

## Extracted Facebook Post

### **Appreciating the Multi-layered Benefits of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail (RVRT) – at a Local, Regional, and State/National Level**

CONSTRUCTIVE COMMENTS/SUGGESTIONS WELCOME

**From Terry Lewin, RVRT Supporters' Group (RVRT Inc.) Vice-President (March 9<sup>th</sup> 2023).**

The Richmond Vale Rail Trail (RVRT) was first proposed more than 20 years ago, with active planning underway now for over a decade.

A comprehensive feasibility study was completed in 2014, while the initial 'Community Information Sessions' about the current RVRT proposal were held over 6 years ago (November, 2016). Since that time, most of the focus of the three participating Councils (Newcastle, Cessnock and Lake Macquarie) and their Consultants has been on revising Trail design features, undertaking environmental, strategic and other assessments, consultation, and securing the various basic planning approvals. Thankfully, these **basic planning approvals are starting to fall into place** and hopefully will be finalised over the next few months.

Now is probably a very good time for a **solid push to accelerate the RVRT's development, funding and construction.**

Consequently, the RVRT Supporters' Group would like to use this opportunity to publicly ask all of our elected representatives (both State and Federal) [as well as NSW candidates seeking election on March 25<sup>th</sup> 2023] for a **clear commitment to "... steadily move this regional project forward, and to work collaboratively with local communities and all tiers of government to help make the RVRT a reality"**.

Unfortunately, the fragmented nature of RVRT planning processes has tended to draw attention away from looking at the value of the trail in its entirety for the Hunter Region. Election and grant funding cycles also tend to have the same effect by **compartmentalising everything** (e.g., by focusing only a particular electorate or LGA, or only on the cycling or tourism aspects of the trail).

There is no doubt that the RVRT's true benefits greatly exceed the contributions of its component parts. To appreciate the overall significance of the RVRT for the Hunter Region and beyond, we need to *simultaneously* consider the multi-layered benefits arising from the **Whole of the Trail** and the **Localised Benefits** for Communities, Groups and Individuals.

In short, we all need to focus *jointly* on what the RVRT can do for local residents and communities on a day-to-day basis, and for the Hunter Region globally on an ongoing basis. Such a **dual focus** will lead to a better and more integrated 'Trail Product', as well as setting a solid framework for optimising the trail's longer-term benefits (and attracting State/Federal funding).

The accompanying Tables (Pictures A to C) summarise some of the RVRT's potential benefits, divided roughly by their likely level of impact – and, where relevant for illustrative purposes, by the RVRT Section (Eastern/Western):

**Local Level:** Improved local community connections (and safety); and Improved liveability and healthier lifestyles.

**Regional Level:** New active transport options; New bridges and boardwalks; Improved access to national parks, conservation areas, and regional attractions; and Opportunities for improved access to cultural/heritage information and areas.

**National/State Level:** General tourism; Rail trail & cycle tourism; and Relationship to the broader '*Shiraz to Shore*' Hunter Cycle Trail proposal.

The last Table (Picture D) highlights some **Other Considerations:** Consistency with regional strategies and developments; Employment and business opportunities; Cost-effectiveness; and optimising the RVRT's benefits.

Adding to the RVRT updates and arguments presented in our February 2023 RVRT Supporters' Group Newsletter, the RVRT is also a **central element within the proposed broader '*Shiraz to Shore*' Hunter Cycle Trail**, an initiative of the Hunter Joint Organisation of Councils. The accompanying images further illustrate the inter-relationship between these proposals, including: Picture E - Possible Sections within the Hunter Cycle Trail, with the RVRT identified as Section 3; and Picture F - Potential Future Connections and Extensions, with the five surrounding Federal Electorates also identified.

Both the RVRT and the Hunter Cycle Trail are now identified as priority projects in the *Hunter Regional Plan 2041*, which was released in December 2022. We would also argue 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 (at the '*Shore*' end of this Trail).

