SGS Economics & Planning

RESTORATION OF THE ORBOST HISTORIC SNOWY RIVER FLOODPLAIN RAIL BRIDGE FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE VICTORIAN COMMUINTY

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ASSESSMENT

AUGUST 2019

Prepared for
the Friends of East Gippsland Rail Trail (FEGRT)

Independent insight.

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Snowy River Floodplain Rail Bridge

Restoration of the historic timber rail bridge for the benefit of the Victorian community

Friends of the East Gippsland Rail Trail (FEGRT)

1. Overview

1.1 Executive Summary

The Snowy River Floodplain Rail Bridge (the Bridge) is the longest historic timber rail bridge in Victoria. Standing at 770 metres long, it straddles the historic Snowy River flood plains and has done so since its completion in 1916. Up until 1987, the Bridge and the railway it carried provided a vital economic link to the town of Orbost, connecting the town to crucial trade routes for timber and agricultural products. The Bridge has seen soldiers sent off to world wars and welcomed them back. This iconic structure has played and continues to play a vital role in shaping the identity of the town of Orbost.

The Bridge is located right alongside the Princes Highway, just before the highway crosses the Snowy River outside Orbost. The Bridge is currently a scenic feature at the beginning (or end) of the East Gippsland Rail Trail (EGRT). Physical access onto the Bridge is denied due to its current state of disrepair. Thus, it cannot be incorporated into the Rail Trail. The EGRT cannot follow the rail corridor and separates from it at Burn Road, roughly 500 metres from the Bridge and 3 kilometres from Orbost. Users of the rail trail must then follow a separate path towards the town.

The town of Orbost has suffered a decline in its fortunes that to some extent mirrors that of the bridge. The timber industry has contracted and this, along with other changes in the local economy, has led to significant reductions in employment and commercial activity. The community is ageing and younger people have less incentive to stay in the district. Orbost is in urgent need of a project that can build on its many existing strengths to attract new interest from tourists and to increase residents' confidence in the future.

Restoring the Bridge and incorporating it into the EGRT is a concept that offers a way to combine an economic stimulus for Orbost with preservation of a heritage icon greatly valued by the community.

The window for taking advantage of this opportunity is closing, as Snowy River Floodplain Rail Bridge finds itself at a critical juncture. The Bridge requires restoration, as it risks collapse without intervention. A report from TRAM Engineers & Services from June 2015 noted that although the Bridge has suffered deterioration since the closure of the rail line in 1987, it was considered to be repairable. A detailed inspection of the Bridge determined that a limited number of piles require replacement as a whole or in part. Beams and crossheads were found to be in remarkably good condition, and the repairs needed were not deemed significant. The decking on top of the Bridge would require total replacement, which is not a difficult task.

There are two integrated problems this report seeks to address:

- Having suffered declining employment and business activity in recent decades, Orbost requires an economic stimulus.
- The Snowy River Floodplain Rail Bridge has fallen into disrepair, thus limiting its social, cultural and economic value to Orbost and Victoria.

Should the future trajectory of the Rail Bridge remain unchanged, risking collapse, the likely consequences are the:

- Loss of economic opportunities associated with an expanded visitor economy in Orbost
- Loss of an opportunity for the Rail Bridge to be incorporated into the East Gippsland Rail Trail and the resulting, highly attractive, extension of the Rail Trail into Orbost
- Loss of an authentic and iconic marketing tool that can be used to promote Orbost, the East Gippsland Rail Trail and East Gippsland generally
- Loss of economic opportunities associated with an expanded visitor economy in Orbost
- Loss of a heritage asset to Victorians
- Loss of a cultural landmark that has long played a role in the economic, social and cultural fabric of Orbost
- Loss of an opportunity for the local and broader Victorian community to use and enjoy the Rail Bridge into the future.

The recommended solution is to restore the Snowy River Floodplain Rail Bridge, re-establishing and enhancing its heritage value and adding the Bridge to the East Gippsland Rail Trail as an iconic trailhead connecting into the town of Orbost.

Two options for the restoration have been considered:

- Option A: Full 'like for like' restoration. Restoration involves repairing or replacing piles, crossheads, beams and kerbs; removing ballast and decking; and replacing with new timber decking. Handrails and safety rails/wires/mesh will be added to occupational health and safety standards. An interpretation plan will be implemented, and signage installed. The project will also cover some ancillary works, including access ramp and a sealed carpark at the eastern end of Bridge. The restored Bridge will then be incorporated into the EGRT and promoted as an iconic trailhead. Plans will be put in place to develop the tourism sector in Orbost to capitalise on the restoration. This option is estimated to cost $3.5 million.
- Option B: Is the same as Option A but alternative decking material is used instead of timber, and the carpark would remain unsealed. The alternate decking will be made from artificial materials, such as fibreglass mesh or plastic. This option would have lower maintenance costs and would lead to a reduction in the restoration time of 6 months. This option will impact the heritage value of the restoration to a degree, but the alternate decking will provide for a smoother surface, benefiting users and access for mobility aids. This Option is estimated to cost $3 million.

The benefits of the recommended solution are the:

- Creation of additional economic opportunities for Orbost associated with an expanded visitor economy
- Realisation of the opportunity for the Bridge to be incorporated into the EGRT and the resulting highly attractive extension of the Trail into Orbost
- Creation of an authentic and iconic marketing tool for Orbost, the EGRT and East Gippsland generally. The Bridge can be leveraged to increase visitation to the town and region
- Retention and enhancement of a heritage asset to Victorians
- Retention of a cultural landmark that has long played a role in the economic, social and cultural fabric of Orbost
- Realisation of the opportunity for the local and broader Victorian community to use and enjoy the Rail Bridge into the future.

The above benefits, where possible, were monetised and tested against the costs of restoration via a Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA). The CBA found that both project options deliver robust benefit-cost ratios (Table 1). Option B provides the larger net benefit in terms of present values, due to the reduced restoration and maintenance costs, and the benefits commencing 6-months earlier (due to the shorter restoration time). The difference between the two options is minor, however, and the final decision on which option to pursue should also be informed by restoration requirements, practicality and the views of the community and heritage experts.

The most considerable quantified benefits in the CBA are the increased economic activity from the increase in visitation generated by Bridge restoration, and the creation of a new recreation asset for the local Orbost and wider area community (user experience and recreation benefit). Other

quantified benefits are improved health and wellbeing outcomes from increased participation in physical activity, educational benefits derived from the interpretation of the history of the Bridge, the economic story of the town and Aboriginal cultural history, and the value of retaining Victoria's heritage. From a break-even point of view, it would take around ten years after restoration for both Options to break-even, i.e. when the benefits overtake the costs of restoration.

No single benefit leads to the Options being beneficial on their own. A strong case cannot be made for restoration looking through an economic development, heritage, or social lens only. The realisation of all the benefits (economic, social and cultural) in tandem leads to the project being beneficial to Victoria and make for a compelling case for investment.

Table 1: CBA results over 15 years (against BAU) - $2019

	Option A	Option B
Present value: Costs (discount rate of 4%)		
Restoration costs	$3,355,000	$3,050,000
On-going maintenance and marketing	$1,896,000	$1,426,000
Total Costs	**$5,251,000**	**$4,476,000**
Present value: Benefits (discount rate of 4%)		
Increased economic activity from tourism	$2,575,000	$2,595,000
Recreation and user experience	$2,522,000	$2,560,000
Health and well-being	$677,000	$688,000
Educational benefits	$397,000	$400,000
Protection of heritage: non-use value	$175,000	$165,000
Total Benefits	**$6,346,000**	**$6,408,000**
BCR	**1.21**	**1.43**
NPV	**$1,095,000**	**$1,932,000**

A series of sensitivity tests were performed on the above results. It was found that with a 20% increase in restoration costs, or a 50% increase in maintenance costs, or a 20% reduction in tourist expenditure, both Options remain beneficial. Only in a worst-case scenario, where capital and maintenance costs are higher than envisioned, and tourist expenditure lower, does Option A have negative NPV and a BCR below 1 (0.9). Option B remains beneficial even under this worst-case scenario.

The Snowy River Floodplain Rail Bridge has remained standing through floods, decommissioning and decomposition. Throughout the years, its role in the community has shifted, from a piece of essential economic infrastructure to a key element of Orbost's social fabric and a key visual element in the Snowy River landscape. This project will allow the Snowy River Floodplain Rail Bridge to transform into the Gateway to Orbost, to be relished by the town, and to attract and welcome visitors to the area for years to come.

FEGRT acknowledges the financial support provided for the study by the Victorian Government, East Gippsland Shire Council, Orbost and District Historical Society and private donors.

2. Background

2.1 A town in transition

Orbost is a town in transition. Forestry and agriculture, both once pillars of the Orbost economy, have reduced their overall contribution to the town's economy. Since 2006, the number of Orbost residents employed across many sectors has declined (ABS, 2006- 2016). The loss of employment opportunities has been attributed to:

- Changes in log allocations following the introduction of the State Government "Our Forests, Our Future" (2002)
- Closure of sawmills in the region and consequent reduction in timber-related employment, and
- Decreasing labour intensity (i.e. fewer employees required for each unit of output due to automation) in both the forestry and agriculture sector (Geographia, 2013).

As a result, there has been a 'hollowing out' of the working-age population, and a net decrease in jobs, particularly for full-time positions, resulting in a higher unemployment rate than wider East Gippsland and Victoria as a whole. The median household income in Orbost is lower, and the median age is higher (sitting at 52).

