

Draft Loddon Mallee Regionally Significant Trails Strategy

Executive Summary

Loddon Mallee Trails Network



June 2010

Executive Summary

The Loddon Mallee Regionally Significant Trails Strategy has identified seven trail proposals of regional significance that have the potential to attract domestic and international visitors to the area; showcase the unique landscape and cultural features; invigorate local communities; enhance the region's reputation as a key competitive and recreational cycling centre; and provide recreational opportunities for local residents. These seven regionally significant trails include:

Captain Melville's Trail

This 48km trail begins along the Loddon River in Bridgewater and follows low use secondary roads through attractive farming country to the Morning Star Mine near Inglewood. Trail users can divert into Inglewood to explore historic buildings and then continue through the Kooyoora State Forest over Mt Kooyoora to Melville Caves, via the wineries of Kingower. Visitors can walk, cycle and horse ride in certain sections and will have the opportunity to explore the bushranger, indigenous and gold mining heritage of the area.

Digger's Trail

The Digger's Trail is essentially an off-road 54km cycling and walking loop attached to the Goldfields Track which connects Castlemaine to Maldon, Newstead and Guildford. Its key features include historic townships and buildings, gold mining relics and Box Ironbark forests. A major attraction of this trail is the potential to incorporate the historic steam train between Maldon and Castlemaine as part of the overall trail experience.

Goldfields Track

This Goldfields Track connects Ballarat and Bendigo via 210km of off-road tracks suitable for walking, and in several sections, mountain bike riding. It forms part of the much larger Great Dividing Trail which takes in the towns of Bacchus Marsh, Ballan, Daylesford and Castlemaine. Key attractions of this well-known long distance trail include historic towns and buildings, Castlemaine Diggings Cultural Heritage Park, gold mining relics, Box Ironbark forests, Mt Alexander and the historic Coliban channel system. This trail received a grant of \$500,000 in December 2009 to upgrade the Ballarat to Bendigo section.

Murray River Experience

Rather than one long, connected trail, the Murray River Experience focuses on development of trails in key locations along the River, which link with existing town walking and cycling networks. Trails contained within the Murray River Experience include an 11km canoe trail at Cohuna; further development of 60km of walking, cycling, canoeing and horse riding trails around the River Redgums and wetlands of Gunbower Island; a 50km trail along the Murray River from Swan Hill to the culturally significant Nyah-Vinifera Forest; and a 48km Chaffey Trail (walking / cycling) from the Psyche Pumps south-east of Mildura to Wentworth (NSW) highlighting the Chaffey Brothers irrigation infrastructure and early settler history. There is potential for the Chaffey Trail to extend to Renmark in South Australia in the future, creating a three state trail and also potential to incorporate paddle steamers as part of the trail experience.

Mt Alexander Mountain Bike Hub

Already a favourite location of mountain bike riders from around Victoria, plans are underway to further develop a section of Mt Alexander as a 30.5km mountain bike hub incorporating a series of cross country and downhill trails. Great potential exists for events at this site and the proximity to public transport in Castlemaine and Bendigo will add to the accessibility of this hub. This mountain bike hub will form a self-contained loop attached to the Goldfields Track.

O'Keefe Rail Trail

Although one section of the O'Keefe Rail Trail already exists (19km), there is strong support to extend the trail beyond Bendigo and Axedale to Heathcote (a further 28km). This extension will greatly enhance the attractions of the trail by incorporating local produce and wineries in the Heathcote region. The extension of the O'Keefe Rail Trail to Heathcote provides opportunities to link a number of other trails and towns to Bendigo in the future, e.g. Shepparton, Nagambie, Kilmore and Mansfield.

Waranga Trail

Commencing in Heathcote, this 110km predominantly cycling trail travels 53km on existing low use forest roads through the Heathcote-Graytown National Park via the historic ghost town of Whroo to Rushworth. From Rushworth to Murchison, trail users will travel along a 22km section of rail trail which traverses the Waranga Reservoir and will then join with a yet to be developed trail from Murchison to Shepparton. Works are about to commence on the Murchison end of the Rail Trail. Should this trail be developed from Shepparton, there is potential for trail users to travel all the way to Bendigo and then onwards to Ballarat via the Goldfields Track.

Six other were trails identified in this report as being very worthy of development, although their appeal is more likely to be at a municipal level, at least in the short term. Like those trails identified as having regional significance, these trails are also strongly supported by the communities in which they are proposed. These six trails include:

- Goldfields to Murray Trail – Bendigo to Echuca (cycling / walking).
- Hanging Rock Trail – Woodend, Newham and Hanging Rock (cycling / walking).
- Cobb and Co Cycle Touring Trail – Maryborough, Talbot, Clunes, Mt Beckworth and Ballarat (cycle touring).
- Dunolly Cycle Tracks – Dunolly (mountain bike riding).
- Bendigo Bushland Trail – Bendigo (cycling / walking).
- Wombat State Forest Mountain Bike Park - Woodend (mountain bike riding).