Link to February 2023 RVRT Supporters' Group Newsletter:

[https://www.richmondvalerailtrail.org.au/uploads/1/2/0/4/120411157/rvrt\\_supporters\\_group\\_newsletter\\_february\\_2023\\_6\\_pages.pdf](https://www.richmondvalerailtrail.org.au/uploads/1/2/0/4/120411157/rvrt_supporters_group_newsletter_february_2023_6_pages.pdf)

*(Pic. A: Local Level - RVRT Potential Benefits)*

**Illustrated Benefits  
(Some examples)**

**RVRT Eastern Section**

(Newcastle LGA)  
*'Shortland to Tarro, Fletcher/Minmi  
and Pambalong'*

**RVRT Western Section**

(Cessnock & Lake Macquarie LGAs)  
*'Stockrington to Kurri Kurri'*

<b>Local Level:</b>	<b>Improved Local Community Connections (&amp; Safety)</b>	<b>Improved off-road walking &amp; cycling connections</b> (linking schools, parks and local facilities/attractions) within the:
	Shortland, Tarro/Beresfield, and Wallsend/Fletcher/Minmi communities.	Stanford Merthyr, Pelaw Main, and Kurri Kurri communities, mostly via Log of Knowledge Park.
	<b>Improved Liveability &amp; Healthier Lifestyles</b>	<p>As is the case for other regional shared pathways (e.g., the Fernleigh Track), having day-to-day access to the RVRT will <b>benefit a broad range of local users and their visitors</b>, across all age groups - including walkers, cyclists, runners, bird watchers, reduced mobility users, family &amp; other groups.</p> <p>The RVRT (which is essentially free to use) will <b>improve liveability and promote healthier, active lifestyles</b>, which will have positive physical and mental health benefits – which are especially beneficial outcomes during periods of economic uncertainty and following events such as the COVID pandemic and natural disasters.</p>
	<b>Future Local Connections</b>	<p>To: Tuxford Park, University of Newcastle and Newcastle cycleways network; Minmi and Cameron Park housing estates; and wider Lake Macquarie &amp; Maitland networks.</p> <p>To: Aquatic Centre and Margaret Johns Park (Kurri Kurri); Peace Park (Weston); Cessnock to Abermain/Neath shared pathways; and wider Cessnock Trails network.</p>

*(Pic. B: Regional Level - RVRT Potential Benefits)*

**Illustrated Benefits  
(Some examples)**

*[Continued]*

**RVRT Eastern Section**

(Newcastle LGA)

*'Shortland to Tarro, Fletcher/Minmi and Pambalong'*

**RVRT Western Section**

(Cessnock & Lake Macquarie LGAs)

*'Stockrington to Kurri Kurri'*

<p><b>Regional Level:</b></p> <p><i>[In tandem with the local level benefits]</i></p>	<p><b>New Active Transport Options</b></p>	<p><b>Safer, off-road cycling alternatives</b> (e.g., to the New England Highway), linking the Tarro/Beresfield (and Maitland) areas with Shortland &amp; Newcastle cycleways network. New cycleway access to Raymond Terrace via the RVRT (Tarro) &amp; approved M1 Extension.</p>	<p>Opportunities for longer-distance active transport within the Kurri Kurri and Cessnock areas; together with <b>cycling and walking events</b> (e.g., from Log of Knowledge Park).</p>
	<p><b>New Bridges &amp; Boardwalks</b></p>	<p>Ironbark &amp; Fishery Creeks.</p>	<p>Wallis &amp; Surveyors Creeks.</p>
	<p><b>Improved Access to National Parks, Conservation Areas, &amp; Regional Attractions</b></p>	<p>Hunter Wetlands National Park (Coastal Wetlands); Pambalong Nature Reserve; Tank Paddock; Blue Gum Hills Regional Park; Hunter Wetlands Centre.</p>	<p>Stockrington, Sugarloaf, and Werakata State Conservation Areas; mid-trail precinct (Seahampton Road); Log of Knowledge Park; Kurri Kurri CBD &amp; murals.</p>
	<p><b>Opportunities for Improved Access to Cultural/Heritage Information &amp; Areas</b></p>	<p>Aboriginal heritage (Awabakal); industrial/mining heritage (J &amp; A Brown); &amp; railway heritage (Hexham and Minmi).</p>	<p>Aboriginal heritage (Mindaribba), industrial/mining heritage (Stockrington and Kurri Kurri mines); &amp; railway heritage (three historic brick tunnels, Richmond Vale Railway Museum).</p>

**(Promoting Environmental Awareness & Tourism)**

**(Promoting Cultural & Heritage Awareness)**

(Pic. C: State/National Level - RVRT Potential Benefits)

**Illustrated Benefits  
(Some examples)**

*[Continued]*

**RVRT Eastern Section**

(Newcastle LGA)

*‘Shortland to Tarro, Fletcher/Minmi and Pambalong’*

**RVRT Western Section**

(Cessnock & Lake Macquarie LGAs)

