondents had ridden or walked a rail trail. 82 per cent reported they had, 10 per cent reported they intended to and 7 per cent reported that they had not.

There were many ideas around how the trail can reflect the region's heritage and stories which could be told as part of the trail development, with some of the most popular being:

- Brochures
- Pocket maps
- Interpretive signage
- Rail connections to the area
- Relationship to the building of the Snowy Hydro
- Indigenous relationship to the area
- Timber and mining history
- Farming, including cattlemen.

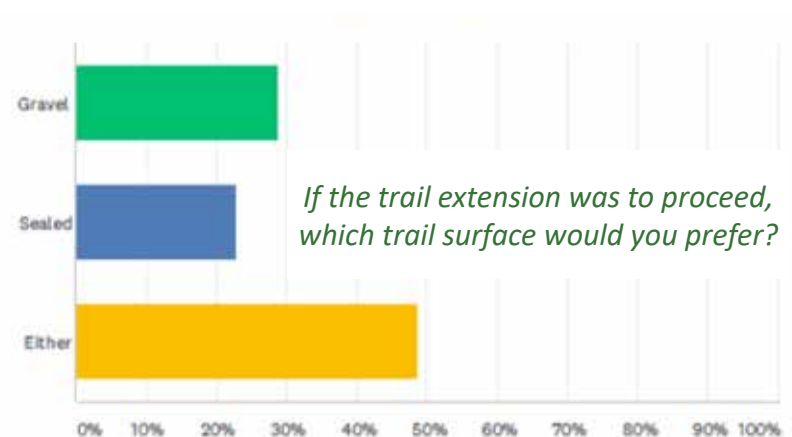
With regard to the trail surface for the proposed extension, there was no clear indication of whether gravel or sealed was preferred.

When asked to comment on ways to enhance the rail trail experience, the following suggestions were made:

- Easy trail access
- Campsites along the way

- Toilet facilities
- Access to drinkable water
- Access to food and beverages
- No on-road sections
- Good signage indicating users position on the trail
- Clear signage
- A strong marketing campaign promoting the rail trail.

A limited number of respondents expressed an interest in becoming part of a community trail management and maintenance group. These people will be contacted as the trail enters the development stage.



Landowner Concerns

Feedback from landowners raised several concerns, the majority of which, have been raised and addressed as part of the development process of other rail trails. A recent Rail Trails Australia forum was hosted by the Tumbarumba – Rosewood Rail Trail Committee. Presenters at the forum highlighted similar concerns raised by landowners. These risks and concerns were overcome by some innovative solutions whilst maintaining a world class user experience. It should be noted that each landowner’s concern is unique and solutions need to be tailored to minimise trail development impacts.

In 2017 Murray Local Land Service prepared a Strategic Risk Assessment – Biosecurity Risk Associated with Rail Trails for the newly constructed 21km Tumbarumba Rosewood Rail Trail. This report is available from various sources, including the Murray Local Land Services.

On its web site (https://murray.lls.nsw.gov.au/_old/biosecurity/disease-control/rail-trail-biosecurity-risk-assessment), the Murray Local Land Services states: *Murray Local Land Services staff were engaged to carry out this risk assessment as independent experts, and this is their independent view.*

In completing this risk assessment, Local Land Services is not making a judgment on whether or not the proposal in question should proceed. The risk assessment is used by the proponent to engage with landholders as part of the development proposal. This document can be used as a generic template when considering risks for rail trails or other similar developments. However, it has been specifically designed with the Tumbarumba-Rosewood Rail Trail in mind, and some of the risks and treatments may need to be modified accordingly.



Impact/Concern/issue	Possible Solutions/Comments
<p>Fire risk</p> <p>Increased fire risk along rail corridor due to ungrazed vegetation.</p>	<p>Areas of high fire risk should have a higher maintenance priority along with a fire management plan developed in close consultation the with local CFA / DELWP Forrest Fire Management. Trail closures during fire ban periods. Crash grazing during low usage periods with a temporary hot wire to separate stock and users is commonly used. This has its own risks with regards to stock / user interaction and should be avoided unless closely monitored by the landowner / trail maintenance crew.</p>
<p>Weed control</p> <p>Who will be responsible for weed management along the rail corridor?</p>	<p>Development of an effective trail management plan with clear roles and responsibilities of committee of management. Regular maintenance inspections and communication with community groups.</p>
<p>Biosecurity risk</p> <p>Concern that rail trail users will spread contamination between farms and livestock.</p>	<p>The Strategic Risk Assessment – Biosecurity Risk Associated with Rail Trails is to be used as a generic template when considering risks for rail trails or other similar developments. This document has been developed for the Tumbarumba-Rosewood Rail Trail, and some of the risks and treatments may need to be modified accordingly.</p>
<p>Fencing the Rail Corridor</p> <p>Operational impacts of dissecting a farm including moving livestock, vehicles and machinery, developing watering points on both sides etc.</p>	<p>Fencing along railway corridor boundaries is important to the success of any rail trail but maybe inappropriate in some circumstances. This should be determined after consultation with each adjoining landowner.</p> <p>Fencing, where required, will be a project cost. Adjoining landowners may wish to be receive materials / remuneration if they wish to erect the fencing themselves.</p> <p>Fence maintenance / replacement will be part of ongoing trail maintenance costs.</p> <p>Gated crossing points with cattle grids for cyclists should be strategically located to minimise impact to farm movements. There are circumstances where overpasses or underpasses are required. If fencing the rail corridor prevents stock access to an existing water source, provision of additional stock troughs should be included as a development cost.</p>

Impact/Concern/issue	Possible Solutions/Comments
<p>Privacy Residences that have been built close to the rail corridor will be impacted by trail users.</p>	<p>A combination of security fencing and screening plantings. Minor localised re-routing of the trail via a road reserve or land lease agreement.</p>
<p>Trespassing, theft and vandalism Landowners concern regarding trespassers particularly in remote areas</p>	<p>There have been no reports of trespassing, theft or vandalism on the Murray to the Mountains Rail Trail since the establishment of the trail.</p> <p>Numerous studies have concluded rail trails do not generate crime. Research and anecdotal evidence suggest conversion of rail trails tends to reduce crime by cleaning up the landscape and attracting people who use the trail for legitimate reasons such as recreation and transport and thereby increasing passive security.</p> <p>Prohibiting motor vehicles via Locked management access gates reduces property crime. Keeping the trail well maintained will aid visibility and passive surveillance. Regular trail maintenance inspection patrols and trailside ancillary businesses will deter unwanted activity.</p>
<p>Litter Who is responsible for litter collection?</p>	<p>Some landowners expect to see litter appear along the rail corridor. The reality is that this is not the case. Generally, rail trail user groups enjoy being outside amongst nature and are custodians for the natural environment. They will vigorously enforce trail etiquette and will often be seen picking up litter left by anyone doing the wrong thing. Provision of bins at trailheads and key rest stops monitored and emptied by trail maintenance crew.</p>
<p>Public liability Who is liable for user safety?</p>	<p>The Committee of Management will be responsible for the liability of users on the rail trail. Effective signage at trailheads and access points is a good risk mitigation tool. Adjacent landowners carry no additional liability. Regular hazard inspection programme will limit exposure.</p>
<p>Unauthorised trail users Motor bike and cars using the rail trail.</p>	<p>Unauthorised access to the trail by motorbikes, cars, etc, presents a concern for trail users and landowners. Design and installation of appropriate lockable gates and barriers will negate this. Sections of trail where this is not possible can be monitored by trail cams with illegal use reported to police for enforcement.</p>

Impact/Concern/issue	Possible Solutions/Comments
<p>Funding construction Who is going to pay?</p>	<p>There are many Federal and State Government funding streams available for tourism, economic development and recreation projects such as this. Local Government agencies are rarely able to fund projects of this size.</p>
<p>Ongoing maintenance Who will pay for maintenance of the trail?</p>	<p>There are concerns about the capacity of Council to maintain the trail. Good trail design and quality construction will minimise ongoing maintenance. A trail management plan should clearly define roles and responsibilities of all members of the committee of Management with regular trail maintenance inspections. A little often is always more manageable. Community groups can prove to be a valuable resource and community ownership of the trail is a critical component. However, they should not be leant on too heavily as this will result in volunteer burn out.</p>
<p>Policing the Trail Concern about enforcing trail etiquette and controlling users.</p>	<p>Rail trails attract healthy, nature loving, like minded, positive people. All users are relatively self-policing and are keen to educate other users of trail etiquette. Appropriate signage with contact details of the relevant authority will enable users to report any issues.</p>



A community committee is to be formed and will be consulted during the development process. Aside from the invaluable local knowledge the committee members will possess, it will ensure community and landowner concerns are considered with a collaborative approach. This will foster inclusiveness and ownership of the trail as a community asset.



Farm crossing overpass, Tumbarumba



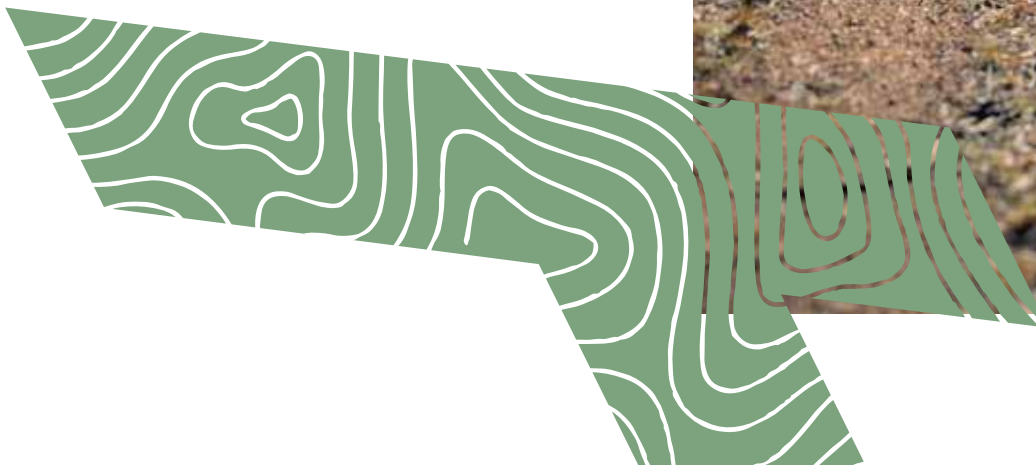
Farm crossing gateway, cattle grid solution, Tumbarumba



Stakeholder Consultation

Key stakeholders were identified including as: DELWP, HVP, Towong Shire Council, Parklands Albury Wodonga and various community rail trail advisory groups.

Consultation with HVP Plantations was undertaken to assess the feasibility of developing the rail trail along the original rail alignment through the plantation between Shelley Station and Mansells Road, Beetoomba. Discussions revealed that HVP had negotiated the lease of the rail corridor as part of the plantation through title consolidation. This was critical to forestry operations as the rail corridor forms part of the main logging haul road through the heart of the plantation. The option of constructing a trail beside the haul road within the rail corridor was considered but would result in a less than an ideal user experience. Log trucks, dust, trail closures due to forestry operations, combined with the associated risks of public access within an operational pine plantation, meant that an alternative option had to be found. Consultation raised the possibility of utilising a Crown Land 'hardwood' corridor that runs through the plantation. This would provide a suitable trail link, whilst maintaining the required safety buffer during forestry operations.



Strategic Alignment

This project aligns with and supports local, regional and state strategic frameworks in recreation, health, tourism and economic development.

Active Victoria – A Strategic framework for Sport & Recreation in Victoria 2017-2021

Supports *Strategic Direction One* and the key area of change to increase capacity of facilities through ‘Maximised use of existing spaces... tracks and trails’

Hume Region Significant Tracks and Trails Strategy 2014-2023

The HCRT identified as being regionally significant.

Victoria’s High Country Destination Management Plan 2013-2023

Identified under Priority Project 1: *Ride High Country – Rail Trails – the delivery of rail trail extensions.*

Identified under Priority 2 – *Ride High Country Mountain Bikes.*

Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2019-2023

The HCRT project provides opportunities to support the focus of active living and the support of walking and cycling.

Victorian Visitor Economic Strategy 2016

Vic High Country total contribution to gross regional product and employment was approximately 21% (2013-14).

The HCRT project satisfies the creation of infrastructure for key public tourist attractions.

Satisfies key 2025 outcome where ‘Regional and Rural Victoria has a more diverse product offering and is attracting more visitors who are staying longer.’

Satisfies key 2025 outcome for ‘Significant improvements in tourism infrastructure ...delivering a better visitor experience.’

Towong Healthy Communities Plan 2018-2021

Meets Priority Area 2: *Active Living – Enhancing Infrastructure to support physical activity and to develop partnerships to increase sport and active recreational opportunities.*

The future development of Equestrian activities as a link to the Man from Snowy River brand.

