



# Cycle Aware Wellington

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## Rimutaka Railway: application for concession: CAW submission 30 January 2012

Submission to Greater Wellington Regional Council on behalf of Cycle Aware Wellington Inc (CAW) which represents the interests of cyclists in the Wellington Region.

This submission updates our submission to the GWRC Social and Cultural Wellbeing Committee 23 November 2011.

### Summary:

**We conclude that the proposed walkway does not offer a credible replacement for the existing rail trail. Reinstatement of the railway would change the experience of cycling the route completely, and is likely to make it impractical for beginners and cycletourists, if not all cyclists.**

### Rimutaka Rail Trail as a cycling facility:

- The steady gradient (maximum 2.5%) and wide track makes it one of the few rides in the Wellington Region that is suitable for families and beginner cyclists.
- Together with the Great Harbour Way and the Hutt River Trail, it provides a cycle touring connection from Wellington to the Wairarapa that is likely to form part of a future Nga Haerenga/NZ Cycle Trails route and is far preferable to the higher and busier Rimutaka Hill Road. It is also a key part of the popular Big Coast cycling event.
- Many cyclists enjoy the heritage aspects of the route such as cycling through the tunnels and viewing machinery.
- The Rimutaka Rail Trail is extremely popular, with approximately 40 000 visitors per year, growing at 13% per year.
- The “bible” of NZ mountain bikers, *Classic New Zealand Mountain bike rides*, gives the rail trail the maximum four star rating – only given to 20 of the 300 rides.

### Bicycling implications of the proposal:

- We agree with the trust that it is impractical for cyclists and trains to share the existing route: apart from the limited space in tunnels and cuttings, it is hazardous to ride parallel to rail tracks, and difficult to ride on ballast and sleepers.
- The proposed walkway specifications are not credible. The original proposal for a “walkway” was not suitable for cycling: at 2m it is too narrow for cyclists to pass comfortably, and the 12.5% gradient required to get around tunnels and cuttings is more than the International Mountain Biking Association recommendation for cycle path gradient, and 5 times the existing gradient. The revised proposal has changed these specifications to a 4m width and up to 5% gradient, but the estimated costs have not been changed. This is unrealistic, since a cycle/walkway to these specifications will be significantly more expensive to construct. For example, doubling the width of a track on steep terrain, which much of the walkway follows, means that four times the amount of material needs to be excavated. Cutting deeper into the hillside means

that more rock is likely to be encountered, and increases erosion risk. Reducing the gradient means that either the track needs to be made longer (for example by using switchbacks to gain and lose height) or cuttings have to be constructed. We are concerned that the stated specifications are likely to be compromised in the course of construction.

- The proposal mentions the use of volunteer labour in the project overall. The Wellington cycling community is fully committed in existing trail projects, and it could be difficult to raise volunteer effort to build a replacement for the current rail trail. This issue is not addressed in the proposal.

**Other issues** raised by CAW members:

- The area is now a forest park, and non-motorised recreation is the most appropriate use of the area. Existing motorised recreation (e.g. the Go Kart track) is localized, and on the perimeter of the Park. Reinstating the railway, and establishing tourist facilities and a bus station at Summit, will change the character of the Park dramatically.
- The route is now public space. The proposal will turn the rail trail into a privately controlled space. A significant part of the proposed budget comes from an “angel investor”. It is not clear what conditions or requirements such an investor may have on use and access of the rail corridor. There is a significant risk that the Regional Council will incur liabilities if the Trust is unable to find the resources for this ambitious plan.
- While the proposal mentions the use of volunteer resources, there is little evidence of support for the proposal from the wider rail heritage community.
- It is risky to run coal fired engines, which historically caused frequent scrub fires, through a forestry plantation. The Parks Network Plan notes that there is a regionally significant wetland habitat at Ladle Bend on the rail route. While the proposal mentions replanting with fire resistant species, this is not allowed for in the construction plan. Clearing and replanting fire vulnerable areas is likely to require significant resources.
- The current proposal is only to reinstate the conventional railway line that connected with Rimutaka Incline fell railway, not the historic Rimutaka Incline itself. The proposed railway reconstruction has limited historic significance. While the scenic values of the route are high, existing railways (for example the North Island Main Trunk line) run through similar bush clad areas. The existing route is a valuable industrial archaeology site, and should be left as such.



To sum up, this is the **Rimutaka trail from the perspective of an 11 year old cyclist**:  
“A while ago, I went on a cycling trip with my family to the Rimutaka Rail Trail. It was awesome. Of course the bike ride was brilliant, but the tunnels were what made it special. Just the thrill of zooming through, the only light coming from your bike light is great. Please don't take away the tunnels!”