

Rail Trail Introduction

Part1

Chairperson:

Good evening and welcome to this information session hosted by the Murwillumbah and District Business Chamber, I am Ilze Jaunberzins the President of the Chamber.

To begin on behalf of our meeting tonight I would like to show our respect and acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land, of elders past and present and future on which this meeting takes place.

The purpose of tonight's forum is to provide for the options of either on track or off-track formations for the construction of Murwillumbah Crabbes creek section of the Northern Rivers Rail Trail.

This discussion is within the Tweed Shire Council resolution of its meeting on the 15th of February 2017 and in essence this resolution has five elements.

The options within these five elements:

1. One, Council chose to accept the federal funding for the rail trail
2. Two, invite tenders to the construction of the rail trail on the track formation with an option to submit and off formation alternative adjacent to the track, so on formation is actually where the track currently sits and off formation is parallel to that.
3. Number three is to seek state funding for the ongoing maintenance
4. Four to seek protection against selling off of the corridor by requiring an Act of parliament
5. Five to investigate the option of utilizing the corridor for driverless cars.

This meeting is about filling in the information gaps and providing the opportunity for a balanced discussion from a variety of perspectives. What we are doing tonight is not going to change the decisions that have been made by the Tweed Shire Council. They have decided there will be a rail trail. It is fully funded. It will go forward and it's up to us now to as a community to start the discussions canvassing the advantages of on track formation and the advantages of off track formation and whether a combination of two is also feasible.

The offer of \$13 million dollars to develop a rail trail option is one which is truly a one off opportunity for our area and needs to be I would suggest spent very judiciously based on extensive evidence and facts. This is the purpose of this evening to provide the community

with facts. The Chamber itself has no position, we are hosting this event for various and multiple voices to be heard.

And as the purpose of tonight is to explore the Council resolution, this is not the forum to argue for the return of heavy rail to the area in the short term as this is not within the scope of the council's resolution.

The evening will be facilitated by Lieutenant Colonel David Freeman (who has 28 years' experience in military and legal practice). I will desist from reading you the eight font double page resume but the summary, I'd like to pick out the highlights including 28 years' experience in the military and legal practice, deployments to east Timor Iran and Afghanistan and has been a consultant to the U.N on human rights.

In addition in 1996 Lieutenant Colonel Freeman was made a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society for completing the first Sea to summit of Africa and saving the life of a Norwegian mountaineer on Mount Kilimanjaro.

He is independent and experienced in fair and respectful facilitation who will ensure that the mission of this evening is fulfilled. And I need to alert you, that he has gifted his talent and expertise for us as a community for free so David thank you very much.

And so, it is in the spirit that all the information from the panel will be respectfully given and I am inviting us all to also respectfully receive it. I invite you to be open, curious and question deeply. Our panel has been selected from a range of expert areas of interest and also in view of the fact that the Council is preparing the parameters of the tender options it is most appropriate that no Council representatives are on the panel so that the integrity of the process is maintained.

Finally, some logistics. The evening has two parts, firstly seven minute presentations. Strictly seven from our panel then we'll have a short break and then a Q & A session driven by questions from the community sent by email or submitted tonight right at the start of the break time. We have already twelve quality questions have been submitted by the community and we've really welcomed the quality of the questions there. So if you want to put a question to the panel, you will have time to submit to Karissa and Peter during the ten minute break.

Now the evening's proceedings will be taped to ensure an accurate report record of the presentations, Questions and answers and we will conclude at 8pm.

I'm really looking forward to these next 2 hours of rich information, I'm sure I'm going to learn much more than I currently know from just reading snippets in the paper and so it is my pleasure to introduce our facilitator David Gower Freeman:

Part 1a

David Gower Freeman:

The purpose of tonight's public forum is to provide information to Murwillumbah and District Communities with the On and Off-Track options.

I will read out the biography to introduce you to each speaker, they are subject matter experts.

I will conduct the facilitation, it will be like a college debate. I will tap the bell at 6 minutes, double tap at 7, then I will encourage the speaker to finish so the next speaker can get up.

Public declaration, my family has been involved in Murwillumbah for the last 103 years, we have a modest farm on the border - but we still send our products through Shoebridges transport down to Sydney, we have a love of Murwillumbah and do all our agriculture business here.

In the spirit of goodwill, I invite the forum to be respectful to the speakers - you will get your opportunity in the 2nd half to speak (if burning question jot it down and it will be asked 2nd half)

Eva Heath – Member of the Board of MDBC will now read out a statement from your Mayor - This is rail trail meeting from **Mayor Katie Mill-**

“Sorry I can't attend but I hope the following will assist with clarifying in council passed a resolution at the meeting on the 15th February in essence to:

1. Accept the Federal funding for the Rail Trail
2. Invite tenders for the construction of the rail trail (for on trail with an option to submit an off trail option alternative adjacent to the track)
3. To seek state funding for ongoing maintenance
4. To seek ongoing protection from selling off the corridor by providing an Act of Parliament
5. To investigate the option of utilizing the corridor for driverless cars

With the Federal Gov now matching State promise funding, this means the estimated establishment funds are now secured for the on formation rail trail option.

There has been no investigation into the costs of an off-formation Rail Trail, Council staff have suggested this option could be 50% more expensive. The tender process will reveal whether the off-formation trail formation is viable, if there are any bids.

The latest report estimate costs between \$300,000-450,000 every year.
Neither the maintenance costs or asset renewal costs have currently been secured.

There is a risk such costs may fall back to council in the future, even if a Community Rail Trail Trust is established.

