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Report to Landcare Committee  
from Victoria Owen and Ross Jackson, Parks and Forests

## **Proposal to Reinstate the Rimutaka Railway**

### **1. Purpose**

To respond to Council's request for a paper addressing the proposal to reinstate the Rimutaka Railway.

### **2. Background**

At the Landcare Committee Meeting of 27 August 2002 Mr Hugh McCracken and Mr Stephen Porter gave a presentation on the Rimutaka Incline Heritage Railway Development Proposal. Messrs Porter and McCracken suggested that the Council could assist the working party with a feasibility study and help to facilitate the resolution of resource management and heritage issues.

At that meeting, Councillor Laidlaw requested that officers undertake an informal in-house consultation on the broad parameters of the proposal. He also noted that until Messrs McCracken and Porter had presented a formal request Council was unable to determine the degree of support that might be provided.

Councillor Yardley noted that in order to facilitate the proper consideration of the project within the review of the Forest Lands Management Plan, Officers would need to prepare a paper on the proposal and report back to the Committee as soon as possible. This paper responds to those requests.

### 3. **Process to Date**

We have since undertaken consultation within the Council about the proposal. These discussions have included Parks and Forests staff, civil engineers, Environment Division planners, Utilities Services staff, and the Council's property consultant. The Chair of the Heritage Rail Trust (Mr Euan McQueen) also attended a meeting with staff. These meetings highlighted a number of concerns about the proposal (**Attachment 1**). A summary of these issues was sent to Messrs McCracken and Porter, for their consideration and response (**Attachment 2**).

We met with Messrs McCracken and Porter, along with staff from the Department of Conservation to discuss the proposal and issues which have been raised. Messrs McCracken and Porter presented their response to those issues which were then further discussed at the meeting.

### 4. **What Does the Group Want from the Council?**

Messrs McCracken and Porter have both immediate and long-term requests for the Council's contribution to the project.

In the short term they would like the Council to:

- Contribute to a feasibility study (financially and with human resources).
- Provide a representative on the proposed Railway Trust.

In the longer term they are asking Council to:

- Make Council land available for the railway from Maymorn to Summit.
- Change the Forest Lands Management Plan for the area to provide for the railway.
- Provide a walkway / cycleway to replace the existing Rimutaka Rail Trail.
- Provide possible alternative access to the Kart track and rifle range as well as the airstrip at Kaitoke.
- Provide public amenities at station areas, including the Summit.
- Make changes to the Regional Plan and the Regional Transport plan.
- Manage the riparian strip on the Pakuratahi river and tributaries.
- Assist in providing ballast from rivers.

The group indicated a belief that Councillors had already directed staff to contribute to a feasibility study.

### 5. **Response to the Proposal**

At this stage we have limited information on the proposal, which makes it difficult to come to a fully informed judgement. Until a comprehensive business plan is completed, many of the implications are open to debate. Our response is made on the basis of the limited information available to date.

While the idea of re-establishing the railway holds considerable appeal, we have some significant concerns about the implications of the project. We have discussed these concerns with the group and they have responded, nevertheless some concerns remain outstanding:

