

Green light for rail trail's inaugural stage

BY MAX MCKINNEY

THE long-touted Richmond Vale Rail Trail has moved a step closer to reality after plans for the 32-kilometre shared path's initial sections in the Newcastle local government area won approval.

The Hunter and Central Coast Regional Planning Panel gave a green light to City of Newcastle's development application on Monday following an assessment meeting in November.

The approved project includes about the first third of the full rail trail, which has for years been proposed to run from Shortland to Kurri Kurri mostly following the old Richmond Vale rail line.

The council split the project into four trail "legs" - Shortland to Hexham Junction (3km) along a water pipeline track, Hexham Junction to Minmi (7.5km) along the rail corridor, Minmi Junction to Pambalong Nature Reserve (2.1km) which runs under the M1 Motorway and allows for a connection to Kurri Kurri, and a spur from Minmi Junction to Fletcher (700 metres) to link with residential areas.

About two kilometres of the Shortland to Hexham section, which runs through Hunter Wetlands National Park, requires approval from NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service to proceed.

The project was approved subject to 100 conditions of consent, including meeting a range of environmental and construction requirements.

Horses, dogs and any other domestic animals will not be allowed on the track.

The council was also



APPROVED: An artist's impression of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail passing through Hunter Wetlands National Park and (inset) a map showing the approved sections in the Newcastle local government area and future connections to Kurri Kurri and Tarro.

forced to drop two legs, from Hexham Junction to Tarro and a Hunter Wetlands Centre link at Shortland, from its plans. These will be subject to future applications.

Newcastle lord mayor Nutali Nelmes said the planning panel's approval was a "major step forward" for the future "regionally significant recreational and tourism attraction", but the \$21 million project would ultimately require external funding.

"Significant work went into preparing this DA and I want to congratulate everyone who played their part," she said. "This is an important milestone and I'm excited and very optimistic about the future of the Richmond

Vale Rail Trail."

Billy Metcalfe, president of advocacy group Richmond Vale Rail Trail Incorporated, said the planned 32-kilometre path had the potential to be an iconic attraction.

"This is a project with state significance, linking the coast to the valley will be a major achievement," he said.

"Reaching this point is exciting as many of the project's major planning milestones have been met.

"If we can get the current DA finalised and find funding, it's time to get on with the western end of the project, so the full potential of the [trail] can be unlocked."

The full trail runs through the Newcastle, Lake Mac-

quarie and Cessnock LGAs, the Wallsend and Cessnock state electorates and the Newcastle and Paterson federal electorates.

Greens councillor John Mackenzie described it as "the Fernleigh Track on steroids". "When completed, the full rail trail will be ... supporting commuting and recreational cyclists, but also people with reduced mobility, walkers, runners, bird watchers, families and community groups," he said.

"Importantly, it will enable access to high value conservation areas that were previously inaccessible.

"This is smart, clean, green investment in transport and our tourism industry."



LONG RIDE TO REALITY: David Atkinson and Billy Metcalfe in the tunnel under the M1 Motorway in 2013.

Mars taps into hydrogen generated heat

THE Central Coast Hydrogen Food Cluster and Star Scientific Limited have announced the first applied research project using hydrogen to provide heat for industrial-scale sanitation with Mars Food Australia.

"Over the course of the past year there has been a significant shift in the conversation around hydrogen with a new sense of urgency across industries," Star Scientific's Global Group chairman Andrew Horvath said.

"The global food manufacturing sector is demanding a green pathway

to process heat for cooking and cleaning."

Star Scientific created the Hydrogen Energy Release Optimiser (HERO). A catalyst is applied to a substrate in the form of a coating. When introduced to hydrogen and oxygen in a closed environment, the catalyst generates industrial scale heat.

"Our HERO technology answers the call; it is a non-polluting catalyst that uses hydrogen to generate zero emission, limitless heat necessary for many major industrial applications without any combustion," Mr Hor-

vath said.

General Manager of Mars Food Australia Bill Heague said as a global company it was committed to sustainable processes and investing in renewable energy and process heat.

"This pilot provides a real and tangible step towards a more sustainable future, and we are thrilled to be involved," he said.

The 18-month pilot is part of the Central Coast Hydrogen Food Cluster, a new industry-led hydrogen collaboration on the Central Coast between Star Scientific

Limited and Central Coast Industry Connect Limited.

"With the establishment of the Central Coast Hydrogen Food Cluster we have the platform for industry players to be involved in the development of alternative heat sources for the food industry using hydrogen," executive director of Central Coast Industry Connect Frank Sammut said.

"Having a global company like Mars Food Australia taking part in this first pilot project demonstrates the will and the need of industry to move forward with becoming

truly 'clean and green' and will showcase the enormous opportunity of this technology in the local and international marketplace."

Star Scientific will undertake extensive testing and consultation with Mars Food Australia, regulators and relevant government agencies, throughout the development process of the pilot. Once completed, it will provide a foundational framework for the development of other heat sources used in food manufacturing.

"We are really excited about being able to demon-

strate how our HERO can pave the way for Australian food manufacturers to reduce emissions, and very grateful for the support from all levels of government for this pilot," Mr Horvath said.

"For us, it's a recognition of the critical role that the cluster will play as an 'incubator' of regulatory issues for the hydrogen supply chain and more specifically, 'green' hydrogen made from renewable energy.

"This will enable us to identify challenges and provide solutions."

- MATTHEW KELLY