A 1% shire wide rate rise would provide approx \$500,000 per year.

A decision still needs to be made whether the rail trail should be bitumen or gravel (or parts of each)

This needs to be decided, whether it's on or off the formation.

Council is currently investigating the possibility of a soil stabilization product (often used for roads in mining operations) which would provide a natural gravel look - but a more stable base than just gravel.

If a tender for the on formation trail is successful, the track would have to be removed - it could be sold for scrap metal or potentially stored possibly even adjacent to the track.

There will obviously be better opportunities for tourism and transport in the corridor if both the track and the adjacent trail was utilized.

- Rail explorer bikes, push/pull trolley, cars and golf-type carts are examples used elsewhere around the world on used tracks
- Such venture starts out just using some of the sections of the track, simply avoiding difficult sections, or using a multiple of transport options.

Councilor Cherry has spoken her experiences in using the push/pull trolley cars in Germany (that her family enjoy on their trips) she advises that passengers just disembark and can jump onto an adjacent trolley going another direction to continue on their route.

A Vintage style Tram in Melbourne uses the same type track as our rail track, but would not need the standard weight bearing bridges as fostered in the ARUP Report.

In my opinion it would be a shame if these options are not fully investigated before this significant piece of infrastructure is lost forever.

David Gower Freeman:

Thank you Eva

Apologies have been received from Russell Moore and Kim Marsden

I will introduce Jane Lavery from the NSW Business Chamber - Jane is the Regional Manager for the Northern Rivers NSW Chamber.

Jane has been an Economical Development Professional for the Northern Rivers for 14 years and has worked for both Ballina and Byron Shire Councils in this capacity, and also as a consultant to other councils in this region developing economic development, strategies and or working on major projects.

Jane works in partnership with Northern Rivers businesses, and industry stakeholders to improve business conditions, improve local economies, and has a passion for creating employment and opportunities for young people in this region.

Jane Laverty:

Thank you, David.

Thank you to the (Murwillumbah District Community) MDBC for bringing us all here, I give them a lot of credit for making this happen.

I would also like to acknowledge the traditional Custodians of this land, both past and present, and thank them for sharing their knowledge.

And I thank all of you for being here.

I know this is a topic for which people are very passionate, and I thank you for taking time out to hear a variety of perspectives, and keeping your mind open.

I am part of the NSW Business Chamber, and we are the peak body for business across the state, we play a role in advocacy, helping business grow and helping them manage employee relations.

I was fortunate as a young person to grow up in Western Sydney with access to employment opportunities and the ability to develop my core skills through a variety of experiences that set me on my career path.

This is because I had both access to jobs, as well as access by transport to those jobs.

Young people in this region do not have the same opportunities or access.

Both access to jobs and transport.

I think this is the opportunity that we have in front of us.

I believe we have 2 separate issues/opportunities here:

With everyone look at the same infrastructure to be used.

1. Tourism product - of quality/attraction that can create development with jobs and work for our young people

This region has one of the highest unemployment rates across the state, one of the very highest youth unemployment across the state. There are also very misguided numbers of under employment.

I would say to you that it is not too far of a stretch to say we are in a crisis in this region in terms of jobs (for young people particularly).

2. The other issue is public transport - that enables our community to move around the region timely and comfortably

When I am talking to people over the last 2 years we have had this discussion with the community - this is what they see as the main issues.

When I came here 14 years ago, it seemed like we had 3rd world public transport. I also still feel this way, I have also been far enough immersed in the data and the constraints of our infrastructure - our geography and the layout of our infrastructure, that what I think we are in is a chicken and egg situation.

We need the people (the visitors) to create a big enough mass to allow and get the funding for the infrastructure, so they are fully linked.

So I would like for us to think of the opportunities in front of us differently. I just don't think we have put the energy into the public transport conversation in the right way. We look at our existing infrastructure and assume it was what it once was.

Where would we put our transport solutions? I am putting it out there to consider - not just old rail but new land towards transport, as they do in QLD and Sydney.

This tourist product solution is really timely, we have great tourism products in this region - to look at attracting international tourists to contribute into local economies and not drain it from our local communities.

We need to get the economics right to have a sustainable economy.

If we fight and operate without strategic perspective we won't get these opportunities again. We need both the confidence and capacity to get these things to happen. We need to demonstrate to government, that when we are talking about something we are passionate about, that we can work together. (Otherwise State Government will go elsewhere to communities where people do like working together).

I will finish off with this - Great societies grow where good people plant trees for shade that they know they may never sit under. I ask all of you to think about our future generations and what actions will ensure they have great opportunities in front of them for jobs and access.

David Gower Freeman:

Ok now Cameron Arnold, NSW Tourism. Cameron is a Tweed Shire Resident, currently the regional peak authority for Tourism in Northern NSW.

Cameron has been involved in Tourism in the Byron and Tweed Shires for the last 10 years, he is Vice President of the MERIT Group, being involved since inception of the concept. He is very aware of the need for Tourism products that capture the true essence of the Northern Rivers, (That the Rail Trail will).

Cameron Arnold, NSW Tourism:

Thank you David, I am going to take you all on a journey down the river so follow me.

I just wanted to start by saying I am the tourist guy in the group - the reason I got involved in the project from day 1 (originally started at Tweed tourism and then moved into Byron shire and regional tourism) -

What we recognize is the fact that there are not enough things to do in the region - so we need to develop product that shows off what we have here- that sticks to the true essence of what we know in this region (but develop it to attract more people and disburse the hot spots people flock to).

