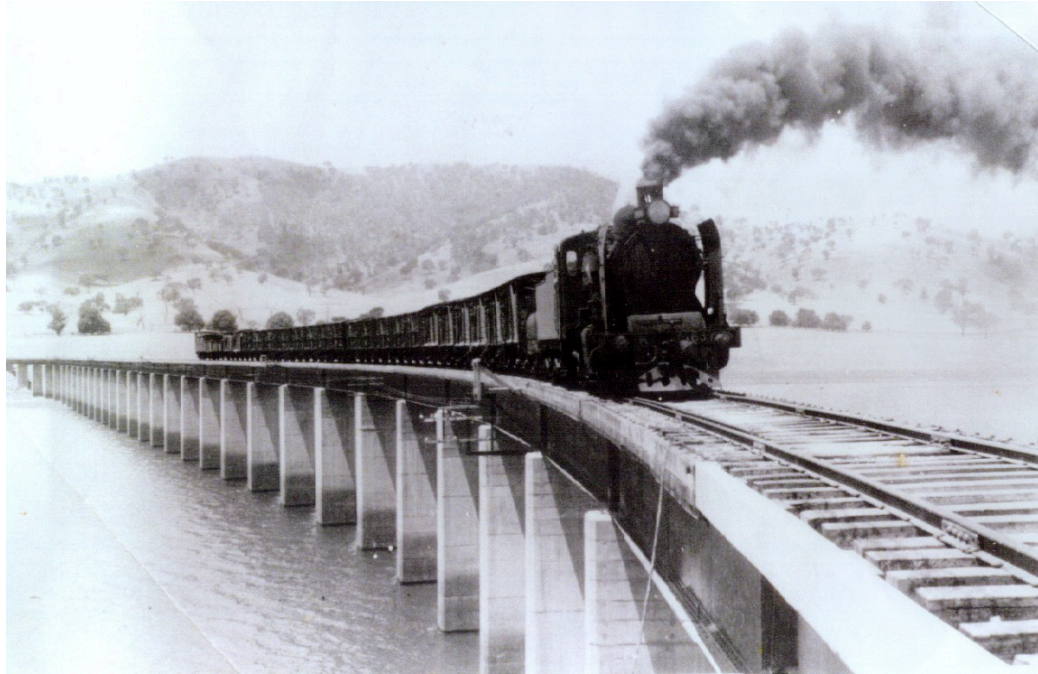


High Country Rail Trail Green Paper 2005:
Steaming Ahead



Stage Two of Rail Trail Development in Regional Victoria

*Appointment of Committee of Management for
Old Tallangatta to Cudgewa section of
former Wodonga-Cudgewa Railway*



INTRODUCTION:

- After the initial burst of successful activity with the Rail Trail from Wodonga through Tallangatta to the Mountains and Cudgewa, the time has come to examine the best community orientated way forward and to clarify the way ahead. This paper entitled "High Country Rail Trail Green Paper 2005: Steaming Ahead" seeks to draw out elements associated with successful rail trail operations, in particular the right way forward with the highest Irish Broad Gauge Branch railway line pathway in Australia and possibly in the world.

VISION STATEMENT:

- To develop a network of shared recreational trails between Wodonga and Corryong with links to the Murray River Trail and Murray to the Mountains Rail Trail.
- Appointment of Parklands Albury Wodonga Ltd as Committee of Management for the remaining undeveloped sections of the former Wodonga-Cudgewa Railway Line, between Old Tallangatta and Cudgewa.

GOALS:

- To provide a safe environment in which community members can pursue a range of recreational opportunities
- To create a trail which provides a multi-use recreational, environmental, heritage and tourist resource along the entire disused Wodonga – Cudgewa railway corridor
- To respect and preserve naturally, culturally and historically valuable areas whilst maintaining mutually beneficial relationships with all stakeholders
- To ensure trail development, management and marketing continues to be “owned” by the local community
- To grow the regional economy through developing and marketing a quality tourist product
- To promote rail trails as a “lifetime experience” rather than a just a travel destination.



KEY THEMES:



Access for all	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than 700 people participated in the official opening of the Tallangatta to Old Tallangatta section of the rail trail. A quality surface has facilitated recreational use by seniors on their scooters, parents with prams, runners, walkers and cyclists of all ages and abilities. A separate equestrian trail has improved safety for all trail users. • 68 km's of Crown Land (Old Tallangatta to Cudgewa) is not currently accessible to the public until a Committee of Management is appointed and negotiations with neighbouring landholders commence.
Community Managed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trail development has been through the efforts of more than 850 community volunteers; local businesses, three local councils, three local rail trail advisory groups (Wodonga-Sandy Creek Rail Trail Advisory Group, Tallangatta Rail Trail Advisory Group and the High Country Rail Trail Steering Group) and Parklands Albury Wodonga • In excess of 31,721 hours of time, expertise and materials has been donated and \$285,000 in grants and sponsorships. • Parklands will establish local rail trail advisory groups to develop and manage sections between Old Tallangatta and Cudgewa.
Cultural Heritage needs to be conserved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whilst 11 of the 21 timber trestle bridges in the Old Tallangatta to Cudgewa section remain unmanaged, our cultural heritage deteriorates. • Restoring these nationally significant timber bridges will provide both economic and employment opportunities for the local community.
Environmental Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since grazing ceased on the developed section of the rail trail, in combination with revegetation, weed and pest control measures, there has been a noticeable increase in the volume of high conservation value grassland and open woodland areas.
One third of the way there	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Department of Sustainability & Environment has only appointed Parklands as Committee of Management for 38km's (Kiewa River to Old Tallangatta) of the 103km railway reserve. • Parklands has demonstrated that this can be done successfully in partnership with the local community.

