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**General Information and Update:** The Richmond Vale Rail Trail (RVRT) will be a regionally significant 32+ km off-road cycling and walking trail from **Shortland (near Hunter Wetlands Centre) to Kurri Kurri (Log of Knowledge Park) via Hexham/Tarro and Fletcher/Minmi** - see *Newsletter* image above. The RVRT will run primarily along the former Richmond Vale railway (a private line that closed in 1987), as well as utilising Hunter Water Corporation pipeline corridors within Newcastle LGA.

- The RVRT was first proposed around 25 years ago, with **active planning underway now for over a decade**, following completion of a comprehensive feasibility study in 2014 and the RVRT’s inclusion in Hunter Regional Plans (October, 2016; December, 2022) and numerous local strategic plans.
- Sub-sections of the Eastern RVRT totalling 13 km (within Newcastle LGA) received Regional Planning Panel Concept-level approval in December 2021, while a 14.4 km sub-section of the Western RVRT (within Cessnock LGA) received Concept-level approval from Cessnock City Council in May 2023.
- The proposed broader 100+ km **Shiraz to Shore Trail** (see *Newsletter* item) is also intrinsically related to and dependent on the RVRT project proceeding. All of the Western RVRT contributes to core *Shiraz to Shore* Trail sections, together with a critical Eastern RVRT sub-section (Pambalong to Fletcher).
- The rate at which these trails develop will obviously depend on funding from Federal, State and Local Governments. It is also anticipated that **progressive trail construction** will help to stimulate more rapid funding and development of the remaining sections.
- With increasing competition for infrastructure funding, it is imperative that we **continue to work together to promote integrated joint trail development** that optimises the identified benefits for local communities and the overall Hunter Region.

## Engaging with Agencies and Elected Representatives

- As a small community-based group with a long-standing and clearly signalled agenda ('RVRT Supporters'), we need to do whatever we can to **help move the RVRT (and Shiraz to Shore) proposals forward**, essentially through engagement, advocacy and communication activities.
- To achieve the desired community outcomes (and within a reasonable timeframe) we need **strong and ongoing support from a broad range of agencies**, including: local Councils, National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), Transport for NSW (TfNSW), local business and community groups, all of our elected representatives, and State and Federal governments.
- Communicating with like-minded groups is also important, such as: Newcastle Cycleways Movement (NCM), Rail Trails Australia, Rail Trails for NSW, and individual rail trail and cycling/tourism groups.

## Planning-related RVRT Visit/Walk by Local MPs and Councillors (29/9/2023)

In September 2023, we contributed to a well-organized and highly successful walk through Stockrington State Conservation Area to Tunnel #1 and the nearby railway cutting (see *Walking Path* image opposite) – which was designed to **further familiarise our elected representatives with the sorts of experiences trail users are likely to have**, and to assist them to better understand and promote the RVRT/*Shiraz to Shore*.



**Thanks (again) to the 18 attendees**, which included: four elected representatives [Meryl Swanson (Federal MP for Paterson); Dan Repacholi (Federal MP for Hunter); and Mayor Jay Suvaal and Cr. Rosa Grine from Cessnock City Council]; three senior representatives from Hunter Joint Organisation of Councils (Hunter JO); four NPWS Officers; six RVRT Supporters' Group Committee Members; and Belinda McNab (from the Office of Meryl Swanson), who helped to co-ordinate the event (and took most of the photos).

## RVRT Ministerial Visit (23/11/2023)

In November 2023, another opportunity arose for a brief RVRT visit by two Federal MPs – Kristy McBain (MP for Eden-Monaro, and the Federal Minister for Regional Development, Territories and Local Government) and Meryl Swanson (MP for Paterson). To highlight the 'Coastal Wetlands Zone' segment of the RVRT (and *Shiraz to Shore*) we met at Kau-Ma Park, Fletcher.



['Kau-ma', meaning 'To Gather Together']

Kau-Ma Park is an inspirational location, with multiple 'artworks' (e.g., Eagle Shelter, Three Canoes, Three Chairs) and fantastic views across Hexham Wetlands and the nearby Rocky Knob outcrop (identified as an 'Aboriginal Place' NSW Heritage location).