To disburse tourist out of Byron and into the hinterland into places we know need the economic stimulus is something we need to really work on.

When the rail trail topic came up - I instantly jumped on to it as ticking this box.

What does the rail trail exactly do?

- There are 500 plus of them around the world - it is not just a bike track
- It is to reignite a disused location to disburse tourists and give them an experience of that local area/taste and flavour and help promote jobs and employment
- The best trail we have seen is in NZ in Queenstown
 - Kate Parker is the CEO of the Queens trail 80km track/trail so we have spoken to her
 - Their tourism has grown all year round since the track
 - All The villages that sit along the trail are now booming (not just in winter)

In investigating the option, I want to explore some ideas -

When considering what on earth to do here, we need to establish a world class tourism product that can attract people internationally - it can't be a small bike track.

It needs to be sustainable and we can't constantly rely on council and ratepayers to pay to sustain it.

It is all about doing it properly so it is self-sustainable.

Ideas to throw out there, that you may see on a rail trail - no matter whether it is tarmac, gravel, bitumen

- A train
- Segway tours
- Solar power buggies
- Mobility scooters

- Electric bike tours
 - Cycle tourism is not about the fittest people riding on the trail, it is about people that may not have access
- Community and fundraiser events like fun runs

I would like to share this one concept with you about the Tweed Rail Trail

- When we talk about packaging, we talk about selling the whole package and experience
- You can start at Murwillumbah, have a tour on the river
- Then head to the start of the Rail Trail - and head to the Regional gallery
- Then stay overnight in a B&B
- Then back on the trail to Crabbes Creek
- You get picked up from there and have a saltwater beach experience
- And you are getting all that experience and what is best in the Tweed, based on a Rail Trail product (That is what it will do)

So that is the Rail Trail stuff - I am also a resident, I have 4 kids (my eldest son has had to move to Melbourne to study and for work).

When you think about what jobs this will create / and what jobs will come.

- It is not just cafes, it is marketing, its managing, its accounts
- It is everything that goes with Tourism and the career pathways it creates.

I am going to finish up by saying this is not just a bike track, it is an experience that showcases what we have to offer in the Tweed and right through the North Coast (And this is stage 1 - ultimately the whole 132 km needs to be completed and then we have a world class product)

David Gower Freeman:

Thank you, Cameron, now our 3rd speaker tonight is Bill Fenelon, Bill is a long term Northern Rivers resident with concerns for the community, Bill has an advanced diploma of transport operations and also an international ship master, Bill will now address the public Forum thank you.

Bill Fenelon:

Good evening everyone and thank you for coming, I have been an advocate for the railway for the last several years - and I got onboard for no other reason that I couldn't stand to see the waste of the public infrastructure.

I am also a cyclist and I ride a lot of the cycle ways around the world, and I tonight want to talk about the advantages of building the rail trail off formation and allowing the tracks to be saved - save the line for the future.

I have a series of photos which show a pathway can be built alongside a railway.

There is a lot of talk about protecting the corridor by building the rail trail with the railway.

The railway is already protected and still in place between Condong and Murwillumbah and obviously over the years people would have like to get their hands on it since 2004 - and they haven't been able to through the protection of Section 99a of the Transport Protection Act. The railways are already protected all throughout the state.

If we were to look at on-track formation, it would require the tracks to be lifted and for this protection to be removed. Once the protection is removed, the land will revert to Crown land - the corridor all the way to Casino.

Can I ask the question, if you talk about protecting the whole corridor, do you talk about protecting the whole 30 metres through Byron Bay? Through the whole business Centre?

If the protection is removed, we don't know what is going to happen to a lot of this area and real estate.

If we were to consider a push bike trail alongside the rail -

They say the rail is never coming back - the reason it stopped in the first place is for political reasons - for a long time the Nationals ranted and raved about how important the rail was for us to provide jobs, and nowadays the Nationals are telling us it's not important anymore and it's never coming back.

Well I say the Rail is never coming back with the bunch of current politicians that we have. That might change, if we can keep the tracks down for long enough.

Allowing the corridor to change is extremely short sighted.
Populations will extend through the current corridor and trains will be needed.
We are talking in 50 years' time here.

The North Coast regional plan in the next 28 years is 46,000 new homes in the Tweed Shire. So for tourism already, we are already the 3rd most likely tourist destination.

We have the people and the agriculture here to support the railway when we need it, if not now.

Otherwise when we do need it again in the future, Taxpayers will have to bear the cost of purchasing new land to buy new railways if the corridor is lost - within 20 years taxpayers will be asked to fork out the money for new land.

At the moment all that land is owned by the railway.

As an example, QLD railway has paid \$300 million for 4.1km of new track. So, the extension to the airport - \$1.8 billion.

This is because, they don't own the corridor and they had to buy the land - and the most expensive part of the railway is the land itself.

Then there is the surveying and the leveling, and the bridge piling - when all of this is already in place, and we will destroy it if we rip it up.

I advocate that we build the cycle way as well -as I think it is a great thing to have, but it would be the greatest advantage to have it alongside the train track.

I am going to wrap it up at that.

David Gower Freeman:

Thank you, Bill, great pictures and very informative. So we have another engineer now, Tom Reiner.

Tom is a long time resident of the Tweed and a civil engineer by profession. He has been involved in many constructing major projects including railway, road, bridge, airport and solar farms.

Tom is entrepreneurial and innovative to find ways to make things happen - and is passionate about providing for the transport opportunities in the local community and opportunities to come.

