

Good morning everyone. For those who don't know me I'm Jason Wyeth Secretary of the South Burnett Rail Trail Users Association and this is Michelle Hansen a avid Rail Trail advocate and part of our association

Firstly, I like to say thank you for making this time available for us to speak hear today.

It has been wonderful to watch, over the last 4 and a half years, how the South Burnett has embraced the Rail Trail. From its humble beginnings, and with a lot of hard work by Council and community groups, we now believe that the Rail Trail is well on its way to be one of the driving forces for adventure tourism in our region.

Today we would like to highlight the successes of the Rail Trail and look at the developments around the Rail Trail that have enhanced usage and visitation and focus on some opportunities for the future.

Firstly, I have some data that I would like to share with you. Currently we have 4 trail counters on the Rail Trail. They are simple counters and just count passes over a time period. The counters are positioned:

- At the 2km mark out of Kingaroy
- Just past Memerambi.
- Near Transmitter Rd at Tingoora and
- Just 2 months ago we place our fourth counter just north of the Butter Factory in Wondai at the Simpsons Rd crossing

From 2021 to 2022 the following number of passes were recorded:

- At the 2km mark out of Kingaroy- 34885 (which we believe demonstrates the overwhelming support of Kingaroy locals for the trail)
- Just past Memerambi- 12465
- Near Transmitter Rd at Tingoora- 11973 and
- At Simpsons Rd at Wondai- 1997 (1375 in April alone)

These results were in spite of various travel restriction due to COVID 19, floods and recent trail closures. We believe that this data points to the amazing popularity of our trail with both locals and tourists alike.

I would now like to extrapolate how much we believe the Rail Trail is worth to the local economy in broad terms. To do this ,I would like to reference a study

completed on the BVRT in July 2021, titled Brisbane Valley Rail Trail (BVRT) Visitor Research Program Report.

On average the study found that on the BVRT, day trippers spent on average \$120 with Overnight visitors spending on average \$180. 82% of visitors were from outside of the LGAs that encompass the BVRT. With 62% of visitors staying one or 2 nights.

So being conservative, if only 40-50% of all passes on our counters were individual people, that would equate to between 4800 and 6000 individual users per year, at an average spend of between \$120-\$180 per user. Now, I believe that we can start to see a ball park income to the South Burnett of between:

\$576000- \$720000 @ \$120 per user to an upper end of between \$864000- \$1080000 @\$180 per user. This upper number is also in line with the original Economic Assessment Report that projected income of around \$1.2M once the trail was fully developed.

Either way you look at this, the yearly return to the South Burnett is many times larger than the yearly maintenance cost investment from council. This is money going into mum and dad small businesses, it is money into motels, B and B's, caravan parks, pubs, cafes and shops.

Further to this data we have seen a major increase in our rail trail free camping stays at both Wooroolin and Wondai from 2020-2021, with the trend continuing into the start of 2022. (Due to COVID restrictions in early 2020, I will compare the last 6 months of each year at both locations,).

Visitation at Wooroolin increase from 1290 campers in latter 6 months 2020 to 1602 in latter 6 months 2021. In Wondai the increase was even more pronounced with 2078 campers staying from June to Dec 2020 as opposed to 3123 campers for the same time frame in 2021. Like Wooroolin Free Camp, this increasing trend has also occurred in the first 4 months of 2022. I would like to state as well, that in total between the two free camps we saw 7120 campers stay in 2021 with close to 12% of these campers having bikes with them.

Apart from some very impressive data, we have seen the South Burnett community truly embrace the enhancement of the Rail Trail, with a number of

community, government and funding organisations supporting the development of numerous projects. Examples of these enhancements include:

- The Link Trail from Yarraman to Kingaroy via Nanango, organised by the Nanango Cycling group in conjunction with SBRC and funded by Heritage Bank Nanango
- NAN 1, NAN2 and the Linville circuit rides organised and funded by the same groups as the Link Trail
- The Loop Rides Project- 6 Loop fully signposted rides starting and finishing on the Rail Trail- planned by SBRTUA in conjunction with SBRC and funded by the Gambling Community Benefit Fund
- Gordonbrook Dam MTB Trails project- planned by the SBMTB- funded by SBRC, Gambling Community Benefit Fund, FRRR and Stanwell Community Partnership Fund
- Wondai MTB Trails- developed by SBMTBC in conjunction with QLD Parks and Wildlife Service, with funding support from SBRC
- Moffatdale Winery Route- developed by SBRTUA in consultation with SBRC and funded by the Gambling Community Benefit Fund

All of these developments are designed with the Rail Trail as their centre. They are designed not only to attract more visitors to the South Burnett, but to get them to stay another day or two. Whilst we don't have hard data on the usage of these developments, anecdotal evidence suggests high usage through key times of the tourist season.

I would now like to hand over to Michelle as she will focus on opportunities moving forward.

6-7mins total

Rail Trail Opportunities and Possibilities

The data and income figures that Jason has just provided are quite astounding especially when we consider that the rail trail is still in its infancy and has not been actively promoted. I love to think that any asset within the South Burnett is a benefit to the whole region. This goes without saying for the Rail Trail!

We have the opportunity to set ourselves up as the adventure playground for the large population sites of the Sunshine Coast and Brisbane. We are well located for these people to come and explore and experience the adventure of the South Burnett. Encouraging people to use our rail trail and other adventure tourism activities benefits our entire region.

