

# Richmond Vale Rail Trail Inc

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## Annual General Meeting (AGM) & General Meeting – March 2023 (Draft) Minutes

Conference Room, Hunter Wetlands Centre  
1 Wetlands Place, Shortland NSW  
9:45 am, Thursday **March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023**

### Present

Jutta Bradley	Guy Hodgson
Marilyn Eade (Committee)	Terry Lewin (Vice-President, Meeting Chair)
Colin East (Committee)	Sam Mansfield (Committee)
Paul Gage	Paul Paynter (Cessnock Councillor)
Prue Gage	Tony Proust
Darrin Gray (Committee)	Sam Reich (Committee)
Leigh Gibbens (Secretary/Treasurer)	Alec Roberts (Committee)
Rosa Grine (Cessnock Councillor)	Tim Roberts
Jacqui Hicks (Newcastle City Council)	

### Apologies

John Beach	Wendy Heys
Tara Dever	Billy Metcalfe (RVRT Inc. President – currently on a well-deserved holiday)
Robert Dudgeon (Newcastle City Council)	Ross Nugent
Anna Gurnhill (Newcastle City Council)	

### 1. Welcome

This meeting was chaired by Terry Lewin, who declared the meeting open at approx. 9:50am and welcomed everyone. There were 17 attendees and 7 apologies (*see above*). Early in the proceedings, all attendees had an opportunity to briefly introduce themselves. The Draft Minutes from the last AGM (held on March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2022) were accepted, without a formal vote. [The Conference Room at the Hunter Wetlands Centre turned out to be an excellent choice for our AGM – Thanks to Leigh Gibbens for organising this].

### Annual General Meeting (AGM):

### 2. President's Report (Presented by Vice President, Terry Lewin)

Thanks to everyone for attending this AGM and to all of the RVRT's supporters. While there was no formal change in RVRT planning approvals during the last 12 months, there was a reasonable level of (largely positive) RVRT-related activity during that period – giving us some justification for '*remaining optimistic*'. In addition, we consulted and/or communicated with a range of people and groups during the last year, as detailed below:

- A. **Meetings in 2022:** (2022 AGM: 3/3/2022 – Delayed due to COVID, with no AGM during 2021).  
**Committee Meetings** – 24/5/2022, 11/11/2022 [Recommendation - 3 meetings + AGM per year].  
**Meeting with Local NPWS** on 21/4/2022 (Leigh Gibbens & Terry Lewin met with Glen Crombie & Jo Erskine) – wide-ranging discussion, including RVRT/Stockrington SCA interface, longer-term

plans for SCA (e.g., gazettal), preferred access points & facilities, concerns about Draft *REF*, limited resources, & activation of Revised Project Funding Agreement with DCT about proposed Mid-trail Precinct. [General concern expressed – that the RVRT should not unduly disrupt NPWS’s ability to perform their various everyday roles and activities (e.g., within Stockrington SCA)].

**Meeting with Cessnock Councillors** on 7/9/2022 (Billy Metcalfe & Terry Lewin met with Rosa Grine, Mitchell Hill and Mayor Jay Suvaal) - discussed RVRT approvals, funding strategies, planning & management, optimising the RVRT’s benefits, & local shared pathways – e.g., Bridges Hill; follow-up meeting at Log of Knowledge Park (14/9/2022) with Mayor Jay Suvaal – focused on **improved local connectivity** (with subsequent suggestions about potential local shared pathways within Kurri Kurri, Pelaw Main and Stanford Merthyr). [A similar focus on local RVRT connectivity is occurring within Newcastle LGA and elsewhere (in relation to the Hunter Cycle Trail)].

**Other Meetings** (Billy Metcalfe & Terry Lewin met separately with Rosa Grine and Kate Harris on other occasions). We would also like to acknowledge **Councillor Rosa Grine’s strong RVRT advocacy** (and encouragement) during the past year.