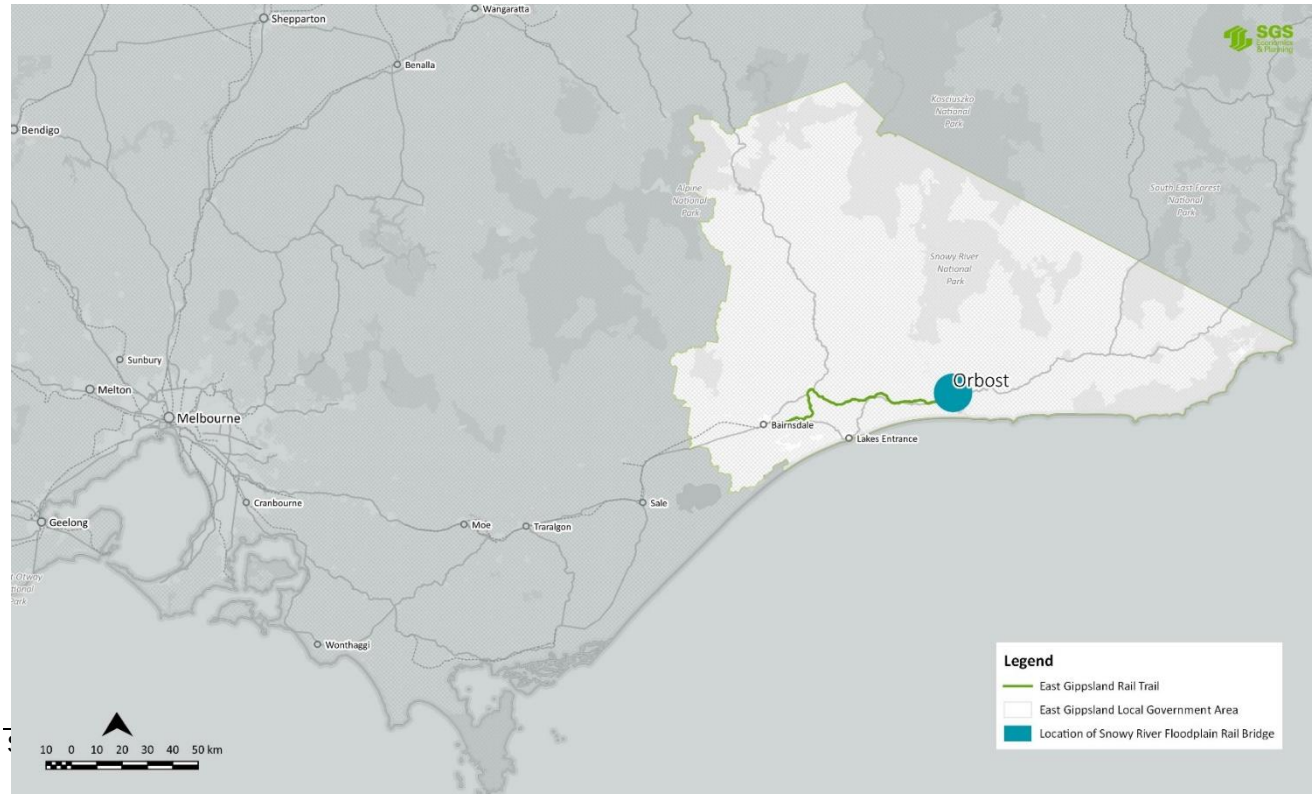
The Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage (IRSD) places the suburb of Orbost at Decile 1, meaning that its one of the most disadvantaged areas (top 10%) in Victoria. The East Gippsland LGA also experiences high disadvantage relative to Victoria (top 30%) (ABS, 2016).

In developing this economic and social assessment, SGS consultants visited the town of Orbost to speak with local community members to better understand the local setting. The above statistics support the story told by the residents of Orbost. Some typical direct quotes include "we need to rebuild the town's economy", "our town is really struggling", and "the town has lost everything economically".

Importantly, residents spoke of the need for a unifying project to change the overall narrative of Orbost from decline to resilience and hopefulness; particularly a project that would help transition their economy back into health.

2.2 The Snowy River Floodplain Rail Bridge

Figure 1: Location of Snowy River Floodplain Rail Bridge



The Bridge is low timber railway bridge traversing the Snowy River Floodplain. The Bridge is 770-metres in length and is the longest historic timber rail bridge in Victoria.

Figure 2: The Snowy River Floodplain Rail Bridge, 2018

Source: M. Leatch (supplied by the Friends of East Gippsland Rail Trail)

The Bridge, built in 1916 and an engineering wonder, is at the end of the now-closed Bairnsdale to Orbost railway line. The Bairnsdale to Orbost line had many large trestle bridges over its 100 km length, with the Snowy River Floodplain Rail Bridge being the longest. Many of these bridges no longer exist. Those that remain have significant heritage value. Adding to the Bridge's significance is that its large longitudinal beams are made from Southern Mahogany; a locally occurring species not typically used for bridge construction (that has proven to be quite durable).

Until decommissioning in 1987, the Bridge provided a vital economic and transportation link to Orbost. The railway line fostered the development of East Gippsland. By providing a reliable trading route, it was essential in the growth of the timber and agricultural industries. Before the construction of roads and road transport, the Bridge also carried passengers in and out of Orbost.

The Snowy River Flood Plain Rail Bridge has played a vital role in shaping the identity of Orbost. It is considered by many to mirror the health of the town itself. When in working condition the Bridge provided the physical link between Orbost and the world beyond. Today, seeing the Bridge fall into disrepair symbolises and reminds many locals of the ongoing economic decline of the town. As one community member explained: "*What does doing nothing [with the bridge] say about us all? It would be a sign of great depression.*"

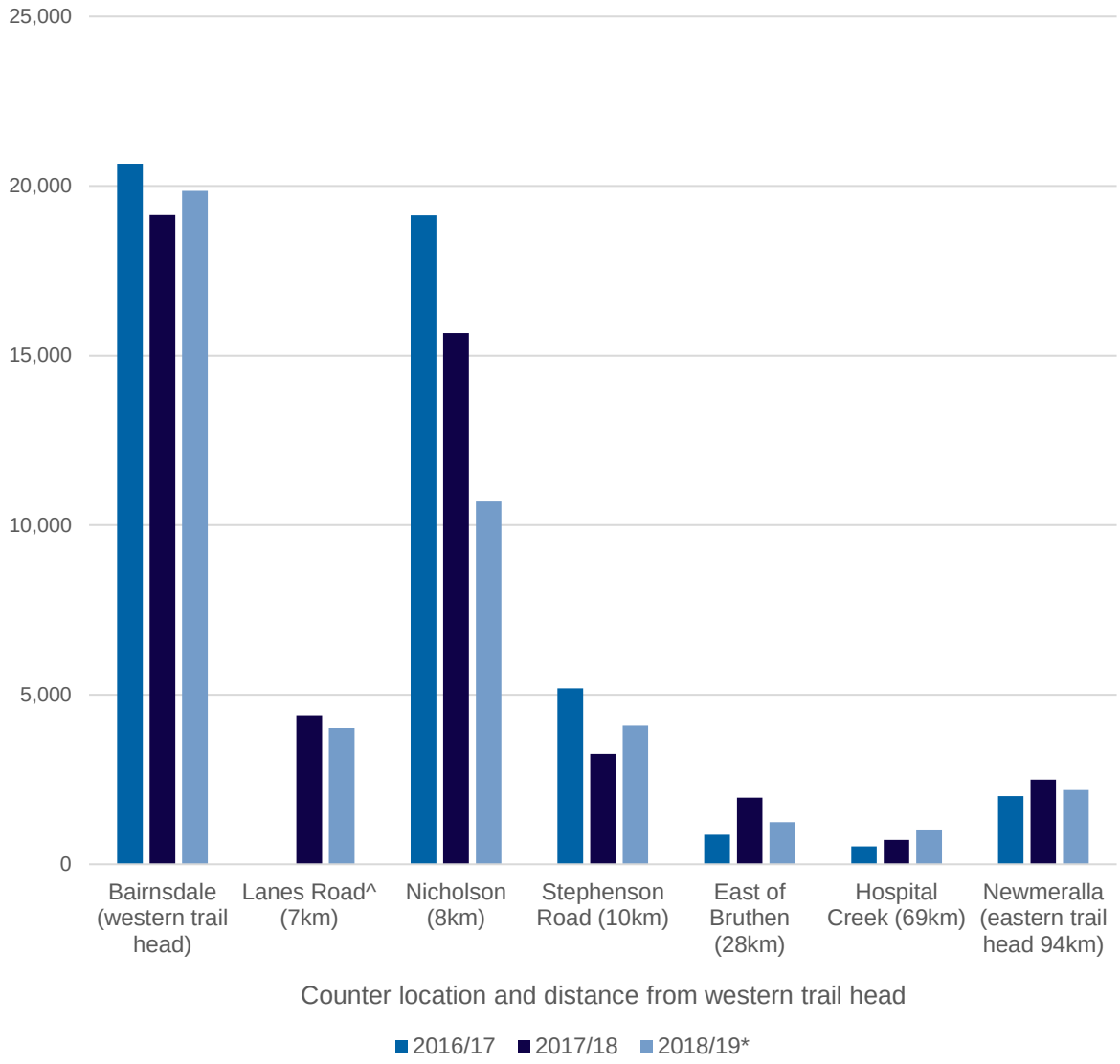
Figure 3: The Snowy River Floodplain Rail Bridge, 2018

Source: B. Martin (supplied by the Friends of East Gippsland Rail Trail)

At present, usage of the EGRT centres on the western end of the trail, around Bairnsdale, as shown in **Figure 3**, of visitor counts for 7 locations along the EGRT for the past three financial years, ordered by distance along the trail. The counter location at Newmerella, at the eastern end of the EGRT, is just before the trail ends at Burn Road, Orbost.

It can be expected that the Bairnsdale end would have higher usage given Bairnsdale's population (12,952) and closer proximity to Melbourne. But based on a per capita basis (town population divided by visitors), the Bairnsdale end has 1.5 annual users per resident (based on a three-year average) and the eastern, Orbost end 1 user per resident.

Figure 3: EGRT per annum visitor counts for 2016/17 to 2018/19



Source: (Oxer, 2019) *East Gippsland Rail Trail Summary of Trail Visitor Counts.*

**2018/19 counts are for a third of the year, extrapolated out to get full-year result*

^Lanes Road count not available for 2016/17

Other findings from the visitor counts include that usage has been flat or decreasing in most count locations.

2.2.1 A new role for the Snowy River Floodplain Rail Bridge

The Bridge is located right alongside the Princes Highway, just before the highway crosses the Snowy River outside Orbost. The Bridge is a scenic feature as people enter Orbost and at the beginning (or end) of the EGRT. Access onto the Bridge is denied due to its current state of disrepair. Visitors and locals cannot traverse the Bridge, and it is not incorporated into the Rail Trail. The EGRT leaves the rail corridor at Burn Road, roughly 500 metres from the Bridge and 3 kilometres from the town of Orbost and follows a separate trail towards the town.

There are opportunities for the Bridge to perform a new role. If fully restored and made safe for use by pedestrians, cyclists, and mobility scooters/ wheelchairs, the Bridge could be incorporated into the EGRT. Inclusion of the Rail Bridge into the trail would breathe new life into the Rail Trail and bring about a multitude of benefits that are discussed in detail in this report.

2.2.2 Potential collapse

The Bridge requires restoration, as it risks collapse without intervention. A site inspection in June 2015 by bridge engineers - TRAM Engineers & Services Pty Ltd - revealed that the existing deck on the Bridge is rotten, and the failure of a small number of piles has caused the superstructure to dip and twist dramatically. Additionally, a combination of fungal decay and termite attack has further deteriorated the collapsed piles and a considerable number of additional elements of the Bridge.

Despite the Bridge suffering collapse at several locations and in need of extensive renewals, restoration of the Bridge was deemed as achievable by TRAM Engineers & Services (TRAM) and again by the External Projects Manager of the Puffing Billy Railway in 2015. It should be noted that both assessments are now four years old; hence, structural integrity issues may have increased since this time.

2.3 Definition and evidence of the problem

There are two integrated problems this report seeks to address:

- Having suffered declining employment and business activity in recent decades, the town of Orbost needs an economic stimulus.
- The Snowy River Floodplain Rail Bridge has fallen into disrepair, thus limiting its social, cultural and economic value to Orbost and Victoria.

Should the trajectory of the Rail Bridge remain unchanged (and thus risk collapse in the future), the consequent losses will likely occur:

- The loss of an opportunity for the Rail Bridge to be incorporated into the East Gippsland Rail Trail and the resulting, highly attractive, extension of the Rail Trail into Orbost
- The loss of an authentic and iconic marketing tool that can be used to promote Orbost, the East Gippsland Rail Trail and East Gippsland generally
- The loss of economic opportunities associated with an expanded visitor economy in Orbost
- The loss of a heritage asset to Victorians
- The loss of a cultural landmark that has long played a role in the economic, social and cultural fabric of Orbost
- The loss of an opportunity for the local and broader Victorian community to use and enjoy the Rail Bridge into the future.

