



# Richmond Vale Rail Trail Inc

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## Annual General Meeting (AGM) – March 2022 Minutes

Spoonbill Café, Hunter Wetlands Centre  
1 Wetlands Place Shortland NSW  
10:00 AM, Thursday March 3rd, 2022

### Present

James Bartlett (Media Advisor to Federal MP)	Sam Mansfield (Committee)
Colin East (Committee)	Billy Metcalfe (President)
Prue Gage	Malcolm Mills
Paul Gage	Ross Nugent
Rosa Grine (Cessnock Councillor)	Sam Reich (Committee)
Guy Hodgson	Alec Roberts (Committee)
Paul Hughes	Meryl Swanson (Federal MP)
Terry Lewin (Vice-President, Meeting Chair)	

### Apologies

John Beach (Committee)	Andrea Hackney
Jutta Bradley	Greg Hartman
Marilyn Eade (Committee)	Wendy Heys
Jo Erskine (NPWS) – Flooding concerns	Carolyn Mathews
Leigh Gibbens (Secretary/Treasurer) – Flooding concerns	Tim Roberts
Darrin Gray (Committee)	Ingrid Waeger

### **1. Welcome**

(There was heavy rain about and the meeting did not commence until approx. 10:15 am). The President declared the meeting open and welcomed everyone. Early in the proceedings, all attendees had an opportunity to introduce themselves. Thanks to the Spoonbill Café for allowing us to use their covered verandah area for this AGM.

The Draft Minutes from the last AGM (held on December 1<sup>st</sup> 2020) were accepted, without the need for a formal vote. Darrin Gray was co-opted onto the Committee during 2021, to commence once his formal duties as a Cessnock Councillor were completed (just prior to the Council elections).

### **2. President's Report**

Welcome - As President of RVRT Inc. for over a decade, it's been a very long process in trying to get the Richmond Vale Rail Trail built.

- I think it should have been built in sections, not as one long process.
- However, things have changed now, as Newcastle Council have already completed (almost) all of its approvals processes for the Newcastle end of the Trail.
- As part of this, we had a public meeting with the Regional Planning Panel (RPP) for over two hours in November 2021. I thank Terry Lewin and Sam Reich for their contributions to this meeting on behalf of RVRT Inc. Robert Dudgeon, from Newcastle Council, did a very good job, as well. Getting approval for the Newcastle section first (and beginning construction) is important, so all communities can be progressively connected.

- I have had recent discussions with Robert Dudgeon. He informed me what still needs to be done to finalise the Agreement with NPWS about crossing the Hunter Wetlands National Park. Once it is done, he feels they won't have any problems getting the money to start construction.
- We have had a lot of issues with COVID-19, and we never had an AGM last year. I thank everyone for staying involved.
- As reported in the Newcastle Herald item on December 9th 2021 (**Richmond Vale Rail Trail focus shifts to Cessnock end - see copy attached**): "It's time to get on with the western end of the project" and we need to work with the new Cessnock Councillors to make this happen.

*Billy Metcalfe*

The bottom half of the *Handout* on the last page of these Minutes provides additional information about the sections of the trail that were approved by the RPP in December 2021, together with information about other relevant public infrastructure projects exhibited during 2021.

### 3. Treasurer's Report (Extracted from written report)

Leigh reported that we have 9 financial members at present (and 25+ members in total) and a balance of \$1,715.26 in the Newcastle Permanent Account as at 30th November 2021.

The Opening Balance at the 2020 AGM was \$1,599.75. Income since that time (totalling \$265.00) was from membership fees (\$180.00), donations (\$5.00) and RVRT booklets (\$80.00). Expenditure during that period (totalling \$149.49) was associated with Annual Registration with the Department of Fair Trading as an Incorporated Organisation (\$47.21), Vodien Domain Name Renewal (\$99.00), and PayPal fees (\$3.28). Consequently, Net Receipts since the 2020 AGM totalled \$115.51.

