

The Little River Railtrail – An update on progress

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Abstract

At the 2005 conference I reported on the establishment and vision of The Christchurch to Little River Rail Trail Charitable Trust. Since that time we have seen two sections open and commence operation, with 26km of its final 44 km in length in daily use it seemed timely to provide delegates with an update of progress with the project which received first place in the “Best cycle facility project” section of the SPRC cycle friendly awards in 2006.



Opening Day

Chris Freear is the Chair of the Little River Railtrail Charitable Trust, which was established to raise the funds and facilitate the establishment of the Trail. He is also the president of Kiwi HPV Inc. the national body for the promotion and development of Human Powered Vehicles.

Brief History

“It’s taken 10 years but the project is now an overnight success.”

The Little River Railtrail is a combined walkway/cycleway from Christchurch to Little River following the alignment of the original rail line where practical. The concept was reborn (the initial study and recommendation for a walkway/cycleway dates back to the mid 1970’s) as a “new millennium” project and was developed by a working group involving Environment Canterbury, local councils (Christchurch City, Selwyn District and Banks Peninsula District) the Department of Conservation, Transit New Zealand, Community Associations and other interested parties. The working group was established in 2000 and was principally concerned with establishing if support for the project existed and identifying a viable route.

One of the biggest challenges facing the project was the fact that over half of the original rail corridor had been sold into private ownership and it is through these sections that working group laboured to identify viable alternative public corridors. The Trust building on this original work has since refined the route options to include a combination of retired rail corridor, road reserve, queens chain, paper roads, recreational reserve and private land. In 2004 the Christchurch Little River Rail Trail Trust (Trust) was established and the working group handed over management of the project to this broad group of enthusiastic community supporters whose focus has been the fundraising and establishment of the Little River Railtrail.

The Little River Railtrail forms an important inter-district connection that is becoming a vital transport artery that links communities, facilitates enterprise and promotes good health. The Railtrail provides an opportunity for everyone to walk/cycle in an environment that is safe, pleasant and pollution free – note that these are key goals within the Canterbury Regional Land Transport Strategy. The Trail also strongly supports the governments overall aims of an integrated, safe, responsive, and sustainable land transport system and the promotion of public health. Note that it is this fit with the over arching policy which has been so important in establishing the support of the bureaucracies involved.

The Little River Railtrail

The trail covers a route of 44km using where possible the original rail corridor, because of its proximity to Christchurch the trail not only has a recreational function but also forms part of a direct commuter artery for cyclist. Thus the section of the trail from Prebbleton to Lincoln has an asphalt surface compared with the crushed rock surface used for the sections intended for recreational use beyond Lincoln.

In time it is expected that the Little River Railtrail will form the ‘back bone’ of a regional network of cycle/walking trails, while also providing an arterial connection to the recreational opportunities available on Banks Peninsular.



Progress to date



On Sunday 28 May 2006, some 7 years after the idea was first mooted, stage one of the railtrail was opened to the public, the section built on the old Christchurch to Little River railway line embankment runs from Motukarara to Catons Bay. The trail not only gives access to Te Waihora/Lake Ellesmere, considered to be Canterbury's most important wetland and of international environmental significance, but also to the historic Kaituna Quarry.

Section Two from Prebbleton-Lincoln officially opened on 30 November 2006.



Selwyn District Council Mayor, Michael McEvedy, opened the second section of the Railtrail, from Prebbleton to Lincoln on 30th November at a ceremony held at Lincoln Primary School. The new 7km sealed section runs along side Birchs Road close to the site of the original Railway between Prebbleton and Lincoln. Already many people are using this section. Many have commented how enjoyable it is

being off the road and away from the traffic.

During bike-week deputy Mayor, Kelvin Coe led off a group of 331 cyclists of all ages from Lincoln to Prebbleton in its bid to make Selwyn District the most cycle mad region in New Zealand. Families had lots of fun basking in the afternoon sun at the Prebbleton Domain with music, giveaways and activities for the kids.



This was enough people for Selwyn District to win the title of "Most Cycle Mad District in the Country", a milestone which has changed the way Selwyn Councillors relate to the project.

To date the trust has raised \$1.7m and spent \$1.5m on bridges, fencing, plantings, track surfacing, signage, installation of toilets, promotion, etc. The Trust has already secured the funding for the section from Christchurch to Prebbleton with work scheduled to commence in April 2008. Other sections under development this coming summer are:

- The final 800m into Little River village
- The section through the Ahuriri wetland

In the mean time the consultation on route options between Lincoln and Motukarara enters its 3rd year, but we are hopeful that this process is drawing to a close.

Other facilities which have been put in place along the trail include:

A new car park at Kaituna, this was developed by the Hornby Rotary Club. The Rotarians are also responsible for landscaping the area and providing picnic tables. With the result being it is now a great place to stop off for a picnic and head off on to the Trail. Access to the car park is off State Highway 74.

The Historical Motukarara Station Restored and Re-sited.

This project has been spearheaded by the Lincoln Rotary Club, who restored and then returned the original Motukarara Railway Station to its home next to the trail. The Clubs members have spent hundreds of hours working on this project. In addition to this work, the Rotary Club has landscaped the area around the Station, making it a very attractive access point to the Trail. Lincoln Rotary was also responsible for the restoration of bridge 7 on the first section of the trail.



Railtrail Winner of SPARC Cycle-Friendly Award.

The Motukarara - Little River Railtrail section won the Avanti Award for Best Cycle Facility Project 2006. Thirteen finalists were selected from 31 nominations for the 2006 Awards. Now in their fourth year, the Cycle-Friendly Awards are designed to acknowledge and celebrate some of the most notable achievements in the country that are helping to promote cycling and to create a cycle-friendly environment. If you haven't been on this award winning section it must be time to try it out.

Funding Sponsors – without the generous support of these organisations nothing would have happened, the Trustees and all the people who have gained pleasure from the Railtrail are most grateful for their contribution.

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