**We thank both MPs for their enthusiastic visit** and their acknowledgement of the substantial amount of trail planning that has already been undertaken.



We would also like to take this opportunity to **acknowledge and thank Bill Landenberger**, a local geologist and keen panorama photographer, who has taken interesting photos along many sections of the trail and the surrounding areas. Link to 360 Cities account: <https://www.360cities.net/en/profile/landy42>

*Opposite: 'Little Planet' View of Kau-Ma Park, Fletcher - extracted from Drone Panorama (Bill Landenberger, 18/11/2023, relative altitude of 23 metres).*

## **RVRT Eastern Section – Newcastle LGA**

- The **preferred construction sequence for the Eastern RVRT Section** (Route R1 to R7) is illustrated on the **next page** - as of April 2024, and subject to change:

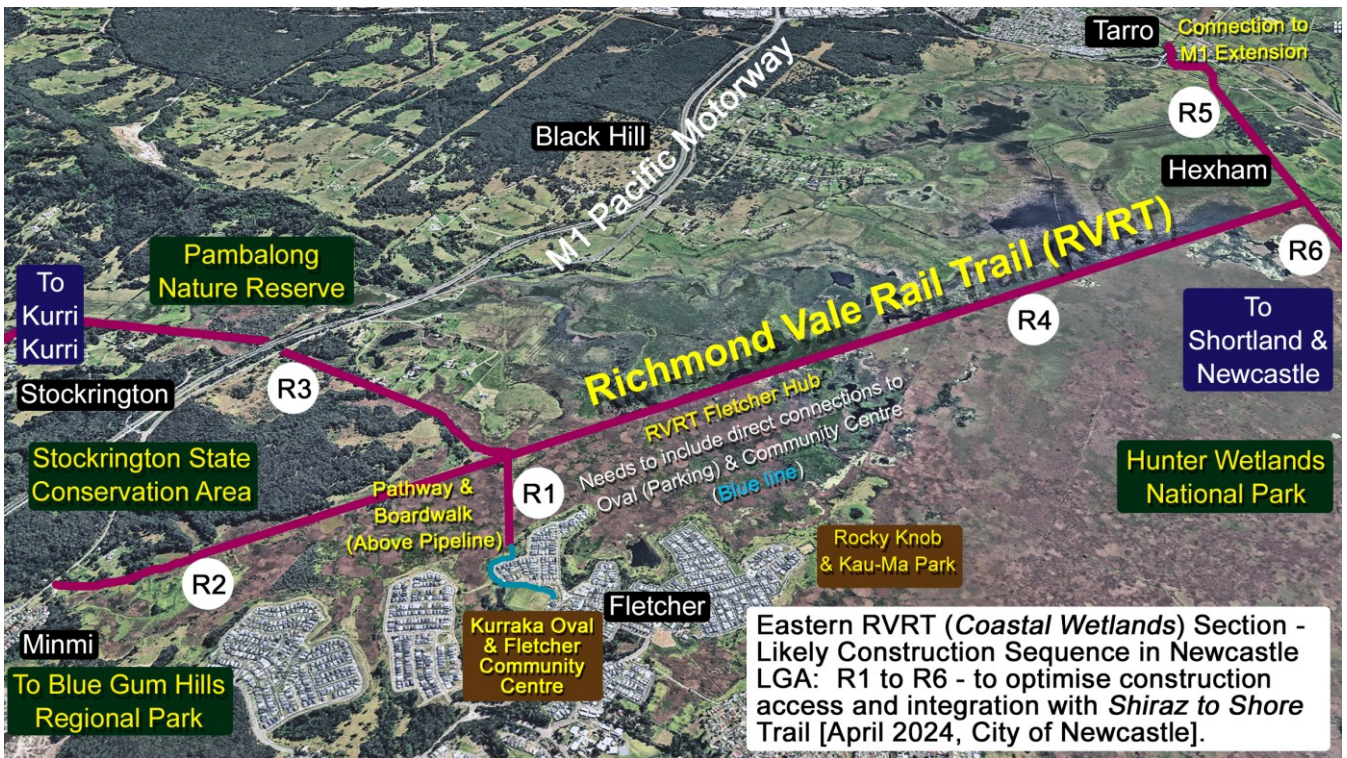
- R1:** Fletcher to Minmi Junction (approx. 800m, above pipeline, including boardwalk);
- R2:** Minmi (opposite Fire Station) to Minmi Junction (approx. 2km);
- R3:** Pambalong Nature Reserve (Newcastle LGA boundary) to Minmi Junction (approx. 2.2km);
- R4:** Minmi Junction to Hexham Junction (approx. 5.2km);
- R5:** Hexham Junction to Tarro (approx. 2.1km to the link with M1 Extension under construction); and
- R6:** Hexham Junction to Shortland (approx. 5.4km, to near *Hunter Wetlands Centre*).