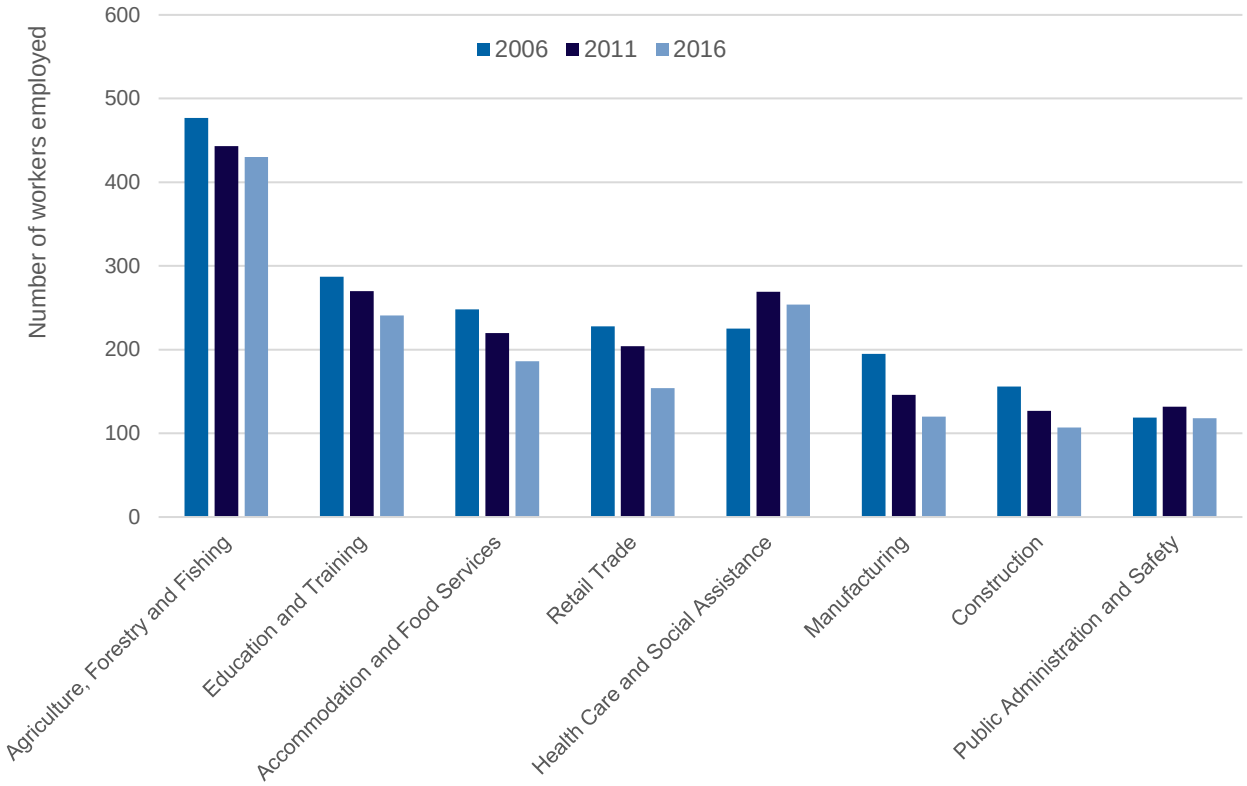
Further detail on these points is outlined below.

2.3.1 Orbost is in urgent need of an economic stimulus

The town of Orbost has suffered declining employment and business activity in recent decades. Forestry and agriculture, both once pillars of the Orbost economy, have reduced their overall

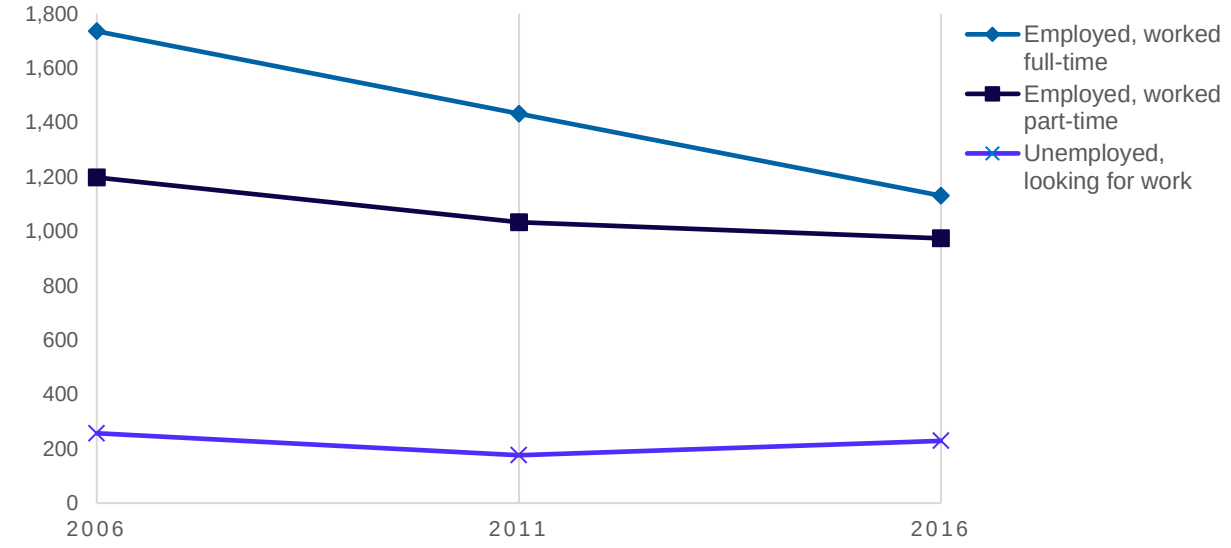
contribution to the town's economy. Since 2006, the number of jobs in the Orbost area[1] has decreased by over 300 (or by 14%) (ABS, 2006 – 2016). As shown in Figure 4, the decline in jobs has occurred across many industries including major exporting (agriculture, forestry and fishing; manufacturing), as well as industries that service the local population (retail trade; education; construction). There has also been a reduction in jobs in accommodation and food services, suggesting a decline in the local tourism and hospitality industries. This contraction has led to a decrease in people engaged in full-time or part-time work (Figure 5)

Figure 4: Employment by industry in the Orbost area (eight largest industries ranked by 2006 size)



Source: ABS 2006 - 2016 Censuses - Counting Employed Persons, Place of Work (POW), Industry of employment

Figure 5: Orbost area status of people in the workforce

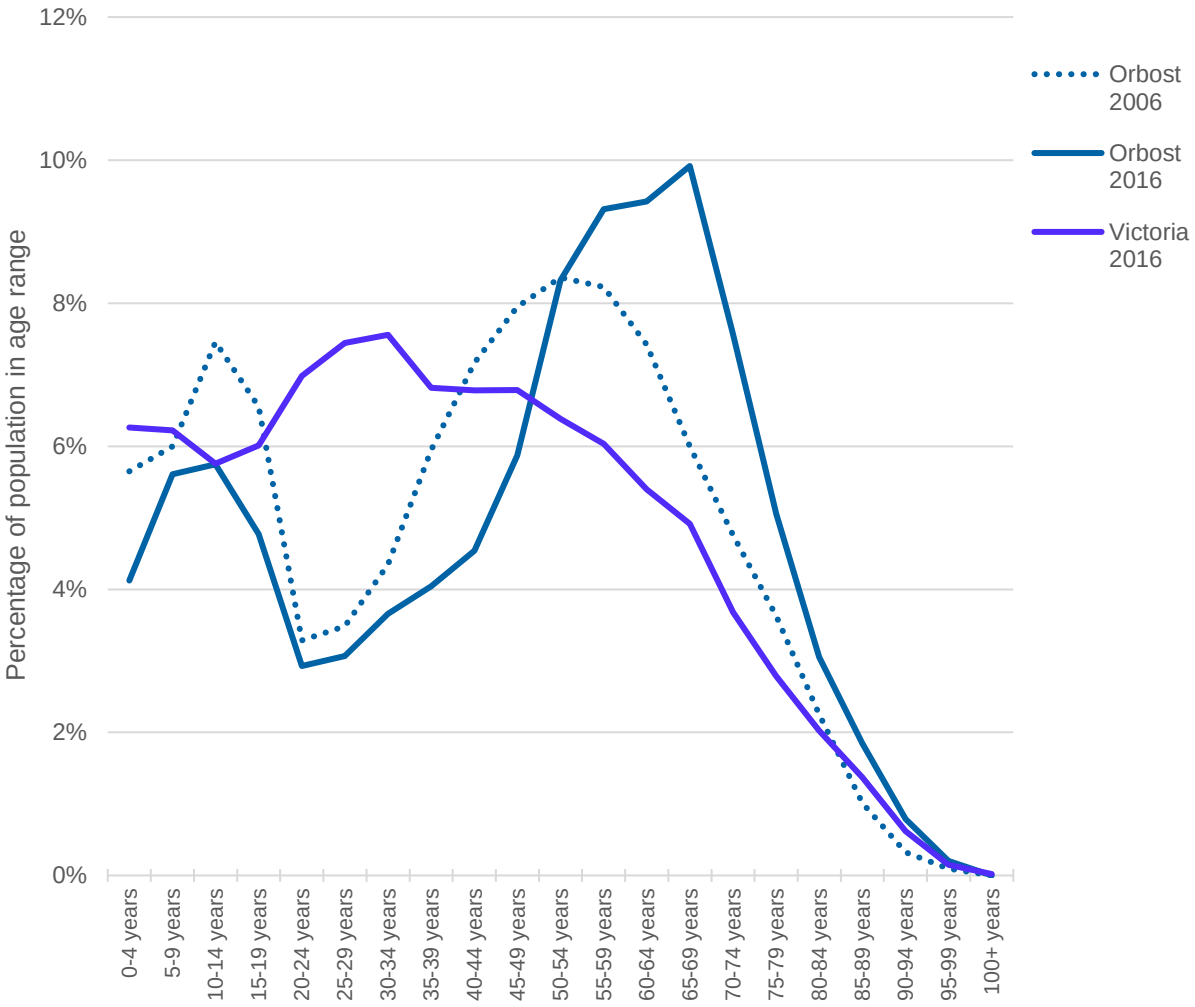


Source: ABS 2006-2016 Censuses - Counting Persons, Place of Usual Residence (MB). Labour Force Status by SA2

[1] Defined as the Orbost SA2 area from the ABS. The SA2 area is larger than the township of Orbost and includes the surrounding area stretching from Nowa Nowa to the NSW border.

Figure 6 considers Orbost area's age profile. It shows that compared to Victoria (in 2016) the proportion of people aged 15-49 in Orbost is much lower, particularly those aged 20 to 34. Conversely, the portion of the population aged 50 and above is higher. This reflects an ageing population and that young people tend to leave the area in their late teens and early twenties in search of employment and education opportunities elsewhere. The figure also shows the age profile for Orbost in 2006 (the dotted line). Since 2006 the Orbost community has become older, and the gap in working-age population in comparison to Victoria has grown more pronounced. For Orbost, the median age of the population in 2006 was 43, rising to 52 by 2016. This is significantly higher than the median for Victoria (37 years).