*‘Stockrington to Kurri Kurri’*

<p><b>State/ National Level:</b></p> <p><i>[In tandem with the local and regional level benefits]</i></p>	<b>General Tourism</b>	<p>The Hunter is already a major tourism destination in NSW. In combination with the existing attractions, improved access (via usage of the RVRT) to National Parks, Conservation Areas, and Local Attractions &amp; Cultural/Heritage Areas <b>will itself increase the likelihood that visitors stay another night and/or undertake repeat visits.</b> As evidenced by the Fernleigh Track’s growing popularity ... As locals increase their RVRT usage, they will also encourage their friends and visitors to further explore the RVRT and the Hunter Region.</p>
	<b>Rail Trail &amp; Cycle Tourism</b>	<p>Cycling/walking rail trails and other tourist trails is becoming a very popular activity in Australia &amp; New Zealand. The RVRT will uniquely link metropolitan and rural areas. It will also <b>enhance the image and attractiveness of the Hunter and NSW as rail trail &amp; cycle tourism destinations</b> – adding to the impact of the <i>Tumbarumba to Rosewood</i> and <i>Northern Rivers</i> Rail Trails.</p> <p>Over time, the RVRT will also connect with a range of other local shared pathways, including: The Tramway and Fernleigh Tracks, and the Lakeside Cycleway (from Glendale to Eleebana).</p>
	<b>Broader ‘Shiraz to Shore’ Hunter Cycle Trail Proposal</b>	<p>The RVRT is also a <b>central element within the proposed ‘Shiraz to Shore’ Hunter Cycle Trail</b>, an initiative of the Hunter Joint Organisation of Councils (see <b>Section 3 in the accompanying images</b>). Furthermore, recently the Hunter JO received a NSW ‘Business-Case-and-Strategy-Development-Fund’ grant (of \$387,500) to begin work on a Hunter Cycle Tourism Strategy.</p> <p>We would also argue that the <b>RVRT should be prioritised in any construction staging plans</b>, given its strategic relevance, planning history, &amp; ability to immediately double the potential length of bike rides initiated from the existing ‘Shore’ (Eastern) end of this regional pathway.</p> <p>The RVRT will also facilitate future connections and extensions via the Hunter Cycle Trail to:</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>Thornton, Raymond Terrace, Newcastle Airport</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>Heddon Greta, Maitland, Morpeth, Rutherford, Branxton</p> </div> </div>

*(Pic. D: Other Considerations)*

**Illustrated Benefits  
(Some examples)**

*[Continued]*

**RVRT Eastern Section**

(Newcastle LGA)