- This route sequence **optimises RVRT construction access** (from Minmi and Fletcher) and **integration with the proposed Shiraz to Shore Trail** (which includes R1 and R3 among its

core sections, together with all of the Western RVRT Section).

- **R5** and **R6** (which run along the former Pipeline trail) will make a more marked regional contribution to Active Transport (being adjacent to the Pacific and New England Highways); and they are also more likely to be funded from other sources.
- City of Newcastle was unsuccessful in a recent (Federal) *Growing Regions Program* grant application to design/construct a portion of the R1 to R4 route.
- However, their intended course of action has not changed – namely, moving ahead, section by section, **progressively refining and updating the designs for the next section as actual construction moves along the trail**.
- Findings from the Shortland and Tarro active transport project undertaken by City of Newcastle in 2023 will also inform route choices between Shortland and Tarro, as well as the development of other local inter-connecting shared pathways.





- **RVRT Eastern Section Video** (15+ km within Newcastle LGA) - illustrating **Likely Points of Interest** ([July 2023 YouTube Video, 5 Min. 52 Sec.](#)).

### Optimising the Tarro-Beresfield Connections:

Construction of the M1 Pacific Motorway Extension to Raymond Terrace is well underway and the finalised *Design and Landscape Plan* has just been released (May 2024). In the Tarro area, cycle paths from the RVRT will go under the viaduct and up the sides of the M1 Extension embankments (near centre, upper third of image opposite) - allowing experienced riders from the Maitland and Raymond Terrace areas to use the RVRT as an **active transport route to Newcastle**.

Now would also be the perfect time to sort out and construct a new **Shared Pathway Bridge over the New England Highway** (similar to the Jesmond Shared Pathway Bridge) – allowing all potential RVRT user groups to safely & easily move between the Tarro-Beresfield community and the RVRT (via an Anderson Drive connection).



### RVRT Western Section – Cessnock & Lake Macquarie LGAs

- **Re-cap:** This 17km RVRT Section (Stockington to Kurri Kurri) traverses Stockington and Werakata State Conservation Areas and includes: **three historic brick railway tunnels**; construction of two new concrete bridges (at Surveyors and Wallis Creeks); and a major trail head at *Log of Knowledge Park*.
- Cessnock City Council approved the *Review of Environmental Factors (REF)* and associated reports for their 14.4 km sub-section in mid-2023 (17/5/2023), subject to 44 Conditions of Approval. **Our thanks to Council and the 127 individuals and groups who provided written submissions.**



Some further images from the Planning-related Walk/Visit to the RVRT Western Section in September 2023.