- B. **Federal Election** (21/5/2022) – Communicated via email with all candidates seeking election in local Federal seats (Paterson, Newcastle, Hunter) & via Facebook Post (14/4/2022). Limited (written) response, typically from minor parties. [Served as reminder about RVRT, if nothing else].
- C. **Exhibition of *REF* for RVRT Western Section** (May-July 2022) – Substantial effort was put into Web, Facebook and Other Communications by Supporters’ Group members – with 125 submissions received by Cessnock City Council. [Considered to be a solid number of community submissions].
- D. **Re-establishment of RVRT-NPWS Landcare activities** (from 3/11/2022) – Congratulations to everyone involved – particularly Sam Mansfield and Leigh Gibbens (our Landcare co-ordinators)!
- E. **February 2023 Supporters’ Group Newsletter** - General Information; Keeping the RVRT On Track in 2023; Key Reasons to Accelerate RVRT Approvals, Funding & Construction; RVRT Eastern Section – Newcastle LGA; RVRT Western Section – Cessnock & Lake Macquarie LGAs; Inter-relationships between Recently Approved Regional Developments; Optimising the RVRT’s Benefits [*Improving Local Connectivity, Engaging with Local Communities, Businesses and Organisations, Establishing a Regional Advisory Committee, Working Together to Secure Funding, Enhancing Regional Connectivity and Tourism – “Shiraz to Shore” Hunter Cycle Trail*]; Local Landcare Initiatives; Richmond Vale Rail Trail (RVRT) Inc.).

This **detailed Newsletter** was produced in multiple formats, and was generally well received; it was also successfully **used to communicate with local politicians and candidates**. [Link to Newsletter](#). [Thanks also to Alec Roberts for his ongoing RVRT-related Web support!] [Two RVRT Supporters’ Group Newsletters per year would also be a good initial target].

- F. **Other Supporting Documents** (9/3/2023) – “*Appreciating the Multi-layered Benefits of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail (RVRT) – at a Local, Regional, and State/National Level*” – [Link](#). [This document usefully illustrates the trail’s layered benefits & consistency with regional strategic plans].
- G. **NSW State Election** (25/3/2023) – Communicated via email with all candidates (across 7 electorates). Face-to-face meetings with Sonia Hornery, Tim Crakanthorp & Clayton Barr, and two Federal members (Sharon Claydon & Dan Repacholi) + emails to Meryl Swanson & Pat Conroy. [Once again, these contacts served as a useful RVRT reminder. Everyone expressed positive support for the RVRT; however, several sitting MPs also expressed ‘uncertainty’ about how best to advance RVRT funding; a **willingness to hold further discussions** with their colleagues was also expressed].

H. **Murwillumbah Forum (24/3/2023)** – Successful Day (and Northern Rivers Rail Trail Celebratory Weekend) – Special Thanks to Sam Reich and [Rail Trails Australia!](#) [Ongoing discussion recommended about lessons learned & opportunities/approaches]. RVRT Update Presentation by Terry Lewin is available on YouTube – [Link](#).

One of the issues that Terry emphasized was the need for a Dual Focus: “*Simultaneously* considering the multi-layered benefits (at Local, Regional and State/National Levels) arising from the **Whole of the Trail** and the **Localised Benefits** for Communities, Groups and Individuals. [Not compartmentalizing or fragmenting everything]”.

I. **Special Thanks to Leigh Gibbens** – our outstanding and ‘outgoing’ Secretary/Treasurer. Well done Leigh!

[This photo of *Leigh Gibbens* receiving some gifts was taken by Tim Roberts at our AGM (30/3/2023)].



### 3. Treasurer’s Report

Current (Financial) Membership stands at	4
<b>Income</b> since 2021/2 AGM:	\$80.00 in Membership Fees
<u>TOTAL:</u>	<u>\$80.00</u>

<b>Expenditure:</b>	\$48.21 Dept Fair Trading Incorporated Organisation Fee
	\$0.18 PayPal fees
<u>TOTAL:</u>	<u>\$48.39</u>

**Balance:** \$31.61

#### **Richmond Vale Rail Trail Inc Balance Sheet 30th March 2023**

Opening Balance at AGM 2021/2	\$1715.26
Cash On Hand	\$0.00
Liabilities	\$0.00
Cheque Account	\$1746.87
Total Current Funds available	\$1746.87

[Note: While we have 25+ Members, we had effectively not pursued collection of Membership Fees during the COVID-affected years, during which we also had minimal expenditure].