Tom Rayner:

Thank you, I will get straight into it - I am here as I am sick of the misinformation and fights of whether the Rail Corridor should be rail trail or for trains.

Money figures to fix up the rail train are

misleading. The most important objectives

are:

1. To save the transport corridor for future generations - population growth is high and is not going to stop, we will need to the corridor
2. Public transport services - along the line is about nil, people are using cars as there is no other option
3. Regional economic development - Tourism - this region needs visitors/tourists to spend money here as at the moment they are driving past.
4. Provide facilities for outside activities - when the rail trail is built it will be a great provider of this and I will be on my bike.

The failure of our past governments for maintaining the line and providing train services that meets community requirements has left this region short again - funding a rail trail is a positive step forward.

It is not the best solution if they look at building it on the current rail line and it requires the current track to be removed. Take up the rails, our transport will be eroded and gone.

Tweed Shire Council's suggestion to build on the rail tracks (changing the existing track) is not the best solution and is expensive.

It involves removing 50,000 metres of railway line, removing approx. 50,000 railway sleepers, removing 34,000 tons of ballast and placing it down the side of formation (that has had many years of chemical application, brake pad asbestos, possibly the arsenic content but I am not too sure about that)

The best location for the rail trail is off - formation - alongside with an average of a 30 metre wide corridor to work with.

The rail will use approx. 2.5 metre in gravel width - and save width of the corridor for the future.

Tweed Shire Council has not costed this option - and the off formation has had a lot of discussion, though not placed real costs, only to say it may cost 50% more for the off-formation.

Now I have done some more work on this - and costed it - to run alongside as off-formation -

- That figure is \$8.137 million dollars including GST
- That is about 50% less

Or if the existing cycleway between Mooball and Burringbar is used there is a saving of around \$800,00 with to total being \$7.3 million dollars.

With this proposal the transport rail corridor is safe.

The rail trail people, and those in the community that want exercise, should be happy.

Council will construct the Murwillumbah - Crabbes creek rail trail along the track within its funding budget.

But what about the other needs? Community transport, economical tourism development - the solution is -

- A frequent light axle-road Tram service between Burringbar and Murwillumbah

Passenger studies show that in rural/regional areas (which is our area) - there is a requirement of many more pick up/drop off points

We have a major growing tourist destination in Byron, with people wanting more places to visit - and that should be Murwillumbah (and everything we have to offer).

Murwillumbah is begging for more visitors and it isn't connected.

A tram is the answer - but I thought I better test whether a frequent timetable can work - an hourly service including Burringbar, Mullumbimby - around 16 trips per day serving villages, school kids, community and tourists. Also for music festivals, etc.

Looking at Melbourne type trams, with spares for busy times.

Each having solar panel packs, and you can bring your bicycles and there is room to put them. We can use the remaining money left over from the savings of going off-formation. Trams are light, can stop/start easily, not as many limits to track capacity - This would help keep the current railways, increase tourism, encourage transportation.

Provide a rail trail - are we doing something?

I propose the solution to be

Construct a fit for purpose rail trail beside the track, as Byron is doing, propose an expression of interest for research and development. Work with Byron, the Mayor is keen to work with Murwillumbah and bring visitors here.

Let's all work together to achieve greatness for the community - Thank you.

David Gower Freeman:

Our next speaker is Patrick Knight, Patrick's principal qualifications is a Civil Engineer from the University of Newcastle in 1969, post graduate master in Transport in 2015, and employment through local government engineering for over 50 years.

Currently in Ballina Shire Council part time (2 days per week) his rail trail involvement - is participating with Northern Rivers rail trail for the last 5 years - and has involvement in the Casino to Lismore / Eltham section of the rail trail - and preparing design proposals and cost estimates.

Patrick Knight:

Thank you, David thank, you to Chamber, and thanks everyone for coming.

As David said, my initial involvement with the rail trail is 5 years ago.

1. My first priority is to preserve this corridor and this marvelous community.
2. My second motivation, while I understand all the benefits of tourism, I think the biggest benefits is for the community - it joins villages and communities.
 - It would mean people could cycle from one village to another

If it is not constructed as a rail trail - my fear is that the corridor could go. I would hate to see the Casino/Murwillumbah rail go downhill and be sold off.

As far as Murwillumbah / Crabbes creek - TSC have decided to tender out an on/off-formation for options.

My own work on the rail trail in the last few months has been on the Casino/Lismore/Eltham section - and I can give you some insight.

- We have had a small number of volunteers engineers assessing each bridge
- There are a number of bridges between Casino/Lismore/Eltham around 40 (Casino to Lismore) and 20 more between Lismore and Eltham

- The vast majority of the bridges are Timber, and the interesting thing about these bridges is that they are all built of approx. 300 ml (300 movements) of square season timber
- There is generally 3 run within each span
- In our investigation of the existing bridges, invariably mostly they are rotten
- Part of this is because in the years prior to closing the council did not put the money in it should have, they bandage a lot instead of fixing it
- Because they are square girders that water sits on top of - they are subject to wet and rot constantly
- Most of them are unserviceable now due to the rotting- in 5-10 years 99% of these bridges will be gone.

To solve this problem for the rail trail - we have had an engineer designer to come up with a solution - most bridges have concrete at ground level - we can replace the timber with galvanised steel and reinforced concrete on the top.

We have found we can replace the bridges between casino and Eltham at a reasonable cost - so, because we do need to use the existing bridge stands - we do have to be on the formation.

I guess with other off track options, you can certainly engineer the track off the formation. The principal problems really are cost. There a lot of tracks on high formations above flood plains.