One of the ways to encourage people from outside our region to visit the South Burnett and use the rail trail is through the promotion and development of events. There are many events held on the rail trail and the possibilities we have for future growth because of these events is tremendous. The rail trail is home to the following events:

Current Rail Trail Organised Events

- The Wondai Country Running Festival – The festival is now in its 5th year with approximately 600 runners plus their friends and family expected this year. The festival supports many local businesses, clubs and associations and funds raised are given back to the community.
- The South Burnett Express Relay – This year 90 runners participated most of which were from Brisbane & the Lockyer. They brought their families and stayed the weekend to explore the SB. Athletics Australia is looking at making this a national event and there is already interstate interest in the event.
- Wondai Parkrun – Up to 70 runners and walkers participate each week of which there are usually several visitors to the area. We often get lots of positive feedback on the course. It is an important social gathering for many every week and is very inclusive with participants ranging from babies in prams to the elderly.
- The Mother's Day Classic – This event is always well attended and has been an important annual fundraising event for Cancer research.
- Taste The Trail – This event is in its 3rd year and is extremely popular. Every year it has sold out in less than 24 hrs. With people putting their names on waiting lists. It is a culinary bike ride stopping at townships between Kingaroy and Wondai to sample refreshing tastes of the South Burnett. A wonderful opportunity for promotion of our regions' food and wine producers.
- Education Qld District Cross Country Trials – The rail trail provides a safe and easily accessible facility for local school children to compete and families to come and watch and cheer them on.
- The Rashers Rush – This is a popular BaconFest event with Ride and Run options available.

The **Possibilities for the future** are endless. We haven't even scratched the surface! There are so many opportunities with potential to bring more people, more money, social cohesion, and mental and physical health benefits to our region. I'd like to mention a few thoughts and ideas.

1. Adventure Tourism has grown exponentially worldwide over the past years with **tourists visiting destinations previously undiscovered**. This allows for new destinations to market themselves as truly unique, appealing to those travellers looking for rare, incomparable experiences and what our region offers is certainly that! Multi day Ride Routes offer an opportunity for all the towns within the South Burnett to be involved and leverage existing tourist infrastructure and council owned assets for example the dams and wineries.
2. Business Opportunities present themselves such as Guided Bike Tours, Shuttle Services and Bike Hire. We have spoken with local bus companies and tourism operators who are keen to be involved. In addition, there is a lot of opportunity for additional accommodation options such as Air BnB and Bed and Breakfast providers.

3. Electric Trio Bikes—These are bikes that have two (2) forward facing seats with single seat for a Volunteer Trained Pilot to transport the Aged, Disabled, or young children. These are an excellent way to support all abilities within our community to get out in the great outdoors.
4. Community Bike Rides – This idea promotes Community engagement, connection, and social interaction.
5. Festival of Cycling – This could be an annual celebration of cycling adventure within our region providing opportunities for all to participate and enjoy our rail trail.
6. Development of tour packages utilising the expertise of existing tourism bodies to develop a variety of tourist packages.
7. The rail trail with proper commercialization and promotion could become a known “Must Visit” in addition to the Bunya Mountains and the Dams similar to how the BVRT has become a major tourism asset to the Brisbane Valley.
8. Continuous Rail Trail Ride from Ipswich through to Gympie with linked public transport to get riders back to the South East Corner.
9. We have the opportunity to rename the rail trail within the South Burnett and Gympie LGA’s to something all-inclusive, non-controversial, non-town specific and something which encourages unity of the regions such as Qld Country Rail Trail, Great Country Rail Trail or the like.
10. Do a study on our rail trail through external consultants like the study conducted for the BVRT in 2021. This would provide more accurate data around income and visitor spending habits for the region but more importantly would look at opportunities to maximise and enhance visitor spend.

This council has been doing wonderful works in regional development and the SBRTUA would like to thank you for your support especially with the donation of \$3000 towards the digital marketing of the Rail Trail. It is quite clear that other regions, such as the Brisbane Valley and Toowoomba are now realizing that adventure tourism and development of rail trails is a very worthwhile investment. As a longtime resident and ratepayer of the South Burnett, I am impressed with this council’s attitude towards investing in the future of this region. This council can be proud of the return on its investment into the rail trail as it is certainly paying huge dividends for the whole of the South Burnett.

It is so great to see and know the impact that the rail trail has on our region, and exciting to see the possibility of it becoming a major part of our local economy. To achieve this, it would be advantageous to work more closely with Gympie and adjoining shires to make this a reality. Perhaps a joint advisory group between the LGA’s would be a great advantage and would open up lines of communication and develop positive relationships between the regions. This would also be a huge advantage when sourcing external funding to promote and develop the rail trail and facilities on the rail trail. **When we work together, we are stronger.**

In summary our hope is that we have provided you with food for thought and some excitement around the possibilities for the future, and the growth that is possible through the promotion, enhancement and development of our current rail trail and adventure tourism in our region. With a Collaborative effort and prioritized focus the rail trail has so much more potential. **We have hardly touched scratched the surface!** We look forward to collaborating with council and receiving your continued support. Thank you.

Written by Michelle Hansen
 South Burnett Rail Trail Users Association
 18/05/2022