Could all RVRT Inc. members **please pay their current 2023 membership fee** (\$20.00) [for the next 12 months] 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 Email to Sam Reich (our new Secretary/Treasurer) to let him know about the transfer ([rvrt.inc@gmail.com](mailto:rvrt.inc@gmail.com)).

#### 4. Landcare Report

Current number of volunteers stands at 20 very energetic and committed people.

We resumed Land Care, after a long hiatus due to Covid, then due to wet weather, on 3 November 2022. We have been able to meet and work on the first Thursday of every month since then - except for January.

We are working on a beautiful site, on Blue Gum Creek, near the remnants of a timber bridge. The location is shady and scenic with only the sound of bell birds (and the chatter of the group) to entertain us. After several hours working, we stop for morning tea, supplied by Sam Mansfield.

Thanks to Sam, my co-Coordinator and to all the hard workers who make this activity enjoyable.

*Leigh Gibbens, Land Care Administrative Coordinator*



*Some photos from the December 2022 and March 2023 Landcare Sessions*



## 5. Cessnock City Council Report from Kate Harris, Open Space & Community Facilities Manager

Please see update below in regard to the RVRT over the last 12 months:

- **Landowner engagement** was finalised in 2022, Council Officers met with each of the impacted landowners (these were mostly site meetings) to document minor changes to the concept designs. These changes were mostly in the form of style of fencing through private property, additional farm gates, slight relocation of animal bridge crossings and additional landscaping/visual barriers to improve privacy.
- The **REF** [for the Western RVRT Section] and supporting documents were publicly exhibited from 12 May – 3 July 2022. **125 submissions** were received during the exhibition period.
- As the committee may be aware, I was successful with the Manager role in June 2022 – however, it **took a substantial period of time to replace my substantive position** of Principal Recreation Planner. Due to competing priorities, the RVRT project was placed on hold.
- Due to resourcing constraints, Council engaged GHD in November 2022 to prepare a **formal submissions report** to accompany the report to Council re the **REF's** endorsement. This document is currently being finalised.
- I had intended to prepare a report for endorsement of the **REF** to the April 2023 Council meeting at the latest, however a private landowner has recently requested further changes to the concept designs which form part of the **REF** (relocation of the car park at Dog Hole Road [to another, yet to be identified/confirmed location]). This is based on relatively new findings regarding the Aboriginal significance of the proposed car park site. This matter is currently being discussed and engagement with the landowner is ongoing, but will most likely **require minor changes to the concept designs**.
- Pending no further delays, I'm anticipating the **REF** will be presented to the **May Council meeting** – this will be influenced by me being able to finalise the concept designs that are within the **REF**.

I hope the Committee have a productive meeting. Please let me know if you require any further information. [Kate Harris, Open Space & Community Facilities Manager]

## 6. Newcastle City Council Report from Anna Gurnhill, Senior Transport Planner (Active Transport) – Presented by Jacqui Hicks (Newcastle City Council)

### Reflection: the last 12 months

Key milestones:

- **REF** progressing through NSW Parks and Wildlife for Hunter Wetlands section.
- GHD Newcastle engaged to lead this work.
- Funding and RFQs [Requests for Quotation] issued to design connections at Shortland and Tarro.