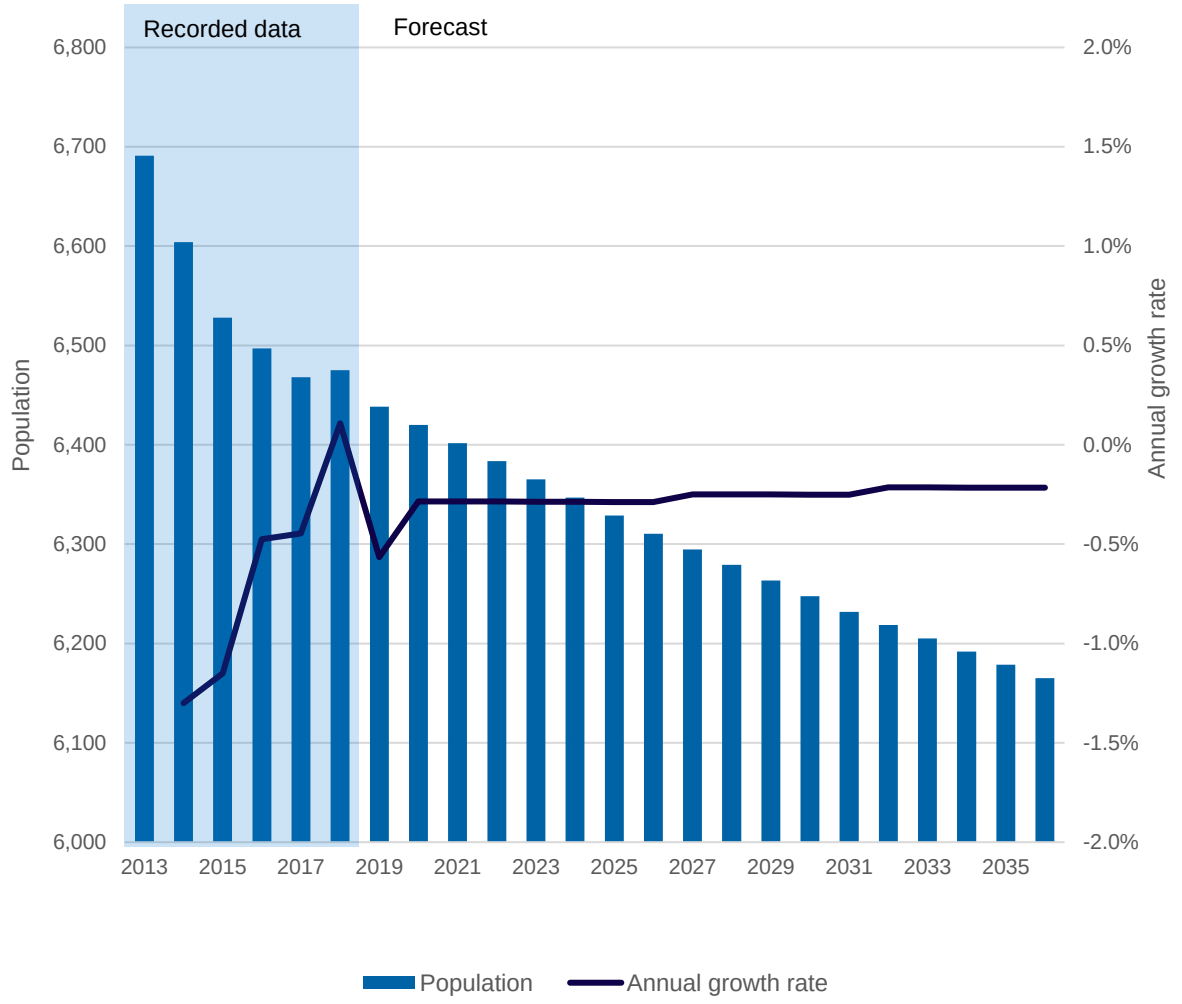
Figure 6: Age profile of Orbost area in comparison to Victoria



Source: ABS 2006 - 2016 Censuses - Counting Persons, Place of Usual Residence (MB). Age in Five Year Groups

In addition to the above, there has also been a decline in population in the area of between -0.5% to -1.3% over the past few years, with a slight increase in 2018 (0.1%) as shown in Figure 7. This decline is forecast by the Victorian Government (Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, 2019) to continue. The forecast change in population is around -0.3% per annum through to 2036.

Figure 7: Population decline in the Orbost area*



*Defined as the Orbost SA2 area. The SA2 area is larger than the township of Orbost and includes surrounding area stretching from Nowa Nowa to the NSW border. This is the smallest geography that VIF forecasts are available.

Three indicators for the town of Orbost (not area) further demonstrate the need for an economic stimulus (Table 2). Orbost's unemployment rate is higher than both the East Gippsland LGA and Victoria, while median household incomes and SEIFA scores are much lower.

Table 2: Statistics from the ABS Census of Population and Housing 2016

Indicator	Orbost*	East Gippsland	Victoria
Unemployed	9.6%	6.4%	6.6%
Median household income	$718	$935	$1,419
SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-economic disadvantage[2]	862 (decile 1)	958 (decile 3)	

*defined as the ABS state suburb of Orbost
Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2016 and ABS Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA), 2017

The SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage (IRSD) is a general socio-economic index that summarises a range of information about the economic and social conditions of people and households within an area. A low score indicates relatively greater disadvantage in general compared to Victoria. For example, an area could have a low score if there are many households with low income, many people with no qualifications, or many people in low skill occupations.

Orbost has a very low IRSD score, and places in the top 10% for disadvantage (decile 1) in Victoria.

If growth opportunities in tourism are not captured, Orbost risks deepening current levels of social and economic disadvantage and disengagement.

2.3.2 The Snowy River Floodplain Rail Bridge has fallen into disrepair

The Bridge has fallen into disrepair limiting its social, cultural and economic value to Orbost and Victoria.

Should the trajectory of the Rail Bridge remain unchanged (and thus risk collapse in the future), the consequent losses will likely occur:

2.3.2.1 The loss of an opportunity for the Rail Bridge to be incorporated into the EGRT and the resulting highly attractive extension of the Rail Trail into Orbost

At present, the EGRT terminates at Burn Rd, several kilometres short of Orbost. The current trailhead at Burn Road is virtually invisible, being well out of town on a back road. There is no visible connection to Orbost. A lack of funding for the current length of EGRT contributes to this.

This is supported by the Strategic Business Case for the entire EGRT (The Right Man, 2019) which identified that a key challenge for the EGRT is that the trailhead at the Orbost end has limited infrastructure (parking & a shelter) at Burn Road, even though this is defined as the end of the trail. This trailhead does not provide a strong sense of arrival.

Victoria's Trails Strategy states that visitors expect integrated trail-based experiences that incorporate ready access to quality accommodation, excellent local food and wine, appropriate transport and support services, and other complementary experiences (Victorian Government, 2014). At present, the eastern (Orbost / Newmerella) end of the EGRT does not provide ready and easy access to services and experiences.

Not having the trail end/head connected directly into Orbost leads to missed opportunities for businesses in Orbost and the experience for visitors.

There is a missed opportunity to create a stronger link between the trail and the Orbost commercial centre to maximise potential local economic benefits.

2.3.2.2 The loss of an authentic and iconic marketing tool for Orbost, the EGRT and East Gippsland

The EGRT, which passes through a variety of forest and farmland, attracts visitors to East Gippsland for multi-day tours or shorter day trips. The EGRT is currently underperforming when comparing visitor numbers to highly successful rail trails elsewhere in Regional Victoria (The Right Man and Frisbee Fitzgerald Landscape Architects, 2019).

By means of comparison, the Murray to Mountains Rail Trail, considered to be one of Victoria's premier regional rail trail experiences, receives around 100,000 users around Bright, and approximately 18,000 users outside of Bright annually (The Right Man and Frisbee Fitzgerald Landscape Architects, 2019).

The EGRT may never be as popular as the above trails, but there is an opportunity being missed to use the Bridge as an icon for the EGRT and Orbost in marketing and promotional efforts.

The Bridge is an important and interesting heritage asset that, if incorporated into the EGRT, would add to the experience of current trail users. Traversing the Bridge would be an iconic way to start or finish the EGRT, which would encourage more visitors to the region. If overall use of the rail trail increased, this would benefit all the towns and settlements on the trail, not just the town of Orbost.

2.3.2.3 The loss of a heritage asset to Victorians

The Bridge is listed under the Heritage Overlay in the East Gippsland Planning Scheme and has been assessed by the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) study of timber bridges and classified as being both historically and aesthetically significant at the State level.

The Rail Bridge was constructed to form part of a railway system intended to facilitate new settlement and development in East Gippsland, open up access to the timber, farming and mineral resources of the region, improve the safety and reliability of transport to Melbourne, enable trading with south-eastern New South Wales, and ultimately to link with Sydney via the New South Wales railway that would terminate at Bombala. The Bridge at Orbost was constructed during World War I, and although the railway line never extended past Orbost, the rail line was key in fostering the growth of the East Gippsland population and timber and agricultural industries by establishing a reliable trading and transport route.

By the early 1940s, the Bridge had become Victoria's longest timber railway bridge.

The Bridge is constructed from Southern Mahogany, *Eucalyptus botryoides*, which is unusual. The use of this native timber adds to the historical significance of the Bridge.

The Bridge is highly visible from the Princes Highway and the Orbost-Buchan Road. The Bridge's long, low profile winds across the floodplain and has long been a significant part of the river plain landscape. As such, the Bridge's aesthetic value was also recognised in the timber bridges study.

Without intervention, the Bridge is at risk from collapse or irreversible decay. Further, at present, the Bridge's unique history, the story of the town and region, and the floodplain's rich Aboriginal history are not shared with visitors to the area and users of the EGRT.

2.3.2.4 The loss of a cultural landmark that has long played an essential role in the social and cultural fabric of Orbost

The Bridge has and continues to play a vital role in shaping the identity of Orbost. SGS Economics and Planning facilitated two community workshops with members of the Orbost community to understand community sentiment around the Bridge. The Friends of East Gippsland Rail Trail advertised the sessions widely and with ample notice provided to ensure everyone who wanted to have their say (either for or against the project) could do so. During those workshops, it was clear that community sentiment regarding the Bridge was overwhelmingly positive. Every participant at the workshop (over 30 community members in total) voiced their support and enthusiasm for the bridge restoration project. The community members spoke with passion and emotion when recalling what the Bridge meant to them personally and to the town itself. This sentiment is further attested to by the various campaigns and promotional drives undertaken by the local community advocates to raise the restoration project's profile (see the Appendix for some recent examples).

The Bridge is considered (by many) as a symbol of the health of the town, having for so long been the physical link between Orbost and the world beyond. The Bridge is considered to be physical evidence of the once-thriving rail route and timber industry of Orbost. The Bridge also holds an emotional connection to historical events, such as the World Wars. One resident spoke about seeing soldiers sent off to World War II over the Bridge, with some of these soldiers welcomed back to Orbost over the Bridge once more. Other community members spoke about how the Bridge and the town are inextricably linked. Provided below are some key quotes from community members:

"*The Bridge is the story of the town. Nothing can replace the timber industry, but the Bridge celebrates that heritage. It's also a wonderful vista as you enter the area."*

"*I've lived in the town all my life. A part of coming home is coming down the hill and seeing the Bridge. It's home."*

The collapse of the Bridge would, therefore, be a devastating loss for the social and cultural fabric of Orbost.