In view of COVID-19 related disruptions during 2021, we have decided not to request payment of any outstanding membership fees for that period.

Could all RVRT Inc. members please pay their current **2022 membership fee (\$20.00)** by direct transfer to our Newcastle Permanent Account (BSB: 650300, Account: 520487801). Please include your name in the associated transfer description and also send an E-mail to Leigh to let her know about the transfer ([rvrt.inc@gmail.com](mailto:rvrt.inc@gmail.com)).

### 4. Landcare Report

We will re-schedule the planned address by Jo Erskine, NPWS Ranger, Lower Hunter Area, which was due to cover a range of issues, including RVRT Landcare activities, RVRT approvals and concerns, and the Stockrington State Conservation Area; the re-scheduled meeting is likely to be conducted online.

Sam Mansfield reported that a reasonable amount of preparatory work was undertaken during 2021 and that he now has keys with which to access parts of the Stockrington State Conservation Area.

A new area for Landcare activities has now been confirmed, near the derelict wooden bridge that used to take traffic to Stockrington No 2. Colliery (off Seahampton Road, near Blue Gum Creek). Sam indicated that a temporary parking area would need to be cleared nearby before we can routinely move vehicles and equipment to that site. Currently, RVRT Landcare activities are scheduled to re-commence on Tuesday 15th March – but this may need to be changed, given the current weather patterns. Please **meet before 9 AM** at the NPWS gate on Dog Hole Road, Stockrington.

## 5. Cessnock Council Report – written report from Kate Harris, Principal Recreation Planner.

“Ahead of the RVRT Inc’s AGM this week, please see below update:

- Landowner engagement is complete;
- GHD have been engaged to complete minor updates to the REF and concept design following site meetings with landowners and taking on their feedback;
- I will be briefing the new Council regarding the project on Wednesday 13 April;
- A council report will be prepared for the **20 April Council meeting** recommending the REF and supporting documentation be placed on Public Exhibition. Public exhibition dates will be firmed up in the next couple of weeks”.

## 6. Newcastle Council Report – written report from Robert Dudgeon, Interim Program and Project Services Manager.

“City of Newcastle is continuing with preparation to seek Part 5 approval and licencing for the NPWS sections of the trail. The timeframes for this depend on NPWS review and approval. I believe there may be a change in NPWS management currently and this may present a risk in seeking a timely approval”.

## 7. Election of 2022 Committee

There were no formal nominations for office-bearer roles in advance of the AGM. All three existing office bearers were appropriately nominated (and seconded) for their existing roles by meeting attendees and were re-elected unopposed for the next 12 months (or until the next AGM):

- a. President – Billy Metcalfe
- b. Vice-President – Terry Lewin
- c. Secretary – Leigh Gibbens
- d. Treasurer – Leigh Gibbens

Likewise, following some brief discussion about the desirable number of (non-office-bearer) Committee Members and their potential roles and liaison activities (*see below*), all existing Committee members were re-appointed to the Committee: John Beach, Marilyn Eade, Colin East, Darrin Gray, Sam Mansfield, Sam Reich and Alec Roberts (together with the office-bearers).

## 8. Other Business

Sam Reich reminded the group that there had been **other positive meetings** during 2020/2021, including consultations with Tim Askew from the Joint Organisation of Councils (about the *Shore to Shiraz* shared pathway proposal), Glen Caldwell from *Destinations NSW*, and *Trail Towns* Productions Pty Ltd, about a possible episode featuring trails in the Hunter region. Our Facebook page has also generally been well received during the last year – and provides a range of posts about other trails.

### Engagement strategies & liaison opportunities.

Terry Lewin foreshadowed some of the **Possible Issues for Discussion** (*see* the top half of the *Handout* on the last page of these Minutes) – highlighting the fact that we are a small group and ‘*need to work both with and through other groups and organisations*’. Optimising/utilising the links that our current members have with other groups, and potentially identifying associated liaison roles for Committee members, appear to be worthwhile directions to follow.