<p>Growing international bicycle tourism & eco-tourism market</p>	<p>With tourism in Australia forecast to grow from an anticipated \$66 billion in 2000 to \$98 billion in 2010, there is a great opportunity to draw high yield international visitors to this region:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • United Kingdom bicycle tourism is valued at A\$1,095 million pa • European bicycle tourism is forecast to reach A\$42 billion within 20 years (Sustrans 1998). • Canada's Bruce Trail's economic contribution is A\$15 million pa (Green 1999). • USA Local recreation users generated a total of A\$2.4 million per trail on the Heritage, St Marks and Lafayette trails (United States National Parks Service 1995). • Scotland study of the West Highland Way trail found that this trail attracted 90,000 visitors per year and supported 47 full time jobs (Aitken 2001) • North East Victoria – potential to become trail mecca with links between High Country Rail Trail, Murray to the Mountains Rail Trail, Hume & Hovell Track & Murray River Trail
<p>Local solutions for local issues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Until a Committee of Management is appointed for Old Tallangatta to Cudgewa, the local community is unable to either accept offers of expertise, materials or fundraise to make this undeveloped trail safe.
<p>Opportunity cost for rural businesses</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two local businesses which have diversified into bicycle hire and other related businesses along the developed section of the High Country Rail Trail have reported increased patronage from rail trail users. • However, the potential flow on of economic benefits of this rail trail will not be fulfilled until the remaining sections of the rail trail are developed. This is because a longer trail attracts higher yield visitors and encourages visitors to stay for longer. • Committee of Management for 95km's of the former Ovens Valley Railway Line was transferred to the Alpine, Indigo and Wangaratta Shires more than six years ago. The flow on economic benefits of tourist related expenditure from rail trail users is estimated to be in excess of two million dollars per annum (La Trobe University Research Paper & Murray to Mountains Trail User Surveys & Modeling). • The lack of appointment of a Committee of Management for the Old Tallangatta to Cudgewa section of the High Country Rail Trail since the late 1990's has cost the community in lost opportunity.
<p>Majority of neighbouring landholders supportive of rail trail</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Towong Shire contracted an independent Consultant to interview all neighbouring landholders between Old Tallangatta and Cudgewa. The final report reveals that the majority of neighbours support this rail trail. • This Independent Consultant also reported that the lack of any Committee of Management and subsequent lack of information on rail trail development has aggravated the situation, causing anxiety.
<p>Majority of rail trail land (69%) does not impact on farm properties</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The section of trail from Old Tallangatta to Cudgewa is approximately 68 km in length. Of this <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 9 km is on the road reserve ○ 27 km is through Parks Vic, State Forests & Plantation) ○ 11 km runs beside farm land ○ 21 km runs through or splits farm properties. • 21 properties adjoin the rail trail. A number of these owners support the development of this rail trail.

National and regional significance of tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A healthy tourism sector contributes to the economic and social well-being of all Australians. • Tourism in Australia is forecast to grow from an anticipated \$66 billion in 2000 to \$98 billion in 2010 and \$150 billion in 2020 (Ruthven, IBISWorld.com) • It is estimated that Albury Wodonga’s tourism industry is worth \$161 million per annum (IAW Visitor Attraction Plan). • Tourism provides significant business and employment opportunities in regional Australia, particularly for small to medium sized businesses. • It also provides a vehicle for Australians to interact with the natural and cultural environment
Return of Investment within 3 to 5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The capital costs to open the Old Tallangatta to Cudgewa section of trail are small relative to the anticipated annual return in visitor expenditure on what will be the most scenic rail trail in Australia. • Murray to the Mountains Rail Trail cost \$2 million to open 95km’s of trail in the late 1990’s. Revenue from rail trail user related expenditure has grown to in excess of \$2 million per year by late 2003 (various sources).
Strong Community Ownership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This paper combines the vision of the local rail trail advisory groups’ strategic plans. To maintain community “ownership”, it is vital that the vision, aims and objectives of the local community are incorporated into all aspects of trail development, management and marketing. • What may be appropriate for one section of the trail does not necessarily mean it will apply to other sections of the trail.
Visitor safety at risk on undeveloped sections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is considerable community pressure to open up the remaining 68km’s of Crown Land as a rail trail. • Whilst this land is not managed as a rail trail, risks such as poor trail surface and unsafe bridges pose considerable risks to the Crown as an increasing number of people access this public land.



STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS:

CURRENT POLICY	APPLICATION
Provide equitable access to public land for a diverse range of appropriate recreation and tourism opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 68 km's of Crown Land is currently not accessible to the public until a Committee of Management is appointed and negotiations with neighbouring landholders commence.
Plan, manage and monitor recreation and tourism use of public land to minimize impacts on natural and cultural values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weed and pest control is currently undertaken in an ad hoc manner by landholders who graze this land gratis between Old Tallangatta and Cudgewa. In contrast, weed and pest control is a prime focus of the local rail trail advisory group's volunteer working bee calendar. The 21 timber trestle bridges are deteriorating. It is not possible to fundraise to restore these bridges and make them safe as no one has been formally appointed as Committee of Management.
Provide and maintain appropriate recreation and tourism services and facilities on public land to foster visitor enjoyment and education and to ensure visitor safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No Committee of Management means no risk management signs, amenities or educational signage. Local youths have built and installed visitor amenities and risk management signs on the sections of the rail trail where Parklands is Committee of Management. Parks Victoria has installed barriers across the ten most significant timber trestle bridges to prevent pedestrian and vehicle access.
Encourage, facilitate and promote opportunities for appropriate recreation and tourism use on public land through research, communication and stakeholder consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local rail trail advisory groups have established a web-site, promotional brochures and events to raise the profile of the rail trail. Local rail trail volunteers have worked with neighbouring landholders to resolve issues, ensuring all stakeholders needs are considered. There is no opportunity for communication or stakeholder consultation with landholders between Old Tallangatta and Cudgewa while awaiting appointment of as Committee of Management publicly promised by the Minister for Planning in November 2002.



CURRENT POLICY	APPLICATION
Victoria, the World's Most Liveable State	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although Melbourne has been voted the World's Most Liveable City twice since 2002, there is an outstanding challenge. The only way to ensure excellent liveability for the entire State by all community and government sectors being able to implement the highest planning principles to development. • Until a Committee of Management is appointed for the Old Tallangatta to Cudgewa section, vital planning cannot be undertaken.
Victoria is setting the pace in rail trail development in Australia. Approximately 25 rail trails totaling over 1,300 kilometres will eventually be developed as multi-use recreation trails and conservation corridors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 570 kilometres of rail trails are currently available for public use in Victoria. • Most of the remaining 730 kilometres of this public land is sitting there relatively unmanaged. Appointment of Committees of Management will offer tremendous, vital opportunities for recreation and tourism. • Easy gradients, wide curves, interesting cuttings, bridges and reminders of railway eras now past make these disused lines great walking, cycling and horse riding tracks. • In addition, the railway reserves are ideal corridors for nature conservation.
Rebuilding Victoria's social infrastructure, the building blocks of prosperous and sustainable communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong community ownership of this project means we maintain the momentum to successfully develop a major recreational and tourism asset. • The completion of the entire rail trail will impact positively on the regional community in increased self esteem, pride and increased prosperity through increased visitors to this region.
Renew the highly successful Regional Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF) to continue the economic development of regional Victoria.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The High Country Rail Trail has already benefited from the reinstatement of the RIDF fund. • Commensurate vital funding stretches a very long way when the community manages projects that are community owned. 31,721 hours equating to \$587,000 in volunteer time, expertise and donated hours have been contributed so far.



RESOURCES REQUIRED:



STRATEGIC ACTION	RESOURCES REQUIRED	BUDGET ESTIMATE	YEAR
Bridges	Kiewa River footbridges being installed	in progress	2005
	Sandy Creek Inlet – 594 metres in length Engineering assessment in process.	\$ 500,000	2006
	Trestle Bridges x 21 – to be investigated. Total of 1,233 metres in length. Most only require new decking (\$147,984 for timber) and hand rails (\$246,640 for steel). Employment and business opportunities for local community and local plantation.	\$ 250,000	2007
		\$ 250,000	2008
		\$ 250,000	2009
Fencing	About half of the fences between Old Tallangatta & Cudgewa have fallen into disrepair. Estimate \$40,000 in materials & \$60,000 in volunteer time to reinstate	\$ 20,000	2006
		\$ 20,000	2007
Safety	Signage – standard signs installed @ \$100 per km	\$ 3,400	2006
		\$ 3,400	2007
Trail surface	Recommend upgrade with gravel from Old Tallangatta to Cudgewa.	\$ 40,000	2007
		\$ 40,000	2008
		\$ 40,000	2009

CAPITAL EXPENDITURE REQUIRED \$ 1,416,800

CONCLUSION

– in partnership with the community:

In fitting with the Victorian Government's pledge to rebuild and revitalize Regional Victoria, we urge the Minister for Planning to appoint Committees of Management for the remaining 730km's of disused railway land that has been reserved for rail trail development.

The first announcement is the appointment of Parklands Albury Wodonga Ltd for the remaining 68km's of the Wodonga-Cudgewa Railway Line. We are supportive of development and management by a partnership of local advisory groups supported by Parklands Albury Wodonga Ltd.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

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