**We thank NPWS for their strong support for this event, as this State Conservation Area is closed.**



- **RVRT Western Section Video** (17+ km within Cessnock & Lake Macquarie LGAs) - illustrating **Likely Points of Interest** ([July 2023 YouTube Video, 4 Min. 41 Sec.](#)).
- Council is also seeking some RVRT-related land acquisition funds from NSW Government's *State Voluntary Planning Agreement Program*.
- As already noted, 100% of the Western RVRT contributes to core sections of the *Shiraz to Shore* Trail. Consequently, major funding for any trail sections is likely to have flow-on benefits for both trails.
- Cessnock City Council has submitted a **grant application (for \$17.5m) to the Federal Government's Regional Precincts and Partnerships Program** - to fund the *Shiraz to Shore* sub-section between Pokolbin (*Hunter Valley Gardens*) and Abermain (via the *Visitors Centre*, Lomas Lane and Werakata National Park) (see **Stylised Map** on next page).
- Over the past few years, all three of the participating Councils (Newcastle, Cessnock and Lake Macquarie) have been **strengthening the network of shared pathways** that will connect with the RVRT (and *Shiraz to Shore*).
- For example, Cessnock City Council has used grant funding to improve pedestrian and cyclist connectivity between *Bridges Hill Park* (Cessnock) and Wine Country Drive at Lomas Lane (Nulkaba).
- Several new/upgraded shared pathways are also identified in Cessnock's 2024-25 Operational Plan, including paths between Cessnock and Abermain, and between Neath and *Log of Knowledge Park*, via *Maybury Peace Park* in Weston (pictured below).





## 'Shiraz to Shore' Trail Proposal by Hunter JO is Gathering Pace

The proposed broader 100+ km *Shiraz to Shore* Trail extends from Hunter Valley Wine Country to the port of Newcastle and the shores of Lake Macquarie on the Pacific Coast. Hunter Joint Organisation of Councils (Hunter JO) is co-ordinating this proposal, with approx. 20 km of the RVRT (from Kurri Kurri to Fletcher) contributing to core sections of the *Shiraz to Shore* – see **Stylised Map** below.



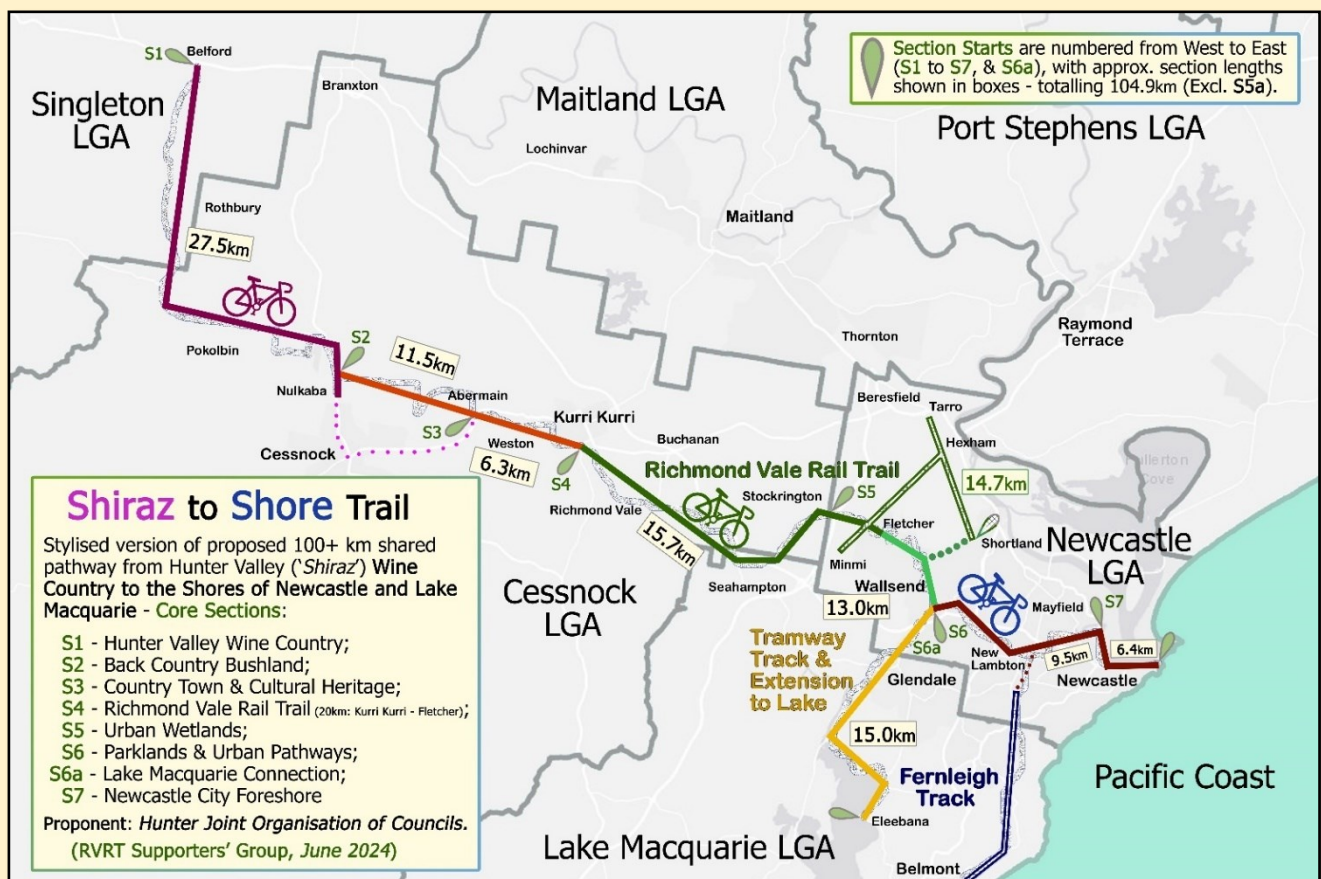
**Congratulations to Hunter JO** (and Kim Carland & Tim Askew in particular) and the participating Councils and numerous stakeholder groups for their ongoing efforts developing and refining this Proposal. **An official public release of Proposal details will occur soon** (including the overall Concept Plan & Business Case, and broader Hunter Cycle Tourism Strategy), in