There is also much of the line in narrow spaces where couldn't fit both in the formation. We could engineer to have that part of the track further away, or more cuttings, you can raise more formations- but it is a matter of cost.

It is extremely difficult in areas that have tunnels (it is extremely difficult to bypass tunnels by going offline and similarly with the bridges)

- And there are around 160 bridges between Casino and Murwillumbah

If we reuse the foundations of those bridges - we can use fairly economical bridges, including pedestrian bridges, using the foundations and doing it economically. Off the formation we would need to rebuild for all of the rivers, tunnels, roads, etc.

So in the end it is an expense thing - and the other issue of course is if we are trying to build a world class railway for international tourists - being on the railway is the best track to be on.

If you want to visit the Northern Rivers, Tweed Valley - being on that formation gives you the view, the expanse, and it is what we need to attract visitors and for us locals who want to cycle for longer.

It is far more expensive and we may not get the grants off track - and we do not give the same experience to the user.

I feel we may not achieve the rail trail objective being off formation, and we may eventually lose the corridor.

Let's use it and let's get a community benefit out of it.

David Gower Freeman:

Ok keeping a theme with public transport and knowledge in this area, we have Jeff Meers as our next speaker.

Among other careers Jeff has worked for Qld Dept of Transport for 20 years - involved in the policy and planning for public and active transport, the last 4 years prior to retirement Jeff was the director of planning programs, including cycling and walking infrastructure.

I invite Jeff to address the Forum.

Jeff Meers:

Good evening, I am going to present a series of images and talk about the history and background of how we got to where we are, I will talk about the rail trail organisation, some of the misconceptions out there at the moment - and if we have time some of the issues around public transport.

We all know the railway line closed in 2004, due to decision of government. Between 2004-2010 there have been a lot of efforts and study to get the trains back on.

In 2012 the state government did a condition assessment and transport study

In 2013 - they used their results from those investigations in a report and released it as the Murwillumbah Transport Study.

That report in essence said it was costing too much to run and maintain the railway, that there was a drop in passengers, that the demands have disappeared - and there was no driver to reinstate the trains at that time.

Their key recommendations were that the rail line does not meet the needs of the public transport needs of the region - in their study it explained the bus services needed some significant improvement.

I'm sure we will all agree with that.

The report briefly explored the option of the Rail trail - amongst other options that it looked at for the use of the corridor - and it said that this option for Rail Trail should be looked at further.

So in 2014 the government issued a Rail Trail Feasibility Report - that looked at the Casino-Murwillumbah and use of a Rail Trail.

That looked at what others were doing around the world, what was involved, and decided that this corridor, and for potentially strong benefits of this community, that the project is likely to be viable.

That was followed then in 2015 by some money that the government has put aside for Tourism regional infrastructure and out of that the Tumbarumba rail track was funded, as a pilot rail trail to see how things work in NSW.

They are about to finally start building.

At the same time last year, and in 2016 councils around the region were making submissions, Tweed was successful last year in obtaining \$6.5 million from the State government and then a further \$6.5 from the federal government has announced early this year.

And I congratulate the Council on their foresight and achieving investment in public infrastructure for this region. \$13 million doesn't fall out of the sky very often in NSW so Tweed residents should consider themselves lucky.

At the same time as all this was happening, our group crowd funded \$75,000 to prepare a business case for the Casino-Eltham section.

So that is sort of the background that gets you to where we are at the moment.

I will now bring you to our rail trail organisation - the Northern Rivers Rail Trail Incorporated -

- After the government report came out in 2013, saying they were looking at bringing the trains back but it wasn't a good idea anyway - a group of 8-9 people got together and were a group of people with different skills (retired people business, reps from the councils, people from housing and tourism) and their goal is to secure funding for rail trail Casino to Murwillumbah (and it remains our goal)
- It has only expanded slightly since then, they recognise they needed engineering, planning, marketing skills and we have some ex- Government people in here helping us

My reason for joining the organization is my background in transport (I am well aware of how much making tracks available for public transport can help a community - in terms of health, productivity, etc.)

I retired and have seen the empty road corridor here and wondered why nothing has happened - I started exploring - and seen while there was a report saying no viable cause of getting the trains back - though there was a group actively working towards getting a Rail Trail.

So the group is active, we have crowd funded from the local community; we are bringing a case to the Council and working on it.

Some of the misconceptions that I currently think are out there -

- **Some people think that our organisation is responsible for stopping the trains coming back**
 - That certainly is not the case (we wouldn't have that power anyway)

- It is the government that have decided to stop the train - certainly not us
- **People think we want to rip up the tracks**
 - Again, that is not true - our goal is to get a quality product from Casino to Murwillumbah
 - How that is constructed is not our business, we just want a quality product to bring jobs, allow people to commute and provide safe and effective conditions
 - Where and how it gets built is a decision for the people that handle the money and those that make those decisions
- **Some people claim we want to sell of the corridor**
 - We certainly don't want to sell off the corridor, we want to keep it so we can use it as a Rail Trail
 - The government is already selling parts of the corridor in Byron
 - If it continues to be unused - they will sell it, not us, not Council, but government
- **Some say we are making money out of it**
 - No we are not - we are a committed group of people wanting to do something for our community and build a good piece of public infrastructure to benefit the company.
- **There is not a big company behind our organisation**
 - We are small and rely on donations

Thank you.