Tourism North East

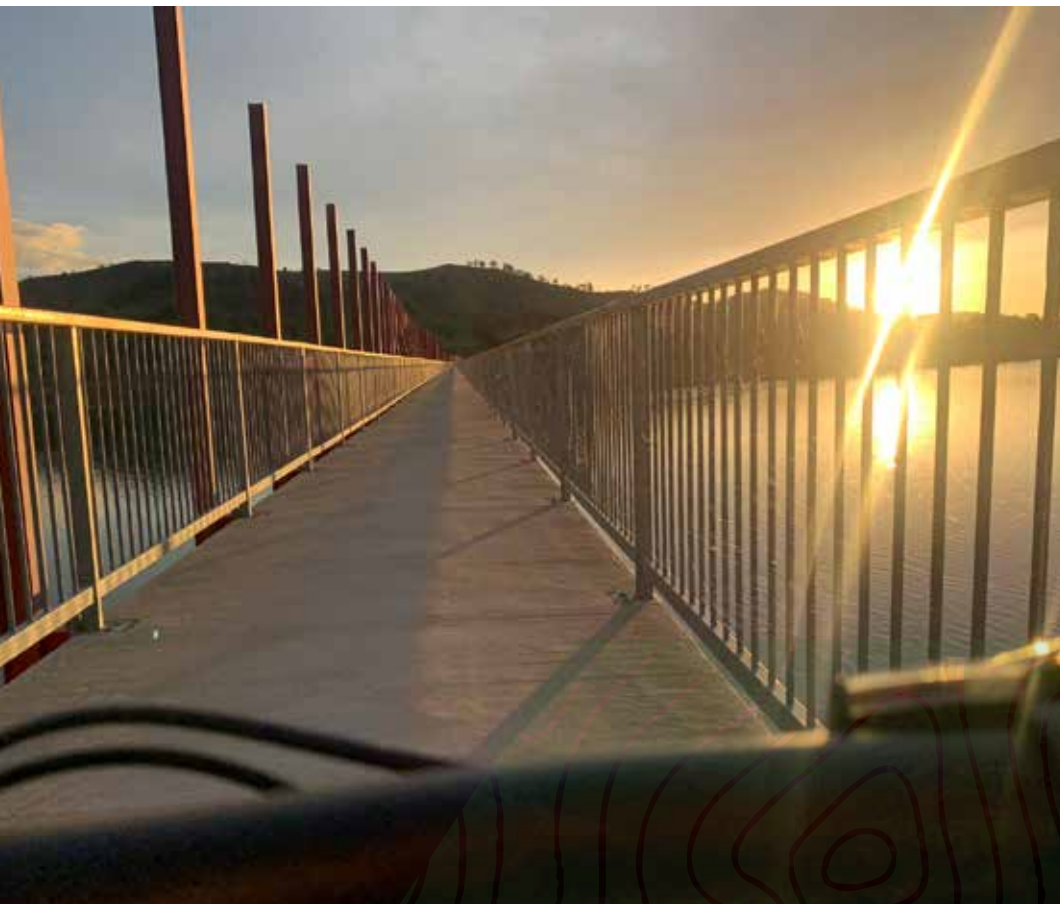
Cycle tourism, nature based tourism and cultural heritage are identified as ‘product pillars’. The HCRT project will make a significant contribution to this pillar.

Upper Murray 2030 Vision Plan

This plan is designed to drive investment into the Upper Murray, to build regional long term sustainability, prosperity and health. It was prepared by Upper Murray Business Incorporated in partnership with Upper Murray Health and Community Services, Towong Shire Council, Snowy Valleys Council and key members of the local community.

The HCRT has specifically been highlighted in the Vision Plan as:

- a key tourism opportunity project
- supporting local tour opportunities in the report a link between the 'town trails' projects.



Hume Strategy for Sustainable Communities

Rail trails are listed as "Investment Ready" in the Hume Plan, strengthening the State's economy and improving the health, wellbeing and lifestyle of the community".

This project aligns with the following key strategic priorities:

- *Environment - protecting native habitat and biodiversity (nature tourism product and associated conservation works); priority Strategies 3.3 and 3.4*
- *Community - strengthening communities, increasing resilience and enhancing liveability (community capacity building through steering committee and involvement); Priority Strategies 6.1,6.3, 6.4., 8.1 and 8.3*
- *Economic - facilitating innovation in tourism to encourage new and evolving Business; Priority Strategy*
- *Transport - linking communities through improved public transport and transport linkages Priority Strategy*
- *Land Use - maximising use of existing infrastructure; Converting existing railway infrastructure into a rail trail represents value for money.*

Healthy Together Victoria

The significant State Government investment in Healthy Together Wodonga, highlights the obesity issue in this region, which is an indirect economic cost. The extensive sections of flat and accessible rail trail directly support the State Government efforts through providing *nature based, easy access and low fitness trails for passive recreation.*

Victorian Trails Strategy (2013 – 2023)

Proposed Trail Development

Considerations

- Land Tenure
- Landholder concerns
- Fencing
- Bridges
- Trail surface
- Drainage
- Road crossings
- User expectations
- User safety
- Environmental and cultural values

Land Tenure

The rail corridor consists of multiple parcels of crown land to form what is often referred to as a lineal reserve. These parcels of land are managed by the Department of Environment Land Water and Planning. Following the removal of the rail line, the majority of these parcels of land are grazed as part of surrounding farm operations. These impacts will be minimised through consultation with landowners and a carefully considered design approach. The exception to this is the rail corridor that passes through the Shelley pine plantation managed by Hancock Victoria Plantations (HVP). When purchasing the plantation from the State Government in 1998, HVP negotiated the lease of the rail corridor as part of the plantation through title consolidation. This was critical to forestry operations as the rail corridor forms part of the main logging haul road through the heart of the plantation. Many of the historic trestle bridges have been enveloped in a Parks Victoria historic reserve. The balance of the proposed trail alignment would utilise VIC Roads road easement.



Landholder Concerns

Understandably, landowners are apprehensive about trails close to their properties. It is important that issues and concerns are identified and addressed before any trail development takes place. Many landholders dislike having decisions imposed on them or left feeling as if they have had no input. Some landholders are resistant to change, especially if they perceive it will have detrimental impacts on their lifestyle and farming operations. It needs to be acknowledged that some opposition will never be completely overcome, despite evidence-based testimonials from people in similar situations. Issues that have been raised during landowner consultation and others that may be raised in the future are included in this report. Conversely, landholders who understand and support the many social and economic benefits a trail will bring to their community, will prove to be extremely valuable advocates.

As with all rail trail development, the common issues tend to centre around a number of key elements:

- Farm operations and management: Disruption to farming operations / practices and biosecurity concerns
- Lifestyle and amenity: User safety, security, privacy, theft, trespass, noise, disturbance and a range of related issues
- Trail management: Maintenance, behaviour of trail users, littering, toileting and other issues.

Fencing

It is commonly perceived that fencing the rail corridor will adversely affect farming practices. However, not fencing can create issues with livestock/ trail user interactions and subsequent liability issues. Other issues raised include that of fire hazard, as the un-grazed rail corridor provides greater fuel loads during periods of fire danger. Another common concern is the ongoing maintenance of the fences once erected. Fencing of the rail corridor is an important component of a successful, well managed rail trail and is key to providing a premium user experience.

Fencing along a rail trail is strongly advised for the following reasons:

- Help prevent unauthorised access onto the rail trail
- Prevent authorised trail users (cyclists, walkers, horse riders) from wandering onto adjoining properties
- Minimise disturbance of stock by trail users
- Minimise risk to trail users from stock
- Prevent boundary creep
- Delineate freehold (private property) from Crown land for maintenance and liability clarity
- Prevent stock from damaging trail surface and table drains, especially when a gravel surface becomes wet
- Prevent stock from defecating on the trail.

Consultation with each adjoining landowner will be required to tailor specific solutions. Where identified as required, the cost of fencing will be the trail developer's expense.

Where the crown land parcel is wide enough, it is worth considering fencing a 6 – 8 metre wide corridor. The remainder of the crown land parcel can be leased back to adjoining landowners for grazing. This could significantly reduce maintenance costs and potential fuel load, whilst allowing farmers to retain more of what they are currently grazing.

Bridges

Bridges and creek crossings represent one of the ‘big ticket items’ of any trail development budget. The original rail line from Shelley to Cudgewa crossed 11 timber trestle bridges. Unfortunately, 4 of the original trestle bridges were lost in the black summer fires. Bridges and creek crossings provide trail users with fantastic points of interest and often become a key attractions. With the use of interpretive signage, the bridges present an opportunity to tell the story of the region including the historical and cultural significance of the rail line. The existing section of rail trail between Tallangatta and Shelley displays several remarkable examples of restored trestle bridges. This has been achieved through truly heroic efforts by teams of volunteers with limited funding and over many years. Commercially, restoration of timber rail bridges is a very expensive, this is due to:

- High cost of engineering assessment
- Limited number of contractors experienced in timber bridge construction nationally
- Often remote location
- Limited access for large construction equipment
- Sourcing construction materials
- Time taken to retain as much original material and authentic character as possible.

Investigating alternative options such as bypassing the original bridge or constructing an adjacent pedestrian bridge may reduce costs.

The Rail Trail Establishment Guidelines by Rail Trail Australia states:

‘Funding should be spent on providing long lasting, fire resistant and maintenance free bridges as a higher priority than retaining historical authenticity. If an original bridge does not meet these criteria then other options should be investigated for funding’.

When proposing a bridge solution consideration should be given to the accessibility and public exposure of the site. A remote site that is likely to receive less visitations may suit a more cost-effective solution. Conversely, an accessible site close to a town or major road with high visitations, would better suit a ‘hero’ solution. This would result in the bridge being an attraction in its own right.



Trail Surface

The survey undertaken during community consultation revealed that there is mixed opinion on whether the surface of the trail should be sealed (bitumen or asphalt) or unsealed (compacted gravel). 22.9% of the 70 respondents stated that it should be sealed; 28.6% stated it should be gravel; 48.6% were happy with either.

Each surface treatment has its advantages and disadvantages. It can be argued that different sections of a trail will suit a different treatment. A section of trail in an urban area or close to a township may better suit a sealed surface to maximise accessibility and patronage, whilst sustaining the higher volume of users. More remote or environmentally significant sections of trail may better suit a gravel surface, with an aesthetic more sympathetic to the natural environment and reflecting a more authentic historic rail trail experience.

The choice of trail surface may act as user filter, as the type and quality of surface can greatly influence the type of user and desired user experience. For example, an occasional recreational cyclist or young family group will gravitate to a sealed surface close to amenities, whereas a seasoned, self-sufficient backcountry mountain biker, will seek out a remote and technically challenging trail. A gravel surface offers something in between these two extremes.

Sealed		Gravel	
Pros	Cons	Pros	Cons
All weather surface	Expensive to construct	Less expensive to construct	Can get soft in wetter areas
Suitable for wheelchairs, small wheels (scooters, skateboards etc)	Increased joint impact for runners and walkers	Less joint impact for runners and walkers	Not suitable for wheelchairs, small wheels (scooters, skateboards etc)
Less routine maintenance	Not suitable for horses	Suitable for horses	More routine maintenance
No user erosion in high traffic areas	Harsh aesthetic in some environment settings	Softer aesthetic in some environment settings	Prone to user erosion in high traffic areas
Consistent surface quality	Ground movement can result in cracking - patching	No ground movement problems	Difficult to achieve consistent surface quality



Drainage

The vast majority of the original culverts passing under the original rail line are still intact and working, albeit in need of cleaning. There are some sections that will benefit from the installation of additional culverts and localised grading. The required drainage work or improvements consist largely of reinstating and/or improving the table drains that run along either side of the rail corridor. This is particularly critical in the many cuttings that exist. Due to the relatively steep grade of some sections of the rail corridor, rock beaching of the table drains will be advisable to minimise erosion and maintenance. The regular inspection and cleaning of the drainage infrastructure should be part of the routine trail maintenance plan.

Road Crossings

Fortunately, there are minimal road crossings on the proposed HCRT extension. The crossings include dirt tracks and driveways, quiet dirt roads, sealed country roads and a highway. The proposed crossing treatments should appropriately reflect the risks posed by visibility, volume and speed of traffic. For example, a trailside give way sign will alert trail users they are approaching a property driveway with occasional slow moving traffic, whereas a barricaded chicane with caution and stop signs will alert users of a busier road crossing with fast moving traffic.

Major road crossing solutions used on other rail trails in Australia include underpasses when typography permits (e.g. on the new Beechworth – Yackandandah Trail.) and traffic lights/pedestrian crossings in built up urban environments (used on the Lilydale – Warburton Trail.)

User Expectations

As explored in section 4.3, the future success of the HCRT is dependent on leveraging its unique points of difference and delivering on the product standards and expectations of the increasingly discerning user. This applies not just to the proposed extension but the trail in its entirety. Consideration should be given to how and what needs to be done along the existing HCRT to ensure a cohesive, consistent, quality user experience is realised. This plan, in consultation with the various advisory groups, will recommend changes or upgrades to the existing section of HCRT to achieve this outcome.

User Safety

The HCRT's charm of winding through sections of remote, rugged, mountainous wilderness presents some safety issues. Patchy mobile phone coverage, weather extremes, lack of facilities/population, creeks, hunters, livestock and venomous wildlife all have a potential impact on the safety of the trail user.

Strategies to reduce these risks include:

- Comprehensive warning/safety signage
- Trailhead signage including trail etiquette and relevant risk mitigation information
- Location markers to assist emergency services
- Signed trail access points
- Adequate fencing.

Environmental and Cultural Values

Although the majority of the proposed extension corridor is currently grazed farmland, there are sections that pass through historic reserves and along creeks and road reserves. Rail corridors are often considered as linear conservation corridors protecting native plants and animals. They often link remnant vegetation in farming areas and contain valuable flora and fauna habitat.

The biological impacts of trail development will be considered as part of the statutory planning process. Ultimately the trail's development will improve and extend the flora and fauna corridor and raise environmental awareness with its users. The impact of the trail's development on European and Cultural Heritage values also needs to be considered.

Any proposed development within the rail corridor is considered to be previously disturbed ground, whereas trail realignments, links, trailheads and alternate bridge crossings will likely trigger impact assessments. The preservation of any historical rail infrastructure is an obvious benefit of a rail trail's development.



Desired Outcomes

- Connecting towns
- Scenic beauty
- Preserve and leverage cultural and historic values
- Point of difference
- Economic and tourism driver
- Create business opportunities
- Community support
- Local amenity
- Strengthen the regions cycle product offering
- Diversify and strengthen nature-based tourism product
- Diversify the regional economy



Connecting Towns

It is highly desirable that rail trails start and finish in a major town and connects bike friendly townships or hubs along the way. These townships or hubs should provide a place to eat, drink and stay, contributing to an immersive authentic visitor experience. The proposed completion of the HCRT will provide these important ingredients. Trail users passing through towns will provide new business opportunities for service providers. Presently, there are opportunities for trail users to acquire accommodation, food and drink, and other services in Wodonga and Tallangatta. Development of the rail trail extension will provide a range of new business opportunities (or allow existing businesses to expand) in Koetong, Beetoomba, Cudgewa and Corryong. The rail trail will assist in strengthening community networks and enhance social cohesion through fostering a sense of community and ownership of the trail. Partnering the HCRT with the successful Tumbarumba – Rosewood Rail trail will see the connection between Corryong and Tumbarumba strengthen. This will result in further economic benefits as trail users travel between the towns to experience the different trail offerings.

