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MANILLA, TUESDAY, 1ST AUGUST 2017

Manilla-Tamworth Rail Trail



A well-attended meeting in the Manilla Bowling Club on Sunday afternoon heard about the potential of a cycle, walking and horse track along the abandoned rail line.

John Moore (above), chairman of Rail Trails for NSW, said any development of a rail trail from Tamworth to Upper Manilla is entirely up to the local community, and widespread support is essential, but he said the potential is

there, with the viaduct as its main attraction.

Landholders along the rail line pointed out major problems that they would experience from public passage through their paddocks, including serious biosecurity issues, difficulty of stock movements, and possible theft, and suggested the TSR as an alternative route. Mr Moore said that any such issues would need to be sorted out early in the planning process for the project to proceed.

He said that if the proposed trail cleared such obstacles, a logical route would be to Upper Manilla, and the Viaduct would be an essential part of it because it would add a unique feature to the path.

Mr Moore said rail trails, with their gentle gradients and sweeping bends, are becoming important for tourism and for local movement in many parts of the world, and small towns along them are finding that tourists who travel by cycle spend many more nights and eat many more meals in the region, rather than speeding through in a car.

The meeting was told that the rail reserve is still owned by the State Government, and John

Holland, has a contract that pays it \$500 per kilometre per year to keep it in a safe condition. Community members suggested that some of this money might be freed for use on the rail trail.

Concerns were raised about the immediate future of the viaduct, and Mayor Col Murray agreed to ask State Member Kevin Anderson what is the exact Parliamentary process for formally closing the line. Knowing this would enable local people to more closely follow any developments. Cr Murray also said that Mr Anderson has confirmed that there is a ministerial directive that no work is to be done on the viaduct without proper community consultation. Councillor Murray said this means there would have to be a strong and clear message from the community on what it wanted.

Planning consultant Mike Haliburton, who has overseen the development of numerous rail trails, said the viaduct carried 160 tonne locomotives, and doesn't appear to be about to fall down. He said abandoned rail lines have gentle gradients that are ideal for walking or cycling, and the actual trail is usually 2.5 metres wide, with the rest of the rail reserve on either side.

Those at the meeting suggested that a trail to Tamworth would provide a safe alternative to those who currently commute by bicycle on the main road.

By Margaret Hurler



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