Similarly, Colin East made a clear case for **changing our focus now** (given the RVRT approvals in December 2021), with Committee members devoting more time during the next year to linkages into the community and mobilising support – and being somewhat less concerned about approvals and design features. In this regard, it was also suggested that we might develop some short presentation materials, which could be shared with or presented to the other groups with which members are affiliated.

Meryl Swanson suggested that bigger committees can be problematic, and that we probably shouldn't try to increase the Committee if the current one is working okay. With respect to liaison activities, Meryl also suggested that we try to engage with (and possibly present to) a broader range of groups, including members of the Maitland Business Chamber. After all, we have '**more of a story to tell**' now that parts of the trail have been approved.

### **Competition from other NSW rail trails.**

Sam Reich suggested that, to some extent, we may be victims of our own success. Now that there are a couple of successful Rail Trails in NSW (developed along corridors that were previously publicly owned), a large number of groups have come forward, and will be competing for public and private funds. So, the RVRT is not '*done and dusted*' when it comes to seeking funding and we need to continue to enthusiastically promote its relative advantages.

Sam also suggested that we should become members of Rail Trails Australia (both as an organisation and individually), especially since there is now a greater coverage of NSW trails:

<https://www.railtrails.org.au/online-store/membership/rta-paid-membership/>

### **Other Issues.**

Given often expressed **concerns about vandalism and other anti-social behaviour** within national parks and other conservation areas, Sam Reich and Colin East both articulated the view that (on balance) opening up areas to the public is likely to be beneficial – e.g., good people doing good things, and associated passive surveillance activities, will tend to drive bad behaviour away, over time.

Rosa Grine, a recently elected Cessnock Councillor in attendance at the meeting, suggested that we cannot assume that the new group of Councillors will be as keen on finalising the RVRT within Cessnock as some of the previous Councillors, and that Council's priorities may change. We agreed to liaise with Rosa, and the other new Councillors throughout the region, and to **provide them with resources that would aid their ability to promote the trail**. Finalising the outstanding development approvals, and ensuring that the whole of the trail is '*shovel ready*' as soon as possible, were considered to be central to seeking external funding for sections of the trail.

When it comes to broader, **regional trail management structures** (seeking to maximise the long-term benefits of the trail, and facilitate shared and integrated usage), it was suggested that the Joint Organisation of Councils should probably be involved. The two relevant Federal MPs (Meryl Swanson and Sharon Claydon), and selected state MPs should also be involved in any advisory committee, together with Council and Community representatives.

Towards the end of the meeting, a **group photo** was taken by James Bartlett (Meryl Swanson's Media Adviser) – a couple of James' photos are shown on the next page (from Meryl's Facebook page).

After the meeting, we also had a brief chat with Dr. Peter Nelson, Director of the Hunter Wetlands Centre (HWC), and we agreed to get together for an informal meeting to discuss some of the HWC's concerns about the RVRT and how to **optimise the potential reciprocal benefits** for the Wetlands Centre and the Trail – and foster potential linkages through Tuxford Park and onto the University and to the wider regional cycle network.

### **Meeting Close and Next Meeting.**

Date for next meeting: TBA.

Meeting Closed at approx. 11:25 AM.

Photos by:  
*James Bartlett*  
(Media Adviser to Meryl Swanson, Federal MP for Paterson)

**RVRT Inc. AGM –  
March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2022**

Spoonbill Café,  
Hunter Wetlands  
Centre, Shortland



## *SOME POSSIBLE ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION* (March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2022)

