

RVRT Supporters' Group (RVRT Inc.)

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**General Information:** The Richmond Vale Rail Trail (RVRT) will be a multi-purpose, 32km (40km with connections) continuous off-road shared pathway, supporting a broad range of user groups. It will run from Shortland (near the Hunter Wetlands Centre) to Kurri Kurri (Log of Knowledge Park), connecting four LGAs (Newcastle, Lake Macquarie, Cessnock and Maitland). The trail runs primarily along the former Richmond Vale railway alignment [a private coal line that closed in 1987], as well as utilising Hunter Water Corporation pipeline corridors (e.g., Shortland to Tarro segment and Fletcher connection).

## Keeping the RVRT On Track in 2023

- **Solid progress** was made in 2021 and 2022 towards obtaining the necessary planning approvals for core sections of the RVRT (*see details below*). Hopefully, the next few months will see finalisation of most of these approvals.
- **Ensuring the whole RVRT is 'shovel ready' ASAP** (in terms of approvals) is one of our immediate goals, which will enhance opportunities for seeking funding for detailed design work and construction.
- **Strong local and regional community support** is central to the RVRT's development, funding, usage, maintenance and long-term success.
- We also need **ongoing communications with our elected representatives** [via personal contacts, emails/letters], with the goal of securing specific (election) commitments and ongoing support. A new Federal Government was elected in May 2022, and there is a NSW State election on March 25<sup>th</sup> 2023. So, now is an **ideal time** for you to communicate with local politicians (and candidates) at all levels of government **to advocate strongly for accelerated RVRT funding and development.**
- While it is great that there are **growing opportunities in NSW** to develop rail trails and other shared pathways, there is also **increasing competition** for the required design and construction funds.

## Key Reasons to Accelerate RVRT Approvals, Funding & Construction

- Deciding to invest in an appealing regional shared pathway that promotes safe community connections, healthy outdoor activities, regional development and tourism, and which is essentially free to use, is clearly a *'no-brainer'* – and an **extremely positive use for public funds**, especially during periods of economic uncertainty and following events such as the COVID pandemic & natural disasters.
- The RVRT will support a **broad range of user groups and activities**, including: active/regular commuters; recreational cyclists, walkers, runners, and bird watchers; families and social groups; individuals/families with mobility constraints; tourist groups; community and sporting events.
- The RVRT will:
  - ... **Deliver a cost-effective array of life-changing benefits**, 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. Various assessments have also confirmed a very positive Benefit to Cost Ratio (BCR) of 2.40.
  - ... **Uniquely link metropolitan and rural communities and attractions**, and **facilitate access to multiple high conservation value areas** that were previously inaccessible (e.g., Hunter Wetlands National Park, Pambalong Nature Reserve, Stockrington and Werakata State Conservation Areas).
- The first formal RVRT proposal was **over 20 years ago**. A comprehensive feasibility study was completed in 2014, while the initial 'Community Information Sessions' about the current RVRT proposal were held 6 years ago (November, 2016) – so, it is clearly **time to make the RVRT a reality**.
- The RVRT has been **identified as a regional priority** in multiple Hunter Regional Plans (October, 2016; December, 2022), the Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan (GNMP, September, 2018), and in numerous local Council plans. Specifically, delivery of regional initiatives like the RVRT will contribute to two of the four overarching GNMP outcomes: ***"Enhance environment, amenity and resilience for quality of life"*** (Outcome 2); and ***"Improve connections to jobs, services and recreation"*** (Outcome 4).
- The RVRT has also been identified as a key component in future regional bicycle network routes. It will effectively become **the spine that links an array of Hunter communities, cycleways and trails**.
- Over the past three decades, tens of millions of dollars of **public money have already been spent on making provision for the RVRT** (e.g., building tunnels under Lenaghans Drive and the M1; monitoring and preserving two historic brick tunnels during Hunter Expressway construction; recent planning for the M1 Extension to Raymond Terrace and the Hunter Freight Corridor). It will be **extremely wasteful** if we do not construct the RVRT, after the decades of effort and planning that have already gone into it.