Scenic Beauty

The HCRT has an abundance of scenic beauty. From the serene waters edge of Lake Hume the trail climbs 580 meters over historic trestle bridges into the mountains, passing Victoria’s highest station at 792 meters AMSL. The trail then descends into the Upper *Murray Man From Snowy River* cattleman country. In contrast, the urban CBD setting of Wodonga’s Junction Place, complete with cafes and restaurants housed within the restored railway buildings, enhance the diversity of the High Country Rail Trail. This unique rail trail experience will offer arguably the most diverse user experience of any rail trail in Australia.

Preserve and leverage cultural and historic values

The completion of the HCRT will provide a valuable opportunity to record, preserve and tell the story of the rail line and surrounding communities for generations to come. The Wodonga – Cudgewa line is steeped in history, as are the communities it passes through. First nation Australians, early settlers, agriculture and timber industries, Snowy Mountains Hydro-electric scheme, Hume dam construction, Bonegilla Migrant Camp, Tallangatta *the town that moved*, mining, Banjo Paterson and *The Man From Snowy River* are just some of the stories that can be conveyed as part of the HCRT experience.

Point of difference - Existing

Fortunately, establishing a point of difference for the HCRT is an easy task. Along with the stunning scenic diversity is the unique climb to Shelley, once Victoria's highest station. This is evident in the trail's dramatic elevation profile.

The existing Wodonga to Shelley section of trail clearly offers two different trail experiences.

Wodonga – Bullioh has a sealed or good quality gravel surface and follows a gentle undulating grade. Passes through towns or lakeside reserves with amenities.

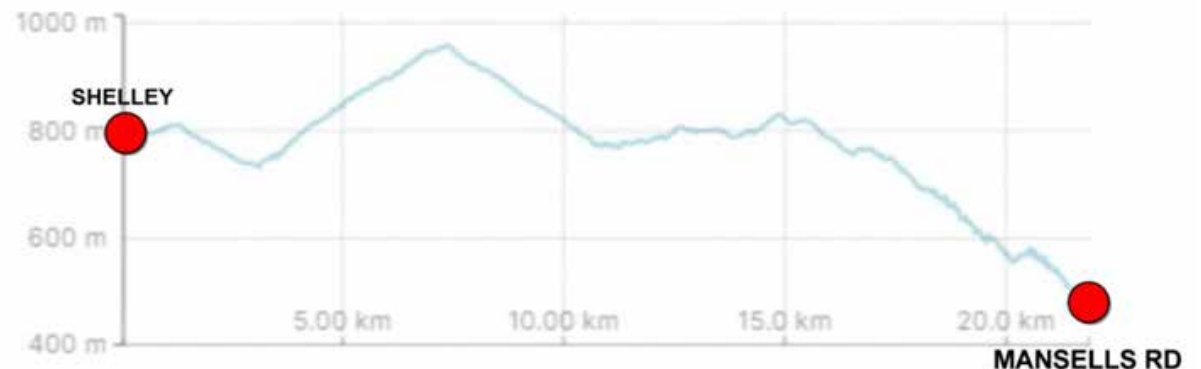
Bullioh – Shelley has a good to average quality gravel surface with relatively steeper grades. There are currently no amenities on this section with the exception of an unsignposted off trail detour to the Koetong Pub.

Point of different - Proposed

Sharing the same stunning scenic beauty, the proposed HCRT extension further diversifies the product offering. As detailed in section 9.2 the identified solution to complete a trail link through HVP's plantation between Shelley and Mansells Road, is the Shelley Wilderness Trail. This is proposed to be a beginner to intermediate natural surface, back country, mountain bike style trail. Once the proposed extension re-joins the rail corridor it will again offer both high quality gravel and sealed surfaces.



On completion, the HCRT will offer three distinctly different trail experiences. It will offer something for all rail trail cyclist segments and also attract and cater for mountain bikers. This will cement the HCRT as a truly unique cycling product.



Economic and tourism driver

Providing access to the Trail from Corryong will create a sense of ownership from the community, activating events and promotion of the new asset. Claiming the status as Victoria's longest and most diverse Rail Trail will see it become a 'bucketlist' item for cyclist from across the country. The higher 'world-class' standard of the product will widen the market beyond cycling enthusiasts. Adding diversity in the trail, such as the beginner to intermediate natural surface section that circumnavigates HVP's plantation, will attract a new market – entry level mountain bikers.

Based on market research undertaken by Urban Enterprise in developing numerous cycling strategic documents for Victoria's High Country, upgrading and completing (installation of required bridges etc.) the existing HCRT will deliver an additional 7,600 visitors per annum. Extending the Rail Trail from Shelley into Corryong, will deliver an additional 16,000 visitors.

Market research suggests that 39% of the new visitors would stay overnight, whilst 59% would be day trippers. The Towong Shire Destination Management Plan states that overnight visitors spend \$287 per day, whilst day trippers on average spend \$62.

Therefore the upgrade to the existing High Country Rail Trail is forecast to directly inject \$1,128,676 into the economy each year after the required upgrades are complete.

Similarly, extending the HCRT from Shelley to Corryong is forecast to inject \$2,376,160 each year from visitor spend. Therefore following the existing trail upgrades, in addition to the extension construction, the HCRT will return a direct economic benefit in the vicinity of \$3,504,836 per annum.

REMPAN illustrates that with a supply chain and consumption flow-on effect, this will expand to an impact of \$4,651,725 and maintain 22 jobs annually.

During Construction, the Trail is estimated to cost a total of \$14,464,505, inclusive of the extension and improvements required to the existing Trail. REMPLAN demonstrates that this will expand to a supply-chain and consumption flow-on effect of \$23,817,546 and the creation of 53 jobs.

The High Country Rail Trail will go a long way to assisting the communities of Towong Shire recover from the economic devastation arising from the Black Summer Bushfires and COVID-19.





Create business opportunities

There are a range of business opportunities for the private sector resulting from the proposed extension and marketing of the HCRT. Examples of these opportunities include accommodation, food and beverages, farm gate sales, supported and guided tours and bike and equipment hire.

There are many examples of similar businesses that have been created along other rail trails. Such services add significantly to the user's enjoyment and can often define the trail experience, as identified in Tourism North East's cycle tourism research.

The success of rail trails such as the regional Murray to Mountains and the Riesling Trail in the Claire Valley, South Australia, can be attributed to ancillary businesses and services that support the trail and enhance the product offering.





Community support

Consultation with the local community revealed strong support for the extension of the HCRT as demonstrated in section 6. Should the rail trail extension proceed, it is important that those community members that previously expressed reservations or concerns are again consulted. This will help ensure strong community support is maintained, ultimately strengthening community networks and enhancing social cohesion through pride and ownership of the trail. The formation of a local community-based “friends of” or “advisory group” was requested in feedback received during community consultation. As with the existing section of the HCRT, the formation of a community-based group will be an important element to the success and governance of the rail trail extension.

Local amenity

An important benefit of a rail trail is improving health outcomes. Towong Shire Council’s Socio-economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) places Towong at 38 out of 79, recognizing the Shire’s communities are at a high level of socio-economic disadvantage (as per the Tallangatta Health Service Plan 2018-2027).

The extension of the HCRT will provide an opportunity for free, accessible exercise. According to the Tallangatta Health Service Plan 2018-2027, nearly a third of all residents of the Shire have a disability and more than 14% of Towong Shire’s children are identified as having ‘special needs status’, compared to only 4.7% nationally. The proposed sealed section of trail will provide an accessible path link between Cudgewa and Corryong.

The development of the proposed trail will improve cyclist and pedestrian safety, which also featured strongly in community feedback.

With no public transport available in the area, the proposed rail trail would provide a safe cycle link between communities. The median age of Towong Shire residents rose from 47 (2011 Census) to 50 years of age in the 2016 Census. The upward trend continues as young people leave the region in search of employment and improved facilities for their young families. Similarly, the current offering

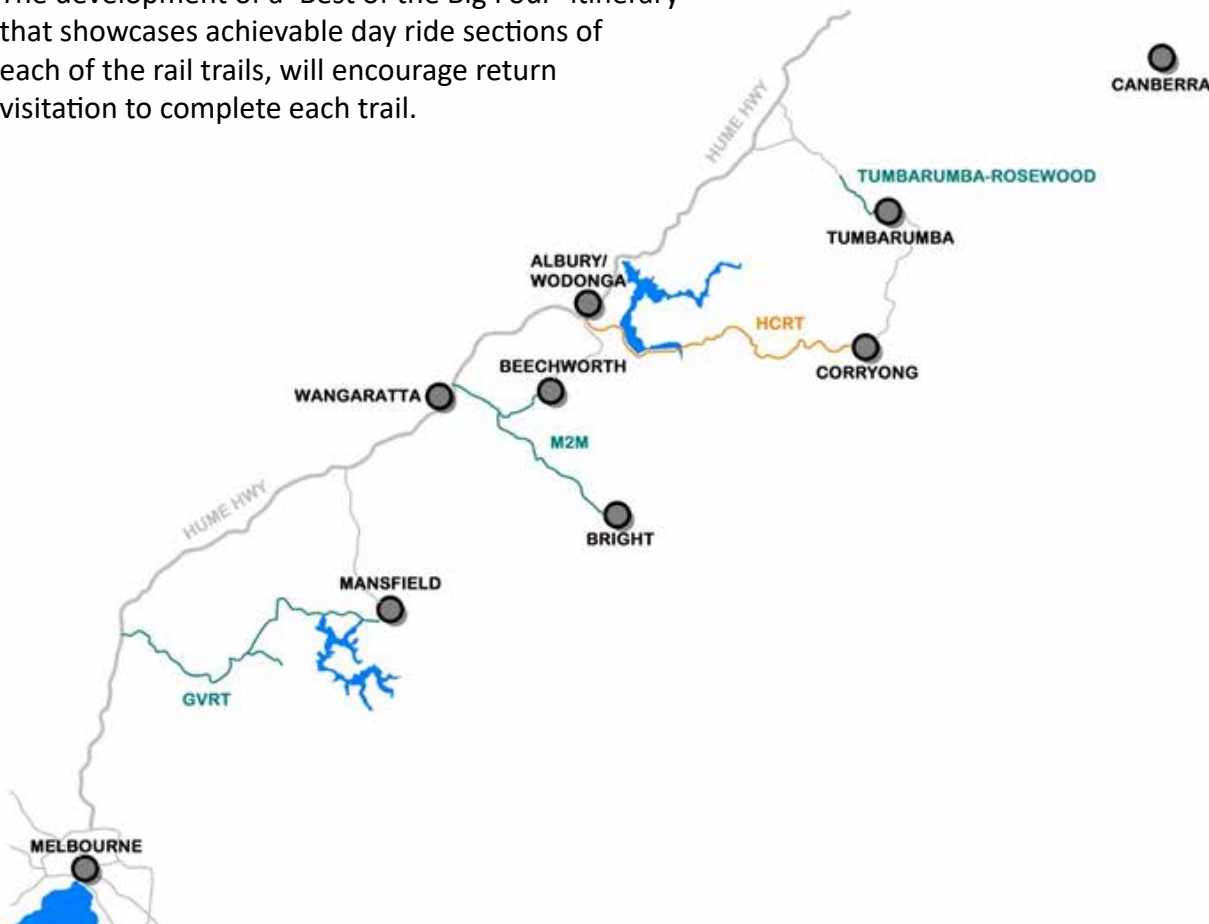
fails to attract families to relocate to the area. The proposed rail trail extension will enhance the liveability of the region and provide employment opportunities. Also, a sense of pride and belonging will be generated as residents connect with the trail and its community driven success.



Strengthen the regions cycle product offering

Offering a uniquely different experience, catering to multiple cycle tourism disciplines and its strategic location within the region, the HCRT will strengthen the cycle product offering in the region. Rail trail cyclists looking for a multi destination holiday or 'road trip' will find the geographical connection between trails and diversity of experience hard to pass. Marketing a partnership or product link between the HCRT, Tumbarumba – Rosewood, Murray to Mountains, and the Great Victorian Rail Trail, will ensure consumer awareness of the region's depth of product offering.

The development of a 'Best of the Big Four' itinerary that showcases achievable day ride sections of each of the rail trails, will encourage return visitation to complete each trail.



Diversify and strengthen nature-based tourism product

Tourism Australia defines nature-based tourism as 'leisure travel undertaken largely or solely for the purpose of enjoying natural attractions and engaging in a variety of nature-based activities.'

Outdoors Victoria have compiled a list of core nature based activities including:

Ballooning – Bushwalking/hiking – Canoeing/Kayaking – Cycling/MTB – Diving – Fishing – Four-wheel driving – Golf – Horse riding – Environment/Landcare – Orienteering – Trail running – Sailing/Boating – Swimming – Rock climbing.

The common ingredient regardless of the activity is the desire to experience unique sensory experiences whilst connecting with the natural environment.

Towong Shire Council are currently looking to develop and activate this tourism sector, realising the enviable depth of natural assets within the Shire. Planning, economic and tourism consultants, Urban Enterprise, are currently working on a 'Destination Management Plan'. The plan will identify a strategic approach to leverage these assets to provide opportunities and economic stimulus to the region.

The development of the HCRT as a premium cycle product supported by strong ancillary services, branding and marketing presence will be a key tourism driver in the nature-based, cycle tourism sector.