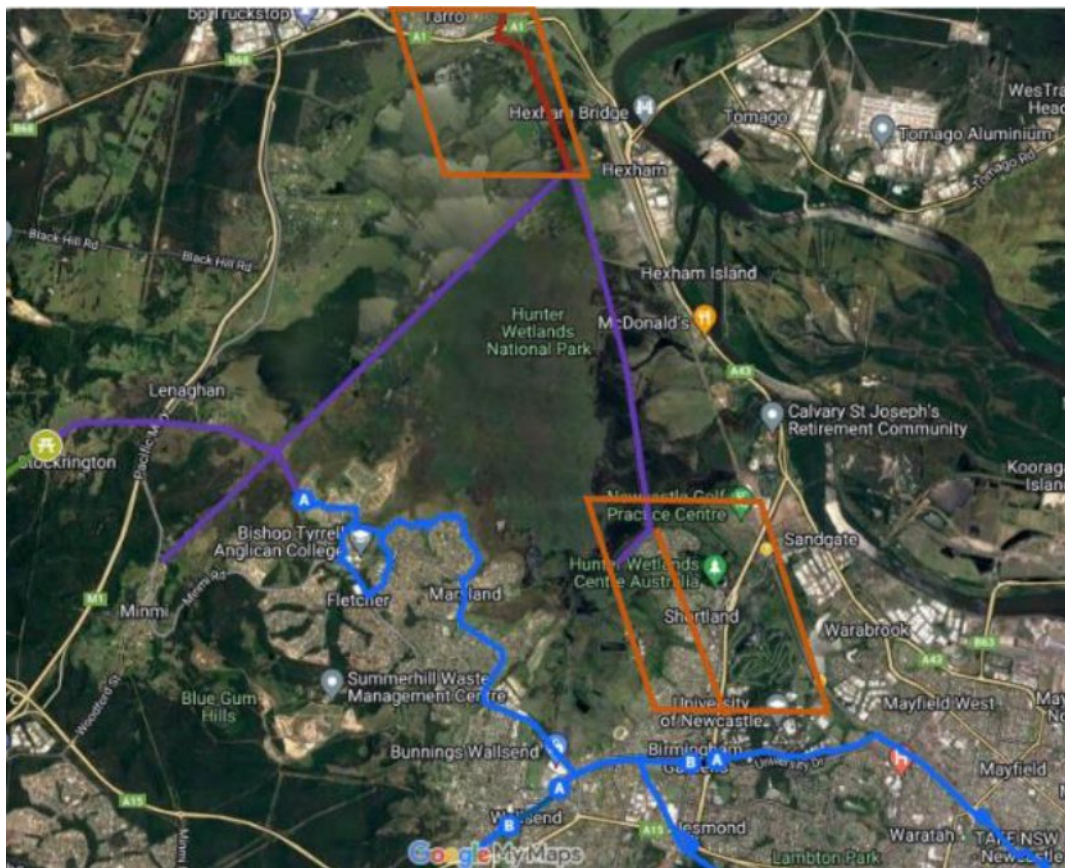
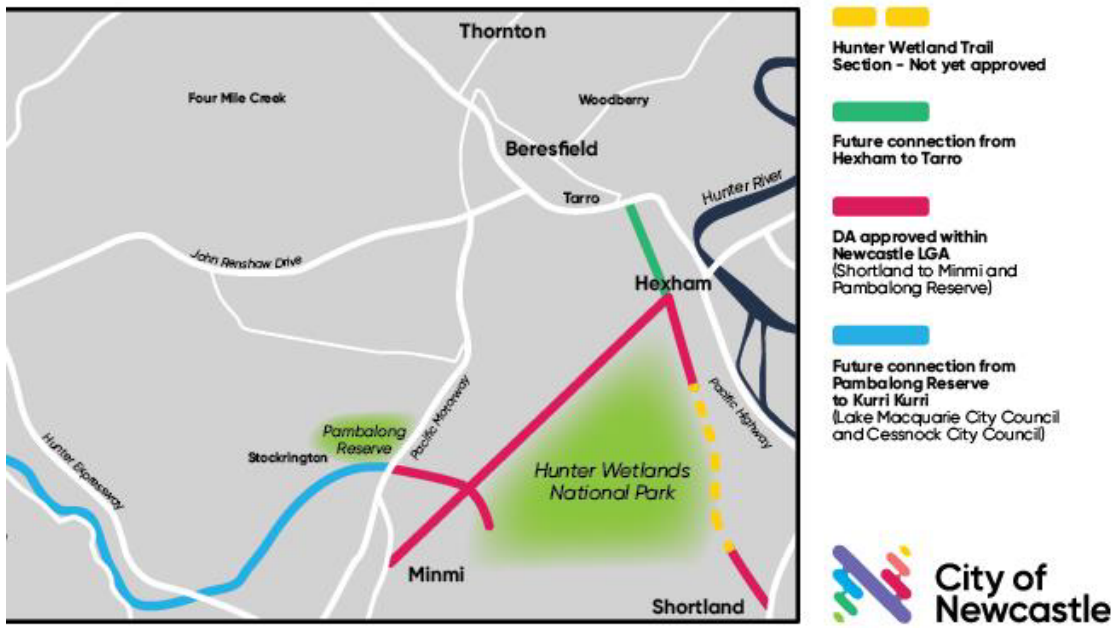
### Looking forward: the next 12 months