2.3.2.5 The loss of an opportunity for the local and broader Victorian community to use and enjoy the Bridge into the future

Access onto the Bridge is denied due to its current state of disrepair. Visitors and locals cannot traverse the Bridge for recreation or any other reason.

The benefits of restoration are further discussed in Section 4 of this report.

2.4 Timing considerations

Immediate intervention is required. Orbost is in urgent need of an economic stimulus, and the Rail Bridge is in a state of disrepair. Inaction could result in a missed opportunity if the Rail Bridge collapsed.

3. Recommended solution

Having discussed the problems confronting the State, this part of the report explores how these problems might be addressed.

This initial exploration is conducted at the strategic level. The objective is not to resolve interventions in detail, but to appraise the broad brush options which Government might pursue.

3.1 Details of the recommended solution

The recommended solution is to restore the Snowy River Rail Bridge, re-establishing and enhancing its heritage value and adding the Bridge to the East Gippsland Rail Trail as an iconic trailhead; connecting into the town of Orbost.

Two options for the restoration have been considered:

- Option A: Full 'like for like' restoration. Option A involves repairing or replacing (as necessary) piles, crossheads, beams and kerbs; removing ballast and decking, and replacing with new timber decking. Handrails and safety rails/wires/mesh to be added to OH&S standards. Interpretation plan implemented and signage installed. The project also to cover some ancillary works, including access ramp and sealed carpark at the eastern end of Bridge. The restored Bridge will then be incorporated into the East Gippsland Rail Trail and promoted as an iconic trailhead and plans put in place to develop the tourism sector in Orbost to capitalise on the restoration.

- Option B: Is the same as Option A but alternative decking material is used instead of timber, and the carpark would remain unsealed. The alternate decking will be made from artificial materials, such as fibreglass mesh or plastic. This option would have lower maintenance costs and would lead to a reduction in the restoration time of 6 months. This option will impact the heritage value of the restoration to a degree, but the alternate decking will provide for a smoother surface, benefiting users and access for mobility aids.

3.2 Evidence of the proposed solution's effectiveness

Many case studies exist that demonstrate that the project case will deliver benefits, both for the restoration of the Bridge in its own right and as a trailhead for the EGRT.

3.2.1 Evidence of successful Rail Bridge restoration projects

3.2.1.1 The Bourne Creek Bridge in Kilcunda

The Bourne Creek Bridge in Kilcunda was constructed in 1911 for the Victorian Railways as part of the Woolamai-Wonthaggi railway. It is a single-track fifteen span all-timber railway bridge, with a total deck length of 91 metres and a maximum height of twelve metres. The line was closed in 1978. The Bridge has been assessed as having historical, technical, social and aesthetic significance to the State of Victoria, and is listed on the Victorian Heritage Database (2019).

Kilcunda's timber Bourne Creek Bridge is now a well-known feature of the Bass Coast Rail Trail, which opened in 2006. It has previously required maintenance due to its beach location, however, in early 2019, the Bridge underwent extensive rehabilitation to enhance safety and amenity for users of the Trail. The project, which formed part of Bass Coast Shire's 2018/19 Capital Works program, saw an $867,000 investment on renewal works. The works involved:

- The manufacturing and fabrication of all new elements off-site.
- The replacement of the upper decking, including handrails. The decking substructure has been replaced with stainless steel members and components to accommodate new fibre composite decking panels. The handrails have been replaced with new marine-grade stainless steel.
- Modifying and strengthening the bridge abutments (East Gippsland Shire Council, 2019).

The project followed another capital works project completed in 2017, which saw the wooden sub-structure of the bridge repaired. The combined improvements ensure the historically significant bridge will remain a landmark feature of the region and vital component of the Rail Trail (Rail Trails Australia, 2019).

Figure 3: The Restored Bourne Creek Bridge

Source: Bass Coast Shire Council

3.2.1.2 The Black Spur section of the Great Southern Rail Trail between Koonwarra and Meeniyan.

In 2014, $1.3 million was invested into the Black Spur section of the Great Southern Rail Trail. The three original bridges included in the Rail Trail were built in the 1890s. However, parts have been repaired and rebuilt several times since. The first bridge was entirely replaced with a new structure, while sections of the second and third bridges spanning the Tarwin River were replaced. Funding was received in three parts; $1 million from the regional growth fund, $290,000 from the Advancing Country Towns fund, and $560,000 from South Gippsland Shire Council (The Mirror, South Gippsland, 2014). The project was completed in 2016 (The Great Southern Star, 2016).

Figure 3: Black Spur Section of the Great Southern Rail Trail

Source: Rail Trails Australia

3.2.1.3 Rail Bridge and Rail Trail Restoration Projects

There are many other examples of rail bridges that have been restored and included successfully in rail trails across Victoria and Australia. These include:

- The Nicholson River Rail Bridge in Nicholson (forming part of the East Gippsland Rail Trail)
- Curdies Bridge (Camberdown to Timboon Rail Trail)
- Nimon's Bridge (Ballarat to Skipton Rail Trail)
- Woody Yallock Bridge (Lilydale to Warburton Trail)

The Puffing Billy Preservation Society is currently involved in repairs to several wooden rail bridges along the dismantled Wodonga to Cudgewa Railway. Four bridges of varying length and height had been re-built by 2016, with more underway (Puffing Billy Preservation Society, 2016).

3.2.2 Evidence of improvements to Rail Trails leading to economic outcomes

Trails elsewhere have generated positive economic impacts on businesses in linked towns and 'energised' local communities. Tourism operators, including shop, café, restaurant, winery, hotel and activity operators, benefit when trail users are encouraged to stop and engage with the local area, and visit attractions (such as the Bridge).

Under the project case, the incorporation of the restored Bridge into the EGRT will increase accessibility to the trail to and from Orbost, and increase the visibility of the trail from the highway. Thus, Orbost's role as a gateway town to the EGRT can be developed.

3.2.2.1 Successful trail upgrades elsewhere

In Victoria, the development of rail trails over the past several decades has seen new tourist attractions develop in the State's regional areas. Of all the Australian states, Victoria has the most developed rail trails. Notable trails include the Great Victorian Rail Trail (134 kilometres in length) and Murray to Mountains Rail trail (116 kilometres). These trails are located in the Victorian High-Country Region, 3-4 hours northeast of Melbourne.

According to RDV (2019), Victoria's High Country is experiencing strong tourism growth ahead of State and regional averages, attracting 3.8 million visitors spending over $1.1 billion annually. Cycle tourism is one of the primary markets fuelling this growth. Due to the quality and extent of the

cycling infrastructure in the region, the High-Country is attracting more cycle visitation and yield than any other Australian region (RDV, 2019).

In acknowledgement of the success of rail trails in delivery positive economic outcomes, the Victorian Government has recently invested $12 million towards a 10-year plan to fund specific initiatives in the high-country region including:

- Enhancements to the existing Murray to Mountains Rail Trail
- Extension of the Murray to Mountains Rail Trail by linking Beechworth and Yackandandah
- Trail enhancements such as better signage, community hubs, and digital interpretations
- A major marketing campaign to both local and international audiences
- Promoting private sector investment in complementary products and experiences

The business case for the rail trail extensions and upgrades in the High-Country (SGS Economics and Planning, 2016) found that once completed the upgrades would lead to an increased usage of the trails by visitors. This would lead to private sector investment and structural growth in the region's economic performance. In total, it was estimated that the investments in trail enhancement and trail connections would generate between 121 and 173 jobs on an ongoing basis in the region and add value to the local economy of between $10 and $15 million per annum.

In another study, an economic impact study of the Murray to the Mountains Rail Trail, Warburton Rail Trail and East Gippsland Trails, found that, on average, for every visitor day at the rail trails, $51.10 of expenditure is injected into the local economy (Beeton, 2003). These 3 trails are quite different as their size, location and level of development vary widely, demonstrating that despite these differences, rail trails have a significant economic potential (Northern Rivers Rail Trail Inc, 2019).

3.3 Scalability of the recommended solution

To achieve the benefits outlined in Section 4 the entire scope of works needs to be funded and completed. Removal of components such as interpretive signage, or if access for all visitors onto the Bridge is not allowed, would limit the benefits of the project leading to a sub-optimal outcome.

3.4 Alternatives considered

No other alternatives have been considered beyond the base case and the recommended solution. There are no alternate approaches besides restoration of the Bridge. Other alternatives are not considered to have the potential to stimulate the Orbost economy sufficiently to be worth pursuing.

3.5 Evaluation strategy

Successful tracks and trails are constantly self-evaluating and improving to provide the best experience for users. Attracting tourists is increasingly competitive between different states in Australia and local regions within states. In response, tourism offerings, including trails, need to be continually evolving to maintain and increase market share.

Trail evaluation is also critical to catch faults and resolve unforeseen issues. Evaluation opportunities also allow the community to regularly have a say on how the trail in their local region is operating.

<evaluation strategy to be identified by FEGRT>

3.6 Why should Government be involved?

The Bridge is located on Crown land managed by DELWP and is an asset of the Victorian Government. Consequently, it is the Victorian Government's responsibility to maintain the Bridge. Having said this, because the costs of maintenance are not directly offset by any revenues for Government, there is little financial incentive for Government to adequately maintain the Bridge. For Government, there are other motives beyond the financial, including economic, social and environmental values. Section 4 broadens out these deliberations by ensuring that the social and environmental externalities experienced by Victorian community members are appropriately considered through cost-benefit analysis.

At this point, the assessment focusses on the alignment between the outcomes of the restoration and Government priorities. Alignment is approached from two perspectives: firstly, legislative requirements and directions, and secondly, policy commitments of executive government.

3.6.1 Legislative alignment

There is a clear legislative mandate to protect the Bridge under state legislation and the provisions of the East Gippsland Planning Scheme.

Planning and Environment Act 1987

Local councils record and protect places of value to the local community. Places of local heritage significance may be protected by listing on a schedule to the Heritage Overlay, under the relevant planning scheme. Local government manages the identification and protection of places under the planning scheme. Councils are responsible for issuing planning permits for the use and development of heritage places under the Planning and Environment Act 1987. The Bridge is listed as being of a Heritage Place, with an associated Heritage Overlay provision, in the East Gippsland Planning Scheme.

3.6.2 Policy and strategic alignment

To further gauge the relative importance of the anticipated benefits in the Government's vision for Gippsland and Victoria more generally, it is necessary to review the Government's public commitments, strategies and formally adopted policies.

Each of Victoria's eight regions are covered by a Regional Growth Plan, which are endorsed as the strategic land use plans for that region. The Regional Growth Plans provide broad direction for all land use and development. The *Gippsland Regional Growth Plan* is underpinned by four guiding principles:

1. **Strengthen economic resilience** by **growing a more diverse economy** that is supported by **new investment**, innovation and in traditional strengths.
2. Promote a healthy environment by valuing Gippsland's environmental and **heritage assets**, and by minimising the region's exposure to natural hazards and risks
3. Develop sustainable communities through a settlement framework comprising of major urban centres that ensures residents have convenient access to jobs, services, infrastructure and community facilities
4. Delivery timely and accessible infrastructure to meet regional needs for transport, utilities, and community facilities.