conjunction with associated promotional events and materials (<https://www.hunterjo.com.au/>).

The proposed Trail (and RVRT) will **simultaneously promote the region as a major cycling tourism destination and directly benefit local communities, families and businesses**, including: economic and tourism benefits and diversification; community access and connection; health, lifestyle and liveability benefits; environmental, cultural and heritage appreciation; as well as cycling-specific safety and commuting benefits. The Trail will be free to use, link metropolitan and rural communities and attractions, and provide a unique conservation conduit for accessing coastal wetlands, national parks and reserves.

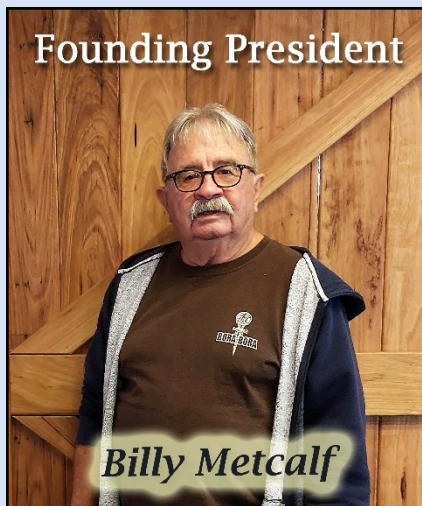
Ensuring other local shared pathways are carefully designed and inter-connected will also contribute to increased patronage and optimising the Trail's longer-term benefits and sustainability.

- **Unofficial Taster video** - illustrating (from West to East) the array of places that you will be able to visit and experience along the Trail ([April 2024 YouTube Video, 3 Min.](#)).





## Congratulations and Thanks to Billy Metcalf



At our recent (RVRT Inc.) RVRT Supporters' Group AGM (April 30th 2024) Billy Metcalf stepped down from his official role as President, after **many years of dedicated and enthusiastic service**.

We acknowledged and honoured Billy's outstanding contribution by offering him Life Membership of the RVRT Supporters' Group as well as conferring upon him the honorary title of '**Founding President**'.

Concurrently, we also **collectively acknowledged all of the key contributors during the past 25 years**.