Anticipated milestones:

- **REF** approval for RVRT section through Hunter Wetlands [See image below].
- Shortland and Taro connections [See image below].
  - Feasibility and concept designs anticipated to be complete July 2023.
  - Detailed design to be undertaken 2023/24.

- Minmi and Fletcher connections – TfNSW grant application *tbc*
  - Three-year project: concept design 2023/24, detailed design 2024/25; construction 2025/26.
- Ongoing coordination and collaboration – internally and externally.

*Anna Gurnhill, Senior Transport Planner (Active Transport)*



## 7. Election of 2023 Committee

We received advice from Leigh Gibbens several weeks before the meeting that she would be resigning from her role as Secretary/Treasurer at the AGM. We also uploaded a Facebook Post (17/3/2023) as a 'Meeting Reminder and Request for Assistance' [See image below].

There were no formal nominations for office-bearer roles in advance of the AGM. Only one person was appropriately nominated (and seconded) by meeting attendees for each of the office bearer roles and consequently they were all elected unopposed for the next 12 months (or until the next AGM):

- a. President – Billy Metcalfe
- b. Vice-President – Terry Lewin
- c. Secretary – Sam Reich
- d. Treasurer – Sam Reich

Following some brief discussion about the general availability of meeting attendees as RVRT Committee Members, the following RVRT Inc. members were appointed (or re-appointed) to the Committee: Marilyn Eade, Colin East, Paul Gage, Leigh Gibbens, Darrin Gray, Sam Mansfield and Alec Roberts (together with the three office-bearers).

The AGM component of the meeting closed at 11:13am.

## General Meeting:

### 8. Engagement & Communication with Members & Supporters (Email, Web, Facebook)

- Some of the issues identified during discussion: **minimal direct communication with general members** during the last 12 months [relative to the volume of internal communications among Committee Members, Facebook Posts, Web materials and requests associated with the *REF* exhibition for the Western RVRT Section]; **lack of clarity about membership** (and membership fees) vs. inclusion on supporter/contact lists; and the need or otherwise for **yearly membership fees** (and how to pay/collect them).
- Whilst a range of views were expressed at the meeting (including concerns that people might wish to be members but have limited financial resources), it will be up to the Committee to settle on an appropriate set of strategies and changes. Clearly, we need to do a better job at engaging and communicating with our members and supporters [and keeping a Register of Members and Other Supporters] – and we **apologise to anyone who experienced limited contact during the last year.**
- Suggested solutions include: *Mailchimp* email lists, where users can self-identify the Category of Membership that they seek [Formal Member or General Supporter - identified on relevant Distribution List(s)] and Unsubscribe whenever they choose; in either case, in future we will forward links to all RVRT Inc. Newsletters, Updates, and General Communications to everyone on

### MEETING REMINDER AND REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE

#### AGM & General Meeting Notice

*Friends/Supporters of Richmond Vale Rail Trail (RVRT Inc.) are cordially invited to our:*

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (AGM) & GENERAL MEETING  
CONFERENCE ROOM, HUNTER WETLANDS CENTRE  
1 WETLANDS PLACE SHORTLAND NSW  
THURSDAY MARCH 30, 2023  
9:45 AM**

The Conference Room is downstairs from the Wetlands Centre entrance. If you would like to purchase refreshments from the Spoonbill Café (which opens at 9:30am), you are welcome to bring them to the meeting.