David Gower Freeman:

Our second last speaker tonight is Peter Finch - Peter is down from the Sunshine Coast and is the co-director of a company with low hanging radio stations on Bribie Island, Sunshine coats and also studying for his Masters of Business Administration through University in the Sunshine Coast and hold Arts degree and Bachelor of Communication.

Peter is going to talk about technology and maintaining infrastructure such as electric trams, or even steam or diesel trains.

I invite Peter to address to forum:

Peter Finch:

To the members of the Chamber of Commerce, members of the panel and community members thank you and welcome.

I first become interested in the Rail business, through a friend who holidays here regularly and asked me if I was interested in trains. He showed me an article where they were proposing a diesel train for this region.

And I thought - that won't work well in Byron with the noise, the fumes, etc.- I started thinking the trams would run electric, be lighter and less disruptive, run on battery, a clean source of clean energy. That would provide a better service - however we know the diesel train has gone ahead anyway in Byron and has had passengers.

When I discussed with people whether they had considered running batteries instead - we have been able to replace the diesel with solar panel batteries instead in Byron so far.

The idea of getting involved in Tweed is to extend the Byron line, should that ever eventuate - to try and connect Tweed and Byron.

Byron currently has over 1.7 million tourists per year - most of these tourists are confined to beach through the day and pubs/clubs at night as they don't have anywhere to go.

If we can try and bring them up here we can show them the delightful part of town. Why not tap into the tourists that are sitting in Byron currently.

The options of promoting the Rail Trail as well as keeping the tracks in place - have good marketing initiatives.

(There is more to Byron than the Bay)

And we have extended it to - there is more to the North Coast than just Byron Bay.

They can tram it to Tweed -there is a lot in Tweed that can be attractive to Byron visitors.

It is not just about dropping off hundreds of visitors to Murwillumbah everyday - it is about a carefully planned tourism sector in Murwillumbah, with the tourist operators to work together - and create opportunities.

It is something that would be a great benefit to Tweed - even for training and job opportunities for students at TAFE, university, and for young people to be employed on the trams, etc.

I believe it is about working with Byron Shire Councils and the current proposals already in place - and joining them both together.

Burringbar for example is a great little town and could be opened to visitors.

So that is about it from me- I see it is electric trams- solar charged and connecting the towns. I am happy to answer any questions after, thank you for listening.

David Gower Freeman:

Our final speaker is a Farmer, I guess we hadn't thought about it until Sue Harnett from Harnett's Dairy farm (103 years old) spoke of the considerations of the rich agricultural area and biosecurity issues.

I invite Sue to discuss and raise a number of issues.

Sue Harnett:

We have a local dairy farm in Burringbar, cattle farm, and we have a cheese factory there as well.

We also belong to a number of farmer groups, and I am basically relaying conversations I have had with farmers, and concerns they have over the Rail Trail, and biosecurity.

We know how important local food is and our green environment is to this community, and a major concern farmers here have is that we are already very close to an international airport, and NSW Farmers' Federation have highlighted that foot and mouth can be a concern from international visitors walking through our farms on Rail Trail.

I guess it needs to be highlighted to the council that while farmers aren't against, we want to ensure farmers interests are still given priority in this project.

Some are for it, some are against, some farmers fear their livelihood is going to be lost - I think if we can have an open discussion about it, and Tweed gives us a priority that our livelihoods are not jeopardized, then there can be a positive outcome.

Fencing is a huge issue - we want to ensure that the Rail Trail is fenced correctly to avoid trespassing, littering, bringing dogs off lead (that can chase cattle, introduce lice that can cause abortion in cattle, they can spread ticks)

E.g. if we had a tick outbreak on the property either side of us that is 500 cattle quarantined, a 12 month and high cost it would see.

The danger of bringing horses on the trail - they can bring viruses also - and we aren't sure if they are trying to allow horses.

There is an existing pathway through Burringbar, and it is not properly maintained - they need to be properly maintained - use existing paths where possible like this one (that can be upgraded).

There are a number of farmers with open sheds near the railway line. These sheds cannot be locked up, they have expensive equipment - it is isolated, and if the general public has access - there could be an increase in theft.

Farmers want to know how we are going to answer these questions, and these problems are addressed.

Thank you.

Letter from Councillor Pryce Allsop addressed to the community read out by MDBC Board member Peter Hiron:

To the community,

It is vital for Tweed looking long term and at its future objectives - plan for our children and our children's children - and understand there is a strategic objective to be taken to arrive at the best possible outcomes.

We certainly need to cater for our locals and the betterment of services where possible.

We also need to capitalise on our Tourism opportunities.

How much traffic can we attract and flow from the Gold Coast Airport through our beautiful Tweed valley, all the time promoting economic development through our region.

I believe Government (state and federal) on both sides of the political arena, can see now the needs of and potential for the Tweed Valley and Northern NSW.

They are prepared to start investing in our region's future and the betterment of our region.

There is a document titled 'The North Coast Regional Plan 2036' - and it is available and I would strongly encourage people to look it over as it is a strong plan for the North Coast and its community's future.

What I believe is that we need to understand is our vision of Tweed and to some extent what we are all about - the Arts, its culture, foods, sport and all that engages our senses.

This Trail is to provide a scene of a nature filled journey through the smaller communities and our history.

The communities that have struggled to survive through the test of time, sharing everything Tweed - the local of time and experience away from the modern worlds hectic pace.

Some of us enjoy this level of existence on a regular basis - but the appeal to many people is to enjoy being removed from the hectic pace and what others might take for granted.

The basis of the Trail is to provide a world class attraction that needs to be experienced - and to surrender yourself to something that shares a special world with its visitors.