This project directly aligns with principles 1 and 2 of the Gippsland Regional Growth Plan. The restoration of the Bridge will help the economic resilience of Orbost by strengthening the visitor economy while at the same time, celebrating a treasured heritage asset.

Other state, local and industry-specific policies most relevant to this assessment are included on page overleaf.

Table 3 Policy recognition of investment in rail trails and heritage

Geographic Area	*Policy / strategic document*	*Key directions*
Victoria wide	Victorian Cycling Strategy 2018-28	Support recreational cycling and sport, tourism and community events. The State Government will continue to develop trails to improve the attractiveness of cycling tourism across Victoria, including rail trails. These usually follow disused rail corridors and provide a comfortable, enjoyable environment for people to cycle for leisure.
	Victoria's Tourism Strategy 2020	Key action: Support investments which enhance the State's nature-based tourism products, such as completing high end walking experiences and associated accommodation development.
	Victoria's Trail Strategy 2014-24	Overall Vision: "*for Victoria to be recognised as a leading trail-based destination that provides a diverse range of quality trail experiences for visitors, while strengthening the State's economy and improving the health, wellbeing and lifestyle of the community*".
Regional Victoria	Victoria's Regional Tourism Strategy 2013-16	Overall strategy aim: To encourage private sector investment in existing and new tourism attractions and infrastructure. Actions listed under 'Priorities for Gippsland' include supporting nature-based infrastructure development
	Victorian Regional Economic Development and Services Review 2015	High Priority: Unique regional tourism segments (recommendation 21) by identifying a number of unique regional tourism segments and developing the product offer.
Gippsland	Draft Gippsland Destination Management Plan Tourism 2030	Strategic priority 2: Develop Gippsland's experiences that encourage new and existing markets to visit, stay and spend Priority: investment in new and improved experiences that deliver on brand and positioning Key actions: - Seek investment in the priority hero and support experiences as described in the Destination Management Plan (Gippland's Trail networks – including the East Gippsland Rail Trail is noted as support experiences). - Develop and undertake an EOI process for identified tourism development sites (such as hero experiences or other available opportunities) Priority: Arts, culture and heritage Key actions: Seek to capitalise on the small but important market for history lovers in Gippsland including packaging history trails, destinations and building experiences with land managers such as Parks Victoria where appropriate
	Gippsland Trail Strategy (Destination Gippsland- under development)	The Strategy will seek to establish a framework for development and promotion of trails across the region, focussing on those that provide the greatest opportunity to and strengthen the visitor economy. Rail trails are expected to feature in the Strategy.
East Gippsland	East Gippsland Shire Tourism Strategy	The creation of an iconic trail head aligns with the marketing strategy for East Gippsland Shire, which is marketed as a nature-based tourist destination. Iconic walks and trails are being developed to motivate visitors to come to East Gippsland.
	East Gippsland Rail Trail Strategic Business Case (2019)	Key priorities for improvements to the trail: - Stronger link to townships – improvement of connections to the towns along the trail to encourage users to stop and utilise local services and facilities - Making more of trail highlights- provision of additional interpretive facilities to showcase the natural, historical and Aboriginal cultural features along the trail

4. Benefits

This section of the assessment discusses the value that is anticipated to flow to Victoria if the problems identified in Part 2 were to be resolved satisfactorily by implementing the solution proposed in Part 3.

The merits of the project options (restoration) versus a business-as-usual approach (nothing changes) are evaluated from several perspectives.

- Firstly, the views of stakeholders are considered in appraising the appetite to deviate from the business as usual scenario.
- Following the stakeholder review is a quantitative analysis. This commences with a survey of the likely triple bottom line impacts of the project options: that is, their social, economic and environmental consequences. This provides the backdrop for a cost-benefit analysis which endeavours to measure the net effect of the project options on the welfare of Victoria. The CBA considers the gamut of project impacts, not just those which are traded and have a market price.
- Based on the CBA, this part of the assessment then makes a conclusion as to whether the project options provide benefits to the community over and above the costs of restoration, in comparison to the base case.

4.1 Benefits of the recommended solution

The restoration of the Bridge will result in the following overarching benefits:

- The realisation of the opportunity for the Bridge to be incorporated into the East Gippsland Rail Trail and the resulting highly attractive extension of the Trail into Orbost
- The creation of an authentic and iconic marketing tool for Orbost, the East Gippsland Rail Trail and East Gippsland generally. The Bridge can be leveraged to increase visitation to the town and region
- The creation of additional economic opportunities for Orbost associated with an expanded visitor economy
- The retention and enhancement of a heritage asset to Victorians
- The retention of a cultural landmark that has long played a role in the economic, social and cultural fabric of Orbost
- The realisation of the opportunity for the local and broader Victorian community and interstate and international visitors to use and enjoy the Rail Bridge into the future.

4.1.1 The realisation of the opportunity for the Bridge to be incorporated into the East Gippsland Rail Trail and the resulting highly attractive extension of the Trail into Orbost

The restoration would allow for the EGRT to connect directly into Orbost where services and experiences can be offered to visitors. The local community can provide a welcoming end or starting point for users and develop as a gateway town for visitors to the EGRT and region. When linkages to the towns and attractions have been made elsewhere, the visitor experience has improved, leading to positive economic outcomes (see section 3.2.2 for evidence). The economic impact a trail can have on a local region increases substantially if trail users can be encouraged to visit towns and attractions, and ideally be encouraged to stay overnight or longer.

The EGRT is already attracting visitors who have shown a willingness to pay for high-quality tourism products. Local operator, Snowy River Cycling, has provided several real client case studies to demonstrate this, provided in the table below.

Table 4: Factors driving demand for rail trail visitation

Visitor package type	*Visitor experience and client spend*
Tailored luxury cycle package	Two single women from Sydney have booked a luxury cycle package scheduled to embark in January 2020. The women will spend one night in Orbost, and four nights along the EGRT. Their package includes five nights of high-end accommodation (private rooms), four meals, bike hire, daily luggage transfers, return transport to the start of the trail, information and support as required. – Direct spend per person (paid to operator): $1595 ($320 per person daily). – Estimated additional spend in Orbost and surrounds: $250- $300 per person*
Tailored cycle group package	A group of seven friends from Melbourne have booked a group cycle package scheduled to embark in September 2019. The package includes four nights of standard accommodation (twin-share), two meals, daily luggage transfers and return transport to the start of the trail. The group will use their own bikes. – Direct spend per person (paid to operator): $590 ($150 per person daily). – Estimated additional spend in Orbost and surrounds: $180- $250 per person*
Great East Rail Trail package (annual event)	Snowy River Cycling offers a yearly booked event named the Great East Rail Trail Ride. This three day, two-night recreational event is modelled on the Great Victorian Bike Ride but offers smaller group sizes and a trail only experience. The event is in its sixth year and is set to be booked to capacity for the third year in a row (capacity is 120 riders). In 2019 it will run from October 4th to 6th. The package includes two nights of campsite accommodation, all meals, full support along the route (rest areas, back up bus, first aid), return transport to the start of the trail, daily luggage transfers and entertainment each evening. – Direct spend per person (paid to the operator): from $450 (standard registration), however up to $750 per person if upgrades are chosen (roofed accommodation and bike hire). – Estimated additional spend in Orbost and surrounds: $100- $170 per person* Past Event survey data shows two-thirds of participants spend at least one extra night in East Gippsland.

Source: Snowy River Cycling

** extra meals, snacks, drinks and other comfort items to be purchased during the stay from local businesses

It can confidently be assumed that by delivering a higher quality rail trail offer (by incorporating the Snowy River Floodplain Rail Bridge into the EGRT), more tourists such as those described in the table above will be enticed to spend time in and around Orbost.

As noted previously, the EGRT is connected to Orbost by a link path. This link path could be used in the restoration through the creation of 'loop walk' that would enable the Rail Bridge to be both travelled across and seen from nearby on the way back into Orbost. The link path also connects the EGRT to Old Coach Rd and the Grandview Lookout that looks over the Snowy River Floodplain. Again, this attractive walking route is near invisible and thus significantly underutilised. An improved EGRT that included a restored Rail Bridge and loop walk to Grandview Lookout would provide walkers (both local and visitors) with a highly attractive 8 km return trip beginning and ending in Orbost. This walk (or ride) would encourage passing visitors to stop into Orbost and spend time (and money) in the local community. The Bridge and loop track would be a recreational and education (via interpretation) asset for the Orbost community and all of Victoria.

The provision of an iconic trailhead is supported by the 2019 business case for the EGRT (The Right Man, 2019). Making more of trail highlights (including the provision of additional interpretive facilities) to showcase the natural, historical and Aboriginal cultural features along the trail, was identified as a priority.

Typical quotes from the local community demonstrating this benefit include "*The whole rail trail system in East Gippsland is underutilised. No one knows it here. The Bridge provides an iconic site to raise the profile of the whole system".*

4.1.2 The creation of an authentic and iconic marketing tool for Orbost, the East Gippsland Rail Trail and East Gippsland generally. The Bridge can be leveraged to increase visitation to the town and region

As outlined earlier, Orbost and the surrounding region needs additional economic opportunities and jobs. As an important contributor to the local economy, the tourism industry is a priority sector for the region. Many regional areas, including Orbost, have seen a continuous decline in historically dominant sectors of employment. Employment in regional areas has become reliant on publicly funded sectors such as government administration, health care and education. Tourism is one of the few privately driven sectors experiencing growth.

Restoration of the Bridge presents as an opportunity to increase visitation to the town both as a recreational asset, but also an iconic landmark that can be used in branding and marketing efforts. Just the sight of people recreating on the Bridge will cause passing visitors to stop into Orbost. Consultation with business owners revealed that already they often have passing tourists stopping into their stores enquiring about the Bridge.

During restoration the town and region will gain recognition in the mainstream, industry and social media. Efforts to save the Bridge have already featured heavily in the media both in Orbost and in Melbourne (via the Age and ABC), and also nationally via rail trail user group press. The 'brand effect' that would arise because of the restoration will, for example, improve the town's credibility as a destination for inward investment and skilled migrants, especially in the tourism-related industries.

Marketing and promotion of trails to raise awareness among possible visitors is of great importance, and best practice trails all target significant effort towards marketing. Research by Taylor (2015) found four factors that drive demand for rail trail visitation, as set out in the table below. The restoration of the Bridge aligns strongly with the success factors identified.

Table 5: Factors driving demand for rail trail visitation

Factor	*Relevance to project case*
Uniqueness: whether the trail is a unique feature that will entice visitors	Under the project case, the Snowy River Floodplain Rail Bridge, Victoria's longest timber rail bridge, will act as an iconic trailhead for the East Gippsland Rail Trail.
Accessibility: can potential visitors access the trail easily	Under the project case, the incorporation of the restored Snowy River Floodplain Rail Bridge into the East Gippsland Rail Tail will increase accessibility to the trail to and from Orbost, and increase the visibility of the trail from the highway.
Role of Gateway Towns: these towns serve as entry points to attractions such as trails and provide services to visitors	Under the project case, Orbost's role as a Gateway Town to the East Gippsland Rail Trail will be further developed.
Proximity to generating markets: these markets provide a critical mass of potential visitors	Under the project case, the Rail Bridge will connect with the 97km East Gippsland Rail Trail between Bairnsdale and Orbost. Extending the Trail to include the Bridge would encourage more cyclists to Orbost and the wider region.

