

City of Whitehorse Sustainability Award Nomination

Nominee Whitehorse Cyclists Inc. Advocacy Group
Project Box Hill to Ringwood Rail Trail (BHRRT) – Concept Design
Summary

Whitehorse Cyclists Advocates published a feasibility study into the Box Hill to Ringwood Rail Trail, linking two Central Activity Districts. When completed the largely off-road trail will encourage safe cycling, reduce road congestion, save fossil fuels and reduce CO2 emissions. They have successfully promoted BHRRT to all levels of government.

The BHRRT will link major cycling paths and provide a safe east-west, primarily off-road, route for cyclists.

Whitehorse Cyclists Advocacy Group

Whitehorse Cyclists Inc. is a leisure cycling club of 230 members, which organises seven day rides each week as well as extended rides, catering for riders of varying abilities. The club formed the Advocacy Group of three original members to lobby widely for better infrastructure for cyclists, as it has been found that cycling facilities must be developed before rider numbers increase.

The promotion of cycling will improve the long term sustainability of the Whitehorse environment because cycling uses renewable energy from the human body instead of fossil fuels. It provides an alternative to fossil fuel dependency, vehicular pollution and the noise associated with motoring. However it is a two-step process. Firstly cycling infrastructure must be provided by government so that cycling becomes viable and safe, with off-road paths to suit the general population, and then secondly people must be convinced of the benefits of cycling. Otherwise it is like asking people to recycle without providing a pick-up service. So while our main objective is sustainability, now we are only at the first stage, so we are emphasising the need for a trail.

The Victorian Activity and Travel Survey, 1994 – 1999, by the Transport Research Centre, RMIT University, states that 53% of car trips in Melbourne are less than 5 km, and the graph on page 20 of Victorian Cycling Strategy 2009 shows that the average bicycle rider makes a 5 km journey. So promoting a modal shift away from cars to bicycles is entirely feasible.

A report commissioned by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing states that ‘a lack of well designed and connected bicycle infrastructure is a major barrier for non-cyclists, infrequent-cyclists and even regular riders.’

A major project for the Advocacy Group was preparing a feasibility study comprising description, drawings, costing and possible project staging for a cycle route linking the Box Hill Central Activity District to the Ringwood Central Activity District.

Whitehorse Cyclists recognised that many potential users of the Box Hill to Ringwood Rail Trail (BHRRT) were yet to be converted to cycling and did not have an organised voice.

Box Hill to Ringwood Rail Trail

There had been earlier studies proposing a shared use path, the Eastern Rail Trail (ERT), from Hawthorn to Ringwood, but these had lost momentum due to difficulties west of Camberwell. Then when the Middleborough Road and Springvale Road grade separations were made, despite representations made by cyclists, no provisions were made for the east-west movement of bicycles. At Middleborough Road in 2006 a pedestrian underpass beneath Middleborough Road was provided for Box Hill High School students, but cycling facilities were overlooked.

The Springvale Road grade separation project was a major investment of some \$140M by the Commonwealth and Victorian governments to eliminate the Springvale Road level crossing. This project was a catalyst for a campaign by Whitehorse Cyclists Advocates to promote cycling facilities in the City of Whitehorse. It was felt that such a project should include an underpass beneath Springvale Road for a shared use east-west path. The Springvale Road project is now complete but regrettably and despite vigorous advocacy by the group, without an underpass. The principal reason given for this unfortunate outcome was that there was no firm plan in existence for the ERT and therefore it could not be factored into the design of the project. A recent impetus for the construction of the BHRRT is that the BHRRT is now shown on the draft revised plan of the Principal Bicycle Network (PBN) prepared by VicRoads. This is a master plan for a coordinated cycling network throughout the whole of Melbourne.

The City of Whitehorse made a request to the Victorian government in March 2009 for a grant of \$40,000 to carry out a survey of the BHRRT within Whitehorse. This request was refused, so Whitehorse Cyclists Advocacy Group approached the Council and volunteered to prepare a feasibility report. This became a 36 page document of professional quality which was launched at Nunawading Offices by the Federal MP Mike Symon in August 2010. Whitehorse City Council has taken this document as a basis and is presently continuing with the development of the project. Since then the advocates have publicized the project widely and gained an undertaking from the new Victorian Government to allocate \$5,000,000 to construct the trail during this current term of office.

The Box Hill to Ringwood Rail Trail (BHRRT) will link currently disconnected major cycling paths and provide a safe, primarily off-road, east-west route for cyclists. At present taking a safe east-west route is very problematic due to high speed traffic on arterial roads, disjointed minor roads and other obstructions like planned estates designed to discourage through traffic, in addition to the hilly terrain. Cycle trails naturally follow railway lines because railways avoid steep hills and have minimum cross-roads

The BHRRT is part of the Eastern Rail Trail, a spine trail planned to run from Hawthorn to Ringwood, and will connect to the existing trail from Ringwood to Belgrave, the Eastlink trails north and south, the Gardiners Creek Trail, and many other shared trails.

