

## **MTB Trails Trust Submission to Council's Long Term Plan 2015-2025**

### **Introduction**

This submission is from the Mountainbike Trails Trust (MTBTT), a registered Charitable Trust operating in the Top of the South Island. The MTBTT has over 900 'Friends of the Trust' supporters, and is a core member of the Regional Cycle Forum.

The MTBTT has a clear vision, to:

*"Position the Top of the South island as a national and international mountainbiking destination, by developing a network of mountainbike trails for all abilities that will be a valued community asset."*

The MTBTT also has a clear strategy on how to achieve this, and this submission to Council's Long Term Plans forms an important part of engaging Councils to be an active part of this vision. We applaud Councils for their ongoing support of cycling initiatives and infrastructure, especially the commitment to both NZ Cycle Trail Projects and urban cycling. This submission focusses on off-road cycling, or mountainbiking, which as a subset of 'cycling' often doesn't get the level of recognition or support it should have as a valued community based, informal recreational activity, or as a regional drawcard to visitors.

### **Challenges**

Unlike most other urban centres around New Zealand, Nelson/Richmond has a broad front-country and broader back-country landscape. This, coupled with generally steep terrain and a number of different land owner interests makes forming a coherent and well-networked trail development and management strategy a reasonable challenge. Council land, including reserves and council managed plantation forests accounts for approximately 50% of the available front-country backdrop, with the remaining 50% vested with forestry interests, amenable private land owners and the Department of Conservation (DOC). The enclosed Network map shows how all these items are placed and how they interact with each other.

Councils support in realising the potential of this area to be both an accessible and valued community recreation resource, and as a national and international destination is an important part of the picture. This MTBTT submission is also designed to improve the understanding at Council level of the potential available in this area, while also generating greater buy-in to be a more tangible part of delivering better outcomes for off-road cycling.

As off-road popularity increases, so too does demand for quality riding facilities and the potential for conflict with other users. The MTBTT advocates for thorough design of any trail resource, and while multi-use will always be a key policy especially for public land, we also advocate for separated facilities where appropriate (especially for high use walking areas). Coupled with this is utilising appropriate management tools, to ensure different user groups have priority where appropriate. Every different trail 'cluster', reserve or forest area will have its own recreational use demands, and resolving these at the design and consultation phase of a given project is essential.

Different areas will also have differing levels of Biodiversity interest and values, and these should be identified, resolved and the projects built around them during the design and consultation phase for each.

## Current Initiatives

The MTBTT is progressing a process with the International Mountainbike Association (IMBA) which would see Nelson/Richmond accredited as a Gold Ride Centre. This would give our region instant recognition on the world stage. At present there is only one Gold Ride Centre in the world, at Park City in Utah. Taupo has Silver Ride Centre status, even though it has nowhere near the number and variety of trail experiences that are currently on offer here. IMBA also designates outstanding trails as Epic Rides, and the MTBTT is also seeking to have as many of these on IMBA's radar as possible.

The MTBTT's Epic Trails plan has been in circulation for 18 months now, and has been embraced by DOC as a blueprint for improving recreational cycling access to the back-country. In the case of the Nelson Lakes area, this has served as the enabling document for developing a trail hub and network for St. Arnaud. The Epic Trails Plan also provides a noticeable point of difference with other areas around New Zealand, and Nelson/Tasman Tourism sees this plan as being a valuable part of increasing and marketing the cycling opportunities on offer.

The MTBTT has brokered free and open access to a private plantation forest between Champion Road and TDC's Kingsland Forest. Silvan Forest forms a crucial component of the networked (front-country) plan, and to date the MTBTT has built 7km of easy grade trails on this land with a significant development plan continuing to roll out in 2015.

The MTBTT is also working with the regions cycling interests via the Regional Cycle Forum to further the understanding and knowledge base around the potential to make a real difference in this area for both the community, and for the region.

## Economic Benefits

As a community based asset, local economy benefits flow through several means, including:

- Specialist retail stores and staff
- Other local businesses – among them bike hire and guiding, skills training, trail design and construction and shuttle transport

Intangible benefits include the health savings from a fitter and more active population, and the reduced pressure on transport infrastructure.

There are several NZ studies on the economic benefits of off-road cycling, notably APR Consultants work for Rotorua (x 2) and Taupo. These studies showed that solid figures can be modelled and estimated, however key points from these studies showed that:

- Over a third of international cycle tourists stay in NZ for over a month
- On average, international cycle tourists spent \$3800 compared to a spend of \$2500 for all visitors
- Cyclists are a high value segment with 22% spending over \$5000
- The net economic impact associated with mountainbiking in the Whakarewarewa Forest, Rotorua, inclusive of multiplier effects is estimated to be \$12 million in 2013.

Two indicative case studies relevant to this information have been performed by the MTB Trails Trust, to consider a domestic and an international visitor to Nelson/Richmond, whose primary purpose is to ride off-road.

