

Submission to Greater Wellington Regional Council on Application for Concession by Rimutaka Incline Rail Trust

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Summary

The Rimutaka Incline Rail Trust proposes to build a railway line from Maymorn to Summit, over the existing walking and cycling tracks. Their proposal would destroy the Rimutaka Rail Trail as we know it. This trail is a wonderful recreational asset, unequalled anywhere in the Wellington Region. It is also a cycle route of national significance and is by far the best cycling access into the Wellington region. The proposed path alongside the railway development is in no way an equivalent replacement – the developer proposes an off-road mountain bike path, not a cycle path. This will be unsuitable for a significant proportion of existing users and will exclude its use by the National Cycle Way.

What is so special about the Rimutaka Rail Trail?

- suitable for people of all ages and abilities, whether walking, pushing a baby buggy, running, or cycling
- safe – the trail is ideal for young families
- challenging – for the inexperienced or unfit, cycling the complete trail is quite challenging, with the added advantage of being downhill on the return journey from Summit to Kaitoke
- weatherproof – the trail is useable in all weather conditions, including during winter despite being in a high rainfall area
- wide – sufficiently wide to allow cyclists to pass walkers and other cyclists with ease, and for parents to walk or cycle beside their children
- good surface – suitable for touring bicycles with relatively narrow tyres
- gradients – even grades, with a maximum of 1 in 39 (2.56%), and consistently up-hill from Kaitoke to Summit.
- accessible – close to Upper Hutt, and accessible by train from Maymorn
- facilities – Ladle Creek Bridge and the Summit station sites offers historical interest, picnic and camping facilities
- cycle linkage – the Rimutaka Trail is by far the best cycling link between Wellington and the rest of the North Island, suitable for cycle tourists
- spectacular scenery
- lots of points of historical and general interest, including bridges, tunnels, cuttings, historic railway relics, and interpretative signs

- unique – there is no other comparable facility in the Wellington region and few in New Zealand.

Developer's Proposed Path

The Rimutaka Railway promoters state that a walkway would be provided from Maymorn to Summit. Their information consistently refers to a “walkway”, not a cycleway. The New Zealand Standard that they reference (HB 8630:2004) is for the construction and maintenance of walkways and off road mountain bike paths - not for cycle ways. This difference is critical to the impact of their proposal on existing and potential walkers and cyclists.

The developer describes a path with 12.5% maximum gradient. This gradient is 5 times as steep as the existing rail trail and is impossibly steep for touring cyclists. The proposed path will be of no use whatsoever to cycle tourists and those of lower cycling abilities due to these steep grades.

The proposed path width is 2 metres. In areas where there is a bank beside the path, a drop off or some obstacle, the path edges are not useable. The 2 metre width will give an effective width of at best 1.4 metres. This is not sufficient for cyclists to pass people with baby buggies for example, and is the absolute minimum for any cycle path.

The existing trail is a high quality walking and cycling route, suitable for people of all ages and abilities, and for most types of cyclist. The developers are proposing a much lower quality route suitable only for able bodied walkers and mountain bikes.

Developer's Estimated Costs

The railway developers have budgeted \$3.4 million for the 18 km path from Mangaroa to Summit. This appears to be inadequate for a good quality path that will require substantial earthworks, runs through some rugged sections, and crosses numerous creeks and the Pakuratahi River. By way of comparison, the Wainuiomata Hill cycle path is estimated by Hutt City to cost approximately \$4 million, and the upgrade and extension of the existing path from Ngauranga to Petone is estimated at \$14 million.

The developer's cost estimates are not credible for the construction of a good quality cycle path.

The New Zealand Cycle Network

The New Zealand Cycle Trail project is now moving into its second phase, which is the establishment of a network of cycle friendly routes throughout New Zealand. This phase of the project uses existing infrastructure. The Taumaranui to New Plymouth route has been completed, forming one of the first sections of the network. Preliminary proposals issued by the Ministry for Economic Development show this network passing through the Wairarapa and along the Rimutaka Rail Trail (see map below). The Wairarapa has many roads which are attractive to cycle tourists, as they have low traffic volumes and pass through interesting countryside. The route into Wellington is likely to pass through Martinborough, and utilize the Rimutaka Rail Trail.

Cycle tourism is growth activity. An attractive entrance way to the Wellington area will have many benefits, both for recreation, and for tourist orientated businesses.

The walkway proposed by the railway developers will exclude the option of the National Cycle Way crossing the Rimutaka Ranges.



Public Consultation

Before losing such a wonderful public asset as the Rimutaka Rail Trail, wide public consultation is essential. A convincing case should be put forward to demonstrate that this allocation of a public asset to a special interest group is in the public interest. There has been no such consultation. The information available at present does not demonstrate that the interests of the 40,000 users per year of this facility will be protected.

Very limited information has been made available regarding this concession application. It is incredible that the railway museum developers could expect the Rimutaka Rail Trail, an extremely valuable regional and national asset, to be handed over to them with scant information available regarding the impacts on the large number of existing users.

Financial Viability

Developers of schemes such as the Rimutaka Railway Museum must be ambitious and optimistic. This inevitably leads to some problematic issues being down played,

costs under estimated, revenues overestimated, etc. Due to the very role of the promoters, their estimates cannot be accepted. The developers of this ambitious project must demonstrate to the Council that they have the financial and management capability to carry through the project before the Council could consider granting a concession. The developer's estimates for costs, revenues, and technical viability should be independently reviewed. This should be done by an experienced consultancy engaged by the Council, at the developer's expense – this is a reasonable price that the developers should be willing to pay when asking for a valuable Council asset to be handed over to them.

Council should have compelling evidence that this project is achievable and look through the developer's optimism if it is to place an exceptionally valuable Council owned asset at their disposal.