



16 July 2021

Representations
Hobart City Council
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REPRESENTATION: PLN-21-302 – MOUNTAIN BIKE TRACKS

The position of the Tasmanian National Parks Association (TNPA) is that the public engagement and planning undertaken to date is seriously inadequate; none of the package of tracks proposed in *Riding the Mountain* should be constructed until the proposal in its entirety has been subjected to a comprehensive planning assessment including meaningful public consultation with all affected users.

The TNPA is aware that *Riding the Mountain* was endorsed by the HCC Parks and Recreation Committee on 15 October 2020 but this endorsement was informed by the claim that the 'extensive community engagement process that occurred in the development of the plan provides an understanding of the full range of recreational users' (HCC Agenda pages 50-51). The TNPA raised concerns about the adequacy of this consultation at the time and has subsequently been involved in several meetings with HCC staff on this matter including a one-on-one discussion with the planner responsible for the public consultation. These meetings have only served to confirm our concerns which are outlined in the attachment to this letter.

It is the TNPA's understanding that one of the locations where user conflict (between walkers and mountain bikers) has been a particular concern has been the Bracken Lane Fire Trail between Bracken Lane and the junction with the O'Gradys Falls Fire Trail (this has been the subject of much discussion and is the location of signage intended to address the issue). The two proposed tracks (only a single bidirectional track was canvassed in the original proposal) linking the O'Gradys Falls Fire Trail to Shoobridge Bend are in close proximity to this location. It would be prudent to progress understanding of existing and potential new user conflict issues prior to starting construction.

Please note that the TNPA supports the concept of providing improved facilities for local mountain bikers on the lower slopes of kunanyi but expects the proposed tracks to represent a considered compromise between the needs of mountain bikers, the needs of other users, and the natural and cultural values of kunanyi. A 'win-win' outcome is still possible but *Riding the Mountain* needs to go 'back to the drawing board' if this is to be achieved.

Yours sincerely,

Nicholas Sawyer, President, TNPA

cc all members of HCC Parks and Recreation Committee

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The TNPA acknowledges the First Nation peoples of lutruwita (Tasmania) and their enduring connection to country. We pay our respects to their elders past and present. We also acknowledge that their land was taken, and sovereignty was not ceded.

Attachment – Analysis of consultation and planning behind *Riding the Mountain*

Summary

- The responses from ‘walkers’ in the user surveys are likely to be biased towards mountain bikers who also bushwalk (more tolerant of mountain bikers than non-cycling bushwalkers). It is likely that a survey of a representative sample of walkers would have found less support for *Riding the Mountain* than reported in the survey results.
- The Shared Use Survey missed the opportunity to identify locations where user conflict is a problem.
- The *Riding the Mountain* Survey missed the opportunity to obtain feedback on issues related to individual tracks.
- The Community Engagement Summary reports that 52% of walkers supported the draft plan. If the TNPA’s hypothesis (dot point 1) is correct, this implies that the level of support from a representative sample of walkers is likely to be under 50%. The HCC should be seriously concerned about proceeding with a project which appears not to be supported by a majority of a major user group.
- It is not apparent that any planning exercise was undertaken following the community engagement to modify the proposed ‘wish list’ of MTB tracks to reconcile the needs of mountain bikers, the needs of other users, and the natural and cultural values of the area.
- Conclusion: considerably more community engagement and considered planning is required to reconcile conflicting priorities if *Riding the Mountain* is to have a positive outcome.

1. Concerns applicable to both Shared Use and *Riding the Mountain* surveys

The initial survey in this series was the Missing Link Survey. This was undertaken to obtain feedback on a proposal for a relatively short section of new track near the top of Strickland Avenue. I personally was aware of this survey but I did not bother to participate because I saw the proposal as appropriate and uncontroversial and I expect that many others thought likewise. It seems reasonable to assume that most of those motivated to comment were mountain bikers keen to see the track constructed. This list of respondents served as the basis for contacting participants in the two future surveys and is likely to have biased responses towards this user group.

Multiple responses were encouraged from users who engaged in more than one activity. Since the main target audience was mountain bikers, it is highly likely that responses from ‘walkers’ were biased towards mountain bikers who also bushwalk. These are likely to be far more tolerant of mountain bikers than non-cycling bushwalkers. I requested from HCC a breakdown of the numbers who had responded as both mountain bikers and bushwalkers but was advised that this was impossible because responses could not be attributed to individual respondents. This was despite an earlier verbal assurance that ‘of course we checked that’.

