

## **PROPOSED RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF RIMUTAKA RAILWAY SUMMARY NOTES FROM MEETINGS WITH OFFICERS**

### **1. Background**

*The Area is Currently Used for Recreation and Forestry:*

- The incline walkway has been developed as a walkway and bike lane.
- Important area for families – provides low incline off road biking opportunities (Hutt River and Pencarrow Road other comparable options)
- 30 – 40,000 visitors per year, roughly 50/50 walkers and cyclists
- Area also used for commercial forestry activities
- Area held for future water collection purposes

### **2. Concerns**

Concerns focus on a lack of full information about the proposal, land and infrastructural issues, financial viability of the scheme, impacts on current uses, operational safety issues, and broad concerns for the Council.

*More Information is Required*

- A comprehensive business plan is lacking for the proposal.
- Need more information to assess impacts on signature values – length of rail route, potential visitor numbers etc.
- Figures presented are for only part of the rail route.
- From Maymorn to Featherston total cost likely to be around \$20million for the project as a working railway (plus additional ongoing maintenance costs).
- Infrastructure (such as parking, stations and shelters) and visitor facilities (such as toilets) would also be required and are not included in the current proposal.
- The rate of return on a \$20m investment would require some 50,000 people travelling at a cost of \$50 per ticket, which would still leave them short of other income required for maintenance.
- The scheme is beyond the scope of volunteers and would need to be run as a commercial enterprise.

*There are Concerns About Land Use and Infrastructure*

- Bridges, in their present form, may not be able to carry the trains.
- Tunnels are too narrow for a train and a walking route.
- The swamp at Ladle Bend may be compromised by the need to improve drainage for the track.
- There are difficulties associated with private land at Kaitoke end:
  - Chance of buying private land at Kaitoke end is remote.
  - The Council has access rights at Station Drive, but it is unlikely that owners would allow for access for the railway, nor is there a legal basis, as building a track on the right of way excludes other users.
  - If wanted to connect to Maymorn, there are many lifestyle blocks and owners who may not grant an easement.
  - Estimated cost of around \$1million to buy the Station Drive properties, and they would have to be bought on the open market by the group (or Trust) – there is no basis for use of the Public Works Act or Council to be involved in private land acquisition.
- There is a general lack of space for marshalling areas, depots etc. Areas which could potentially be used include:
  - The carpark at the Council end of the formation could possibly provide a terminus for the train.
  - Summit yard where there is room for facilities.

*Is the Proposed Scheme Viable?*

- View that the scheme is beyond the likely market, and unless operated on a small scale would not be viable.
- The re-establishment of this railway is a major exercise – other comparative railway projects required much less capital funding.
- Taieri Gorge Railway provided as a comparative example (of a heritage railway operating in rough terrain):
  - In contrast to the Rimutaka, the rail tracks were already in place and in good condition, and trains had operated relatively recently.
  - Used ex-NZ Rail locomotives and carriages, refurbished second hand (replacement cost of stock now is around \$10million new).
  - Run 19 carriages and 5 locomotives plus support vehicles.
  - The first 16km of the rail is owned by Tranz Rail.
  - The total route length is 64km with many bridges and tunnels, so Taieri Gorge Railway is a bigger venture in distance terms.
  - Taieri Gorge Railway requires an average of 2000 new sleepers a year plus ongoing maintenance.
  - There is a balance of paid workers and volunteers (around 30 volunteers, 18 full-time staff).

- Despite this, it took ten years to build a successful business and deliver a cash surplus.
- Cruise ships are a major market (and the voluntary labour aspect is an important selling point in this respect).
- Railway is owned by a LATE (72% owned by the Local Authority, 28% by the rail trust).
- Operational challenges in linking the proposed line with Tranz Rail line.
- The Fell Museum is doing a lot of work interpreting the heritage values of the Incline for the public, and are developing an audio-visual set up which will provide a “virtual” ride on the Fell Locomotive (complete with sound and movement).
- Parks and Forests ran a summer programme event to the Incline which may give some guidance about likely interest/market for the train restoration:
  - Comprised of a bus trip from Upper Hutt to Kaitoke, guided walk up to Summit and down other side (with railway historian guide), followed by trip to Fell Museum.
  - In the Visitor Survey 20% of people said that they would have preferred not to have gone to the Fell Museum. Observation made that about ½ the group did not watch the video.
  - Staff who attended have concerns about the interest levels of the general public in the railway heritage of the area, particularly when there was limited interest with a group who specifically registered and paid (\$10) to attend a ‘railway heritage’ event in the summer programme.
- Weather in the mountains can be very bad, may not be the best for tourists.

*There are Major Impacts on Current Uses*

- Potential conflict of use between railway and recreational users and Plantation Forestry.
- The change in use would have implications for the current use of the area (mainly recreational) – would we have to recreate these opportunities elsewhere? What are the ‘flow on’ effects of displaced recreational users? There are plenty of similar walking tracks but only a few other easy, off-road cycle tracks (Hutt River Trail, Pencarrow Road).
- There are not many options for alternative walkways/cycleways – as the track is very narrow in places and it would be very difficult to provide a continuous alternative track.
- Building an alternative walking track parallel to the formation would destroy its heritage values unless the track was reasonably remote from the rail route.

*Potential Safety Problems Exist*

- There are potential safety problems with having co-existent railway and recreation.
- People have been using the formation for recreation for at least 20 years, may be difficult to get them off it.
- The train tracks could not be available for walkers even when the trains are not operating, as it would be too difficult to manage the safety issues.

*Plantation Forestry Related Issues*

- Fire risk is the main concern.
- Would have to insist on oil fired locomotives – which may affect attractiveness of the railway.
- Insurance implications – insurance policy asks about railways in vicinity – likely to be a cost penalty (and higher for steam than oil).
- Lesser issues of access to Lower Pakuratahi Block – currently use formation to access the area. Particularly difficult from River turn off to Commission Road, where there is no turn off. This could be partially addressed by providing a right angle crossing.
- To what extent would forestry roads be required – for alternative recreations, access to maintain railway, and emergency operations? Would this impact on forestry activities?

*Water Collection Issues*

- There are no plans for development of the area at this stage.
- Potential issues are contamination of the water intake at Te Marua – although the risks would be minimal and no greater than the current risks from the road.

*There are a Range of Broader Implications for the Council to Consider*

- Concerns about the Council providing funding or resources for the project, when it is not core Council business.
- Council needs to think about how this activity would be classified, i.e. commercial? Would Council establish a lease arrangement and charge?
- People have attempted to run motorised tours up the formation in the past and not lasted a long time, e.g. Council provided a trial licence for someone to run a mini-bus up there, but it was not successful.
- The Council has to be clear about what liabilities it would be left with if the volunteer group disappeared or pulled out.

*Some Possibilities for the Scheme*

- Interesting concept, worthy of consideration.
- Could look at establishing part of the railway or parts at a time.
- It is a regional issue, and Council needs to consider its level of involvement.
- They should be encouraged, but WRC is not a funding agency.
- The internationally unique part is actually the Incline, not the WRC owned side – would require DoC permission.
- Another option is to restore part of Cross Creek, provide good interpretation and perhaps develop a part of the line at the foot of the Incline.
- Possible, but limited market in cruise liners (although if they are already having a “train experience” in Dunedin may be duplicating that).
- Schools are a likely market.
- A more realistic option might be good interpretation with static displays along the route with people finishing at the Fell Museum for their planned “virtual” train ride.