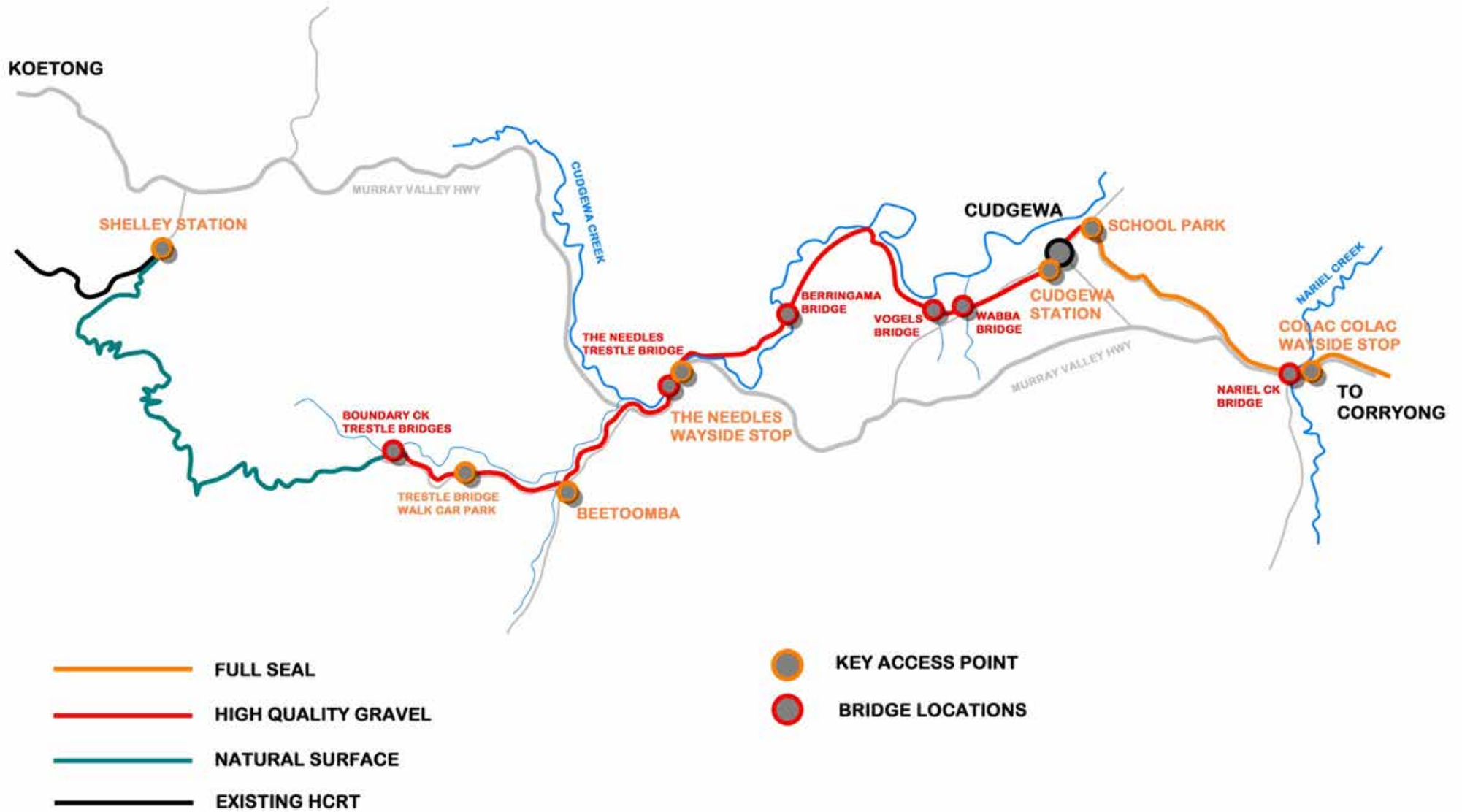


Diversify the regional economy

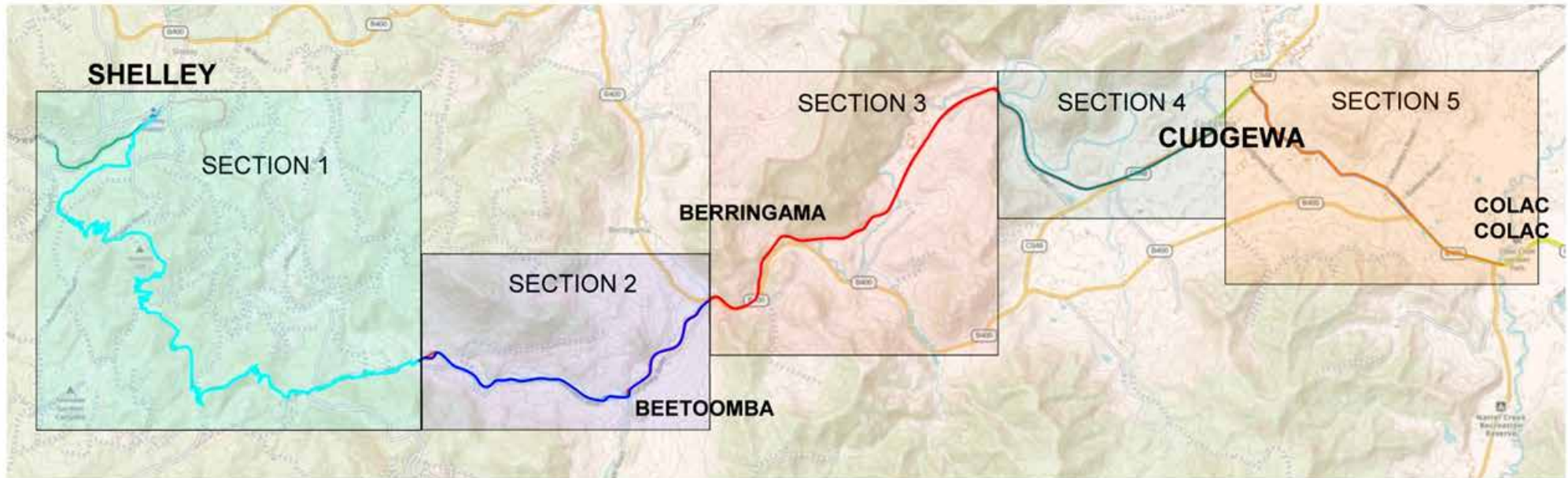
Currently Towong Shire's Economy is agriculture dominant with the industry accounting for 36% of the region's output and 72% of regional export. This leaves the area exposed, with little economic resilience when industry related disaster strikes. Over recent years the agriculture sector has been affected by flood, drought and industry specific disaster such as unsustainable milk prices. The COVID-19 Pandemic has magnified the financial hardship, psychological distress and business downturn felt within the region.

The HCRT presents a significant opportunity for the Shire to develop its tourism offering, leveraging the region's natural assets and diversifying from its agricultural roots. Stimulating growth in the tourism sector will provide resilience during times of agricultural crisis. There is significant potential to develop the region as an agri-tourism and nature-based tourism destination. Research undertaken by Tourism North East demonstrates cycle tourists rate food, wine and brewery experiences highly in conjunction with their cycling activities. The proposed development provides a significant opportunity to leverage on the region's strengths, stimulate growth in private tourism sector and provide employment opportunities for future generations.

Stage 2: Shelley Station - Corryong



Existing Rail Corridor Map Set



Section 1: Shelley Station – Mansells Road

Shelley is located on the Murray Valley Highway, 42 kms from Tallangatta and 7 kms from Koetong. The area now largely consists of pine plantations managed by HVP Plantations. Approximately 1.5 kms from the Murray Valley Highway along Avondale Road, is the site of Shelley Station. The station is the highest in Victoria, located 781 metres above sea level. Opened in 1916, the station operated until its closure in 1979. Only the platform now remaining. Currently, this is where the developed High Country Rail Trail ends/starts, complete with wayfinding and interpretive signage. The large flat site is ideal for development as a key trailhead to include picnic tables, BBQ pits, Toilets and a designated 'tents only' camping area.

The corridor of Crown Land Identified suitable for a link trail is managed by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP). It consists predominantly of dry forest slopes and herb rich foothill forest. The topography of the area features gentle to steep slopes with substantial gully systems. The soil type is predominantly rich organic loam to red clay with localised areas of decomposed granite. There are vantage points that offer spectacular views of the snowy mountains and provide a sense of scale to the vast wild landscape of the Upper Murray. Fieldwork within the area revealed large areas of blackberry infestation and many sightings of sambar deer.

As identified in the stakeholder consultation process, the use of the original rail corridor through the Shelley pine plantation is not an option. However, it is essential to provide a trail through the plantation to enable a safe off-road link to Cudgewa and Corryong. High Country Rail Trail community and stakeholder consultations highlighted the necessity of such a link as being critical to the overall product offering and ultimate economic benefit to the Upper Murray. A link trail would enable users to experience the complete journey from Wodonga to Cudgewa and Corryong.

The topography and boundary constraints of the crown land corridor mean that the construction of a traditional rail trail type product would not be feasible. However, this does present a unique opportunity to develop a natural surface *wilderness trail* that will appeal to a broader range of cycle tourism segments. By attracting the high yielding mountain bike tourism market, it will maximise the economic benefits and business opportunities to the region.

The trail should meet the following criteria:

- Cater for walkers and cyclists
- Constructed to a grade suitable for non-suspension bikes and multiple skill levels
- Constructed to comply with the International Mountain Bicycling Association's (IMBA's) sustainable trails best practice
- Natural surface trail with a 1 meter wide bench
- Consider appropriate rest stops, points of interest, camping areas and vantage points
- Respect and minimise impact to the environmental and cultural values of the area
- Offer a truly immersive 'back country adventure' user experience
- Add value and a point of difference to the High Country Rail Trail.





Considerations

The development will need to take account the Australian Walking Track Grading System (AS 2165.1, see appendices) for walkers/hikers and the Australian Mountain Bike Trail Difficulty Rating System (TDRS, see appendices) for riders.

Walking/Hiking

The possible length of the new link trail would lend itself to a multi-day hike, especially when incorporated as a section of the entire High Country Rail Trail. Opportunities for rest stops, camping and access to water should be investigated. With the HVP link trail likely to be greater than 20 kms in length, it would automatically be graded as grade 4 walk, as per AS 2165.1. With the trail at up to 950m above sea level, remoteness and potential weather exposure should also be considered.

Riding

It is proposed that the trail will cater for a wide range of bikes and rider skill level. For bikes without suspension and lower rider skill level, this will be achieved by constructing a simple trail with a gentle average trail grade, avoiding steep side slopes where possible. To make the trail appealing to more experienced mountain bikers, optional avoidable technical trail features (TTF's) and advanced 'A' lines on descents should be incorporated. Remoteness, side slope grades and possible weather exposure at up to 950m above sea level may determine that a 'Blue Square' trail grade is applied.

Trail Construction Corridor

The final trail alignment corridor will be a 20m wide assessment/construction corridor. This will allow the trail builder room to avoid obstacles and construct a fun, engaging trail experience.

General

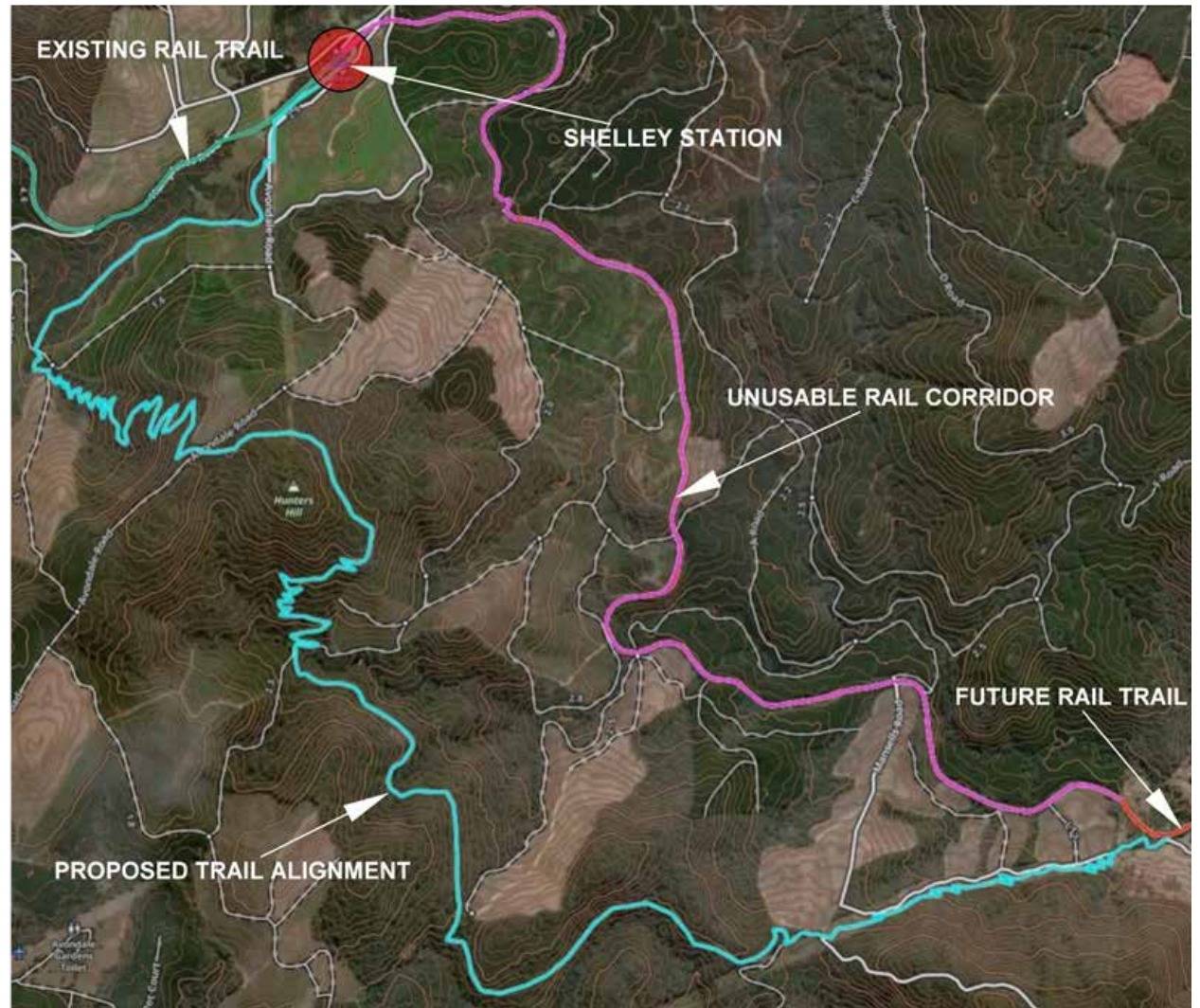
Due to the introduction of a higher-risk activity (mountain biking) and the remoteness of the area, consideration of emergency waypoint signage and access/egress points are particularly important. Fortunately, the pine plantation contains a comprehensive road/fire road network that will greatly assist with this.

