

# Thumbs up, thumbs down to rail trail decision



Tweed Shire Council has welcomed the passing of legislation through the NSW Parliament to formally close the railway line from Murwillumbah to Crabbes Creek (24 kilometres), making way for the construction of the Tweed stage of the Northern Rivers Rail Trail.

Tweed Council general manager Troy Green said, "Council welcomes the passage of this legislation and thanks Mr Provost (State Member for Tweed) and all our current and past members who have steadfastly advocated to secure the way forward for this new tourism enterprise for the Northern Rivers region.

"This legislation importantly retains the corridor in public ownership and paves the way for Council's shortlisted tenderers to bring their rail trail concept designs forward in the next phase of Council's contract procurement."

This first stage of the Northern Rivers Rail Trail has received \$6.5 million in funding from the Australian Government under its

Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Packages Fund, with the NSW Government providing \$7.8 million under its Regional Tourism Infrastructure Fund.

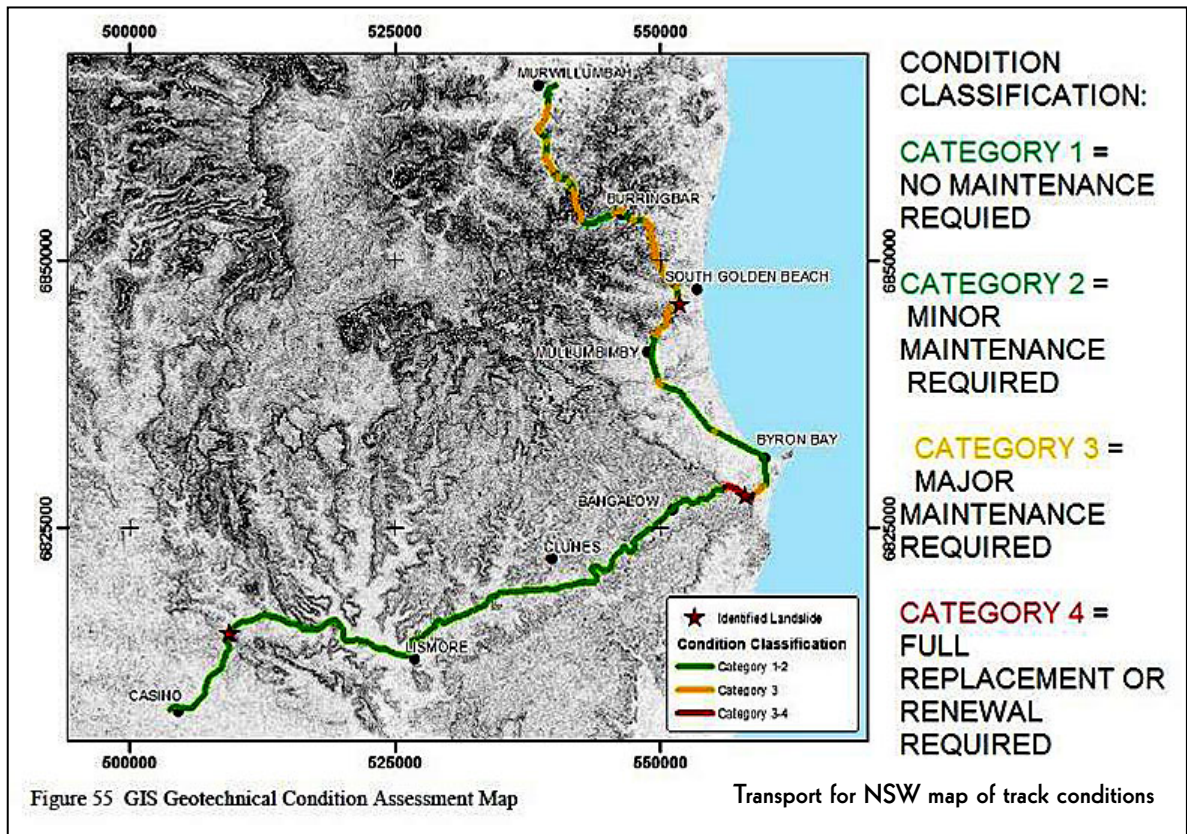
An additional \$600,000 has been secured from the NSW Government to cover the costs of operating and maintaining the section of rail trail for the first three years.

Tweed Council has been engaged as the project manager to oversee design and construction of this section, which it hopes will be operational by late 2022.

The Bentley to Casino section of the railway line also was formally closed by the NSW Parliament. This section forms the western end of the proposed 134-kilometre Murwillumbah to Casino Northern Rivers Rail Trail.

It, too, has received grant funding. Richmond Valley Council has been engaged as the project manager to deliver that section of the rail trail.

However, the Northern Rivers



Railway Action Group (NRRAG) is not happy with the rail trail proposal or the process of approval, saying that consultation with the community, as promised on the Government's own website, has not happened.

NRRAG chairperson Beth Shelley said, "Both Richmond Valley Council and Tweed Shire Council only organised one small meeting each with hand-picked groups such as the Rail Trail group and landholders.

"The Government and Labor during the debate in Parliament stated there has been extensive community consultation to find out if this community wants to have trains running again or a bike path.

This is not true. The communities of the Northern Rivers have not been asked what they want."

A proposal for a rail trail between Armidale and Tenterfield, where the council and the Department of Premier and Cabinet carried out extensive community consultation, found a lack of support for the rail trail. Subsequently, the council decided to not support the rail trail proposal in that region.

In a statement, NRRAG said it had been informed that two railway companies have expressed interest in running services on the Casino to Murwillumbah railway line. Lachlan Valley Railway Society and Vintage Rail Tours are very interested. However they won't be

able to run services if the railway line is ripped up for a bike path.

Since the vote went through to close the Casino to Bentley section, Richmond Valley Council is asking for submissions for the draft Rail Trail Master plan.

NRRAG is urging people to express their preference for the railway tracks to stay, alongside the bike path/rail trail. Use this link: <https://richmondvalley.nsw.gov.au/council/on-exhibition/>

"When looking at the tracks, it's easy to see how wide the corridor is, and how much room there is to easily put the bike path beside it. Council does not need to pull up the railway tracks in order to have a bike path," Beth Shelley said.

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