### Domestic Visitor

A group of four travelled to the north island on an 18 day trip, riding for 16 of those days. Total spend was \$7000 for the group, or \$110 per day. This figure covered transport (private vehicles), accommodation (holiday homes), food (cooked in house) and shuttles.

The Taupo Cycling Economic Impact Study's ratios (APR report) gives a value added figure of \$45 per person per day, giving a total benefit of \$155.60 per person per day. A conservative 1000 domestic off-road/mountainbike visitors staying five days, returns an economic benefit to the region of \$778,000, and using APR's ratios, will create 3.25 FTE jobs.

### International Visitor

These same four also travelled to Colorado and Utah for a three week riding holiday, and total spend was \$8841 per person, or \$421 per day. Location choice was determined by the riding opportunities on offer at a particular location, and a town's ability to cater for mountainbikers. Some guided riding formed part of this trip, as this enabled the group to access the best trails in a location with maximum efficiency. Accommodation was holiday homes, rental cars were hired for transport and meals were a mixture of restaurant provided and cooked in house.

The Taupo Cycling Economic Impact Study's ratios (APR report) gives a value added figure of \$166.80 per person per day, giving a total benefit of \$587.50 per person per day. An achievable 500 international off-road/mountainbike visitors staying five days, returns an economic benefit to the region of \$1,468,750 and using APR's ratios, will create 6.15 FTE jobs.

### **Nelson/Richmond Trail Network – Strategic Focus**

The challenges of the broad front country environment behind Nelson/Richmond create one of the region's greatest assets and opportunities for informal recreation.

The enclosed map identifies those areas of available land that will help create a seamless and well networked resource of accessible trails, providing opportunities for all communities between Nelson-Richmond, while also helping build the area as an off-road/mountainbike destination.

#### **1. Sharlands Creek (Hira Forest)**

Landowners: Ngati Koata and DOC  
Trail Management: Nelson Mountainbike Club  
Status: Established trail network, future expansion within the forest estate possible  
Linked: Yes, through Central and Sharlands Roads  
Main Access Point: Sharlands Road, off Maitai Road  
Serves: Nelson and Nelson north

#### **2. Codgers MTB Park**

Landowners: Ngati Koata and NCC  
Trail Management: Nelson Mountainbike Club and NCC  
Status: Established trail network, planned rebuild 2015 after Easter 2014 storm damage  
Linked: Yes, through Dun Mountain Trail and forest roads between Fringed Hill and the Maitai Valley  
Main Access Point: Brook Street, Dun Mountain Trail  
Serves: Nelson

#### **3. Fringed Hill**

Landowners: Ngati Koata and NCC.  
Trail Management: NCC, and Nelson MTB Club (with existing, purpose built trails)  
Status: Very limited trail network, major potential to develop in a well-planned way. Gondola Project potentially confusing the opportunity here, however trail development planning should continue despite the gondola project uncertainty. Draft plan tabled with NCC based on Brook Street gondola base. Brook Reserve Plan consultation process pending.  
Linked: Mostly, through Dun Mountain Trail and forest roads between Fringed Hill and the Maitai Valley. Linkage to Marsden Valley should be improved after the Sanctuary fence is completed, as well as enhancing back country linkage (Epic Trails)  
Main Access Point: Brook Street, Dun Mountain Trail  
Serves: Nelson

#### **4. Grampians**

Landowners: NCC  
Trail Management: NCC  
Status: Established trail network, mountainbike pressure on Grampians much reduced. Potentially could be a bike free zone given more appropriate off-road opportunities elsewhere?  
Linked: Yes, through suburban boundaries  
Main Access Point: Blick Terrace, Fairfield House and Market Road  
Serves: Nelson urban

#### **5. Pipers Reserve**

Landowners: NCC  
Trail Management: NCC  
Status: New trail network, limited potential to expand.  
Linked: Yes, through suburban boundaries and effectively between Princess Drive and Emano Street  
Main Access Point: Emano Street, Observatory Terrace and Princess Drive  
Serves: Nelson urban

#### **6. Marsden Reserve**

Landowners: NCC  
Trail Management: NCC  
Status: Limited trail network, potential to expand and network per Conservation and Landscapes Management Plan. Draft development plan tabled with NCC.  
Linked: Not well. Linkage to Third House and Fringed Hill should be improved, while linkage to Richmond along the forest road network isn't ideal, but is useable.  
Main Access Point: Marsden Road end  
Serves: Stoke (relevant especially with projected future growth)

#### **7. Silvan Forest**

Landowners: Rick and Sarah Griffin  
Trail Management: MTB Trails Trust  
Status: Startup trail network, developing from Champion Road trail head up into Silvan Forest. Public access secured  
Linked: Yes. Linkage to Kingsland Forest (TDC) in place via forestry roads, however linkage to Marsden Valley along the forest road network isn't ideal, but is useable. Champion Road will also be linked to Saxton Field through future urban link.  
Main Access Point: Champion Road end  
Serves: Stoke, (relevant especially with projected future growth), Richmond