Hunting

Deer hunting is very popular in the Shelley area. Measures to minimise risk should be undertaken including updating online hunting maps via the Game Management Authority, and appropriately placed signage for both trail users and hunters.

Wilderness Trail Overview

The proposed Shelley Wilderness Trail will be approximately 22 kms long, with 469 meters of climbing, 738 meters of descending with an average trail grade of 5.5 percent.

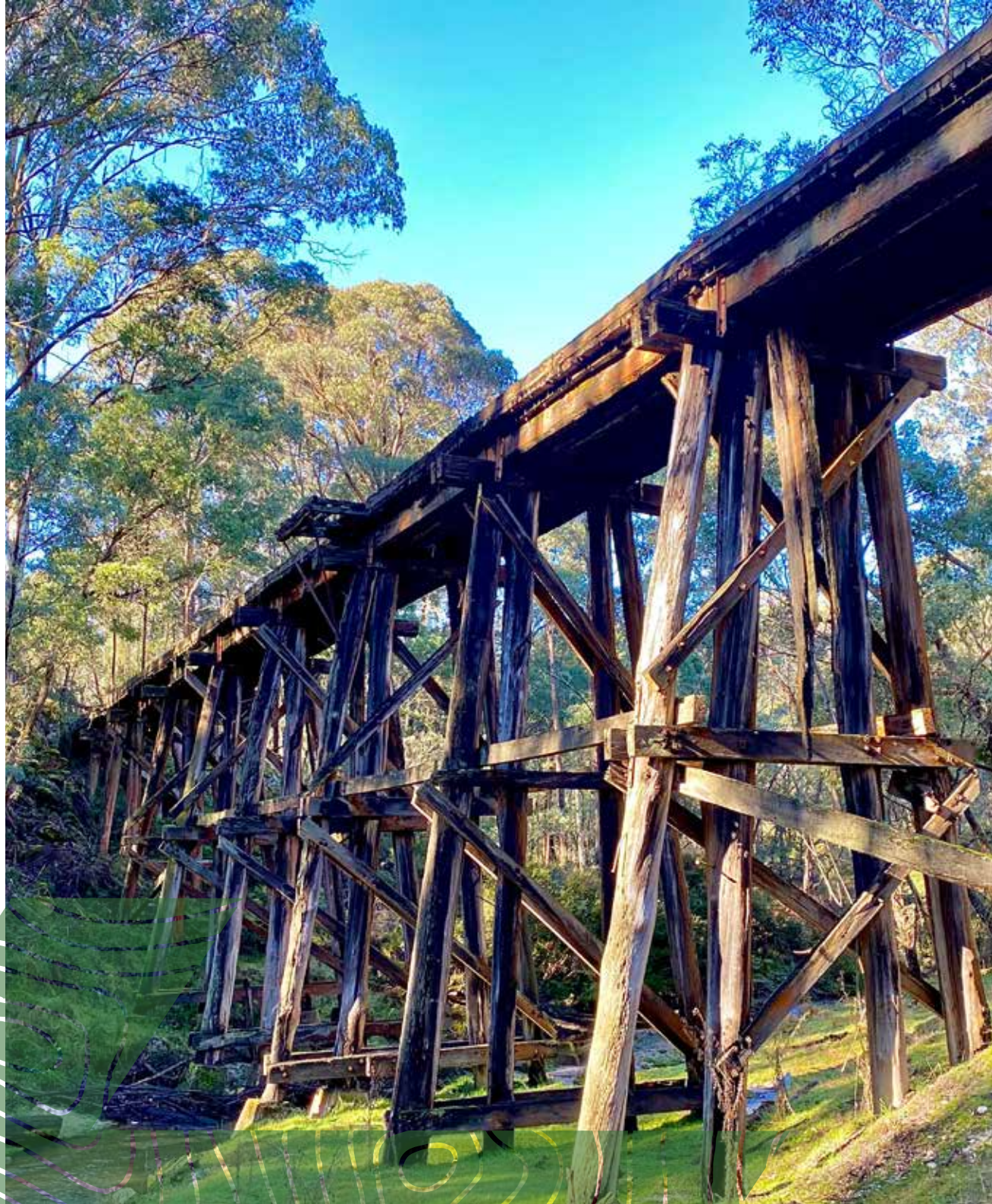


Section 2: Mansells Road – Murray Valley Highway

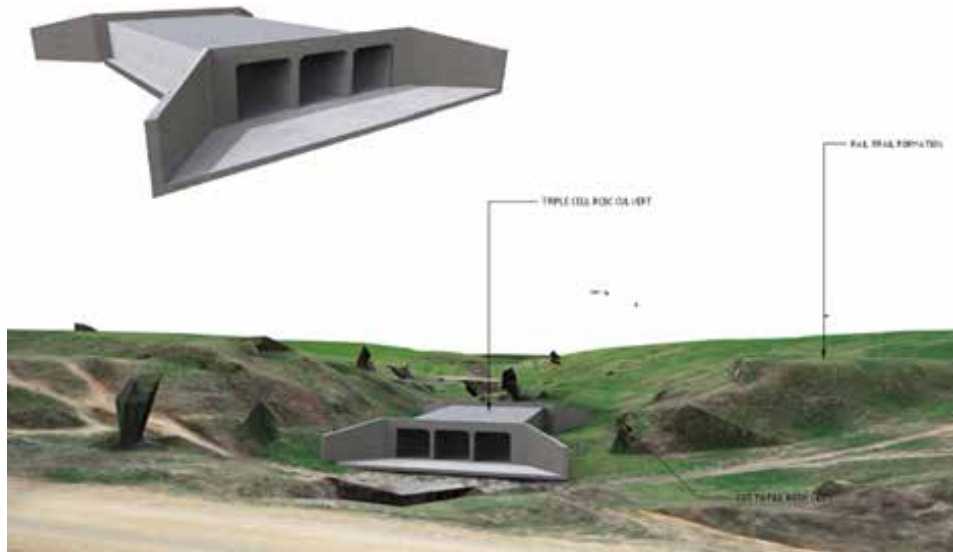
After the proposed Shelley Wilderness Trail (section 1) reconnects with the rail corridor, there are two amazing examples of timber trestle bridges crossing the beautiful Boundary Creek. The cost to refurbish the bridges will be cost prohibitive. It is proposed to bypass the two bridges with a constructed natural surface trail that follows the southern banks of Boundary Creek. This 320 metre bypass will have many benefits including the ability to view these impressive structures from below to really gain a sense of the engineering achievements of that era.

The proposed creekside trail will showcase the natural beauty of the area adding significantly to the user experience. The trail alignment will be on private land, consultation with the landowner has been conducted. The landowner is excited by this concept and intends to offer camping or accommodation. The landowner has expressed concern over public liability of the bypass trail. To negate this, he would be willing to lease this small section of land to the committee of management.

The significant historic value of the trestle bridges and beauty of the environment in which they sit, combine to form a compelling visitor attraction. It is proposed that a car park is constructed approximately 1.8km along the trail to the east, accessed from Mansells Road. This will allow visitors to undertake a short return walk making this attraction more accessible.



Approximately 600m after the trestle bridge walk car park is a small gully and creek line. The original timber 'Mansells Road' bridge was lost in a fire. It is proposed that this is crossed with a triple cell box culvert with the trail graded either side to match surface levels.



A further 2.3km from the new box culvert crossing, is the site of a proposed key trail access point located at the junction of Mansells and Lucyvale Roads. Access to and from the trail via a short section of Mansells Road will provide a detour around Beetoomba trestle bridge. This will also solve a privacy issue with a dwelling close to the trail. It is anticipated that this will become a popular pick-up point for mountain bikers riding the Shelley Wilderness Trail. The access point will allow visitors to park and view the trestle bridge crossing Cudgewa Creek and the site of Beetoomba Station.

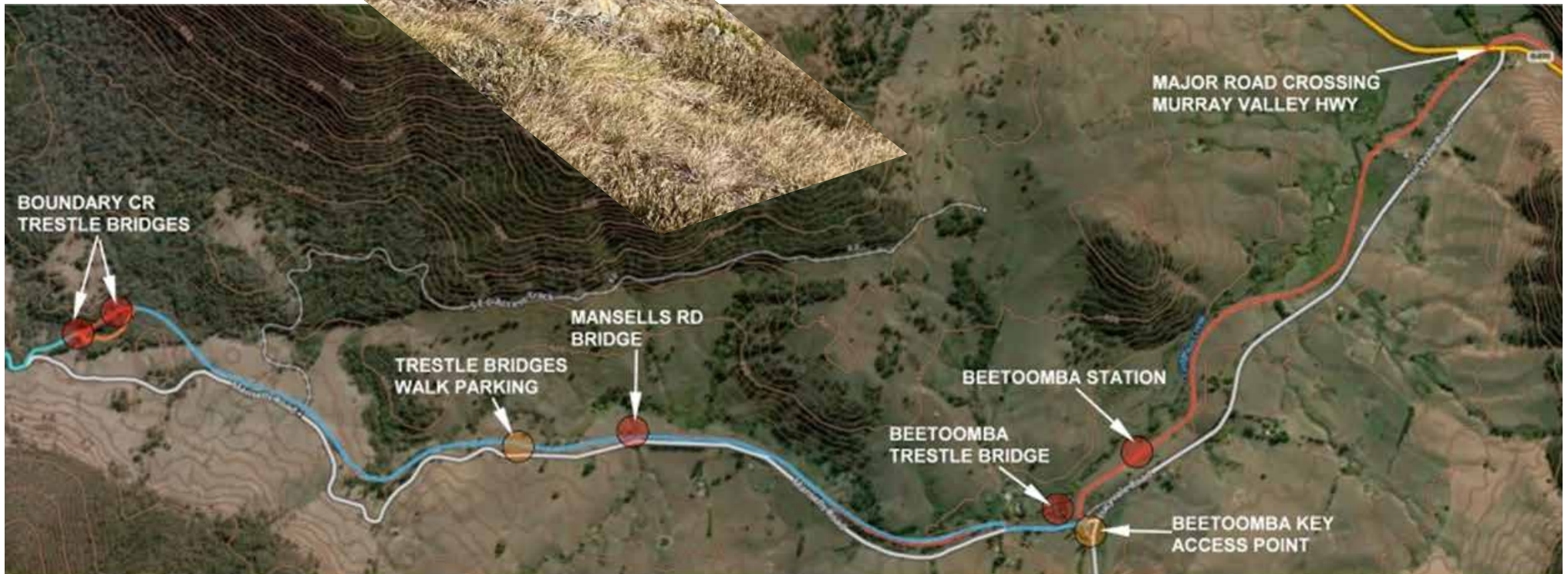
Reconstruction of the platform and installation of interpretive displays will tell the story of the rail line at Beetoomba.





There is 2.7 km of trail between the proposed Beetoomba car park and the Murray Valley Highway. Drainage improvements are required as currently there are several waterlogged areas.

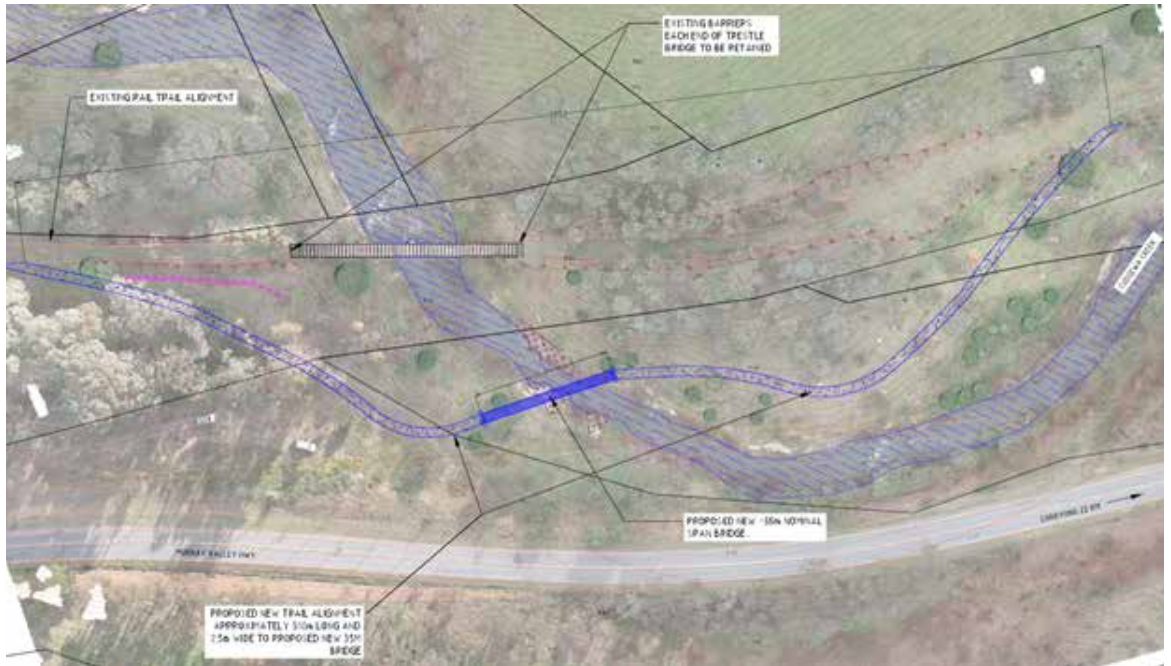
There is a major road crossing at the Murray Valley Highway. Although traffic volumes are not high on this section, traffic travels at up to 100km per hour, with a large percentage being heavy vehicles. The crossing will require appropriate safety signage as per the *Ride High Country Regional Signage Strategy*. The possibility of an underpass should be explored and implemented if feasible. Directional signage to the "Rail Trail" and "trestle Bridges" should be located at the Lucyvale Road intersection.

