



4 March 2014

To whom it may concern

Support of the development of the Northern Rivers Rail Trail.

The gradual removal of physical activity from daily life has set in place a raft of negative health consequences. In the Northern Rivers, 49% of adults do not get enough physical activity and 57% are overweight or obese and are at a risk of developing chronic diseases such as heart disease, many forms of cancer, type 2 diabetes and osteoporosis.

Evidence shows that walking can help in the prevention and treatment of these and other chronic diseases and that people who live in 'walkable' communities are on average 3kg lighter than those who live in 'non-walkable' communities. In the Northern Rivers our low density towns and villages make off-road walking and cycling tracks expensive for local councils to build and maintain but walking and cycling on roads can be unpleasant and dangerous.

Rail trails create healthy recreation and transportation opportunities by providing people of all ages with accessible, attractive and safe places to cycle, walk or jog. Rail trails help people incorporate exercise into their daily routine by connecting them with places they want or need to go, away from cars. The rail trail is an ideal alternative that will be useful for parents to walk their school children to school, for people to use for recreation and exercise and for tourists to access our beautiful countryside. It will also offer great opportunities for fun runs, overnight hikes and training for marathon runners and cyclists.

Once the rail trail is established, it will be the ideal place for our Health Promotion team to coordinate volunteer-led walking groups. These can target older people, new mothers with strollers and people at risk of chronic disease and will give them access to free physical activity and support social interactions.

Physical activity also helps keep people mentally healthy. Rail trails can increase a sense of village pride and connectedness to history and to the natural environment that can improve psychological health. Getting more people out of cars and on to trails also increases casual interactions, socialisation and can reduce crime.

Old train stations can become community hubs as opportunities rise for redevelopment into cafes, playgrounds, community gardens or just an attractive place to sit and watch the passing parade.

For these reasons, Northern NSW Local Health District is a keen supporter of the rail trail development.

Yours sincerely

Chris Crawford
Chief Executive