

# Rail trail push for track removal

Hans Lovejoy

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A rail trail group have been lobbying NSW MPs to amend the *Transport Administration Act 1988* (Section 99A) to allow the transfer of sections of the 132 km Murwillumbah to Casino rail corridor from transport use to Crown Lands 'for the sole purpose of constructing a rail trail'.

And while Northern Rivers Rail Trail (NRRT) claim that the amendment ensures that the corridor 'can't be sold,' rail supporters Trains On Our Tracks (TOOT) aren't so convinced, and are opposed to track removal.



**A stretch of the Casino to Murwillumbah rail line. Photo Wayne Penn**

It's a position supported by local NSW MP Tamara Smith (Greens), who told *The Echo* that should a bill be presented to parliament, her party will push for amendments.

She told *The Echo*, 'I will only support cycle paths along our rail corridors if the corridors remain in public hands through a public trust model and the tracks remain in place'.

NRRT's Geoff Meers told *The Echo* that the NSW Tumbarumba rail trail amendment 'ensures the only use that can be made of the land is for a rail trail. It can't be sold.'

According to [yourvoice.svc.nsw.gov.au](http://yourvoice.svc.nsw.gov.au), the 22km NSW Tumbarumba rail trail will open on April 2020, and includes track removal.

Meers said, 'What we do not support is moving away from that simple change to constrain how or where in the corridor the trail should be built. That is an unnecessary level of detail that, in many places, makes the trail impossible.'

'Our letter to MLCs encouraged them to support the amendment and not to support a requirement to build off-formation'.

Meanwhile, TOOT are calling for an increased service of the existing solar train service from Sunrise to Byron's CBD, and co-operation with rail trail advocates, so other parts of the rail line can coexist with a future train service.

Jeremy Holmes from the Byron Bay Railroad Company told *The Echo*, 'We are open to expanding the service, however there would need to be a financial partner – government or otherwise – to fund any expansion.'

'Byron Bay Railroad Company is a not-for-profit organisation, without government subsidy, and is working toward a cost-neutral operation'.

Last year in July, Byron Shire Council was 'excited' to table its own multi-use rail corridor report, which looked at the 'feasibility of reactivating the rail corridor from Bangalow to Yelgun.'

Mayor Simon Richardson said at the time, '[Report author] Arcadis suggested that a light rail system could be used to take people to festivals and markets and that this alone had the potential to take some 700,000 vehicles off the roads, which has huge benefits for the environment.'

### **Tweed rail trail**

Tweed Shire, meanwhile, is moving ahead with a 24-kilometre rail trail (shared-user path) along the Murwillumbah to Crabbes Creek rail corridor.

Tenders for the \$13m state and federally funded project are being considered 'for the design and construction of the rail trail on the current track formation, but also to allow contractors to put forward proposals to construct the rail trail beside the train tracks, preserving the tracks in place'.

Project director for Tweed Council's rail trail, Iain Lonsdale, told *The Echo* that Council's preference is for a public trust to manage the line, yet says a hybrid model of public may eventuate, which would comprise private, Council and state government involvement.

As for the removal of tracks to facilitate the proposal, Lonsdale said it is 'still up in the air.'

'The successful tender will be asked to design the best option for the budget'.

Owing to the geographic constraints, he says creating a dual use of the rail line will be unlikely.

'We cannot do off-formation construction and it makes sense to recycle the track.'

When asked about her position on Lismore's plans, NSW MP Janelle Saffin said through her office that discussions between TOOT and NRRT 'are ongoing,' yet she maintains the corridor should remain in 'the public hand.'

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