We have tools that share more than a glimpse of our environment but now we can further share that experience.

I have tried to highlight that appeal - that same appeal that draws numbers of people to our regional gallery - turning off the senses and going mainstream isn't my personal vision for Tweed.

I believe that if you want a Byron style holiday or experience - then that's where people should go.

I have heard it said that a bike rail would never come to our region - but I disagree. And I think that if we are going to ask for services we should start by looking at bringing it from the north.

I believe 16 million visitors each year to the Gold Coast Airport will demand access to our gorgeous Valley and to a combined initiative between the Gold Coast Council and the Qld State Government and the NSW State Government and Tweed Shire Council, we will eventually see a light rail being of service as a tourism product and locals alike.

This is a transport that better suits the Tweed. Residents are better linked to our Northern neighbor's. The best initiative for Tweed is to encourage the need for continuation to the North and create a link that we can expand upon.

The great news for now is that we have decided to accept the Grants, and can now move forward with initiatives that benefit both locals and visitors alike.

Regards,

Pryce

Allsop

Rail Trail Part 2

Q&A Forum

Chairperson:

20 questions have been submitted - 12 via email

I ask the forum to extend the time to answer these

I'll hand it over to David to explain how most efficiently and effectively the questions can be handled:

David Gower Freeman:

The first question is:

- 1. Are there any plans at some point in the future, to extend the Trail north, possibly to Coolangatta Airport?**

Peter: As far as I'm aware, there are currently no plans from the State government or Council, and certainly not from our association to head north from Murwillumbah to Condong or even further, our goal is Casino/Murwillumbah

Councillor Warren Polglase: Whilst the trail does not take you up the coast, there are rides you are able to connect back in with paths north - we are not currently focusing on north bound

- 2. At the start of this month a Gold Coast resident died of Mad cows disease, in order to ensure customers get uncontaminated primary produce, since last October it has been compulsory for farmers to maintain biosecurity plans - to achieve this they must prevent visitors from bringing disease into their properties.
How can Tweed council invite tourists onto a bike/horse/foot track across their farms from 2 international airports knowing that all the forces aren't able to stop them illegally carrying food from contaminated originals, including 40 tonnes per annum of meat according to Meat and Livestock Australia?**

Sue: While I'm not an expert of mad cows disease, I guess even with people dropping rubbish on the land, Tweed Shire Council will have to make sure there are proper rubbish protocols, and as far as international travellers are concerned, I guess it's wrapped up in airport security at the moment - how effective it is, that is something I can't answer, but it is a concern for our food producers.

Cameron: there are 500 rail trails around the world and every one of them experience concerns with biosecurity - it is where they have to work with the council, consult, get feedback from people who have actually done it, experienced and addressed it - is absolutely critical.

Rest assured they are being addressed by many places all around the world so we can call on that expertise.

Why do you think biosecurity is even higher risk here?

Sue: I guess we are close to the Qld border where they have cattle ticks, that is a threat to producers.

Beth: apparently in Vic where there are a lot of Rail Trails, they run near the road - in NSW our rails run through farms and back paddocks - so that is why it is more of a concern for us here

Cameron: again it is important were farmers consult with Council - where there is fencing required - put the fences up / take the step to address the problems as they come up and that is what is most important

- 3. Questions of building components - building on the track requires less components and less maintenance, what would you build alongside the track, such as a raised boardwalk - that would be durable on our high rainfall area? And what percentage of track that you surveyed would be unsuitable for an adjacent track due to dead cuttings, tunnels and bridges?**

Tom: it has been really wet recently and I can't see a problem with building an appropriate off formation track - in severe wet weather I don't feel we would be out door anyway.

- 4. As a very supporter of the Rail trail - the question to put in front of the panel tonight if legislation is passed to approve the Rail Trail, will this legislation be able to permit selling parts of the trail or corridors?**

Councillor Warren Polglase: The current legislation protects the rails or other rail assets from being removed, it doesn't stop the land being sold. Land is being sold in Byron - and they are also looking at land in Mullumbimby.

You don't need to change the legislation as it stands to sell parts of the corridor - you only need to change the legislation if you want to remove structures.

The current legislation doesn't actually protect the corridor in that sense - it protects the structures on the corridor.

The new legislation will, in a similar way, if based on the legislation for Tumbumba, will protect the corridor from sale as it says it goes to crown, to be used for the purposes of a Rail trail (and that is it, not anything else)

Bill: the protection that is in place right now does protect the track, to say it doesn't is untrue. The land that has been sold in Byron is not protected under the corridor, it was excess railway land and they are entitled to sell that.

5. Right now it is protected, the corridor is 30 metres wide - are you going to use the entire thing?

Cameron: one of the things put forth is the economics of it - if there is potential to use the whole thing to sustain and maintain it, so ratepayers are not having to contribute to it - then absolutely it will all be used.

In essence if it can be used Bill, it will be used.

Bill: are you saying you will use the entire 30 metres? For the rail trail?

Cameron: it will be used to provide income to fund the rail trail

Bill: are you saying the land could be used to fund the rail trail?

Cameron: I am saying that the organisation that will be responsible for maintaining the rail trail would be able to use part of the corridor in a way to make income to fund the rail trail, that is what I am saying

Can you give us an example Cameron?