It is difficult to say precisely when the RVRT Supporter's Group began. An informal group of cyclists got together in the late 1990s to explore the possibility of transforming the former Richmond Vale Railway corridor into a cycleway. Over time, several inter-related groups within the Hunter also contributed ideas and energy – including: Local Councils, Newcastle Cycleways Movement (NCM), Local cycling groups (e.g., Kurri Kurri Mongrels mountain bike group), Rio Tinto (RTA), Tom Farrell Institute for the Environment (TFI), Donaldson Conservation Trust (DCT), and the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). RVRT Inc. was registered as a Not-for-Profit Association in August 2015. Billy Metcalf was the Group's sole President up until the recent AGM and he will continue to make an active contribution as a Committee Member. Once again, **thanks and well done Billy!**

## Local Landcare and Other Initiatives

During the last 12 months, our RVRT/ NPWS Landcare Volunteers worked in a potential future picnic area between Stockrington Road and Blue Gum Creek, within Stockrington State Conservation Area. **Thanks to everyone involved** – with special thanks to Sam Mansfield and Leigh Gibbens for co-ordinating these activities. Our Landcare Group is currently having a temporary hiatus, with plans to review and resume on ground activities later this year.



Last year we sought to characterise broad segments within the RVRT and *Shiraz to Shore* as **Strategic Zones** – with three overlapping zones identified for the RVRT: **Coastal Wetlands Zone**; **Sugarloaf Range Zone**; and **Heritage & Conservation Zone**.

In January 2024, *Newcastle Herald* ran an excellent (and highly relevant) 7 Part series of articles about Hexham Wetland, to which we made a modest contribution. These articles are accessible from our webpage: [Blog-Post Link1](#) and [Blog-Post Link2](#).

**F.A.S.T. Nearing Completion: Congratulations to Lake Macquarie City Council** on the construction of the Fernleigh Awabakal Shared Track (FAST) – “a shared pathway linking the end of the Fernleigh Track at Belmont with Blacksmiths Beach, creating a **27km active transport route** from Murrays Beach to Adamstown” ... “the longest active transport route in the Hunter Region”.

A mix of Local, State and Federal funds were used to complete this shared pathway (including tourism, environment, active transport, and bushfire recovery funds). It is expected to be fully open during the next couple of months.

*Opposite:* Stylised image of new Cold Tea Creek Bridge at Belmont Lagoon.

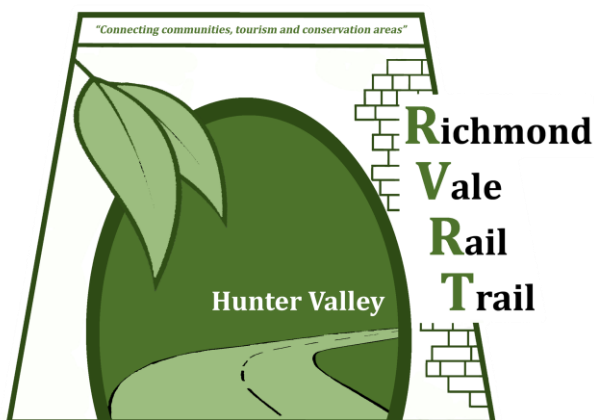


### **Richmond Vale Rail Trail (RVRT) Inc.**

Our members and supporters have long-standing interests in developing the RVRT as a key Hunter Region shared pathway and community resource. We are committed to working with local Councils, communities, other organisations and stakeholder groups, to help promote and deliver this important regional initiative. Please see Contact and Communication Details below, with e-mail and text messages being our preferred method for initial contacts.

The Supporters' Group received a 2024 Australia Day Community *Environmental Award* from Cessnock City Council, based on our longstanding and ongoing efforts in "**advocating for the preservation and development of the Richmond Vale Rail Trail (RVRT)**".

*Opposite:* Terry Lewin, Leigh Gibbens and Sam Reich with Mayor Jay Suvaal, after the Awards & Citizenship Ceremony (Performance Arts and Culture Centre, Cessnock, 26/1/2024).



*President:* Terry Lewin (0404 439 616)  
*Vice-President:* Leigh Gibbens (0433 570 920)  
*Secretary & Treasurer:* Sam Reich (0418 402 644)  
*Founding President:* Billy Metcalf (0417 453 152)

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***Thanks to our RVRT Supporters' Group Committee, Members and Supporters***