## RVRT Eastern Section – Newcastle LGA

- The Eastern Section of the RVRT (*'Shortland to Tarro and Pambalong'*) includes new concrete girder bridges (40m three-span bridge at Ironbark Creek; 20m single-span bridge at Fishery Creek). It will provide commuters and recreational users with a **safe alternative route** to the busy local road network, and **open up public access** to the western section of Hunter Wetlands National Park.
- Initial 13km (**blue**, **red**, **green** and **purple** lines in Newsletter Figure) was **approved by the Hunter and Central Coast Regional Planning Panel** in December 2021 (DA2020/0064, PPSHCC-55; with 100 Conditions of Consent).
- A Review of Environmental Factors (*REF*) for the short section across **Hunter Wetlands National Park** (**orange** line in Newsletter Figure) will be completed during the next few months, in conjunction with the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS).
- A *REF* for the **Tarro Connection** is still required, which will need to be fully integrated with the recently approved and contracted M1 Extension from Black Hill to Raymond Terrace.
- Newcastle City Council is currently seeking 3-years funding from the State Government's **Get NSW Active program** for design and construction work associated with the Minmi and Fletcher RVRT connections; having previously received \$100,000 from the 2022/23 program for further design work on the

Hexham Junction to Tarro RVRT section.

- **Desirable future connections** include: Hunter Wetlands Centre (Tuxford Park); University of Newcastle (and wider cycleways network);

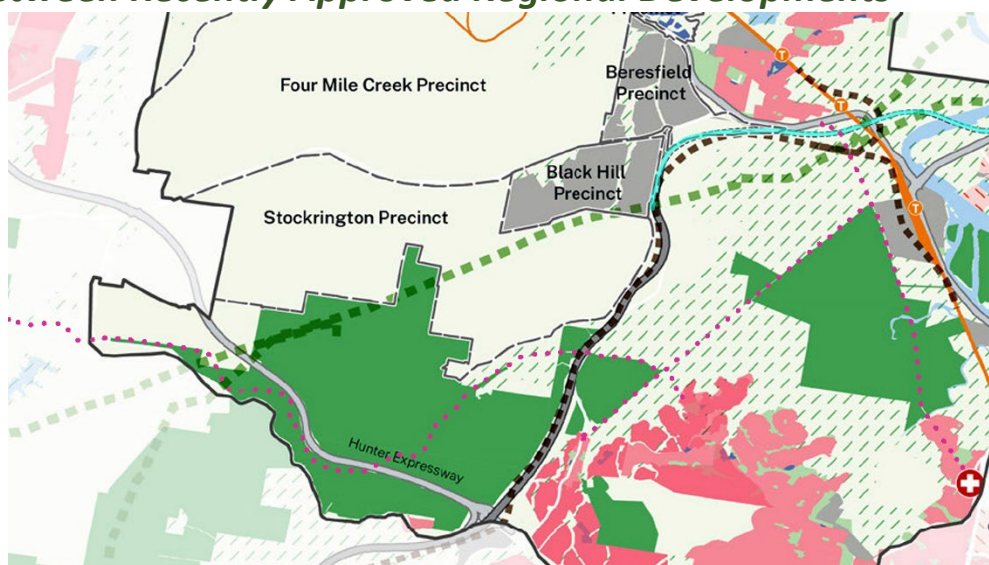
new Minmi housing estates; Lake Macquarie (via R2 [Minmi, Cameron Park] and R6 [Fletcher, Wallsend]); and Maitland cycleways and trails.

## **RVRT Western Section – Cessnock & Lake Macquarie LGAs** (brown line in Figure)

- The 17km Western Section of the RVRT ('Stockrington to Kurri Kurri') includes restoration and repair of **three historic brick railway tunnels** and construction of two new concrete bridges (15m two-span bridge at Surveyors Creek; 70m single-span bridge at Wallis Creek). The trail head at Log of Knowledge Park will include a range of facilities and connection opportunities.
- The short coastal wetlands section of the trail within Cessnock LGA (near *Pambalong Nature Reserve*) was **approved in April 2021** (DA 8/2020/204631/1; with 32 Conditions of Consent).
- Most of the RVRT Western Section is identified as a '**road infrastructure facility**' (Clause 2.107, State Environmental Planning Policy), with a comprehensive *REF* considered appropriate.
- Cessnock City Council **exhibited the required REF in May-July 2022**, with 125 submissions received, which were overwhelmingly positive. However, a small number of objectors raised several specific concerns that needed to be formally addressed.
- Some *REF* amendments have now been undertaken and a formal Submissions Report from GHD Pty. Ltd. (the primary design consultant) will accompany the Council Report to be presented to Councillors.
- It is anticipated that this amended *REF* will not need to be re-exhibited, and will **probably be considered by Council in March-April 2023**.
- Lake Macquarie City Council will also need to **separately approve their 2.7km section** of the jointly exhibited RVRT *REF* (which borders Cessnock LGA on both sides).
- Link to [Ten Points of Interest](#) along the RVRT Western Section (June, 2022).
- In related news, Lake Macquarie City Council received \$398,000 from the 2022/23 **Get NSW Active** program for design work on the Charlestown to Whitebridge connection with the Fernleigh Track [which is part of a **longer-term proposed regional RVRT connection**].
- Likewise, Cessnock City Council received \$761,000 from the same program for design work on the Cessnock to Abermain Shared Pathway [which will contribute to the proposed regional **Shiraz to Shore Hunter Cycle Trail** and associated RVRT connections, *see below*].

