

Presidents Report for 2024 AGM

This year has been a busy one with a few significant milestones achieved, but some challenges remain.

The year began with more work done on further trail development plans, environmental studies and revenue analysis. This work was funded by a NSW Government grant. Now that these reports are completed, we have trail development plans for the MRT corridor apart from sections Chakola to Cooma and Cooma to Nimmitabel. Biosecurity and biodiversity reports for the sections Queanbeyan to Michelago and Nimmitabel to Bombala have also been completed.

These reports provide up to date costs and designs for most of the trail and the confidence that there are no potential environmental concerns. With that our business case has taken shape and has been made available to key stakeholders. The project's benefit to cost ratio remains strong at 3.0 with Net Present Value of over \$100M.

Snowy Monaro Regional Council has been successful with the \$1M Federal grant to fund a short section of the MRT at Bombala. Work to achieve planning approval and obtain the lease from Transport NSW has well and truly started. When the site works get underway in the coming year this will mark an exciting point in construction of the MRT.

Queanbeyan - Palerang Regional Council is supportive of the MRT proposal and their General Manager is keen to submit a grant application in the near future. The section in their LGA is 32 km from Queanbeyan to Williamsdale and when constructed this will make a very positive start to the MRT.

Other work in the background includes both councils engaging with, Transport NSW for corridor lease and with other stakeholders such as Landcare, Regional NSW and Local Aboriginal Land Councils. All this will help when applying for grants and subsequently delivering the project.

Challenges remain. SMRC may seek a new independent report for the MRT business case, including showing how maintenance and depreciation costs would impact on Council finances. This move is in accordance with a council resolution in the April meeting to seeking funding for a new business case and to do this in December. Within Council there is some concern that operating and maintenance costs are significant in the context of a council wanting to minimize additional expenses. It is interesting to note that QPRC does not require this.

Secondly, we had the resignations of our President, Carlo Botto, and committee member Bernie McDonald. Both have provided invaluable assistance with respect to undertaking financial modelling for our business case, however, with support from the remaining team we have been able to continue their great work. Carlo has been a strong advocate for MRT and we thank him for his contribution.

A third challenge is to maintain SMRC's commitment for the MRT project. There has been strong support over the past as Council has acknowledged the widespread community recognition of the significant social and economic benefits of rail trails to the region. We remain hopeful this will continue under the new council and will collaborate with SMRC towards securing further grant funding when the opportunities arise.

We also were saddened to hear of the passing of our Patron Gary Nairn who had been suffering from cancer. His support has been appreciated and he will be sorely missed.

Finally, the state of play with Cooma Monaro Rail history group remains a consideration. Their wish is to run tourist trains from Cooma to Bombala. While we review how it could be possible to add a walking/cycling trail beside the rails in the one corridor, our priority wish in the first instance is to establish the rail trail in northern sections such as Queanbeyan to Michelago where there is no competing interest.

Our dealings with stakeholders including Regional NSW, Destination NSW, Regional Development Australia and local members, Steve Whan and Kristy McBain, have been productive and are ongoing. They remain interested and supportive of our project.

We have also established some direct contacts with local Landcare groups and Transport for NSW which will provide ongoing guidance.

On a personal note, I would like to sincerely thank all the committee members for your contributions over the last year and, especially since I have been acting President. I feel we have been working well as a team and your continued enthusiasm is much appreciated.

Frank Bakker

President – MRT 2024