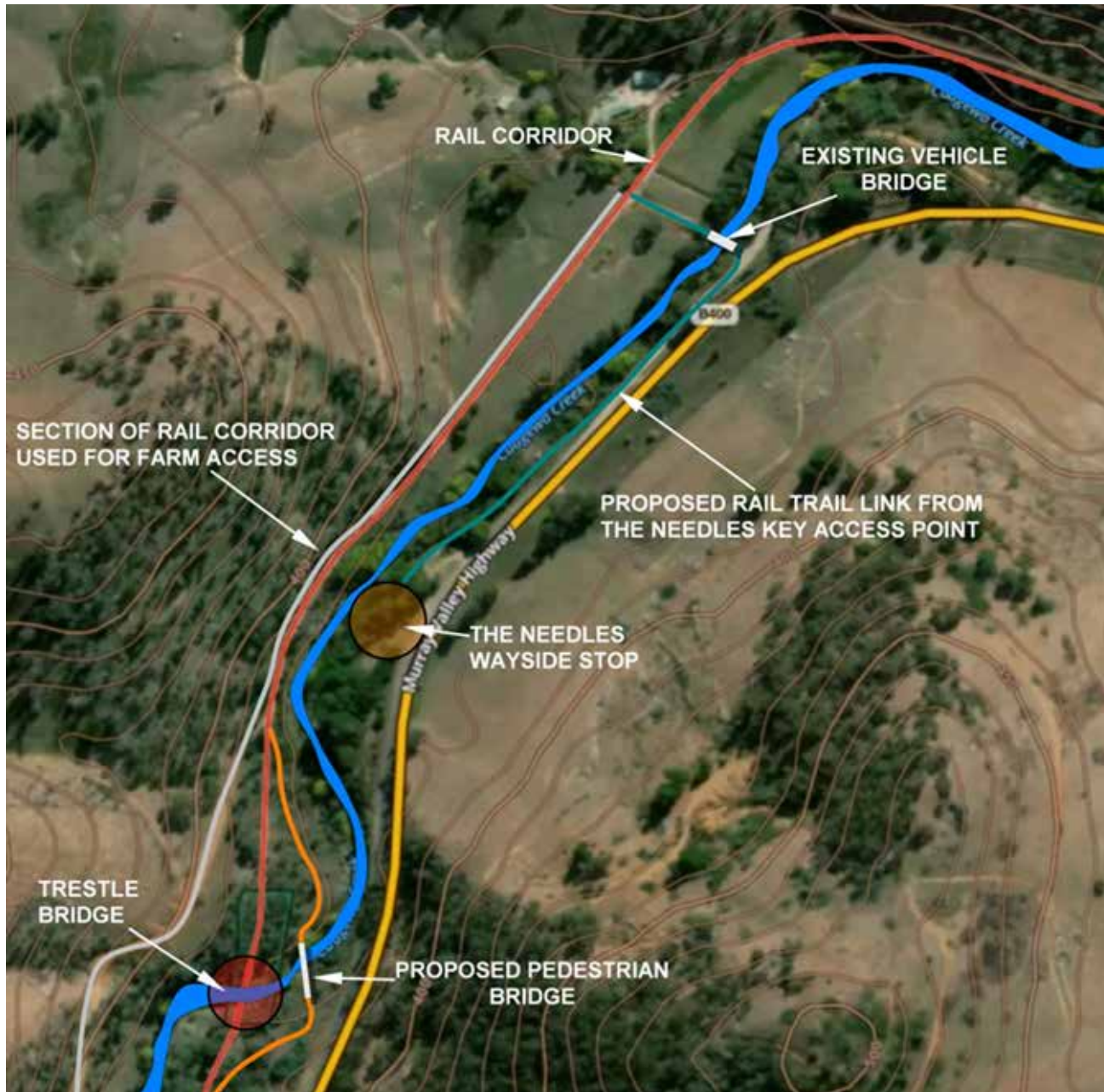


Section 3: Murray Valley Highway - Whiteheads Road

After crossing the Murray Valley Highway, the rail corridor hugs the banks of the Cudgewa Creek. There is a small bridge known as Wabba Track that needs re-decking. The concrete abutments and steel girders appear to be in good order. Ideally, the bridge will be refurbished to take the weight of maintenance vehicles but will be subject to engineers' assessment.

Shortly after Wabba Track, the trail reaches 'The Needles' trestle bridge, crossing the Cudgewa Creek. A new pedestrian bridge is proposed adjacent to the trestle bridge, affording a great view of this fantastic structure. Approximately 300m of trail will be required to connect the new bridge with the rail alignment.





The Needles' is an existing wayside stop on the Murray Valley HWY adjacent to the Cudgewa Creek. This presents an opportunity to be developed as a key rail trail access point. Access to the trail would be via a short section of existing dirt road and vehicle bridge. This will also provide access for visitors wishing to view the historic trestle bridge from the proposed pedestrian bridge. A short section of the rail corridor is used for farm access and should be signed to alert users to potential hazards ahead.

Heading north from The Needles area there are some drainage works required where a gully feeds into the Cudgewa Creek. The trail then follows the Burrowa – Pine Mountain National Park boundary for 1.3km. At this point the trail crosses farmland for 4km until it reaches the Whiteheads - Touzel Road intersection.

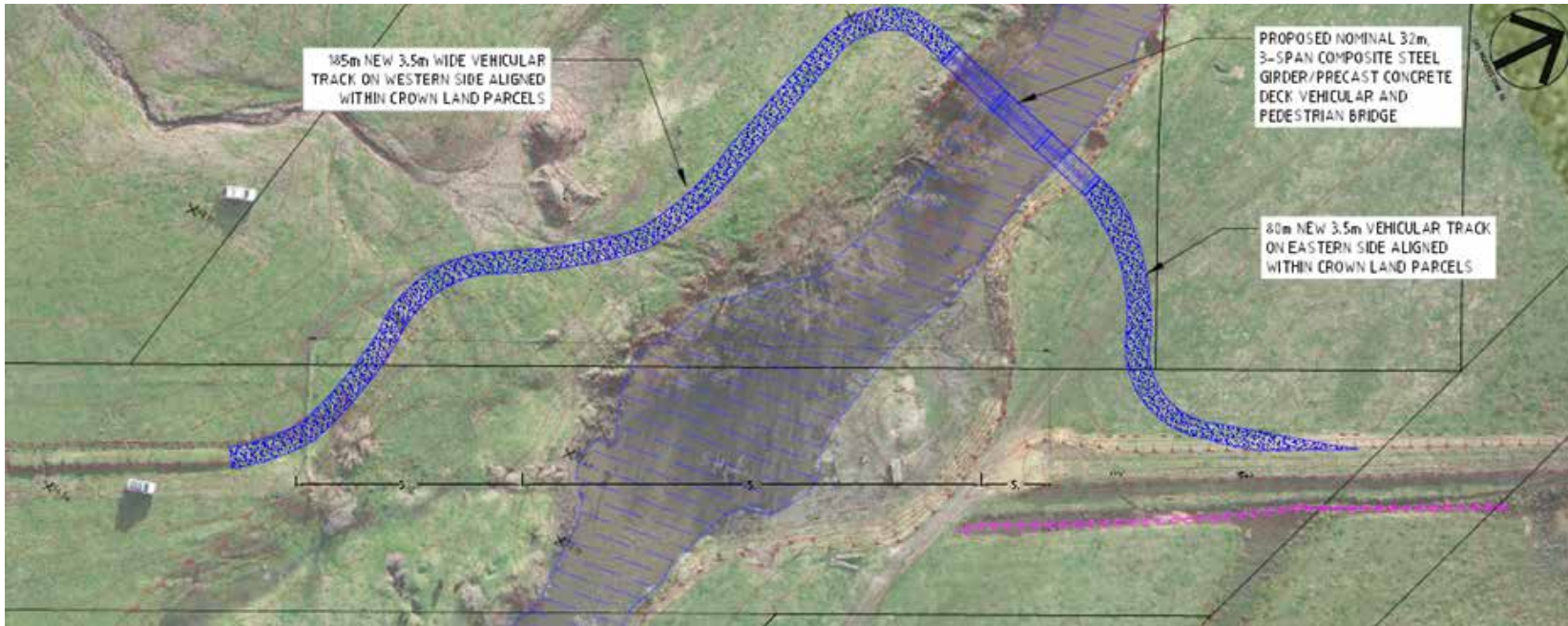
Aside from drainage, fencing and surfacing, the key requirement on this 4km section is the replacement of the Berringama Trestle Bridge. This 96 metre long trestle bridge was destroyed during the Black Summer Bushfires that decimated the valley. The adjacent landowners reported that floating debris would wash down the creek in a rain event and would get caught on the timber piles. Over time, this caused the creek banks to erode and resulted in grievances over maintenance liability. It is highly desirable that the replacement bridge be trafficable to not only aid farm and maintenance operations, but more importantly, provide a strategic crossing point for firefighting appliances during a bushfire attack.



Pre Black Summer Bushfires



Post Black Summer Bushfires



The proposed 3 span vehicular concrete bridge solution will minimise debris accumulation and provide for the desired vehicle and strategic firefighting access. The proposed location of the new bridge is slightly north of the original location within a crown land parcel. This will reduce span requirements from 96m to 32m and result in substantially reduced construction costs.



Section 4: Whiteheads Road – Cudgewa Station

Shortly after crossing Touzel Road, for approximately 2 km, the rail corridor traverses a steep narrow strip of land between Whiteheads Road and Cudgewa Creek. The rail corridor is used as an essential farm access track due to the restrictive topography of this area. Trail development will need to accommodate this. Appropriate signage alerting users of occasional farm vehicle use should be installed.

The trail continues to descend towards Cudgewa Valley Road until it reaches the site of Vogels Bridge. The bridge was lost during the Black Summer Bushfires. Its proposed replacement is a single span open web truss pedestrian bridge.

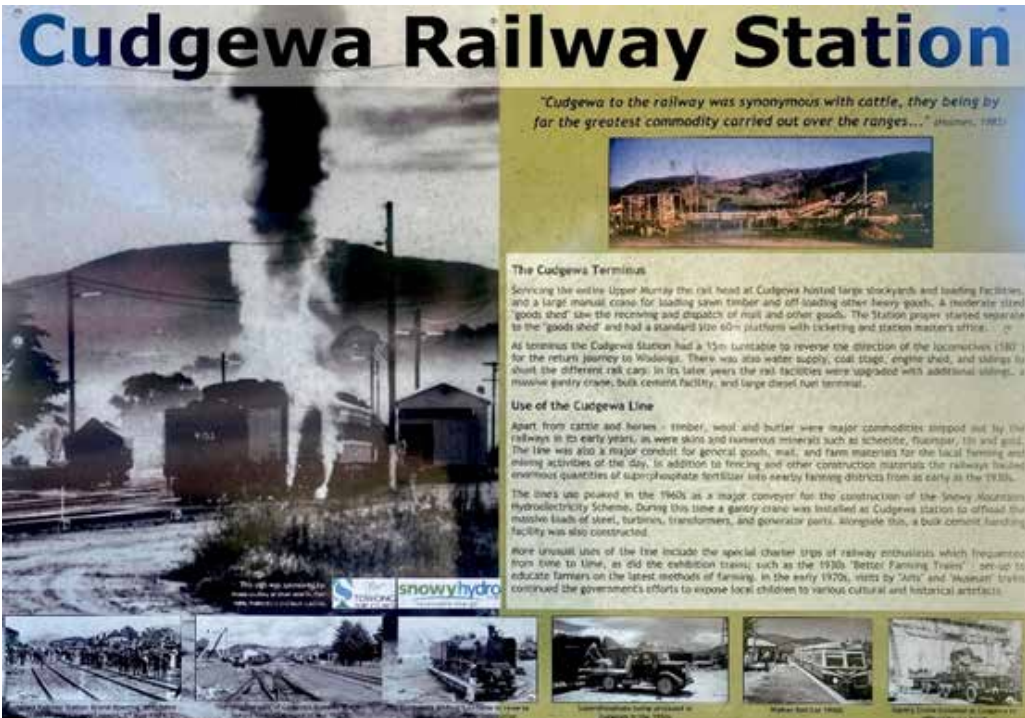
Following on from Vogels bridge, the rail corridor passes close to farm buildings and two dwellings. There are several landowner concerns including privacy, security and the impacts to farming operations, especially where the trail crosses the main access drive. These concerns and impacts lessen as the trail enters a cutting before Wabba Bridge. Ongoing consultation with the landowner during any proposed development will be essential in reaching a best case scenario for all parties. Likely development requirements include, screening plantings, additional fencing and signage (security), major cattlegrid/gate crossing point and additional drainage upgrades in the cutting.



Once a Cudgewa heritage listed landmark, Wabba Bridge was lost during the Black Summer Bushfires. A cable-stayed pedestrian bridge is the proposed replacement to allow rail trail users to cross over Wabba Creek. This new bridge will become a visitor attraction in its own right. Being located close to the future Cudgewa Station trailhead, this attraction will be accessible to visitors via an easy 4km return walk.

Approximately 700m after Wabba Bridge, the rail alignment crosses the Cudgewa Valley Road. Although relatively quiet, vehicles travel up to 100 km per hour. The major road crossing will require appropriate safety signage as per the Ride High Country Regional Signage Strategy.