*‘Shortland to Tarro, Fletcher/Minmi and Pambalong’*

**RVRT Western Section**

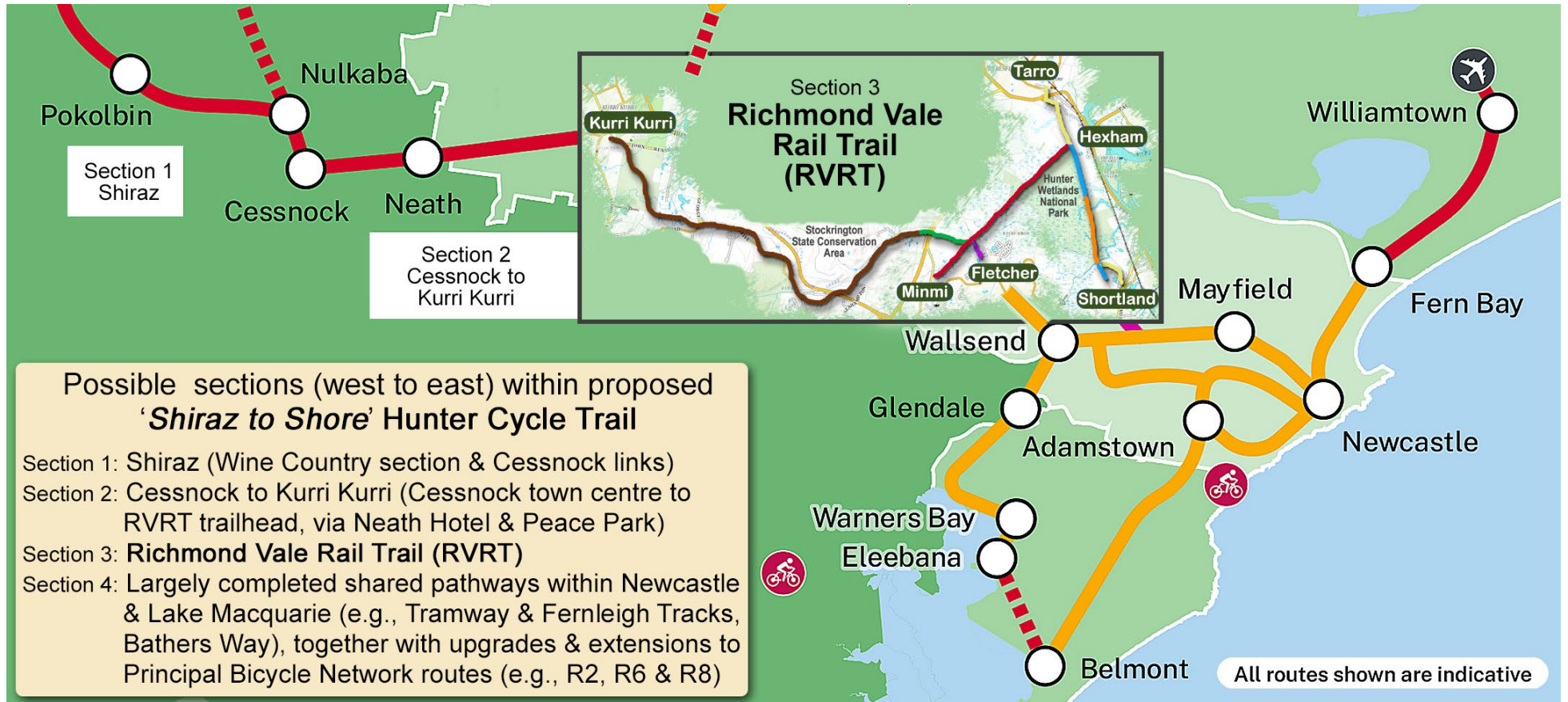
(Cessnock & Lake Macquarie LGAs)

*‘Stockrington to Kurri Kurri’*

<b>Other Considerations:</b>	<b>Consistency with Regional Strategies &amp; Developments</b>	The RVRT has been <b>identified as a regional priority</b> in multiple Hunter Regional Plans (October, 2016; December, 2022), the Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan (GNMP, September, 2018), and in numerous local Council plans. The RVRT also fits very well with NSW’s <i>Future Transport Strategy</i> (2022) vision and with its <i>Active Transport Strategy</i> (2022). Additionally, the approved M1 Extension to Raymond Terrace (contractors selected Dec. 2022) and the approved alignment for the future Hunter Freight Corridor (Dec. 2022) have been carefully chosen to <b>actively protect the RVRT route</b> and facilitate other connections.
	<b>Employment &amp; Business Opportunities</b>	In addition to providing multi-layered direct benefits for all trail users, the RVRT (and the broader Hunter Cycle Trail) should provide <b>considerable employment, economic and tourism benefits for the Hunter</b> – including: trail construction and maintenance jobs; support for local businesses; and opportunities for new initiatives (e.g., trail side coffee shops, bike hire, fun-runs, guided walks, community events, accommodation, and eco-tourism).
	<b>Cost-effectiveness</b>	All of the available evidence suggests that the RVRT will deliver a <b>cost-effective array of life-changing benefits</b> , including: community access and connection; health and lifestyle benefits; environmental and heritage appreciation; economic and tourism; as well as cycling-specific safety and commuting benefits. Detailed assessments have also confirmed a <b>very positive Benefit to Cost Ratio (BCR) of 2.40</b> - so the <i>sooner we build it, the better!</i>
	<b>Optimising the RVRT’s benefits</b>	To optimise the RVRT’s longer-term benefits, <b>other factors</b> also need consideration: improving local connectivity; engaging with local communities, businesses and organisations; establishing a representative <b>regional advisory committee</b> ; working together to secure funding; and enhancing regional connectivity & tourism, through broader initiatives such as the Hunter Cycle Trail.



**(Pic. E: Possible Sections (West to East) within the Proposed 'Shiraz to Shore' Hunter Cycle Trail – With the RVRT identified as Section 3.)**



**(Pic. F: Potential Future Connections and Extensions to the Proposed ‘Shiraz to Shore’ Hunter Cycle Trail – Modified Figure from the Hunter Regional Plan 2041 (Dec. 2022), with the Five Surrounding Federal Electorates Identified.)**

