

## Discussions at RVRT Inc. Committee Meeting

April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2021 – Issues & Ideas

**Location:** Leigh Gibbens' house, Stockrington – from approx. 12:30 to 3:15 pm

[Thanks Leigh! ... and Colin, for supplying a lovely lunch!]

**Committee Members** (as per 2020 AGM, 1/12/2020):

John Beach, Marilyn Eade, Colin East, Leigh Gibbens (Secretary & Treasurer),  
Terry Lewin (V/President), Sam Mansfield, Billy Metcalfe (President), Sam Reich, Alec Roberts.

**Present:** Colin East, Leigh Gibbens, Terry Lewin, Sam Mansfield, Sam Reich.

**Apologies:** John Beach, Alec Roberts, Billy Metcalfe.

### Updates

1. Trail Segment within Newcastle LGA – Update [Some progress over the last 6 months!]

- DA 2020/00641 – Community Facility - Pathway (Richmond Vail Rail Trail) was exhibited in August 2020; full EIS (Coastal Wetlands); approx. 150 public submissions (80% positive)
- NPWS expressed broad support for the RVRT, but raised many issues (e.g., licensing agreements for some NPWS-managed lands affected by proposal; potential biodiversity impacts; disruption to NPWS management and operations during trail's construction and subsequently; flooding; links to Blue Gum Hills Regional Park; etc), which could largely be viewed as ongoing 'trail management and maintenance issues' [Costs & Consequences].
- Regional Planning Panel (PPSHCC-55) has had three sets of briefings to-date (18/11/2020; 10/3/2021 x 2) – Briefing notes accessible at:  
<https://www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/planning-panel/richmond-vale-rail-trail>
- Two separate sub-groups within NCC – Council **Assessment** Staff (e.g., Damian Jaeger) and **Infrastructure** & Property Staff [aka Applicant Representatives] (e.g., Kevin Moriarty). [We probably need to re-engage with key NCC staff].
- Typical communication sequence:  
Panel ↔ Assessment Staff ↔ Infrastructure Staff/Applicant ↔ GHD (Consultants)
- For example: GHD produced an 80-page Response to Request for Further Information (RFI) – (3/3/2021) [actually 17 pages, plus Revised Design Drawings, options for Mort St. access, construction facilities, lighting designs, and contamination response]; Planning Panel discussed 17 issues with Assessment Staff (at first set of meetings on 10/2/2021) and then 18 issues when Applicant Representatives were present (at second set of meetings on 10/2/2021). Subsequent RFI letter from Damian Jaeger to Kevin Moriarty (dated 26/3/2021) identified 14 issues – **Environmental** (1. Contamination; 2. Biodiversity/Birds; 3. Dogs & Horses; 4. Micro Bats/CPTED; 5. Waste Management; 6. Construction Impacts/Waterways; 7. Flooding); **Planning** (8. Gradient of Trail; 9. Parking/Amenities & Access; 10. Parking Provision); **Heritage** (11. Aboriginal Heritage; 12. European Heritage); and **Additional Information** (13. Ownership; 14. Regional Strategy).
- Thus far, NCC Infrastructure's strategy (for gaining DA approval) appears to be to set aside (temporarily ??) any aspects of the trail that will take time to resolve – e.g., Hunter Wetlands Centre (HWC), and associated disability-friendly access paths; Tarro connection (and Aurizon related concerns); provision of amenities and facilities in difficult locations (e.g., Minmi).
- Key concern raised by Planning Panel (3/3/2021) – that we may be able to support and explore in a variety of ways: “14. **Regional Strategy** – Provide details and confirmation of how the current amended proposal, and those portions of the cycleway that have been

*removed with the amended design, relate to the overall City of Newcastle and Regional cycleway strategy. This response should address why the aspects removed ('HWC' and 'Tarro stub') do not adversely affect the broader cycleway strategy". [Potential for linkages to HWC through Tuxford Park, Shortland]*

- Any further insights into Raymond Terrace Bypass related or other issues – Sam Reich.
- Tentative Planning Panel meeting date: June/July, 2021.
- Should we pursue Active or Passive engagement with these Approval processes (??) [Need to encourage Council to formally identify likely (sequential) approval stages – as opposed to discarding everything that poses a short-term problem; RVRT Inc. members probably also need to interact more with representatives from organisations raising concerns (e.g., HWC, Bird watchers, NPWS), to better understand their issues and work towards acceptable solutions].

## 2. Trail Segments within Cessnock/Lake Macquarie LGAs – Update

- Development Application for the first 100 metres of the RVRT within Cessnock LGA was lodged last year (DA 8/2020/204631) – segment of trail adjacent to Pambalong Nature Reserve (needs to comply with Coastal Wetlands requirements); application appears to be progressing smoothly – may be the first section of the trail which is approved.
- RVRT access point changes have been sought (within Cessnock LGA) - from Dog Hole Road to Seahampton Road (midtrial precinct) and from the H.E.A. Entry Road (Surveyors Creek) to the Ridge Road near Survey Marker PM129959 (off George Booth Drive), which would also facilitate improved future access to the western sections of Stockrington SCA.
- Review of Environmental Factors (REF) has been drafted and has been reviewed by some agencies. Will probably be exhibited in a few months' time.
- Cessnock's overall REF strategy has been independently assessed (by 'City Plan') and considered to be appropriate.
- Cessnock has also taken on most of the preparatory work for Lake Macquarie's REF.
- Recently, Kate Harris has been meeting with affected landowners (supported by a GHD Community Consultant – Michael Ulph) – they have initiated contact with 90-95% of owners – going reasonably well, with mostly common problems identified.
- Cessnock's approval processes will be largely 'in house' and will not require consent through the Regional Planning Panel.
- Some issues have also been raised by local Indigenous groups, which need to be carefully worked through, and creative solutions found.