- *Impacts on current users* – there would be major implications for current users. Even if an alternative walking/cycling track could be developed along the entire route, it would be likely to be of a different character to the current wide, low incline track used by cyclists and walkers (particularly families and young children). Current users would be displaced to some extent.
- *Land use and infrastructure* – we have concerns about the capacity of the bridges and tunnels to carry trains and about the difficulties of providing an alternative cycle/walkway where the formation goes through tunnels or over bridges. There may also be constraints in obtaining access or title to private land at Maymorn end.
- *Access difficulties* – The proposed route could affect access to Upper Tunnel Gully and Mt Climie (including logging access for plantation forestry). This issue also has implications for the legal rights of access to transmitters held by BCL, Police etc. Difficulties would arise in providing alternative access to the Kart Club, Rifle Range and airstrip.
- *Viability of the proposed scheme* – We have concerns about the technical and financial viability of the proposal, which would require significant financial resources to develop and maintain.
- *Possible insurance implications* – there would be an increased fire risk for the Council's commercial plantation forestry.
- *Broader implications for the Regional Council* – there are potential liabilities for the Council should the railway fail. A legal Trust is being established and the proposal is that the wind-up clause could transfer assets to the Regional Council. However these assets could in fact become a liability to the Council.
- *Subway Link* - The Council has recently agreed to spend \$80,000 on a subway link between Kaitoke Regional Park and the Rimutaka Rail Trail. This link is part of a proposed regional walk/cycle way from Wellington to Wairarapa. An alternative track (with a potentially steeper grade) could impact on the viability of this walk/cycle way.
- *Cost to the Regional Council* – A rough estimate of the cost to Council of meeting the group's requests would be at least \$1.2 million – \$1.4 million. This would include:
  - ▶ 20km of 4m wide track at \$15/m<sup>2</sup> = \$1,200,000.
  - ▶ Toilet block = between \$50,000 to \$100,000 each.
  - ▶ Unsealed carpark for 50 cars @ \$15/m<sup>2</sup> = \$27,000.
  - ▶ Alternative access for Kart Club, etc. = yet to determine and would require further investigation.

Our response to the specific requests made are outlined below:

### ***Short Term***

- *Contribute to a feasibility study* – A contribution is possible, but would have both financial, and human resource and work programme implications. There is no current budget or spare staff resources to provide for a meaningful contribution to any such study.
- *Provide a representative on the proposed railway Trust* – this is possible but could raise expectations about a Council financial contribution to the project.

### ***Long Term***

- *Make Council land available for the railway from Maymorn to Summit* – possible, however there would be implications for existing users and full consultation would be necessary.
- *Change the Forest Lands Management Plan for the area to provide for the railway* – possible, would be subject to public consultation. Officials consider that the current plan would not provide for the railway and a plan change would be required to enable the development. Under the current *Interim Forest Lands Management Plan*, the Pakuratahi Forest is held primarily for conservation and water supply. The plan provides for the protection of ecological and heritage values of the Incline (and vehicles are not generally permitted). The Incline is recognised as a key recreation area within the forest. Officials consider that the reinstatement of the railway, would represent a major change in the current use of the Incline, and a plan change would therefore be required. If Councillors wish to provide for the railway proposal within the plan, the proposed change should be included in the new Forest Lands Management Plan and be subject to public consultation.
- *Provide a replacement walkway/cycleway* – technically difficult, potential environmental and heritage effects, approximate cost to Council \$1.2million - \$1.4million.
- *Providing possible alternative access to kart track, rifle range and airstrip at Kaitoke* – technically possible for kart club and gliding club but costly and may involve acquisition of private land. May not be possible for rifle range. Alternative access to these sites may require going over Goat Rock and a very steep track.
- *Provide public amenities at station areas, including Summit* – possible, cost implications.
- *Changes to Regional Plan and Regional Transport plan* – Environment Division advises that there would be no reason to change the Regional Policy Statement or Regional Plans to accommodate a rail corridor from Kaitoke to Featherston. Any such proposed activity would have to be assessed according to the current resource management planning framework or regional and district plans and the resource consent process. The Transport Division advises that it is unlikely that a change to the Regional Land Transport Strategy would be made to recognise the railway. The proposal falls outside the scope of the strategy, as it is not a regional transport priority.
- *Riparian strip on the Pakuratahi River and tributaries managed to consider impact on railway and views* – possible.

- *Assist in providing ballast from rivers* – advice from Flood Protection that no suitable material is currently available or likely to be available in the next three years. It is possible that following the regular five yearly survey suitable material could become available, however this would depend entirely on the gravel balance (height) of the river bed.