#### **8. Kingsland Forest**

Landowners: TDC  
Trail Management: Nelson Mountainbike Club, TDC and MTB Trails Trust  
Status: Established trail network, with good scope for expansion and proper networking  
Linked: Semi. Linkage to Silvan Forest (private) in place via forestry roads, however linkage to the Roding and further west isn't ideal, but is useable  
Main Access Point: Easby Park, Marlborough Terrace  
Serves: Richmond

#### **9. Tunnickliff Forest**

Landowners: TDC  
Trail Management: TDC and MTB Trails Trust  
Status: Proposed trail network, with good scope for expansion and proper networking  
Linked: Semi. Great Taste Trail will run past the Wai-iti Domain, however Tunnickliff is otherwise isolated  
Main Access Point: Wai-iti Domain  
Serves: Wakefield

## **10. Rabbit Island**

Landowners: TDC  
Trail Management: TDC  
Status: Limited trail network, with major scope for expansion and effective networking especially in a lower grade space  
Linked: Semi. Great Taste Trail runs through Rabbit Island, however is otherwise isolated  
Main Access Point: Rabbit Island  
Serves: Appleby, Tasman and broader rural

## **11. Saxton (additional to map)**

Landowners: NCC and TDC  
Trail Management: NCC and TDC  
Status: Potential trail network, with good scope for lower grade boundary loops and Features  
Linked: Semi. Railway Reserve linked directly with Saxton, and Velodrome will form a focal point for cycling at the facility. Potential to link directly with Silvan Forest via Champion Road.  
Main Access Point: Railway Reserve and Main Road Stoke  
Serves: Nelson/Stoke/Richmond urban

## **Epic Trail Plan (Summary)**

A to Q represent the back country linkages proposed by the Epic Trails Plan, to provide both a seamless back-country linkage between each trail cluster, and also to provide a wide range of adventure style riding opportunities. The majority of proposed back-country linkages in the Epic Trails plan are on conservation estate, and are being progressed through a management agreement between the MTBTT and the DOC Nelson/West Coast Conservancy.

While some of these back country routes are already in place, in general none work well, are not well networked and are generally legacy type trails. The major Epic Trails project relevant to this area is the Hackett-Starveall-Lee loop, which secures access to the Richmond Forest Park through the Lee Valley.

[Epic Trail Plan enclosed]

## Recommendations

The MTBTT has the following comments about the NCC Consultation Document, and other supporting plans:

1. Gondola Project. Ensure the trail network plan is consulted, approved and activated regardless of the status of the Gondola Project. This network is highly desirable, and should foremost be a freely accessible community asset. The Gondola Project, if it does go ahead should complement and support the trail network.
2. Continue with its focus on developing grade two type trails, easily accessible from urban links. (Parks and Reserves Activity Management Plan 2012-2022 pages 16 and 84). These lower grade trails provide the crucial link between Great Taste Trail and urban cycleway opportunities and more specific intermediate grade and above off-road trails.
3. Provide budgeted funding to progress a consistent rate of trail development on Reserve land including Fringed Hill and the Marsden Reserve, to help realise front-country potential. Engage community groups to match this funding through volunteer time (and in-kind contribution) in both the construction and ongoing management phases.
4. With TDC, support the development of recreational loop cycling opportunities for the Saxton Field complex, complementing the Velodrome project.
5. Together with TDC maintain, utilise and promote Council's GIS system as a key information source for recreational information and opportunities. (Parks and Reserves Activity Management Plan 2012-2022 page 6 Executive Summary).

The MTBTT has the following comments about the TDC Consultation Document, and other supporting plans:

1. With NCC, support the development of recreational loop cycling opportunities for the Saxton Field complex, complementing the Velodrome project.
2. Provide capital budget funding to progress a consistent rate of trail development on Reserve land and including Kingsland Forest, to help realise front-country potential. Engage community groups to match this funding through volunteer time (and in-kind contribution) in both the construction and ongoing management phases.
3. Consider informal recreational needs as a key part of deliberations around access to forestry areas. Specifically for Kingsland and Tunnicliff forests and Rabbit Island, informal recreation should be considered as a valued part of managing these areas.
4. Expand the off-road cycling opportunities available at Rabbit Island, in the grade two space. This will complement the Great Taste Trail, and allow appropriate utilisation of one of the only flat areas of land available in the region for cycling activity of this kind.
5. Continue with the successful policy of user separation in Easby Park/Dellside Reserve where appropriate. (TDC Reserves General Policies 2013)
6. Together with NCC maintain, utilise and promote Council's GIS system as a key information source for recreational information and opportunities.

