

Stakeholders meet to discuss further development of Kingaroy to Kilkivan Rail Trail

On August 1, Bicycle Queensland met with the major stakeholders for the Kingaroy to Kilkivan Rail Trail. This included staff from South Burnett Regional Council, Gympie Regional Council, the Department of Transport and Main Roads (TMR) and members of several users associations involved with rail trails across Queensland. The meeting was facilitated by Bicycle Queensland's CEO Alton Twine.

Bicycle Queensland set up this meeting to discuss how the user experience across the length of the rail trail can be improved. Within the South Burnett region, where that section is known as the South Burnett Rail Trail, the trail has removed the need to open gates, and implemented a bitumen surface. Within the Gympie region, gates remain on the trail and the surface is more akin to the original rail corridor, and shows sign of weathering after recent major rain events in the region.

With the popularity of bike riding growing, the potential for increased visitation in both regions are immense with an improved end to end experience. Cycling tourism is valued at approximately \$2 billion nation wide, yet only around \$200 million of that lands in Queensland.

Who uses the southern end of the Kingaroy to Kilkivan Rail Trail?

Data from the southern end of the Kingaroy to Kilkivan Rail Trail (also known as the South Burnett Rail Trail) shows that the trail has a wide variety of users. The South Burnett Rail Trail users association have recorded an increase in overnight stays in the region, regular events who use the trail and attract external visitors, and noted that the sealed surface also attracts adaptive and disabled users, who are unable to experience the majority of off-road rail trails.

This success has come around over time, with diverse grant funding to invest in infrastructure that doesn't have the same ongoing costs. The trail also connects to other tourism and cycling products – from mountain bike parks to wineries. As such it has diversified the user groups and created greater involvement from the local community and businesses.

The challenges for the northern end of the Kingaroy to Kilkivan Rail Trail

From within the working group, the challenges can be summarised into a few areas. Firstly, the condition of the trail isn't as appealing compared to the southern end. While few users would expect bitumen, a surface that can be ridden in entirety is important. There are a few safety concerns on the northern section due to damage from major rain events. While repair is one element, so is ongoing maintenance.

Being a user-friendly experience is also of concern, with numerous gates and steep gullies to navigate, the experience is distinctly different to the southern end. The

addition of facilities, and costs involved, is also an issue, with the need for toilets and potentially showers at a key location on the route.

Lastly – the group was concerned about how best to promote the trail, given how well it can connect to other rail trail infrastructure in time, a long-term approach around branding and promotion was highlighted as another priority.

Stakeholder feedback from the meeting

‘This was an excellent day,’ stated Alton Twine, BQ’s CEO. ‘We brought together people from different councils, the community to look at what we can actually achieve with this rail trail now and in the future. If you want outcomes, you have to bring people together, you need to establish a common voice and agree on common goals. And I think we have reached that today. I’m really positive about where this is going to go in the future. It is really good to have passionate people around the table with a clear vision.’

Jason Wyeth, from the South Burnett Rail Trail, was very happy with the meeting.

‘Today has been really powerful, being able to get everyone together to chat about the future of the KKRT. This is a little gold mine at this end of the trail. It is great to see Gympie Regional Council here and have both councils talking to each other. We have a few short term things to fix, and if we can get them fixed as soon as possible, then the future is very bright.’

Andrea Ferris (Kilkivan) was at the meeting representing the Kilkivan and District Community Care Association.

‘It is great that people have finally come together to talk about the trail. A great willingness and enthusiasm towards the future has been shown, with some great ideas.’

Andrea is also an avid horse rider and bike rider, but the benefits for the whole community are the most important.

‘As a community member I see so many benefits for the community and for other rail trails in Queensland too. If we can make a good model here for governance and strategy that can be replicated, maybe more people will develop rail trails as it will be easier to govern and manage it.’

Robyn Davies from the Department of Transport and Main Roads also attended, given their investment in the Queensland Cycling Strategy and the benefit of cycling to the economy.

‘The Queensland Cycling Strategy identifies the cycling economy, and powering the economy is one of the core priorities. We’re keen to do whatever we can, including local government rail trail grants that we had in the past. We are supporting councils to do these kinds of infrastructure for everybody in the community, for recreational, transport or general health reasons. They all have an economic benefit. We want to help councils

take advantage of the large cycling tourism market, to bring more people into their areas.’

‘With rail trails specifically, we have a lot of assets of our old rail lines. It makes sense to bring those back into use for the community, to create the best benefit from these older transport assets.’

Perhaps most exciting for a lot of attendees was the future potential, as noted by Robyn. Not just for other disused rail corridors, but connectivity in Queensland. There is scope for the Brisbane Valley Rail Trail to use the Link Trail to connect through to Kingaroy, then to Kilkivan, Theebine, and potentially using back roads and stock routes to get to Gympie.

‘Clearly there are a lot of people in the room today who can see that opportunity. But there are very few of those long, off-road, safe and give a cultural experience of going through small communities in Queensland countryside. Developing something like that, joining the Brisbane Valley Rail Trail (BVRT) to Gympie and connecting via train would be an incredible experience, something that people would come for not just nationally but internationally, if it is a good enough experience.’

The Mary Valley Rail Trail sits south of Gympie, running from Brooloo to Gympie, with stages to Kandanga and then Amamoor proposed. Chrissy Thompson and Craig Thompson from the Mary Valley Rail Trail were in the meeting. While the rail trail they advocate for isn’t connected to the KKRT, it falls within the Gympie Regional Council region, and a rising tide lifts all boats.

‘Hopefully the Mary Valley Rail Trail will be a 21-22km trail in the future, which makes it a point of difference to the KKRT or BVRT. However, if we can loop up with a major project in south east Queensland around connecting the BVRT to the KKRT and to Gympie, then I think that’s a win for everybody,’ said Craig.

‘It looks like our trail will get to Amamoor,’ Chrissy added, ‘and then there could be potential for it to get from Amamoor to Gympie, which is huge potential for the trail and the region in the future.’

There are key points to action from various stakeholders after the meeting, but with a very positive tone for the day, Bicycle Queensland feels like the future is bright not just for the KKRT, but for rail trails and off-road bike infrastructure throughout Queensland.