## **Inter-relationships between Recently Approved Regional Developments**

Extracted from **Figure 21** (National Pinch Point) **Hunter Regional Plan 2041** (Dec. 2022, Pg 116): The approved **M1 Extension to Raymond Terrace** (aqua line; contractors selected Dec. 2022) and the approved alignment for the future **Hunter Freight Corridor** (Dec. 2022, dark dashed line) have been carefully chosen to **actively protect the RVRT route** (purple dots) and facilitate other connections.



Relevant Links: <https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/Plans-for-your-area/Regional-Plans/Hunter/Hunter-regional-plan-2041>  
<https://roads-waterways.transport.nsw.gov.au/projects/ramond-terrace-upgrade/index.html>  
<https://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/projects/current-projects/lower-hunter-freight-corridor>

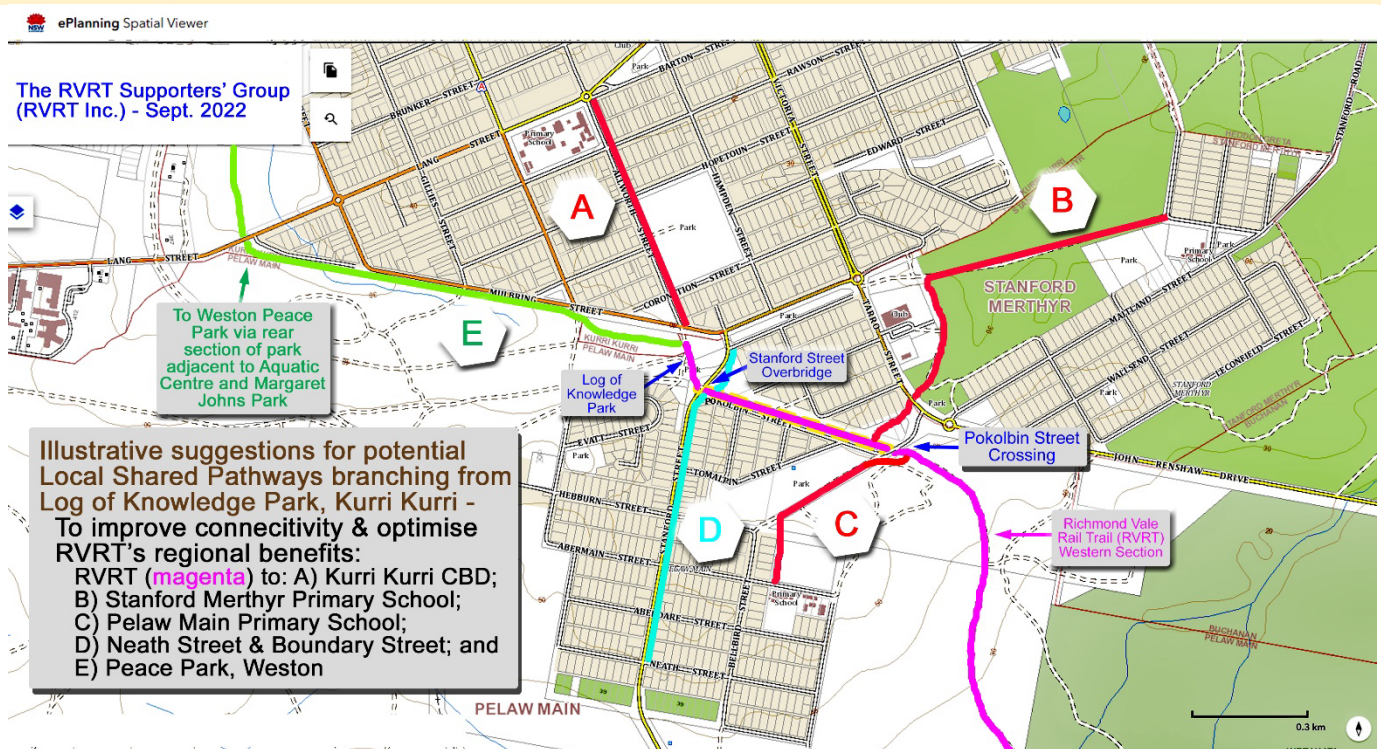


## Optimising the RVRT's Benefits

To optimise the RVRT's short- and longer-term benefits for the Hunter Region (and NSW), we need to **simultaneously focus on design, funding and construction issues and a range of other considerations**, including: improving local connectivity; actively engaging with potential trail users, stakeholder agencies and groups; fostering regional connectivity and tourism; and RVRT management and maintenance.