Source: Taylor (2015), 'What factors make rail trails successful as tourism attractions? Developing a conceptual framework from relevant literature', Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism, 12:89-98.

The restoration of the Bridge and its integration in the EGRT can play an important role in building the town's tourism profile, developing tourism appeal and stimulating related sectors.

4.1.3 The creation of additional opportunities for economic development in Orbost associated with an expanded visitor economy

An aim for the community of Orbost is to facilitate an increase in the economic yield the town derives from tourism by enticing tourists to stop in the town, and preferably to stay for at least one

night. The restoration of the Bridge will allow the town to capture a greater market share by making the town more attractive to visitors, and by linking the EGRT into the centre of Orbost.

Tourism is an important contributor to the sustainable development of regional areas. It is often advocated as a means for diversifying in rural and regional economies, by providing alternative sources of employment and income generation, in times of transition from traditional industries such as agriculture and forestry.

The task of economic development has become difficult for many regional towns in Victoria as traditional regionally-based industries such as agriculture and manufacturing have contracted, as is the case in Orbost (as discussed in 2.3.1), replaced by more knowledge-intensive professions, typically in larger cities.

Funding the restoration of the Bridge presents as an opportunity to expand the visitor economy in Orbost, marginally improving the value of exports from the town. Exports refer to any product or service which is traded to anyone outside of the region due to the restoration of the Bridge. This includes new visitors drawn to visit the area due to the Bridge as part of the EGRT. Besides this, rail trailers are just one segment likely to be attracted to Orbost because of the restoration. These include heritage and bridge enthusiasts, and importantly, visitors in the region who instead of passing through to other destinations, may now stop and visit the Bridge and Orbost due to the new tourist offer and spend money in the local economy, for example getting lunch, fuel, souvenirs etc. Capturing a larger share of passing traffic would provide economic benefits to the town.

The EGRT is the closest trail to the ACT and south-eastern NSW by road, which gives it a competitive advantage over other trails in Victoria. As other states in Australia have very few rail trails, Victoria's rail trails achieve strong attraction for interstate cycle tourists. Existing operators in Orbost can attest to there being a strong presence of interstate and overseas guests attracted to current Rail Trail offerings in East Gippsland. Snowy River Cycling specialises in small group and customised tours across the rail trails of Gippsland. The table below shows the origin of Snowy River Cycling clients between 2011 and 2019, highlighting that over 70% of their clients are from interstate or overseas.

Table 6: Snowy River Cycling Clients by Origin: 2011- 2019

Origin of Snowy River Cycling Clients	*Proportion of clients*
New South Wales	32%
Victoria	28%
Queensland	13%
Australian Capital Territory	9%
Other Australian States	5%
United Kingdom	5%
Other Northern Europe	2%
New Zealand	3%
North America	2%

Source: Snowy River Cycling

New income injected into the local economy is highly beneficial as the income creates a multiplier effect as businesses draw on local suppliers and workers to meet the increased demand from external customers. This, over time, would allow local businesses to invest in new equipment, hire more people and pay higher wages. Greater economic activity also means higher government revenues and more money to spend on better quality services for the community. Economic development enables a higher standard of living for people.

Typical quotes from the local community demonstrating this benefit include "*Tourism is another plank in the economic future for the area… The Bridge has a grand claim. It should be an iconic tourist destination".*

4.1.4 The retention and enhancement of a heritage asset to Victorians

Under the project case, the underlying Bridge structure will be fully restored to its original condition using natural timbers. This will result in the heritage asset not only being retained but also enhanced. The small number of piles that have caused the superstructure to dip and twist in places will be replaced, which will result in a dramatically different visual outcome for the Bridge. Therefore, the two elements of heritage significance (historical and aesthetic) will both be benefitted.

Not only will the restoration preserve a heritage asset, but its value will be enhanced via interpretation.

Interpretation of heritage and trail links to local and historical attractions is an essential component of successful trails. Rail trails often have a long and interesting history built upon the original railway itself. Bridges, tunnels, culverts and stations can be retained and restored, and the history of the local area celebrated, with stories told of the region's original Aboriginal inhabitants, early European pioneers and industries. Interpretations explaining the local flora and fauna are also valuable. These provide a way to engage with the area while visiting the Bridge, enhancing the experience.

As discussed earlier, the local community consulted with for this assessment supported the retention and enhancement of the Rail Bridge for heritage purposes. One community member remarked during the consultation workshops: "*I want the bridge to last long into the future. It's an iconic feature of the town's history*".

Another remarked, "*The Bridge is the story of the town. Nothing can replace the timber industry, but the Bridge celebrates that heritage*".

4.1.5 The retention of a cultural landmark that has long played an important role in the economic, social and cultural fabric of Orbost

Retaining the Bridge will mean retaining a cultural icon and defining feature of the town of Orbost. This will have several social benefits, the largest being the sense of community pride and resilience. Key quotes from the local community demonstrating this benefit include:

"I remember travelling past it as a child when it was still in good condition. It's a huge landmark for the local area. It's iconic. Restoring it will deliver health benefits for the town."

4.1.6 The realisation of the opportunity for the local and wider Victorian community to use and enjoy the Rail Bridge into the future.

Should the Bridge be restored, people will, for the first time in the Bridge's history, be able to use it for recreational purposes. Community members and visitors alike will be able to walk, run, cycle and use mobility aids to traverse the Bridge safely. Community and visitor use of the Bridge will result in many benefits, including physical, social (e.g. community pride), mental, and educational benefits (restoration of the Bridge will also include interpretive signage). The following comments were recorded during conversations with the local community:

"Restoring the Rail Bridge will deliver health benefits for the town".

"I have a young family, and it would be amazing for them if it remains standing and they can use it in the future.

A multitude of benefits will flow to the residents who will get to enjoy traversing the Bridge on a regular basis, including health and wellbeing benefits, social, cultural and educational benefits. The restored Bridge will be a recreational and community asset for Orbost, East Gippsland and Victoria.

There is a desire by residents everywhere to live in places that feature interesting community spaces and recreational facilities. The restoration provides an opportunity to develop such a space for the community of Orbost, allowing for greater community leisure time and healthy active pursuits. During consultation sessions for this assessment, local community members spoke at

length about their desire to personally interact with the Bridge in the future and to see others enjoying it. Key quotes from the local community demonstrating this benefit include:

"Bridges like that are never going to be made again. It's all hand made. It would be lovely to see people using it again", and:

Benefits will also arise for the wider Victorian community who will now be able to traverse the Bridge during their travels to, and through, the town of Orbost.

4.2 Impact assessment

4.2.1 Overview

The full suite of incremental social, environmental and economic costs and benefits of the two Options, i.e. incremental (or additional) to the Base Case (business-as-usual option), are outlined in the following pages.

The Base Case for the project is that nothing is done, and the Bridge falls into further ruin resulting in the problems identified in Section 2.2.

The basis for the inclusion of each benefit, as well as the techniques used to monetise their impacts for the purposes of cost-benefit analysis, are also described.

All these impacts apply across both restoration options. However, their magnitudes may differ.

The identified costs and benefits of the two project options versus the Base Case, segmented on a triple bottom line basis, are summarised in the following table.

Figure 8: Summary of costs and benefits versus Base Case

	Costs	*Benefits*
Social		• Improved experience for recreation users • Health and well-being • Education • Protection of heritage: non-user benefits
Environmental	• Un-priced environmental resource depletion*	• Management of weeds and invasive species* • Community appreciation of the environment*
Economic	• Restoration costs • Ongoing maintenance and marketing costs	• Increased economic activity from tourism • Improved brand value for East Gippsland and Victoria

* Not quantified in the cost-benefit analysis

4.2.2 Social costs

None identified.

4.2.3 Social Benefits

4.2.3.1 Improved experience for recreation users

Both project options will provide an improved experience for both existing and new visitors, local residents and residents from adjoining areas of East Gippsland Shire. At present, the Bridge is closed to visitors and residents.

Allowing access onto the Bridge will provide benefits to the Victorian community in the form of increased community leisure activity and enjoyment. The ABS outlines the importance of leisure time to Australians, arguing that leisure time gives people an opportunity to:

- Recover from the pressures of work and other commitments
- Bond with family and community members

- Pursue their interests and passions, and
- Reflect on their life direction and meaning (ABS, 2015).

Anecdotal evidence indicates that residents use the area around the Bridge for walking and cycling but in low numbers. The pedestrian and cycling infrastructure are of low quality. With the restoration of the Bridge, the community will have a new and highly desirable place to recreate within a short walk or ride from town.

Individuals value their leisure time, even if they are not paid for it. A standard approach to measuring the value of this category of benefit is to take the total additional hours spent recreating and multiply these by a generally accepted value of leisure time[3] (estimated at $17.14 per hour).

Recreation and leisure benefits are assumed to apply to local users and Victorian visitors only, as these benefits accrue to the State and not further afield. Recreation and leisure benefits are assumed to commence straight after the restorations are complete.

SGS has previously completed analysis in support of High-Country Rail Trail and the Murray to Mountains Rail Trail for Regional Development Victoria. Annual use of these trails by local residents was found to be 2,800 and 7,500, respectively. The mid-point of these two figures is used to broadly estimate local usage of the restored Rail Bridge for recreation after restoration. Intrastate visitation and usage have been estimated at 4,000 per annum, rising to 37,000 by 2029 (as outlined in section 4.2.7). It is assumed that each visit lasts for half an hour (on average).

Repeated use of trail infrastructure for recreation is supported by an EGRT user survey (The Right Man, 2019) which indicates that there are many regular users, with local survey respondents indicating that they use the trail, on average, about 15 times per year. However, the current use of the Orbost end of the trail is much lower than the western sections of the trail.

Based on the above assumptions, the per annum benefit is calculated as $83,000 in the first year for Project Option A, rising to $378,000 by 2029. It is assumed that the benefits are the same for Option B but, in reality, benefits may be slightly higher for Option B as the composite materials used for the decking provide a better user experience for riding, walking and use by wheelchairs and mobility scooters.

4.2.3.2 Health and well-being

Besides the leisure benefits, there will also be health benefits to the local community that is more active. Local residents will have the opportunity to take advantage of the enhanced recreational asset leading to healthier, happier lifestyles as physical activity becomes more attractive. The increase in physical activity has tangible mental and physical health cost savings for Victoria.

In line with the Australian Transport Assessment and Planning Guidelines, SGS has estimated a health benefit associated with walking of $3.13 per kilometre. The health benefit for cycling is estimated at $1.58 per kilometre (adjusted to 2019 prices). The same local usage as in leisure time has been used, and it is assumed that these additional users are split between walkers and cyclists. It is assumed that the average trip length is 2kms, which is a conservative estimate given that many users will also ride/walk to the Bridge from town or extend their journey further along the EGRT or onto the connecting loop tracks.

Health cost savings are assumed to apply to local users and intrastate visitors only as these benefits accrue to the State, and not further afield.