It is acknowledged that many non-mountain bikers responded but many others would have ignored surveys that appeared relevant only to mountain bikers even if they were aware of the survey. It is apparent that no attempt was made to obtain a representative sample of all users and explore the full range of their needs and concerns.

1a. Shared Use Survey

The Shared Use Survey correctly identified user conflict as a major issue but made remarkably little effort to recruit respondents who were not mountain bikers. i.e. the users that the mountain bikers were sharing with and, potentially, those most disadvantaged by shared use.

A particular concern of the TNPA is that HCC fails to appreciate the degree to which some (many?) walkers have already altered their behaviour to avoid encountering mountain bikers, and walkers who avoid shared use tracks are the ones most likely to be missed in such surveys.

The other problem with the Shared Use Survey was its failure to seek information about actual conflict between mountain bikers and other users. It is generally acknowledged that only a very small proportion of 'near misses' are reported to the managing authority – this survey would have been the perfect opportunity to obtain some very useful information on the circumstances and location of actual incidents. Instead, questions were mostly 'hypotheticals' about circumstances where mountain bikers considered that conflict was likely.

In particular the 'hypotheticals' omitted any exploration of the possibility that the issues related to user conflict on single track are different to the issues on fire trails. My meetings with the HCC MTB advisory group (18 March) and HCC/WPMT staff (30 March) re user conflict concerns would have been far better informed, and probably totally unnecessary, if information on actual incidents had been collected. The fact that these meetings occurred at all amounts to an acknowledgement that TNPA had raised valid concerns.

1b. Riding the Mountain Survey

Respondents were asked their opinion of the proposal as a package. They were not asked to express an opinion on the merits, or otherwise, of each individual track, or the usefulness to them of individual tracks. This missed the opportunity to obtain useful information to feed into the planning process, particularly in relation to the prioritisation of tracks.

2. Reporting of surveys

The Community Engagement Summary reports that 52% of walkers supported the draft plan. If the TNPA's hypothesis about the responses from 'walkers' being biased towards mountain bikers who also bushwalk is correct, this implies that the level of support from a representative sample of walkers is likely to be under 50%. The HCC should be seriously concerned about proceeding with a project which appears not to be supported by a majority of a major user group.

The consequence of these apparent biases and missed opportunities to gather important information is that the entire community engagement process has demonstrated little more than the obvious, that mountain bikers would like more mountain bike tracks.

3. Planning

No data were provided on the types and numbers of users on particular tracks (even the limited information that must be available from track counters), and none of the surveys have attempted to gather such information. This appears to be another missed opportunity to provide input into planning decisions.

The proposed Mountain Bike Track Network Plan appears to have been prepared by Dirt Art on the assumption that the foothills of Kunanyi are a suitable location for an extensive track network as would be expected in a mountain bike park, with the only constraint being 'no new

tracks above Springs'. Dirt Art's expertise appears to be as MTB track designers, not planners.

Yet there is no evidence that any planning exercise was undertaken following the community engagement to modify Dirt Art's 'wish list' of MTB tracks to reconcile the needs of mountain bikers, the needs of other users, and the natural values of the area. We would have expected, for example, prioritisation of tracks identified by mountain bikers as being particularly useful, explicit attempts to separate walkers and mountain bikers in problem areas, an attempt to minimise the impact on wild character and natural values by minimising the total area that needs to be cleared and consideration of the consequences of fragmentation of habitat by multiple trails (especially when multiple tracks are proposed in close proximity). The convenience of mountain bikers (e.g. adjacent tracks to separate ascent/descent) needs to be balanced against these and many other considerations.

TNPA attempted to do this with the spreadsheet that formed part of our submission. The group that prepared this had, collectively, several decades of professional expertise in recreation planning and over a century of local knowledge of walking and mountain biking on kunanyi. We expected that the HCC would undertake a similar but more sophisticated exercise.

4. Conclusion

Considerably more community engagement and considered planning is required to reconcile conflicting priorities if *Riding the Mountain* is to have a positive outcome.