#### Request for Assistance

The RVRT Supporters' Group (RVRT Inc.) will also need to Elect a New Secretary/Treasurer at the AGM – roles which we are told are "... *not an onerous time commitment*" (by our wonderful current Secretary/Treasurer).

So, if you live in the Lower Hunter and you feel that you might be able to help out, please contact us – Email: [rvrt.inc@gmail.com](mailto:rvrt.inc@gmail.com); Phone: Terry Lewin (0404439616, 4930-3172) or Leigh Gibbens (0433570920).

any of our email lists. For the present, we will also **retain our current Annual Membership Fee** (\$20.00 per year – please see Treasurer’s Report for further information) – which will assist with minor ongoing expenses such as Incorporation costs, Room Hire, Insurance (if required), minor equipment purchases, banners, printing, and so on.

- We will also attempt to update our Web pages and Document Archives during the next few months.

**9. Priorities for Next 12 Months (?)** – ‘Shovel ready’ RVRT; maintaining strong community support; advocating for accelerated funding & development; **regional advisory committee** (focused on integrated development, securing funding, optimising benefits).

- As noted by Colin East at last year’s AGM, there is “... *a clear case for changing our focus now (given the RVRT approvals ...), with Committee members devoting more time during the next year to linkages into the community and mobilising support*” – this is clearly still the case, perhaps even more so, given the recent changes within the NSW parliament, and the identification of the proposed Hunter Cycle Trail in the recently approved *Hunter Regional Plan 2041*.
- With respect to a **regional advisory committee**, the consensus appears to be that we should **continue to push for this**, in consultation with local Councils, elected representatives (within all tiers of government), and the Hunter Joint Organisation of Councils (Hunter JO) – whilst recognising that there are a host of other community groups who also need to have a say.

**10. Broader Engagement Strategies** - developing **more effective links** with local groups (communities), Councils, Federal/State politicians, businesses/organisations, Hunter JO [‘*Shiraz to Shore*’ Hunter Cycle Trail], etc.

- In effect, the RVRT’s members **all need to be ‘ambassadors’ or ‘champions’ for the RVRT**, wherever the opportunities arise.
- Colin East and Terry Lewin also both reflected briefly on their recent conversations with Clayton Barr (MP for Cessnock) [on election day and during the pre-poll period, respectively] – who revealed, amongst other things, that he didn’t realize that the RVRT was as far advanced as it is, that he hadn’t been updated for a while, and that he found the February Newsletter and related materials (and conversations with Terry Lewin) very useful for reframing his views about the RVRT and for having further discussions with his colleagues. [In part, this is also reflective of our limited focus on conversations with State politicians and officials during the past few years (as opposed to discussions with local Councils) – something that we clearly need to rectify].
- As also noted at last year’s AGM, “... *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*”.

**11. Other Business**

- **Lessons from the Northern Rivers Rail Trail** – This was flagged for discussion but we ran out of time. Sam Reich could share his reflections at the next Committee Meeting. [Like many trails, Northern Rivers experienced a long interval from initial planning to construction; most of the funding came from Federal sources; the NSW Public Works Department contributed to project design, particularly in relation to heritage items (e.g., stations, bridges, tunnels); the Northern Rivers JO also played a role; while Tweed Shire Council led the way, and towards the end, put a considerable emphasis on Integrated Signage, Marketing and Monitoring strategies, and User Experiences]. Rail Trail Management Models are also likely to become reasonably standardised within NSW (including for the RVRT).
- **Committee Meeting Schedule** – Sam Reich also foreshadowed the need for more regular Committee Meetings, suggesting that we meet monthly in the first instance. Subsequently, the first face-to-face Committee Meeting for 2023 has been scheduled for 10am on May 11<sup>th</sup> 2023.



