

**Full transcript: SPEECH GIVEN BY MINISTER OF TRANSPORT ON WED 26 MAR 14 AT THE LAUNCH OF RAIL TRAILS FOR NSW**

... after that exceptionally generous introduction, I'm really pleased to be here, and can I acknowledge my parliamentary colleagues that are here, I notice minister Souris, minister Page, Greg Acland from Albury, and if there are any others here can I welcome everyone here today.

Can I congratulate you on the work you've done (and sorry our colleagues from the upper house as well) can I acknowledge the work that all of you have done in promoting positively the issue of rail trails and I'll tell you why. I've been the minister for three years but the shadow minister for four years. And so I've seen in the last seven years a real change in attitude from local communities, and here you have assembled together people from inner city areas like mine to far flung parts of our state, and the fact that all of you were singing from the same sheet, I think, requires all of us as members of parliament to sit up and listen.

Because for too long in NSW we've put this in the too hard basket, and for too long, unfortunately in some communities you haven't had the unity of voice on a particular part of the section of the rail trail, that's been a reason to put the issue aside.

So I want to congratulate you for the work you've done. I also want to acknowledge the contribution or the potential that rail trails do have in contributing towards healthy lifestyles, generating regional tourism, and I want to pay my respects to all members of local government who are here, both at the council level, but at the officer level as well, because you leadership, your representation of your communities, working with your state members of parliament and working with us as the government will ensure that this issue is progressed in the coming - as you recommend - this year, that we are a quarter through already.

But I want to tell you that my personal view is, I am a personal fan of real trails and think they have a big future in our state, and if you look at what Victoria has done, it has been incredibly positive for their economy, for their tourism, for their lifestyle.

But I am also one for advocating that communities have to be united on their issue. I don't think it's the role of government to convince parts of the local community that a rail trail has to exist. So I'm of the view that if the community comes to me unanimously\* and says the council, the local member, the community groups want this, well that's when governments need to sit up and listen, because it means the community has done the hard yards in bringing together a united and common voice, and then it's up to us to do our homework to see if it's feasible. And when I said "do our homework, my selfish position is I need to make sure we never need that bit of rail work again, or that bit of rail corridor again, and that's why when we came to government, we spent a good eighteen months planning for the future.

We have a twenty year rail vision for NSW. So my people now can exactly determine which bits of rail we need for the future and which bits we don't, which makes it much easier and provides certainty when we are looking at the future of corridors.

Having done that work I feel I'm in a much more confident position to be able to look at these issues case by case and I notice minister Page's presence here and we're actually doing a study in his part of the world in the northern rivers area and I'm hoping to get the study next month about a rail trail in the northern rivers.

I'm hoping to be able to release that shortly there afterwards.

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e are committed to the concept, we are committed to moving forward, and I really also appreciate the second point, because I think part of the issue is not only determining whether a corridor is suitable for a rail trail, and I think the most important issue is having community unity on the issue, I really do. It's really important.

But also, that it is collaboration between state and local government. Because, my job as Minister for Transport, if I can be so crass, is to run transport, rail trails don't exactly fit in my area, so maintenance is an issue which I know Minister Parker, minister for environment and local government, also have to have a hand in.

That's also something we will work with collaboratively, in terms of future maintenance, when these things come to be.

As you know, determining the future of a rail corridor is a big decision. It's so big, in fact, that it requires legislative change. So if part of a corridor is going to be converted to a rail trail, I've actually got to go and seek the support of my colleagues in the lower house, which I think I can get, but the support of the colleagues in the upper house as well. And that means, for a good reason, it has to be non partisan, because it has to cross all political parties for it to be successful.

And I think that's where the community unity is so important. Because if the community has come to us, and say the active transport people, the cyclists, the pedestrians, local government, the farmers, they're all happy with this and think it's a great boost for the local economy, great boost for healthy lifestyle, recreation, well that's exactly what we want to hear and we can take the next step of examining whether we can in perpetuity give up that bit of corridor for a rail trail.

So I'm heartened by the work you've done, I'm heartened by observations you've made about Victoria, I've made similar observations. The amount of opportunities that Victoria generates by preserving their rail heritage but also rail trails is a huge boost for their tourist economy, but also promotes active transport.

I don't think people realise how popular active transport is, whether it's walking, cycling. For any community no matter where your proximity is to the big city, where your proximity is to a rural or regional township. People want to get out and be active, to enjoy the local environment, and also support local business. I think that's a very heartening, very encouraging prospect.

I can't tell you how pleased I am to see such a diverse group of people from different parts of the state, coming together as you are and saying the same thing. I look forward, no doubt, to hearing from you.

So thank you very much for the opportunity to be here, thank you for what you've done, and I look forward to being in touch moving forward.

So thanks very much.

\* This was later clarified to mean "that all the stakeholder groups should support the rail trail proposal, accepting that there will be some dissenters within some groups but that a majority of all groups should be in support, indicating that they would comprise of councils, tourism bodies, farmers, local member etc."