Economic Impact

Of the thirteen trails identified in this strategy, the potential economic contribution is conservatively estimated at **\$7-\$8.7 million annually**, providing that trails are developed and managed to a high standard and are marketed appropriately. This is expected to provide the equivalent of **70 to 87 full time jobs** to service trail users. No multiplier effects have been used (multiplier effects would be expected to increase this amount to \$12-\$13 million), and no allowance has been made for increased tourist growth or event income. Approximately **230,000 people** are anticipated to use the trails each year (with many multiple visits, particularly by local residents). The total cost of establishing the 13 trails is **\$18.5 million** (regionally significant trails identified within this report are estimated at **\$11.5 million** and municipal level trails at **\$7 million**).

Trail Opportunities in the Loddon Mallee Region

- **Community strengthening** - through the establishment of 'friends of groups', which encourage expanded networks, skill development and a sense of belonging.
- **Economic growth** - from direct expenditure by trail users on items such as accommodation, food, beverages, fuel, etc.
- **Increased physical activity options for local residents** - which help to improve health and wellbeing and lower health costs.
- **Protection and enhancement of the environment** - through weed eradication, rubbish removal, tree planting, protection of flora and fauna, etc.
- **Creation of unique trail experiences** – such as travelling along one section of trail by steam train, learning about bushrangers and the gold rush, watching the Mallee sunsets and starry skies.
- **Promotion of indigenous culture** – through interpretation and the development of small Aboriginal operated guided walking and canoeing tours businesses.
- **Linking with other forms of transport** - such as paddle steamers, steam trains, aeroplanes, vintage cars, public transport, etc to form trail loops.
- **Facilitation of events** - that attract external revenue to the area.
- **Utilisation of technology** - such as podcasts, virtual interpretive centres, websites, etc to enhance the trail experience.

Challenges Raised by the Project

- **Lack of coordination and communication** – need stronger role by Loddon Mallee Trails Network and a trails development officer to assist with planning and coordination.
- **Lack of tools to assist trail planning and design** – demand for tools to assist trail management bodies to design trails, incorporating information about management options, maintenance, marketing, climate change, working with private land owners, minimising user conflict, understanding planning regulations, sustainability, etc.
- **Lack of research and data collection** – makes it difficult to benchmark and determine accurate and realistic economic impacts of trails.
- **Limited resources for trail developments** – need to clearly identify the benefits of trails to encourage allocations.
- **Market position** – limited marketing of region's trail opportunities; parts of the region are a significant distance from major markets.
- **Long distances and some areas of poor landscape amenity** - can be overcome by only developing trails in key areas and using other forms of transportation to create a loop.
- **Limited supporting infrastructure and services** – these will gradually build up as a result of visitor demand and as a result of working closely with services to offer support.
- **Uncertainty of carrying bicycles on public transport** – limits potential of region to promote trails as a 'car free' experience and to develop loops incorporating public transport.

Recommendations

Based on the opportunities and challenges identified in the Strategy, the following recommendations have been made:

Management and Coordination:

- Endorsement of **Loddon Mallee Trails Network** as the Management and Implementation Committee for the Loddon Mallee Regionally Significant Trails Strategy, with a focus on policy development, governance, lobbying, advocacy, research and local resource development.
- Development of a **trail committee** for every regionally significant trail to assist with management and operations.
- Appointment of a **trail development officer** to progress trail development in the region through policy development; regional level research; advocacy; liaison with other local and State Government agencies as well as trail management groups in other regions; assistance with funding submissions; and the development of suitable local resources and tools.

Research and Data Collection:

- Support development of **further research and data collection** at a local and state level into the benefits of trails; usage levels; and needs and motivations of trail users.

Planning:

- Development of a **suite of tools** to assist communities and government agencies to establish sustainable trails, establishment of 'friends of groups', risk management, incorporating information

about sustainability, accessibility, design, working with land owners, planning regulations, events, use of technology, climate change, minimising user conflict, provision of drinking water and management options.

Trail Development:

- Support the **development of the seven regionally significant trails** as identified in the strategy.
- Support the **development of the six municipally significant** trails as identified in the strategy.
- Development of partnerships with relevant State Government agencies and training bodies to assist in **business development** to support trail users, including support with insurance, the establishment of indigenous tour guiding businesses and the use of alternative transport to create loops.
- Support the development of **detailed design work prior to construction of any new trails** in the region.

Marketing:

- Continue to **liaise with relevant State Government agencies** to ensure that the Loddon Mallee region's trail opportunities are well promoted and accessible for people wishing to use public transport.
- Development of a **marketing strategy** for trails in the Loddon Mallee region.

Maintenance:

- Development of a **maintenance plan** for each regionally significant trail.