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>General discussion about future engagement strategies</b> – noting that we are a <u>small group</u> and that we need to work both <b>with and through other groups and organisations</b> (for example, to:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ further mobilise community support;</li><li>○ lobby for funding opportunities;</li><li>○ promote awareness of and co-operative, shared usage of the trail;</li><li>○ identify/defuse potential problems; &amp;</li><li>○ communicate more effectively with our members and others).</li></ul></li><li>• Potential <b>RVRT impacts/opportunities</b> associated with <b>other projects</b> (e.g., M1 extension; planned Estates; Future trail linkages; etc – <i>optimising the benefits</i>).</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Identified roles &amp; liaison opportunities/responsibilities</b> for Committee and/or general members – so, what groups are you connected with, who do you know (that we should know), how can they help, etc – noting the <b>broad range of potential RVRT users</b> (active/regular commuters, families and recreational cyclists, walkers and bird watchers, people with mobility constraints) and that the RVRT’s potential <b>benefits occur at multiple levels</b>:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ community access and connection;</li><li>○ health and lifestyle benefits;</li><li>○ environmental and heritage appreciation;</li><li>○ economic and tourism; as well as</li><li>○ cycling-specific safety/commuting benefits.</li></ul></li><li>• <b>Other issues</b> (?)</li></ul> |
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### *FOR INFORMATION ONLY*

#### **RVRT – Project Approvals in 2021:**

##### Newcastle LGA:

- Please see our two-page **Media Release** dated December 6<sup>th</sup> 2021 (distributed with Meeting Notes) for: Acknowledgements & Thanks; Unique RVRT Features; and Details about Initial Development Approvals.
- **Hunter and Central Coast Regional Planning Panel** (RPP) met (online) on November 10<sup>th</sup> 2021 [Ref: PPSHCC-55] to determine DA2020/00641 (by the City of Newcastle’s Infrastructure & Property Unit) for the initial Newcastle LGA sections of the RVRT (Sam Reich & Terry Lewin gave brief supportive presentations on behalf of our various community groups).
- Development approval was granted by the RPP on **December 6<sup>th</sup> 2021** for four trail ‘legs’, **totalling approx. 13 km**, subject to **100 Conditions of Consent**:
  - 1) **Shortland to Hexham Junction** (split section, 3 km): 4 m wide path along former water pipeline corridor, with separated walking & cycling paths in steeper section (N.B.: Segment within Hunter Wetlands National Park is now covered by a Plan of Management and requires **separate approval**);
  - 2) **Hexham Junction to Minmi** (7.50 km): 3 m wide path along historic railway corridor;
  - 3) **Minmi Junction to Pambalong Nature Reserve** (2.15 km): 3 m wide path, utilising existing road tunnels under Leneghans Drive and the M1; and
  - 4) **Minmi Junction to Fletcher** (700 m): 3 m wide path with raised boardwalks, along pipeline corridor.
- Two ‘legs’ were temporarily removed (Hunter Wetlands Centre connection & Hexham Junction to Tarro connection), which will be the subject of future applications, together with other future connections.

##### Cessnock and Lake Macquarie LGAs:

- **First 100 metres of RVRT within Cessnock LGA** (adjacent to Pambalong Nature Reserve) required detailed biodiversity assessments under coastal wetlands legislation. Associated Development Application (DA 8/2020/20463/1) was approved by Council on **April 26<sup>th</sup> 2021**, subject to **32 Conditions of Consent**.
- Approvals for most of the RVRT within Cessnock and Lake Macquarie LGAs will be via **comprehensive Reviews of Environmental Factors (REFs)**, which are currently being prepared for public exhibition.

#### **Other Projects Exhibited in 2021:**

- In July/August 2021, Transport for NSW (TfNSW) exhibited both the Environmental Impact Statement for the proposed **M1 Pacific Motorway Extension to Raymond Terrace** (Major Project: SSI-7319; scheduled for 2023-2028) and the Draft Strategic Environmental Assessment for the future **Lower Hunter Freight Corridor** (LHFC, Major Project No.: PS124841, which is still approx. 10-20 years away).
- Importantly, **TfNSW has committed to minimising potential impacts on the RVRT** from these two Major Transport Infrastructure Projects. We also strongly supported the **currently recommended route** for the LHFC, which largely avoids our coastal wetlands and the proposed RVRT route.