- **Better Streets for NSW** – Alec Roberts advocated for this new initiative ([www.BetterStreets.info](http://www.BetterStreets.info)), as a way of promoting safer streets, healthy active transport, and people- and climate-friendly streets – via ‘*a strong collective voice for change*’. Sam Reich is also on the Board of Directors for The Better Streets Coalition. [RVRT Inc. has subsequently joined this coalition].
- **Liaison with Lake Macquarie Council** – Tony Proust enquired about our engagement with Lake Macquarie City Council (and their involvement to date in RVRT planning). He also indicated that he had worked there as a town planner (*‘in a previous life’*) and would be happy to help facilitate better linkages with Council. [Lake Macquarie City Council will need to separately approve the REF for their 2.7km section of the trail]. Thanks Tony.
- **‘Shiraz to Shore’ Hunter Cycle Trail** – Copies of the *attached image* were distributed and briefly discussed. The RVRT is a central element within the proposed Hunter Cycle Trail (*see Section 3*), an initiative of the Hunter JO.

Other Hunter Cycle Trail proposed sections: *Section 1*: Shiraz (Wine Country section & Cessnock links); *Section 2*: Cessnock to Kurri Kurri (Cessnock town centre to RVRT trailhead, via Neath Hotel & Peace Park); *Section 4*: Largely completed shared pathways within Newcastle & Lake Macquarie (e.g., Tramway & Fernleigh Tracks, Bathers Way), together with upgrades & extensions to Principal Bicycle Network routes (e.g., R2, R6 & R8).

Hunter JO’s Stage 1 focus is on Developing a **Hunter Cycle Tourism Strategy** - for which they recently received some funding [A NSW ‘*Business-Case-and-Strategy-Development-Fund*’ grant of \$387,500].

We strongly believe that the **RVRT should be prioritised in any Hunter Cycle Trail construction staging plans**, given its strategic relevance, long planning history, and ability to add directly to existing Newcastle and Lake Macquarie shared pathways.

- **Tim Roberts Thank You** – We would also like to take this opportunity to thank Emeritus Professor Tim Roberts for his **many and varied contributions to planning for the RVRT** during the past decade. In his role as Director of the Tom Farrell Institute for the Environment (TFI) at the University of Newcastle (from 2010-2018), Tim was involved in a range of research projects and other initiatives that had direct relevance to the RVRT. He also helped to organise a highly successful RVRT-focused Active Transport Conference in 2017 and co-ordinated preparation of the associated and beautifully-presented ‘*Towards the Richmond Vale Rail Trail*’ book (ISBN 978-0-6480003-9-6). Tim was also Vice-President of RVRT Inc. for a while (after David Atkinson). We also thank Tim for his other environmental and general advocacy work that has promoted environmental sustainability, active transport and associated community engagement and education.
- **Darrin Gray** – Subsequent to the AGM, Darrin Gray contacted us to say that he was expecting to have more time in the near future to support RVRT Inc. and related activities, including assistance with liaison with local politicians (at all levels of government) and with showing people parts of the RVRT and/or other potential connections – including to the Hunter Cycle Trail. Thanks Darrin.

Meeting closed at approx. 11:50 am. Date for next meeting: TBA.

## Proposed Hunter Cycle Trail - An initiative of Hunter Joint Organisation of Councils

- Many future HCT connections & extensions are possible (beyond Sections 1-4).

We strongly believe that the **RVRT should be prioritised** in any construction staging plans, given its:

- Strategic Relevance
- Planning History
- Ability to immediately double the potential length of rides/walks initiated from the existing 'Shore' (Eastern) end of this regional pathway.