## 6. Feedback from other Agencies and Groups

***The Friends of the Fell Society*** – The Society runs the Fell Museum in Featherston and looks after the remaining Fell engine. At their AGM of 3 November 2002 they resolved that:

*This Society states its opposition as policy to the reinstatement of a railway on the old Rimutaka railway route between Featherston and Upper Hutt.*

The Society has concerns about:

- Use of Fell engine – the Society would not support the use the Fell on the railway.
- Possible detrimental effects on heritage, landscape and environment.
- Impacts on current and future recreational users.

(The full text of the resolution is included as **Attachment 3**).

***Upper Hutt City Council*** – while there have been informal discussions with the Mayor, the proposal has not been formally considered by the Council

***South Wairarapa District Council*** – there has been a meeting with the Mayor, but the proposal has not been formally considered by the Council

***Department of Conservation*** – the proposal has not been formally presented to the Department, and prior to our joint meeting there had been no discussion with DOC staff.

***Chair of Rail Heritage Trust*** – noted that there is not sufficient information to make an informed judgement at this stage and would need to see a thorough business plan to assess the viability and implications of the proposal. The Chair did raise some issues about the scale and viability of the project.

***The Historic Places Trust*** has been contacted informally in regard to the proposal. Their consent would be required for any modification of the historic area.

## 7. Council's Role in Supporting Activities

At the same meeting of 27 August 2002, the Landcare Committee considered Council's role in achieving wider use of the parks and forests and resolved:

*That the Council's role in developing activities in regional parks and recreation areas in order to widen use be through enhanced facilitation and encouragement be endorsed.*

This option was chosen in preference to Council implementing initiatives (i.e. active involvement in running or financing enterprises).

The decision by Council would indicate that while Council could provide some assistance for groups to establish activities, the Council itself would take a limited role in contributing to feasibility studies and implementation of activities.

## 8. Where To From Here?

The immediate requests to be addressed include the request to contribute to a feasibility study and to provide a representative to participate on the proposed Trust.

There is no funding or staff resource available from current budgets to contribute financially to a feasibility study. Staff time is also fully accounted for, and any major contribution by staff would require amendments to work programs and additional funding for a specialist consultant. Unless Councillors wish to dedicate further resources to this project, we consider that we cannot effectively contribute to a feasibility study. Officers consider allocating resources to this proposal is not a priority in the context of regional parks and forests management.

Further, while Council could provide a representative on the proposed Railway Trust this could potentially raise expectations about Council contribution to the project in the future. If Council was to include a representative on the Trust, a terms of reference and clear statement of position would be required to guide that representative's participation in the Trust.

## 9. Recommendations

*That the Committee:*

- (1) **Note** the proposal from Messrs McCracken and Porter to re-establish the Rimutaka Railway from Maymorn to Summit on Regional Council land.
- (2) **Note** the specific requests from Messrs McCracken and Porter to Council, including, that to contribute to a feasibility study and provide a representative to a Rimutaka Railway Trust.
- (3) **Note** that there is currently limited information on the proposal, making it difficult to come to a fully informed judgement on the proposal.
- (4) **Note** that while the idea of re-establishing the railway holds considerable appeal, there are some significant practical implications of the project.
- (5) **Note** that contribution to a feasibility study would have financial work programme implications as it is not currently budgeted for.
- (6) **Note** that allocating resources to this proposal is not considered a priority in the context of regional parks and forests management.
- (7) **Agree** that the Council is unable to contribute financial or significant human resources to a feasibility study at this time.

- (8) *Note that while Council could provide a representative to participate in the proposed Rimutaka Rail Trust, this could raise expectations about Council contribution to, the proposed project.*
- (9) ***Decline** the invitation to provide a representative on the Trust.*
- (10) *Note that should Messers McCracken and Porter provide the Council with a fully formed proposal (including costings) then the WRC will at that time consider supporting the proposal.*

Report prepared by:

Approved for submission:

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- Attachment 1:** Notes from Officer Meetings to Discuss the Proposed Re-establishment of Rimutaka Incline
- Attachment 2:** Response by Messrs McCracken and Porter to Issues Raised
- Attachment 3:** Friends of the Fell Society AGM Resolution