

FEDERAL FUNDING FOR CYCLING AND WALKING INFRASTRUCTURE

Adelaide Hills (Onkaparinga Valley) Rail Trail, SA

Council	Federal electorate	Member
Adelaide Hills	Mayo	Alexander Downer

Description of the Project

This extremely picturesque 27 km recreational and local commuting rail-trail would follow the route of the 89 year old Oakbank - Mt Pleasant rail corridor, linking a number of small towns and hamlets along the Onkaparinga valley. Currently the transport needs of residents are served only by a narrow and circuitous two-lane roadway carrying a high level of mixed traffic. This road has been responsible for many injuries and deaths, particularly amongst school children who often travel by bike to schools from farms or outlying townships. If constructed the Adelaide Hills Rail Trail would complement the well known Riesling Trail in the Barossa Valley to which it would easily connect.

The Benefits

The project would bring a range of benefits to the Onkaparinga Valley and South Australia:

- **Recreation:** The Adelaide Hills community (approx 39,000), and particularly younger folk, would have a quiet, safe, healthy and enjoyable cycling facility to enjoy and providing them with exercise and safe and healthy travel to school, shops, sporting activities and services. The Valley is a favourite location for horse riding. The Trail offers possibilities for a shared pedestrian, cycling and horse riding route.
- **Access:** The route would connect nine small rural communities as well as numerous hamlets and homesteads to schools, shops or other community, service and tourist facilities. There are only 3 Primary Schools (with associated Kindergartens) and two High Schools in the Valley. Many children travel considerable distances each day – often at some risk. The Adelaide Hills Rail Trail would provide these children (as well as all Valley residents) with an extremely healthy and practical alternative to travel by bus, private car or bicycle along the single and heavily used Onkaparinga Valley Road.
- **Tourism:** This historic area has enormous tourism potential, containing many vineyards and other tourism opportunities. The Valley (and each end of the Rail Trail route) are easily accessible from the Birdwood tourism route to the North and the Mt Barker freeway to the South.
- **Local business:** An additional tourist facility would encourage visitors to spend more time in the area and thus invest more in local produce and services. The rail trail would also provide all of the well-documented benefits for local producers and small businesses that are known to stem directly from increased bicycle use in local communities.
- **Road Safety:** The rail trail would provide much safer alternatives for bike riders, pedestrians and horse riders who are currently forced to share the Onkaparinga Valley Road and its verges with extremely heavy car and truck traffic. In such conditions it is essential that bike and horse riders have this quieter and safer alternative. There is currently no other safe transport alternative along the Valley.
- **Community Resiliency:** Like many relatively isolated rural communities, the towns and hamlets along the Onkaparinga Valley are experiencing significant stresses associated with rising transport fuel and business costs, water shortages and social pressures on incomes and cost of living. The Adelaide Hills Rail Trail would become a valuable asset for the entire Valley community, making many valuable contributions to social, economic and family life and providing significantly enhanced resiliency in the face of those challenges the future holds.

Status of the Project

The route was surveyed for feasibility studies in 2004 and 2005. The Friends of the Adelaide Hills Rail Trail have been promoting the benefits of the proposal for some years. The Adelaide Hills Council (in conjunction with the neighbouring Barossa Council) has been working on the proposal with SA's Department of Transport, Energy & Infrastructure. This development

continues on a range of fronts. The Adelaide Hills Council has incorporated the construction of the Rail Trail into its Trails Strategy (and related tourism and community development plans) The trail's development is now a goal of the State Trails Coordinating Committee and is documented in SA's recent Outer Metropolitan Planning plan.

Significant community interest and discussion is also occurring with the local Hills Courier newspaper documenting need for safe bicycle routes for children attending the Mt Torrens Primary School and nominating the rail trail as the best option available.

The former Oakbank to Mt Pleasant Railway corridor has been recognised by Council's Open Space Strategy and Bicycle Plan as a potentially important recreational asset, and more recently identified as a location for a linear park or trail in the Planning Strategy for the Outer Metropolitan Adelaide Region. A Feasibility Study prepared in 2004 strongly recommended that the corridor be converted into a 'Rail Trail' similar to the Riesling Trail in the Clare Valley. While Council has previously indicated that it does not have the necessary resources to develop any trail, the State Government which owns the land has recently advised Council that it is prepared to explore transfer ownership of the land, with this to occur in one parcel rather than in a fragmented manner. Council staff have had discussions with a group representing land owners along the corridor who are putting together options to achieve a trail which better protects their interests than the initial feasibility study, and one which sees a lower initial investment.

Support for the Project.

The State Government owns the corridor and has indicated it wishes to preserve it for the community recreation and active transport use now articulated in Council planning. The trails development has now been publically supported by both the State Trails Committee and the Adelaide Rail Trail planning group as well as all of South Australia's peak cycling organisations (BicycleSA, CyclingSA and the Bicycle Institute of S.A) It is strongly supported by the Adelaide Hills Chamber of Commerce, the Onkaparinga Valley Tourism Authority, all the areas schools and by many local businesses. Council documents indicate that it is a relatively high priority for development, the main impediments being negotiations (currently underway) with adjoining land owners and provision of sufficient funding.

Costing.

Current estimates that include bridgework and similar engineering, and construction of the pathway to a level suitable for shared use over the full 27km now stand at \$5M.

The difference federal funding would make.

Because there is no necessity for the pathway itself to carry motorised traffic (maintenance vehicles etc) the ground and surface treatments required are relatively inexpensive. However aspects of the project push it beyond the resources of a rural council such as Adelaide Hills.

Commonwealth funding would transform this project from drawing board to reality. In particular it would provide for the crucial but relatively expensive components of the project that are beyond the resources of a council, notably the reconstruction of several bridges over the areas numerous creeks. The culverts remain in good condition but most of the steel bridges were scrapped in the 1960s.

Thanks go to the Bicycle Institute of South Australia for this HEAT example