### Improving Local Connectivity

- **As many connections as possible** should be planned - to local communities, schools, nearby attractions/facilities and other cycleways/shared pathways; and/or specific **allowance made for future connections and upgrades**.
- Priority should probably be given to **access points and facilities that are likely to develop as destinations in their own right** and/or to those that are close to key trail features or other regional attractions (e.g., Hunter Wetlands National Park; Blue Gum Hills Regional Park; Mid-trail precinct, Stockrington State Conservation Area; *Log of Knowledge Park*, Kurri Kurri).
- Some examples of **linkable shared pathways** are provided throughout this Newsletter (e.g., planned connections to Cessnock; to the Fernleigh Track [and Tramway Track]; and to the larger Hunter Cycle Trail); which are likely to be funded through targeted grants, such as the **Get NSW Active** program.
- Further illustrative examples of **potential local shared pathways** branching from the *Log of Knowledge Park* trail head are provided in the Figure below.



### Engaging with Local Communities, Businesses and Organisations

- **As broad a range of trail users as possible** should be accommodated and consulted (when finalising each design or planning decision), including those with reduced mobility.
- An overarching goal should be to simultaneously **showcase and protect local environments and trail features** (as usage will typically promote community appreciation and long-term protection).
- **Practical, sustainable materials** should also be utilised that **minimise ongoing trail maintenance costs** (to Councils) and also **reduce impacts** on adjacent landowners or other stakeholders.

- As noted earlier, **engagement with stakeholders, community groups and other agencies should be ongoing**, to optimise the trail's benefits – including development of **shared resources** that are of mutual benefit to multiple agencies (e.g., trail users; Councils; NPWS; community groups; providers of educational, tourism and other resources, etc).

### ***Establishing a Regional Advisory Committee***

- Given RVRT progress and approvals during the last two years, **now is probably a very good time to establish a representative Regional RVRT Planning and Management Committee**, with a particular focus on integrated regional RVRT development, securing funding and optimising the trail's longer-term benefits for residents and visitors.

### ***Working Together to Secure Funding***

- Given the anticipated costs for this regional project, it is likely that **a mix of staged grants will be needed**, including **major up-front funding for larger trail elements** (e.g., trail heads; bridges; tunnel repairs; environmentally challenging sections) and **moderately sized grants for more localised sections** (e.g., shorter segments; links to other shared pathways; fences/barriers adjacent to private property; signage and facilities). Allowing **progressive public access to the RVRT**, before it is fully constructed, may increase regional awareness, promote usage and protection, and encourage further funding.
- **Joint applications from the participating Councils** (for local, state and federal funding) are also likely to qualify for a broader range of programs and to have a higher rate of success.

### ***Enhancing Regional Connectivity and Tourism – “Shiraz to Shore” Hunter Cycle Trail***



Extracted Figure from  
***Hunter Regional Plan 2041***  
(Dec. 2022, Pg 45):

The broader ***Shiraz to Shore Hunter Cycle Trail*** proposal (from Wine Country to the Lake/Ocean) is an initiative of Hunter Joint Organisation of Councils, and includes the RVRT as one of its essential elements.

It provides an exceptional opportunity to simultaneously support and strengthen our diverse range of Hunter local communities and to promote an image of the region as **an active lifestyle and cycle trail tourism destination**.

<https://www.hunterjo.com.au/projects/shiraz-to-shore-cycle-tourism/>



## ***Local Landcare Initiatives***

Our RVRT/NPWS Landcare Volunteers have recently been working in a potential future picnic area between Stockrington Road and Blue Gum Creek, within Stockrington State Conservation Area (near the old bridge, *see opposite*). Special thanks to Sam Mansfield and Leigh Gibbens who are co-ordinating these Landcare activities. The Landcare Volunteers **currently meet on the first Thursday of every month.**



## ***Richmond Vale Rail Trail (RVRT) Inc.***

RVRT Inc., the RVRT Supporters' Group, started as an informal group of cycling enthusiasts in the late 1990's and was registered as a not-for-profit organisation in 2015. Our members and supporters have long-standing interests in developing the RVRT as a key Hunter Region shared pathway and community resource. We are committed to working with local communities, other organisations and stakeholder groups, to help promote and deliver this important regional initiative.

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**RVRT Inc. AGM:**

9:30am, Thursday  
March 30<sup>th</sup> 2023

Conference Room  
Hunter Wetlands  
Centre, Shortland