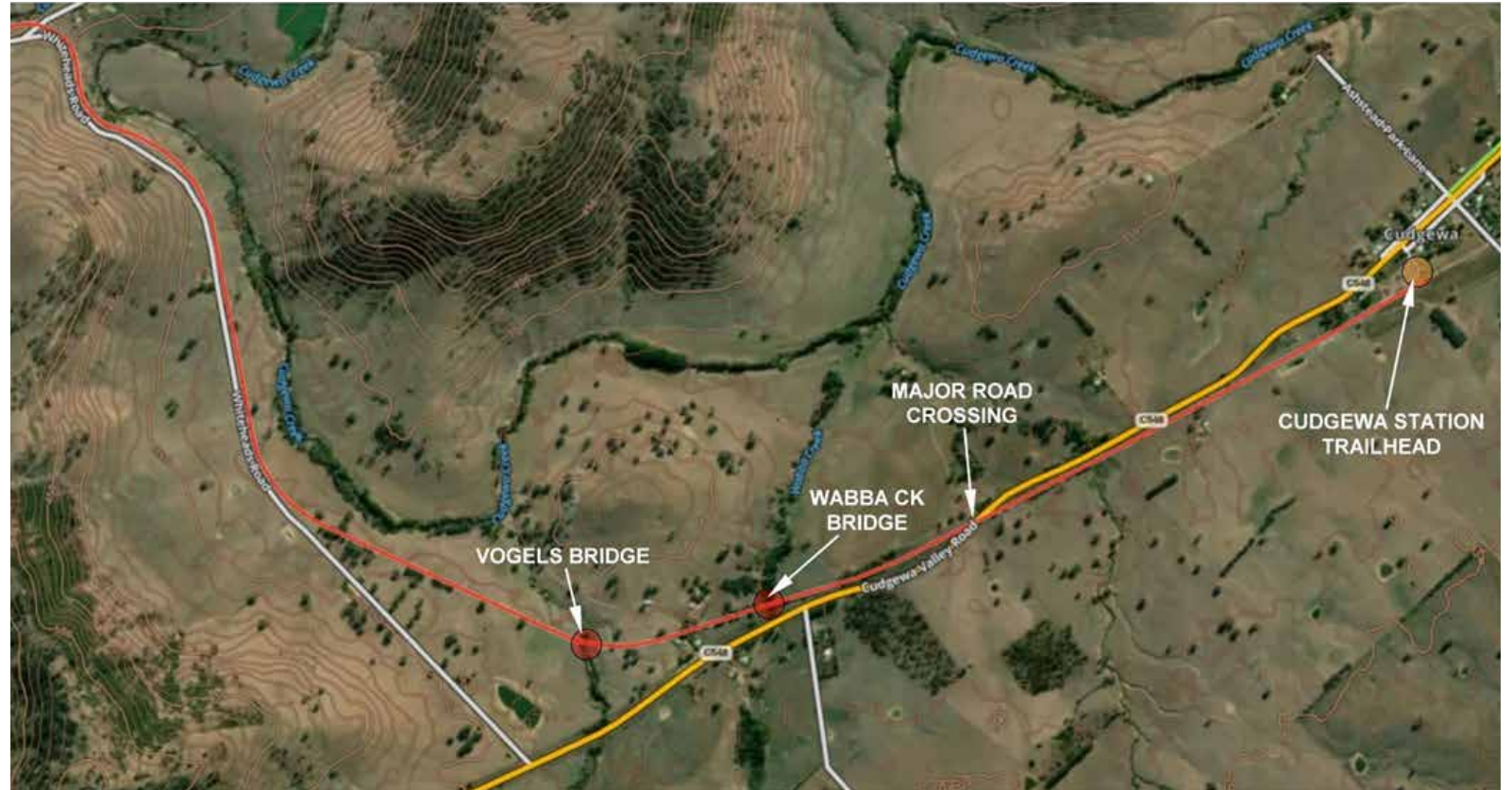


Shortly after crossing the Cudgewa Valley Road, the trail arrives at Cudgewa Station. Here, the rail alignment passes behind several dwellings. Screening plantings and additional fencing may be required to mitigate security and privacy concerns. Key trailhead development should include parking, bike rack, tool station, water, seating and shelters and trail signage.

Directly opposite this site, across Main Street, there are existing toilet facilities. Also located directly opposite is the Cudgewa Pub. The proposed Cudgewa trailhead provides the opportunity to include an interpretive centre. The interpretive centre will showcase the rich history of the rail line and the communities it passes through; first nation Australians, early settlers, agriculture and timber industries, Snowy Mountains Hydro-electric scheme, Hume dam, Bonegilla Migrant Camp, Tallangatta *the town that moved*, mining, Banjo Paterson and *The Man From Snowy River* are just some of the stories that can be conveyed as part of the HCRT experience.

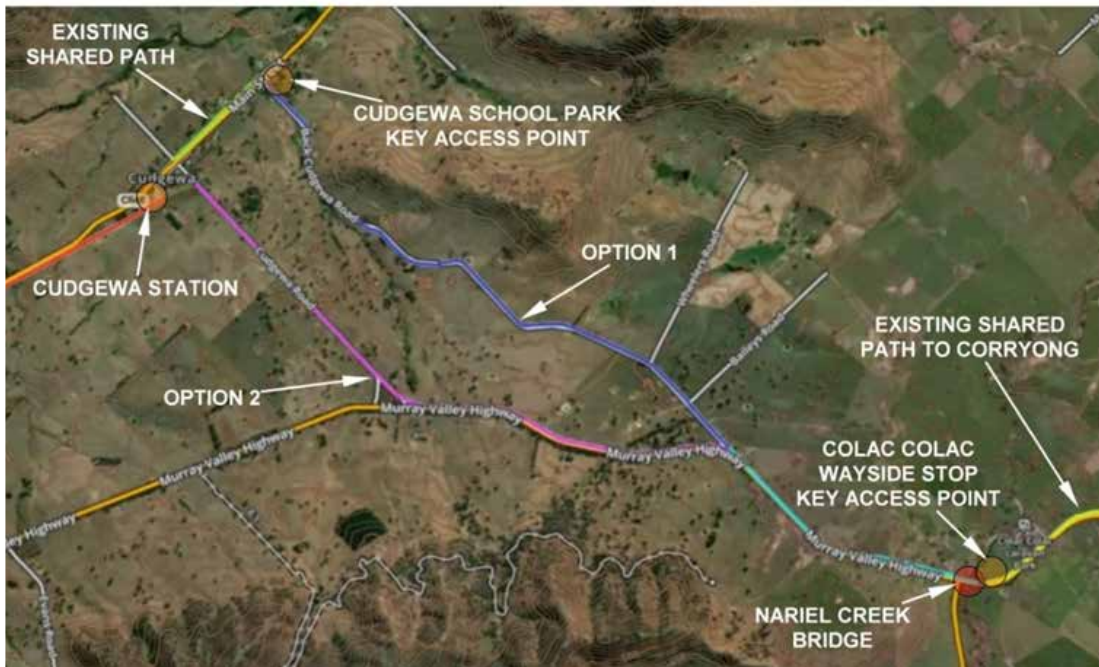
Through the community and stakeholder engagement process, it was suggested that senior members of the community be interviewed and their memories and stories of the rail line and surrounding communities be recorded. These interviews could then be relayed via audio displays. Whilst meeting with landowners, a number of interesting stories were told which highlighted the need to document this valuable local history before it is lost forever.





Section 5: Cudgewa Station to Colac Colac

There are two options available that would provide a connection between Cudgewa Station and the existing shared path to Corryong. This existing shared path is currently accessed at the Colac Colac wayside stop beside the Nariel Creek.



Option 1: Back Cudgewa Road

Directly opposite the proposed Cudgewa Station trailhead is a service road running parallel with Main Street. Trail users will be required to cross Main Street to access the service road and toilet block. Main Street is a quiet road in a 60kmh zone. At the northeast end of this service road is an existing gravel shared path, running parallel to Main Street. Approximately 800m along this shared path is a second service road. At the junction with Back Cudgewa Road, the route takes users back across Main Street and into Back Cudgewa Road heading south.



At this intersection is Cudgewa School Park. Once the site of Cudgewa School, the park is undergoing significant upgrade and development. Successful community lobbying has attracted funding for the development through Bushfire Recovery Victoria. The park will feature play equipment, BBQ shelter, seating, toilet facilities, bike rack, water station, children’s concrete bike track and asphalt pump track. As well as becoming a great community asset, the park will add significant value to the HCRT link to Corryong.

Between Cudgewa School Park and the Murray Valley Highway, the shared path will utilise the Back Cudgewa Road, road reserve. The Back Cudgewa Road is a quiet, gently undulating 4.3km dirt road, offering some great views of the Snowy Mountains. Due to topography and road reserve width limitations, the trail will need to switch sides twice via signed crossing points. Aside from the two crossing points and construction of the shared path, additional infrastructure will be limited to drainage and culverts. A dividing treatment to separate shared path users and vehicles will also be necessary in a couple of short sections. There is an opportunity at the Back Cudgewa Road – Murray Valley Highway intersection to construct a trail side shelter and picnic bench to match those found on the existing Colac Colac to Corryong trail.

From the Back Cudgewa Road – Murray Valley Highway intersection, to the existing shared trail at Colac Colac, the trail will utilise a 2km section of Murray Valley HWY road reserve. The road reserve is up to 40m wide in sections, enabling the proposed shared path to gently meander, adding interest and minimising impact to native vegetation. Multiple large culverts are required in this section. Shortly before the proposed path crosses Nariel Creek, the Murray Valley Highway crosses a relatively large drainage gully. This has resulted in a steep batter from the back of the vehicle guard rail into the gully, which continues for approximately 300 metres. A small retaining wall behind the guard rail and appropriate fencing will be required to enable construction of the proposed path through this section.



Retaining wall treatment on M2M Rail Trail



Bollard dividing path from dirt road

To connect to the existing shared path to Corryong, the path will need to cross Nariel Creek, adjacent to the existing road bridge. It is proposed to construct a suspension bridge that will be a high exposure, landmark structure. Visitors will be able to park at the Colac Colac wayside stop to gain direct access to the bridge and Nariel Creek. Recommended upgrades to the wayside stop include, picnic shelters, benches, bike rack and tool station. This will create a strategically important key access point, approximately halfway between Corryong and Cudgewa.

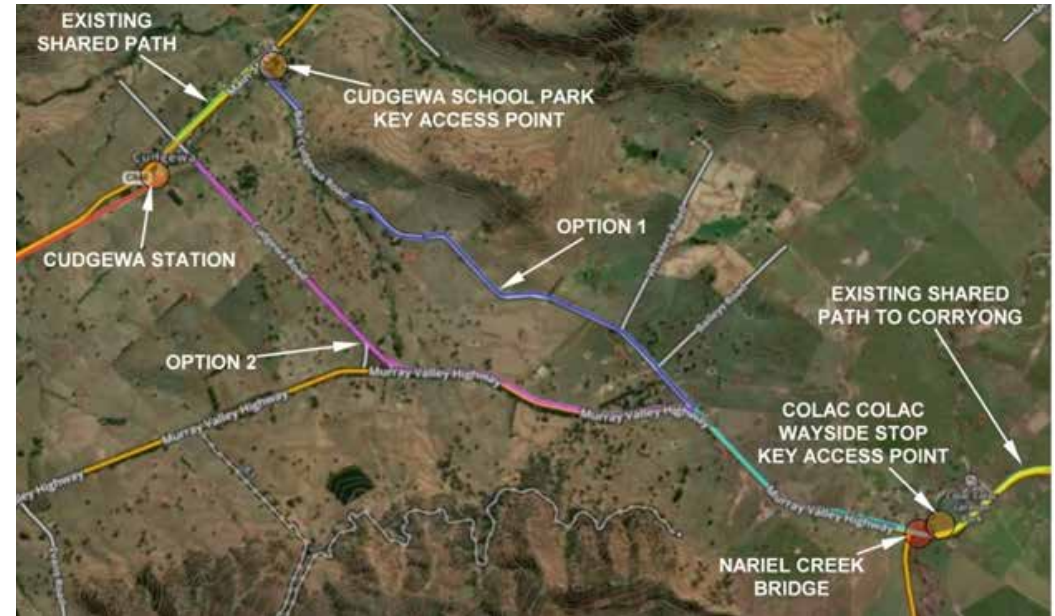
From the wayside stop, users will be able to continue along the existing 5.7km sealed shared path to Hanson Street, Corryong. Approximately 500m from the wayside stop is the Colac Colac Caravan Park, owned by Towong Shire Council. The caravan park is currently undergoing significant upgrades with additional funding being sought to include a 'bike hub'. This will include a café and bike hire. It is recommended that the shared path from Cudgewa School Park to the existing shared path at Colac Colac, be sealed. This will provide a consistent multi-user, accessible surface suitable for families. The development of a shared path to Cudgewa will provide the Caravan Park's many visitors with an additional walking and cycling destination. This in turn will assist in activating the town and provide further economic benefits.

A high exposure suspension bridge to cross Nariel Creek will become a landmark structure.



Option 2: Cudgewa Road

The Cudgewa Station land parcel fronts the Cudgewa Road and will provide for an easy link to the Murray Valley Highway utilising the Cudgewa Road road reserve. This 2.1km section of proposed shared path will gently climb at a consistent grade until it reaches the Murray Valley Highway intersection. Aside from a number of culverts, construction of the shared path will be straight forward until the path approaches the Murray Valley Highway. The Cudgewa Road crosses a small creek line using a large box culvert. The construction of a path over this culvert, adjacent to the road, will require a small retaining wall and barricade fencing. Shortly after crossing the creek, the trail will cross over the Cudgewa Road. Appropriate safety signage would be installed as per the Ride High Country Regional Signage Strategy. A small parcel of road reserve at the Murray Valley HWY intersection presents an opportunity to construct a trail side shelter and picnic bench to match those found on the existing Colac Colac to Corryong trail. The proposed path alignment will then utilise the Murray Valley Highway road reserve until it reaches Colac Colac wayside stop. Option 2 will use an additional 2.1km of Murray Valley Highway road reserve compared with option 1. This additional section will require construction of several large culvert crossings and a small 10 metre span pedestrian bridge.



Feedback from community and stakeholder consultation indicated a preference for the proposed Back Cudgewa Road alignment (option 1). This option is thought to offer a more authentic Upper Murray experience capitalising on the backdrop of the Snowy Mountains. The Back Cudgewa Road has less traffic and less exposure to the busier Murray Valley Highway. The only negative comment to this alignment was the potential of dust from passing traffic impacting the user experience.

Tourism North East’s cycle tourism research identified that 45% of rail trail users desire "family friendly 10 – 20km trails, preferably loops".