Liaison With Other Groups

Government: The Advocacy Group has made presentations to elected members of all three levels of government, and organisations such as Whitehorse Council, Maroondah Council, Department of Transport and VicRoads, which have been well received.

Bicycle Victoria: The Advocacy Group has liaised with Bicycle Victoria which is promoting two key projects in Whitehorse, the BHRRT and a trail along the Melbourne Water pipe track between Mitcham and Syndal.

Schools: The Advocacy Group has made approaches to 20 schools located within 1 km. of the proposed trail and is in discussion with school representatives about presenting the project to students and how it relates to the Ride-2-School program. When children can safely ride to school it will improve their health and freedom and reduce their dependence on fossil fuelled cars. A newsletter has been sent to schools.

Whitehorse Community: The Advocacy Group has facilitated a number of articles in local newspapers in support of the trail and cycling in general.

The Advocacy Group is obtaining over 2000 public signatures for a petition in support of the trail and its sustainability to be presented to the Victorian State Parliament. Club members have been encouraged to obtain signatures from their local communities and cyclists have also been approached at major rides including Eastlink Ride-4-Home, BV Great Victorian Bike Ride and MS Melbourne Summer Cycle.

Permanent displays in the form of banners and maps have been mounted in at Heath Street Blackburn, at the beginning of the Gardiners Creek Trail, and in Laburnum Street Blackburn on the route of the BHRRT. These attract the interest of walkers and cyclists.

There will also be displays of the BHRRT at various public locations in Whitehorse such as libraries.

Reducing the Ecological Footprint

Cycling is an increasingly popular form of transport which yields both sustainability and health benefits at the same time. Riders gain fitness benefits, while reducing their use of fossil fuel and reducing emissions.

The BHRRT will significantly reduce the ecological footprint of all users of the path, many of whom will use the path in lieu of some form of motorised transport. Refer to calculations of potential savings below.

Of course Whitehorse Cyclists as recreational cyclists ourselves also have a lower ecological footprint due to our own cycling.

Estimate of Fuel Saved and CO2 Emissions Saved

By increasing the numbers of cyclists in the long term, the BHRRT will facilitate large savings in the use of fossil fuel and reduce atmospheric emissions. Whilst the quantities may be somewhat conjectural at present, the following is an estimate of the savings to be made.

As the BHRRT does not exist yet, the number of riders that will use the trail in the future must be estimated. The BHRRT will in time form part of a long distance trail extending from Belgrave to Melbourne. It is assumed here that the BHRRT, which serves a different catchment from the Koonung Trail, will in future have a similar number of riders to the Koonung Trail.

VicRoads has a permanently mounted counter on the Koonung Trail near Elgar Road. For the year 2010 it measured an average of 443 cyclists per day (weekdays, non-holiday).

On Tuesday 2 March 2010 between 7am and 9am Bicycle Victoria conducted a survey of bicycle use throughout Melbourne. There were 4 sites on the Koonung Trail and these averaged 124 riders per site in 2 hours. BV advises that their studies show that the daily total of riders is about four times the morning two hour peak, i.e. 496 riders per day.

So if we take the average as 400 riders per day in 2010 for the Koonung Trail, and we allow an annual increase in cycling of 8% p.a. to the year 2016, and BHRRT traffic equal to the Koonung Trail then, there will be 634 riders per day on the BHRRT in 2016.

If the average rider makes a 5 km journey (based on page 20 of Victorian Cycling Strategy 2009) then the annual distance covered is $634 \times 365 \times 5 = 1,159,000$ km.

Emission Reduction

From 2010 the Australian motor manufacturing industry emission target for new vehicles up to 3.5 tonnes was 222 g/CO₂ per km. For 1,159,000 km this would be $1,159,000 \times 222/1000$ kg = 257,000 kg.

So the emissions saved by the users of the BHRRT in converting to cycling from journeys by car in 2016 would be 257 tonnes of CO₂ p.a.

Fossil Fuel Savings

Assuming the average car uses 8 L/100 km, this is an annual saving of 93,000 L of fuel, which would be 1860 refills at 50 L each time.

1860 cars parked tightly end to end would stretch the whole length of the 9.9km BHRRT.

Public Health and Other Benefits

An additional benefit of the trail is the regular exercise that will be obtained by all those cycling on the trail, including riders of all types, and also those who walk to a station to get fit, to exercise the dog or to enjoy the local environment. Their use of the trail will be integrated with their regular daily activities and their fitness will improve and they will lose weight as a result of the existence of the BHRRT.

The reduction in car use will lower pressure on road congestion and car parking in Whitehorse, and this will lower the demand to extend the paved area of the city to accommodate cars.

More Information

The Advocacy Group has mounted the full proposal for the BHRRT at www.bhrrt.org .