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Report to Landcare Committee
from Susan Edwards, Manager Parks and Forests (Strategy & Marketing)

Summit Railway Village Project, Rimutaka Incline Recreation Area

1. Purpose

To report back on Councillor Shaw's Notice of Motion adopted by the Council on 7 December (Report 00.817):

That officers outline in two pages (including practical recommendations), creative proposals to establish an historic railway village at Summit Yard, including an indication of what buildings or features could/should be rebuilt, the need and means to involve Maori, links to the visitor industry, draft time-line, indications of cost, any implications for current logging projects, and other matters that are relevant to the successful completion of the project within a decade, to enable the project to be considered through the Annual Planning round.

2. Creative Proposals

Councillor Shaw's Notice of Motion is a timely reminder that the Pakuratahi Forest has the third highest *Signature Values* of all the Wellington Regional Council parks and forests. The area already has significant recreational, heritage and environmental values (and the potential for further enhancement). The proposed project could enhance those values further. The project has the potential to link into a range of wider Council objectives including environmental education and iwi partnerships.

The project could take a variety of directions; from an environmental/heritage interpretation trail (similar to the *Otago Rail Trail*), to restoring the Summit village as a tourism site, (e.g., *Shanty Town*), where all the buildings at Summit are re-created, rail lines re-laid, a concessionaire operates a tourism venture, etc.

The issues to consider when assessing the options for the project are:

- what type of development would contribute most to achieving Council's wider objectives, (e.g., environmental education, community partnerships)?
- what trade-offs are acceptable between the *Signature Values*? For example, would a tourism venture have a negative impact on current recreational use and environmental values?
- how feasible is a tourism type venture in a relatively remote location like Summit?
- what other opportunities are there for the area?

3. What Could the Project Involve?

Officers have considered the options and briefly discussed the matter with the Chairman of the Rail Heritage Trust and iwi representatives. The general view is that a full-blown tourism venture is probably not currently feasible in a location like Summit. The remote location means that vehicle access would be required along the walkway. This could conflict with recreational users, (e.g., mountain bikers and walkers) and the heritage values of the railway formation. In the visitor survey undertaken last year, walkway users commented that they like the good tracks in the quiet forest and the undeveloped, natural state, of the area. A major tourism venture has the potential to compromise aspects of the forest valued by existing users.

However, a smaller scale development could still capture the spirit of Summit settlement, rather than trying to re-create a replica of it, and portray the railway flavour and way of life at a specific period during Summit's history.

Such a development could, for example, take the form of an interpretation trail. The trail could cover more than just the rail heritage; incorporating the Maori history of the area and the natural heritage (environmental values). It might involve an interpretation centre (a kiosk, one of the houses, the signal box, etc) with interpretation facilities (pictures, information - even audio and video) located around Summit Yard and along the Walkway. The interpretation could provide social commentary and real life experiences of people living at Summit; helping people form a vision of railway workers' lifestyle and experiences.

The project would involve several stages:

- research into the history and matters to be interpreted (rail, Maori, environmental);
- concept design work;
- consultation on concept (iwi, Featherston Fell Engine Society, interest groups, etc);
- detailed design;
- consultation on detailed design (if required);
- construction and implementation.

This approach would also provide opportunities to inform visitors on the environmental values of the area and on good environmental management practices, (e.g., riparian planting).

3. **Interpretation Opportunities**

There are already a number of rail heritage features along the Walkway that could be interpreted:

- rail bridges;
- tunnels;
- culverts;
- cuttings;
- Summit yard;
- building sites and foundations.

Further sites exist on the Department of Conservation side of the Walkway, including the Incline and the former Cross Creek township. (This raises issues such as the future management of the total Walkway, (e.g., the possibility of establishing a Regional Park) and working in closer partnership with the Department to manage the area).

Other features on the Council portion of the Walkway that could be interpreted include:

- Maori archaeological features (trading routes, midden sites, ovens);
- ecological values (wetlands, Pakuratahi River, riparian areas, bush remnants);
- plantation forestry activities (logging activities, replanting programmes);
- recreation opportunities (swimming holes, walks, mountain biking tracks).

All these features and values would combine to create an exciting, interesting and educational interpretation trail.

4. **The Need and Means to Involve Maori**

Iwi representatives are aware of a wealth of information that would be of value to interpret. It would be important to involve local iwi in any initial concept design work and in the detailed design of interpretation boards and wording.

5. **Links to the Visitor Industry**

Officers believe that the interpretation trail would provide an additional tourist attraction in the area. It may also provide an opportunity for tourism operators to develop a commercial tour operation, (e.g., Rimutaka Rail Heritage mountain bike tour).

Issues associated with tourism and the “visitor industry” would need to be addressed during the concept design phase. Developing a “tourist attraction” and introducing commercial tour operators would need to be balanced against the needs and expectations of current recreational users, “*Signature Values*” for the area, and the Council’s broader objectives, (e.g., environmental education, biodiversity and RPS implementation through environmental enhancement and heritage protection).

6. Draft Time-line

A lot of planning and design work is needed before the project can be further refined. Officers’ time is already committed to projects provided for in the Long-term Financial Strategy, (e.g., reviewing park and forest management plans, planning and design work for the new parks - East Harbour Regional Park, Whitireia Park and Wairarapa Wetlands, environmental education, and environmental enhancement projects, etc).

However, officers could refine the project and costings for consideration through the next full review of the Long-term Financial Strategy. This will enable the project to be considered against all other Council priorities at that time. Although this seems like a long time away, the Council has allocated around \$420,000 towards a three-year restoration programme for the heritage bridges along the Walkway. Therefore, good progress is being made towards creating the right environment for the interpretation trail to be developed.

The idea of an interpretation trail along the Rimutaka Incline Walkway could also be incorporated into the review of the Interim Forest Lands and Water Collection Areas Management Plan being undertaken this year. That way, the Trail could be included in the concept plan for the Pakuratahi Forest presented for public consultation.

Task	Timeframe
Review Forest Lands Management Plan and consider an interpretive trail	2001
Research the history and matters to be interpreted - rail, Maori, environmental	2001 - 2002
Concept design work and consultation	2002
Cost project for inclusion in LTFS	2002/03
Detailed design if project approved through LTFS and consultation on design	2003/04
Construct interpretation trail	2004/05 onwards or as provided for through the LTFS

7. Indication of Costs

Project costs will depend on the nature and extent of the project. These aspects would become apparent during the concept design phase. Costs could be in the order of:

- \$100,000 for interpretation on the Council portion of the Walkway;
- \$90,000 to re-create the Summit Signal Box (or alternative interpretative centre);
- \$15,000 for a kiosk at the car park at the Kaitoke end of the Walkway.

8. Implications for Current Logging Projects

The current round of logging will be completed by the time this project is underway; there are no implications for the current logging programme along the Walkway.

9. Communication

No communication opportunities arise from this report at this stage. Opportunities will arise once decisions are made on if, when, and how, the proposal will proceed.

10. Recommendations

That the Landcare Committee:

- (1) *Receive the report and note the contents.*
- (2) *Agree that officers incorporate the idea of an interpretation trail along the Rimutaka Incline Walkway into the review of the Interim Forest Lands and Water Collection Areas Management Plan.*
- (3) *Agree that officers further refine the project and likely costings for consideration through the next full review of the Long-term Financial Strategy.*

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Attachment 1 : Photographs