Cameron: my understanding is that you can grow trees to build carbon credits, and that can go towards deriving income to fund the rail

Unidentified speaker: I say this for my kids, if we the trail for both a tram and a walkway - there is double the chance of us saving (crowd applause)

6. If the train services returned, would there be a bus service connected to suit arrival and departure times? Not everyone likes to fly so trains would help those people? These are a few questions myself and senior friends have asked to be considered:

Jeff: there are a number of reasons why the govt decided to stop the train - partly economic, in the coast in the line, numbers declined using it. Also, they were not running a lot trains, so people aren't using them, so it was a vicious circle.

So, if you ask now, where even more people have their own cars and there is cheaper transport to airport options available, I think the chance of the trains returning is seen unrealistic.

I think yes we do need a better connection to the airport, but we are speaking tonight of heading south, not north.

Tom: the trains were really busy in the late 70s, if trains were to happen and there were people on them I'm sure it would be a public transport initiative to take people where they want to go.

To answer your question, if people are on the trains, trams, or whatever - and they are getting off there would be a public initiative to take people where they want to go every hour on the hour.

7. Regarding the matter of cost, if \$4.8 billion dollars can be allocated to an upgrade the Pacific Highway, why are disputing a fraction of this cost to be spent on the rail service and construction of a parallel trail from Ballina up to Murwillumbah?

Jane: Everyday there are businesses bleeding due to the cost of that road infrastructure, there is not one piece of road infrastructure that a business isn't having to pour money for.

I do think in some respects that good public transport is something we have to put forward for our community, and not just in terms of money returns for investment.

What we do know is that at a level of return on investment, we cannot compare the dollars going in -because plenty of people are supporting and paying the money for the road infrastructure.

When people started testing the money by asking the community if they would spend the money they spend to be on the roads in cars as money they would put towards public transport, often the answer is no. So I ask you, who is here prepared to prepay for their yearly use of public transport.

People change their method of thinking when they are spending their own money.

Cameron: there is a lot of "us and them" going on here - this is ridiculous(*Cameron got up out of his seat and went to sit with pro on and off formation delegation of speakers*) With the Byron train we met with the owners when they built it and yes it was fantastic someone was willing to put money towards it, though part of the plan to have \$ invested into the rail trail beside that train.

8. What is the possibility of having a Shire wide referendum to see if people are ok with our track being ripped up? Or whether they want our tracks to remain intact for the rail trail to be built?

To hold a shire wide referendum would cost \$180,000 - \$200,000 to hold, the process is here in this forum to address issues, and any issues can be placed on the agenda. When I have looked at Queenstown and the way they address issues, including bio-security - they make it extremely strict in the airport, etc. this is just the start of a very long process and we need the support of various groups to see where we will go with everything.

Ask yourselves, how often are you going to use the train really, and who is going to fund it? If it is privately funded, it is not going to be \$4 on the Go Card, it is going to be far more expensive, if you are going to use the train, how many people are actually going to use it? Daily? The reality is you have to be able to justify it.

Laurie participant in forum : a large % of this community feel disenfranchised in the process, we have a large amount of people that don't ride bikes or horses, a lot of youth can only leave in Murwillumbah if their parents drive them around - people with disabilities won't even get to the rail trail in the first place - how did we get here without the consultation of this community?

Michael Simmons Board Member MDBC: I'm not even going to try and answer that. I have been responsible with others for organising this forum, and as the counselors are aware, I have spoken about rail trails and their history. I would like to ask questions regarding.

Why is the Vic rail trail associations way of setting up the rail trail not considered when looking overseas options?

Unidentified speaker: I don't know why you are saying it's not, the Tweed shire have put out tenders so it is an option to consider Vic methods. We are considering both options both on and off formation.

Unidentified speaker: the question of public transport can be raised by the council, though it doesn't have to be connected here necessarily, it can be taken forward in other ways.

9. Why not partner light rail instead of ignoring it? In less than 10 years there have been a revolution with light rails. Light rail would pay for itself and pay for a rail trail, why do the NSW supporters not wanting to connect up north?

Patrick: there is ample room for a bike track and a railway line, because the railway line has been abandoned - we need to consider a lot for what we use the corridor for - will people use it?

The public transport to be attractive needs to go from close to where you live to close to where you need to go for work, hospital, etc. and needs to be frequent. The trouble with rail and light is it generally costs a lot more than busses (busses can be more frequent) and you can also get closer to your destination with busses.

For all these reasons it shows the uptake on public transport for this railway would be very poor.

The other side of the argument is how much is it going to cost to restore it?

I have looked into 60 bridges along and none of them are sufficient to carry trains at the moment.

10. If the council decides to place the rail trail on top of the track, this will mean ripping up the railway lines. In order to do that legislation must be passed through parliament to place protection on the branch line and the whole land becomes Crown land, if 24km is used for a rail trail, what happens to the other 106 km of track, some of it worth millions in Mullumbimby, Byron and Bangalow. There is no promise for further funding for rail trails in this area, so we could be looking at a huge developer land grab.

If the trail is placed next to the track, we don't need to worry. In terms of protecting our heritage and potential rail services for the future, isn't this the best win/win solution possible?

Unidentified speaker: the Tumbarumba legislation only closed part of the line, and the same thing from my understanding will happen here - they will close the part from Murwillumbah to Crabbes creek.

David Gower Freeman:

Well ladies and gentleman, being a military man we said we would close at 8.30pm so we are right on time, there are plenty more questions, it has been a good forum but I might hand over to the Chair to depart:

Chairperson:

Thank you and once again thank you to David for an outstanding facilitation (applause) and thank you to the expertise of the panel who each have brought a unique perspective. It is a passionate panel, so are you, so is the Chamber, so let us build on that for our Shire, Thank you for coming.