The development of both options 1 and 2, would result in a family friendly 19.3km trail between Corryong and Cudgewa, with 50% being a loop.

The potential to develop a shared path link from the Colac Colac access point to Nariel Creek Recreation Reserve was also raised by members of the community. Nariel Creek Reserve offers camping facilities and is the site of one of the longest running folk festivals in Australia. The first Nariel-Creek Folk Festival was held in February 1963 and currently has 3,400 Facebook followers. This link would result in a 3km family friendly path, adding another destination of beauty and historical interest to the shared path network.



Cost Estimates

WORKS REQUIRED TO EXISTING PRODUCT FOR COMPLETION	
Wodonga to Ebden Reserve	\$717,025
Ebden Reserve to Shelley Station	\$2,023,534
Wodonga to Ebden Reserve surface works	\$1,784,225
Colac Colac to Corryong	\$975,733
Total Estimate for completing the existing product	\$5,500,517
WORKS REQUIRED TO DEVELOP NEW TRAIL FOR COMPLETION	
Shelley Station to Mansells Road (Wilderness Trail) - 22,000m	\$1,344,120
Mansells Road to Murray Valley Highway - 7,000m	\$1,669,870
Murray Valley Highway to Whiteheads Road - 8,000m	\$2,207,144
Whiteheads Road to Cudgewa Station - 5,600m	\$1,554,068
Back Cudgewa Road to Colac Colac - 2,000m	\$1,218,603
Cudgewa Station to Back Cudgewa Road/ MVH Intersection via Cudgewa Road	\$996,820
Cudgewa Station to Murray Valley Highway via Back Cudgewa Road	\$949,095
Total Estimate for new trail development (Shelley Station to Colac Colac)	\$9,939,720
GRAND TOTAL TO COMPLETE A WORLD CLASS WODONGA TO CORRYONG HIGH COUNTRY RAIL TRAIL	\$15,440,237

Summary figures have been extracted from an itemised construction budget provided to Towong Shire Council.

Governance

Current Trail Management

The existing HCRT from Wodonga to Shelley is currently managed by Parklands Albury Wodonga (PAW) as the committee of management along with various community groups. The committee of management operates under a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that originated in 2011 with the City of Wodonga, Indigo Shire Council and Towong Shire Council. As part of the MOU, PAW receives a modest maintenance contribution from each of the local government authorities. In 2018, following the sealing of the trail from Wodonga to Ebdon reserve, the City of Wodonga introduced an addendum to the MOU between themselves, PAW and the Bonegilla Advisory Group. This addendum included a maintenance schedule and appointed the City of Wodonga responsible for the upkeep of the newly sealed trail surface.



Governance Models

There are three primary models by which a trail can be managed:

Local Government as manager

Example: Tumbarumba Rosewood Rail Trail in NSW and Railway Reserves Heritage Trail, WA.

The trail is managed like any other community recreational facility or asset, such as a football ground. Maintenance is managed and funded by Council resources and operational budgets, which are often overstretched. This model's strength is its simplicity. However, it limits community and local business ownership. Therefore, Community and business partners may feel they do not have an input into the operation, maintenance and promotion of the trail. This can have a negative effect on the quality of the tourism product, which could lead to an inferior user experience.

Local Government as lead role in partnership with other stakeholders (Committee of Management)

Example: Murray to the Mountains, VIC.

A committee of management comprises of a local government taking the lead role, and community groups. This facilitates community ownership through advisory or 'friends of' groups and private enterprise partners. This model's strength lies in the resulting strong strategic oversight and operational balance. The composition of key decision makers at a local government level and valuable volunteer resources provides a strong framework for project delivery and management. As a proponent, Councils are well placed to access funding streams for the development and ongoing management of a trail. This is the most common management model in Victoria.

Local Government representative in the management structure

Example: Great Southern Rail Trail Victoria; Riesling Trail, SA and current HCRT structure.

This arrangement comprises of a community group or registered entity operating as a committee of management. They tirelessly advocate, raise funds, develop, manage and maintain the trail. Local government involvement is often limited to facilitating landowner/manager permission through an MOU and support for funding applications. As is typical with all clubs and volunteer organisations, there is committee burnout. This change of guard can lead to a lack of long-term vision and strategic planning, which can have a negative impact the quality of the trail and user experience. There is often a perceived lack of genuine commitment from Council.



Case Study - The Great Victorian Rail Trail

The Great Victorian Rail Trail Strategic Development Plan 2020 provides the following governance history.

A comprehensive governance framework was established in 2012 to oversee the development, construction and commissioning of the GVRT, which included three key components – a Rail Trail Advisory Committee and two sub-committees. The terms of reference for each of these groups was defined and agreed to in a memorandum of understanding between the three Council Partners.

The Rail Trail Advisory Committee was charged with guiding and informing trail management, maintenance, development and promotion. Membership comprised of one Councillor, community and business representative from each LGA, who all sat on the Committee in a voting capacity. All LGAs also had a CEO (or CEO delegate) also sitting on the Committee in a non-voting capacity.

The Committee was then supported by a marketing sub-committee responsible for delivering trail marketing and promotion, and a technical sub-committee that advised on all operational matters pertaining to the physical trail.

In 2014, this governance framework was amended. The Rail Trail Advisory Committee was dissolved as the trail was implemented and the tasks that it was charged with overseeing were largely being managed by the councils, so it was deemed redundant.

In its place, an Implementation Advisory Network was to be developed to provide interested community and business members (like those that sat on the initial Committee) with a platform through which to contribute to ongoing trail development. This included providing advice to councils, sharing ideas and developing community/business led networks and initiatives.

The Advisory Network planned to meet twice a year with meetings attended by the Mayor and CEO (or delegate) from each partner LGA, while the Marketing and Technical sub-committees were to be maintained.

While the Council Partners agreed to form this Network, it did not eventuate. In its place, community and business representatives formed a 'Friends of the Great Victorian Rail Trail' group to continue discussions about the trail outside of the LGA framework.

Following the adoption of the Great Victorian Rail Trail Strategic Development Plan, the Mitchell, Murrindindi and Mansfield councils addressed the governance issues and in March 2021 received a grant of \$1.2 million. The funding will go towards implementing the Strategic Plan including art installations and signage to improve and re-energise the visitor experience.



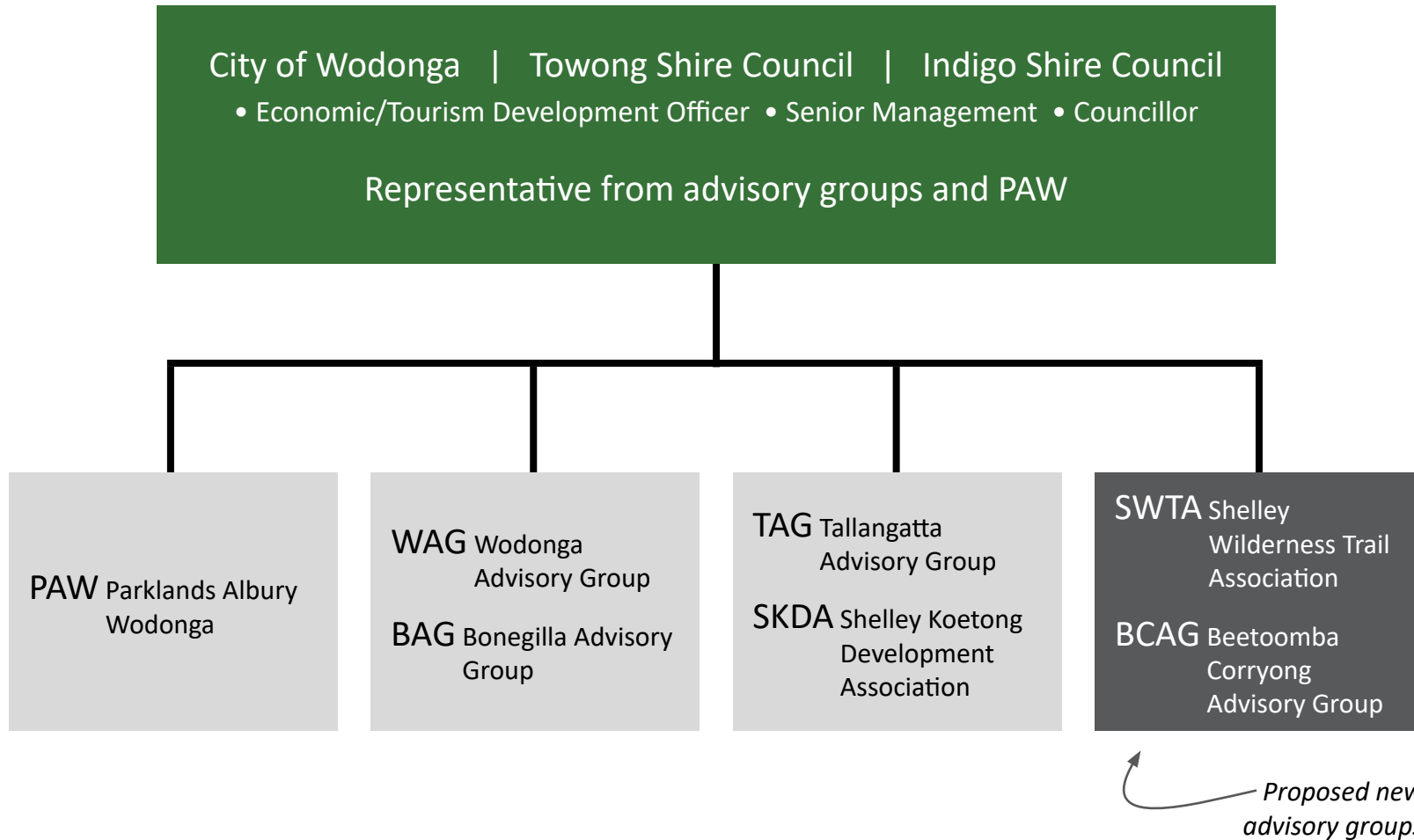
Future High Country Rail Trail Governance

The GVRT case study demonstrates the need for a robust governance structure as well as ongoing senior LGA support and a strong strategic vision. Clear roles and responsibilities are required for not only the delivery of the project but the ongoing management, community engagement and strategic growth of the trail.

In order to obtain landowner consent, current DELWP policy will require that Towong Shire become part of the committee of management for the proposed HCRT development. In conjunction with the relevant community groups, this aligns with the preferred Victorian management model and provides a strong strategic oversight and operational balance.

It has been demonstrated that for the HCRT to reach its full tourism potential, the branding, marketing and overall strategic vision need to be consistent from start to finish. This should be regardless of municipality boundaries. To facilitate this, consideration should be given to applying this governance structure to all sections of the HCRT to drive cohesive strategic trail growth into the future.

Proposed Committee of Management Structure



Maintenance

As with any trail, recreational asset or public space, regular inspections and maintenance are critical components of a management plan. Regular maintenance is easier, quicker and more cost effective than larger more expensive repairs resulting from neglect. Regular inspections are also an essential part of risk management, ensuring user safety and enjoyment. Maintaining a trail to a high standard is imperative to the user experience, especially if the trail is promoted as a premier cycle product.

Maintenance tasks include the following:

- Conduct and document regular inspections of trail and infrastructure
- Clearing of fallen trees/branches and pruning of trail corridor
- Slashing of trail corridor to reduce fire risk
- Weed control
- Clearing table drains and culverts
- Repair trail surface
- Repairs to trailhead and rest stop facilities
- Inspection and maintenance to bridge structures
- Maintenance/replacement of signage
- Check access gates, fences, stock crossings and road crossings.



Maintenance Costs

Estimating maintenance costs is notoriously difficult due to the large number of variables and unpredictability of natural events and vandalism. Whilst volunteers can dramatically reduce the cost of maintenance, this should not be relied upon. A volunteer group’s ability to carry out regular maintenance responsibilities could fluctuate according to availability of members. Also, over reliance on community group labour will result in volunteer burnout and does little to encourage new members to the group.

In 2019, Business Sense prepared a business case on behalf of Lismore City Council and Richmond Valley Council, for the development of the Northern Rivers Rail Trail from Casino to Eltham. This 45km section of rail trail has a projected capital cost of \$33.3 million. The Northern Rivers Rail Trail Association undertook extensive planning and cost analysis for ongoing management and maintenance of the trail. These costs included trail-side vegetation management, paving repairs including reseals, bridge inspection and reporting, and bridge and culvert/table-drain maintenance. Costs incurred for marketing, promotion and insurances will be covered by the overarching NRRT governance body. The predicted average annual operational and maintenance costs for the initial 10-year period is \$3,871 per km per annum.

Similarly, in 2019, Transplan and Mike Halliburton Associates prepared a feasibility study for Snowy Monaro Regional Council for the Monaro Rail Trail. The proposed rail trail between Queanbeyan and Bombala stretches for 213km at an anticipated development cost of \$47.8 million. The cost to maintain the trail, if constructed, is estimated to be \$3,503 per km per annum.

Murrumbidgee Shire Council manages and maintains approximately 74km of the 134km Great Victorian Rail Trail. It spends approximately \$2,000 per km per annum on maintenance along the Kanumbra to Granite via Alexandra section of trail. A trail audit conducted as part of the Strategic Development Plan, concluded that the majority of the trail surface was in good to excellent condition. However, reported anecdotal information suggests that initial construction issues have resulted in increased maintenance costs. These extra maintenance costs could have been avoided had the initial construction been carried out to a higher standard.

The development of the HCRT from Shelley to Cudgewa including the Shelley Wilderness Trail, will result in approximately 124km of trail. The proposed shared path link to Corryong, including the existing section from Colac Colac to Corryong, will provide an additional 13km of trail. The following table sets out a projected break down of annual maintenance costs and includes low to high range estimates. Costs are expressed for each LGA, calculated according to the length of trail within each boundary.

Local Government Authority	Length of HCRT	Low Range Costs	High Range Costs
City of Wodonga	19	\$38,000	\$66,500
Indigo Shire Council	9	\$18,000	\$31,500
Towong Shire Council	109	\$218,000	\$381,500
Total	137	\$274,000	\$479,500