## 3. Landcare Group and related – Update

- Land Care Co-ordinator – Sam Mansfield (has key to access Stockrington SCA)
- Land Care Administrator – Leigh Gibbens
- New location for 2021 Landcare activities - in the vicinity of the derelict bridge across Blue Gum Creek, which used to be part of the road to Stockrington No 2 Colliery.
- Proposed schedule for activities. Thanks to Sam Mansfield, some stairs have been constructed in the new Landcare location for 2021 – to facilitate safer access by volunteers. His goal is to establish fortnightly Landcare activities that are appropriately resourced and can be carried out on a relatively continuous basis. A small amount of funding is required, together with some powered and hand-held tools – which Sam is currently trying to secure.
- NPWS volunteers – requirements and issues. [Need to clarify the ways in which RVRT/SCA Landcare group can seek small amounts of grant funding – from NPWS and elsewhere].

## **Other Proposals/Initiatives/Opportunities**

4. ‘*Shore to Shiraz (S2S)*’ Cycle Tourism proposal – grant application (Bushfire Recovery funds).
  - Development of a long-term Cycle Tourism masterplan for the whole of the Lower Hunter.
  - Initiated by the Joint Organisation (JO) of Councils [JO contact: Tim Askew].
  - Seeking approx. \$20m, including \$11m-\$14m for on ground (build) works involving Cessnock LGA related trails, including the RVRT (i.e., Kurri Kurri to Pambalong section).
  - Grants to be determined in June/July 2021, with a two-year expenditure timeframe (i.e., July 2021 to June 2023) – if successful, would be administered through Cessnock Council.
  - RVRT Inc. provided a letter of support for the S2S proposal, as did a broad range of Hunter organisations.
  
5. Stockrington State Conservation Area (SCA)
  - Draft Fire Management Strategy (FMS) displayed recently. [Leigh has a hard copy of this Map/Plan and Terry has an electronic copy].
  - Retirement of Kathleen Straw (NPWS Ranger, Lower Hunter Area).
  - Ongoing damage and anti-social behaviour.
  - Restricted public access; pros/cons of delayed gazettal processes.
  - Revised ‘Midtrail Precinct (Stage 1)’ funding agreement between NPWS and DCT (trigger for modest on-ground work – based on RVRT approvals and funding confirmation).
  
6. Local Cycleways related developments – Sam Reich
  - Sam identified some of NCC’s current and proposed cycling initiatives, including dual single-direction cycleways within the West End area (around Worth Place).
  
7. Other relevant rail-trail activities/initiatives
  - Tumbarumba to Rosewood Rail Trail
  - Rail Trails Australia forum (April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2021) – Sam Reich
  - Sam Reich provided a brief history of the Tumbarumba to Rosewood trail, and where it fits within the NSW government’s rail-trails piloting program. He also outlined some of the insights that he gained from attending the recent Rail Trails Australia forum (Snowy Valleys Council). Link to presentation materials and video: <https://www.railtrails.org.au/2021/894-nsw-rail-trails-forum>
  
8. Preparations for Regional Planning Panel Meeting - Trail Segment within Newcastle LGA
  - Encourage participation by other interested parties – Cessnock Council.
  - Emphasise unique features (e.g., ‘conservation conduit’), multi-user benefits, community connections, regional aspects, whole greater than sum of parts, RVRT as the backbone for Lower Hunter cycling, walking, and conservation tourism.
  - Need brief presentations by a few community members (?)
  - Actively tackle current difficulties (?) – HWC, Tarro connection, amenities and facilities provision (not just for a cycleway – but for a multi-layered regionally significant resource).

## **RVRT Inc. Administrative and Community Engagement Matters**

9. RVRT Inc. business registration and resources – Organisational address, web page support and endorsement (Sale of Billy’s pub).  
[Leigh will modify our letterhead, to remove current address; and clarify whether or not we need a registered address, etc].
  
10. Web page upgrades. Assistance with web page management (check with Alec).

Documentation (?); Information repository (?); Inter-relationship with Facebook pages.  
Automated web-based membership and payment options.

[Terry will discuss website management options with Alec Roberts, including multi-level community engagement options – e.g., RVRT Inc. – Membership, - Trail Supporter; - Donation].

11. RVRT Inc.'s Community Engagement - Membership vs. Contact Lists, Information Provision.  
'RVRT Supporters Group' Activities (?); Periodic Newsletters (?); Recruitment drive (?);  
Political considerations and actions (?)

[It was agreed that we need to become more active in the RVRT engagement and promotions space; '*grow our brand*', if you like. Goal: to facilitate the achievement of 'Overwhelming Community Support' for the trail – and thereby assist in the securing of combined State/Federal or other funding. Sam Reich also raised the potential need to bring in some outside marketing expertise, to help move us in the right direction, such as Penny Spoelder from TRC - <https://www.trctourism.com/about/team/penny-spoelder/>  
We will probably also need to raise some modest funding in order to explore such possibilities].

### **Other Issues**

12. ????

Next Meeting TBD