Based on the assumptions above, the initial per annum benefit is calculated as $22,000 for Option A, rising to $102,000 by 2029. It is assumed that the health benefits are the same for Option B.

[3] Private recreation time is valued at 40% of seasonally adjusted full time Average Weekly Earnings for Australia, equivalent to $17.14 per person-hour.

4.2.3.3 Education

The restoration of the Bridge, saving a historical asset, and the interpretive signage to be placed around the Bridge offer an opportunity for education. If the users of the Bridge learn about the history of the Bridge, the local area and of the significance of the floodplain to Aboriginal communities, then this is a benefit.

To value the education benefits, the cost of providing education in Victoria was used as a proxy. According to the Productivity Commission's 2016 Report on Government Services, total recurrent expenditure (by all governments) per full-time equivalent student in Victorian public sector schools amounted to $13,294 in 2013/14. Assuming 184 school days per year, each of 6 hours, the cost of providing education per hour per student in Victoria is approximately $12. This figure was adopted in this evaluation without adjustment for inflation to maintain a conservative position.

If every user of the Bridge spends five minutes learning about the historical and cultural significance for the Bridge and floodplain, then the per annum benefit is $7,000 in the year after restoration, rising to $64,000 per annum in 2029 with increased visitation and use (see economic benefits for visitor demand calculations).

4.2.3.4 Protection of heritage: non-user benefits

The restoration of the Bridge will be valued by many people across Victoria, even if they do not plan to use it recreationally or visit[4].

According to the literature, there are three elements to this non-user value:

- 'Option value', that is, the knowledge that the restored Bridge will be indefinitely accessible to the non-user in the future, with an implicit understanding by the non-user that the loss of the Bridge would result in a quantifiable loss of this option
- 'Existence value' which reflects the pride and satisfaction which non-users may feel in living in a community with outstanding heritage assets, and
- 'Bequest value', that is, non-users valuing the opportunity to leave quality community infrastructure for the benefit of future generations.

Based on scholarly investigations of willingness to pay for the protection, retention or rehabilitation of historical or cultural assets and creation of new public domain assets, non-visitors to the Bridge can be expected to place some value on its restoration.

In 2018, Heritage Victoria, a branch within the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), commissioned SGS to develop a tool that would allow for practical valuation of specific heritage assets in Victoria (SGS Economics and Planning, 2018). Using the asset-specific willingness-to-pay (WTP) tool developed as part of this study, the capitalised value of the heritage services generated by the assets on the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) was estimated to be in excess of $1.1 billion. This translates to roughly $0.45 million per asset on average, though it should be noted that there is a broad spectrum of valuations per item reflecting parameters of asset type, land use, condition and access.

In terms of annual value, at an estimated value of $1.1 billion, Victoria's heritage stock generates an annual flow of more than $40 million in benefits for the community (calculated at a yield of 4%). This flow relates only to WTP for purely heritage services. It does not include collateral benefits, for example, support for tourism exports or underwriting cultural 'branding' for destinations.

As the Bridge has been assessed as having State significance, even though it is not on the Victorian Heritage Register, it is assumed that the Bridge has a non-use heritage value similar to average items on the list. Assuming the Bridge has a heritage asset value of $0.45 million (the average across the VHR), and a yield of 4%, the annual heritage value of the Bridge is estimated at $18,000 for Option A. For Option B a 10% discount has been applied to the annual value to account

[4] This is based on the non-excludable public good theory. The heritage value used is an average value per person. Some people will value the bridge highly while others not at all.

for the reduction in heritage value from using a composite decking material, as opposed to a like-for-like replacement. The annual value for Option B is $16,200

4.2.4 Environmental costs

4.2.4.1 Un-priced environmental resource depletion

This is the cost of depleting environmental resources in the restoration process, i.e. over and above the cost that is included in the 'market price' of materials to be used in the restoration.

This cost has not been separately quantified in the evaluation. However, it could be argued that the environmental externalities in question are already 'optimally' managed via planning regulation and the arrangements put in place by State and Commonwealth Governments to protect the environment.

4.2.5 Environmental benefits

4.2.5.1 Management of weeds and invasive species

As part of the allowance for maintenance, it is assumed that the management of weeds and invasive species around the Bridge will be an on-going task. This benefit has not been separately monetised in the CBA.

4.2.5.2 Community appreciation of the environment

Tracks and trails present an opportunity to experience and appreciate nature. They can give people a sense of place and an understanding of the enormity of past events and an understanding of what is at stake if the environment is not properly cared for.

Nature-based tourism, more broadly, plays an important role in the environmental movement, as they can act as an active means for teaching people about the natural environments. They can also play a key role in securing lands for environmental conservation.

The increased awareness of immersion in nature leads to more respect for the environment, and a desire to protect it, across a wide range of cohorts.

This benefit has not been monetised.

4.2.6 Economic costs

4.2.6.1 Development and delivery cost for Options A & B

For inputs to the evaluation, SGS relied on cost estimates provided by FEGRT. These were developed by TRAM Engineers & Services in 2015 and provision has been made for inflation and additional works required due to an extra four years of deterioration and for potential additional costs of sourcing large dimension timbers.

The estimated development costs for each option are shown in the table below.

Table 7: capital cost breakdown

Option	*Works*	*Cost*	*Timeframe*
Option A	Full restoration – 'like for like': repair / replace (as necessary) piles, crossheads, beams & kerbs; remove ballast & decking & replace with new timber decking. Add handrails & safety rails/wires/mesh to OH&S standards. Provide access ramp, sealed carpark, interpretation and signage.	$3.5 million	1-1.5 years
Option B	Full restoration of structure & alternative decking: repair / replace (as necessary) piles, crosshead, beams & kerbs; replace timber decking with decking & safety rails etc. made of alternative materials. Provide access ramp, unsealed carpark, interpretation and signage.	$3.0 million	1 year

Source: Friends of East Gippsland Rail Trail, 2019 and TRAM Engineers & Services, 2015.

4.2.6.2 Ongoing maintenance and marketing costs

For Option A, SGS has been advised that maintenance costs will be low for the first 10 years, with only regular inspections required (TRAM Engineers & Services, 2015). Replacement of individual planks or short sections of decking may be required after 10 years. SGS has assumed maintenance costs of 2% of the capital costs in the first ten years, then 5% per annum from then on.

The percentages above are based on the maintenance costs used in the business case produced for Rural Development Victoria for the Murray-to-Mountains and High-Country Rail Trails (SGS Economics and Planning, 2016).

For Option B, SGS has been advised that maintenance costs are 50% less than timber over the 50-year life span of the materials (FEGRT, 2018[5]).

For both Options, a marketing and events allowance of $100,000 per annum[6] has also been included. This has been included as some form of marketing and activation exercise will need to be performed to increase the use of the Bridge, and therefore the number of visitors to Orbost, to achieve the economic benefits outlined.

In total the ongoing maintenance and marketing costs are estimated at $184,000 per annum, rising to $310,000 after ten years, for Option A. For Option B the costs are $130,000 per annum rising to $175,000 per annum after ten years[7].

4.2.7 Economic benefits

4.2.7.1 Increased economic activity from tourism

As a direct consequence of the restoration of Bridge and positioning as an iconic trailhead and visitor attraction, the number of people visiting the region, along with the length of time spent per visit, is likely to increase benefiting the local economy. The planned restoration has been assumed to have a positive impact on local tourism activity in two ways;

- Having an iconic trailhead and tourist feature will increase overall visitor numbers to East Gippsland and an increased market share of forecast tourism growth; and

[5] Based on Wagners website: https://www.wagner.com.au/main/what-we-do/composite-fibre-technologies/products/traffic-infrastructures/timber-bridge-rehabilitation
[6] Based on guidance from East Gippsland Shire Council.
[7] SGS was not provided detailed maintenance costs estimates. The assumptions used are broad estimates and further investigation of ongoing costs of restoration may need to be pursued in future.

- An increased capture rate of existing tourists who, if they cannot access or learn about the Bridge, would have otherwise just passed through without stopping and spending any money in town.

Expenditures made by additional visitors will boost welfare by increasing economic value-added in the local economy. These value-added contributions include the revenues received by businesses and households less the purchases of intermediate (input) goods and services utilised in the production process. These value-added contributions are approximated by 'profits' generated by businesses and 'wages' received by households.

SGS estimates the value-added contribution to be some 25 percent of total visitor expenditures.[8] This margin has been applied to total incremental expenditures made by interstate and overseas patrons versus the Base Case.

Between 2009 and the end of 2018, East Gippsland LGA has experienced an average annual growth rate (AAGR) in visitor nights of 2.9% per annum; and an AAGR in day trips of 0.86% (Tourism Research Australia, 2019). This growth in visits though has been lower than the growth rates experienced in the Greater Gippsland Region, which has seen visitor nights increase by 3.3% and day trips by 3.4% per annum. This means that East Gippsland has been losing market share in comparison to the rest of the Greater Gippsland Region.

The solution proposed in this report will provide East Gippsland with an iconic landmark drawing attention to the area while making the EGRT a more desirable cycling and walking destination.

For the purposes of the assessment, SGS made a series of assumptions to estimate the increase in visitor nights and day trips that could feasibly be attributed to the restoration.

Figure 9, developed by SGS, shows historical and forecast visitor nights in East Gippsland. The Base Case assumes that the AAGR of visitor nights will match current levels (2.9% per annum) and East Gippsland will fall further behind the rest of the Greater Gippsland Region as a visitor destination. The darkest blue line is a reference scenario and shows the forecast visitor nights if, after the restoration, the growth in visitor nights in East Gippsland matched the rest of the Greater Gippsland region. This scenario has been deemed by SGS as unlikely to be achieved by restoration of the Bridge alone, so the Project Case is a scenario where the Bridge closes the gap between the Base Case and the reference case by 25%. This means that by 2029 the restoration will lead to an increase in visitor nights of 29,453 per annum (or 0.8%). This figure aligns with experience elsewhere, where rail trail improvements have contributed to an uplift in visitation.

In addition to overnight visitor nights, there will also be those that visit for the day or stop for the day who would have otherwise continued through without stopping. This also includes a greater ability to attract visits to the Bridge and Orbost from the broader area such as holiday visitors to Marlo or Cape Conran. The Project Case for day visitors has been estimated using the same method as visitor nights and is shown in Figure 10.

The Project Case will see day visitors increase by 34,116 per annum by 2029 over the base case. This is an increase of 5%.

The additional spend of these visitors is assumed to be in line with current spending levels in East Gippsland at $135 per night per visitor night and $93 per day trip (Tourism Research Australia 2019a)[9].

Based on the above assumptions, in the first full year after the restoration, the increase in visitation will lead to an increase in visitor expenditure in East Gippsland of $588,300 rising to $5,532,600 in 2029. From 2030 onwards it is assumed that the increased visitor expenditure is the same as in 2029.

[8] Acknowledging that some profits may be repatriated interstate or overseas.
[9] This is an average figure. Some visitors may spend considerably more, such as those who partake in cycling tours and spend $700 to $800, while others will spend less, such as those having lunch in Orbost after spending a few hours at the Bridge, before moving on.

Figure 9: Historical and forecast visitor nights in East Gippsland – base, project and reference scenarios

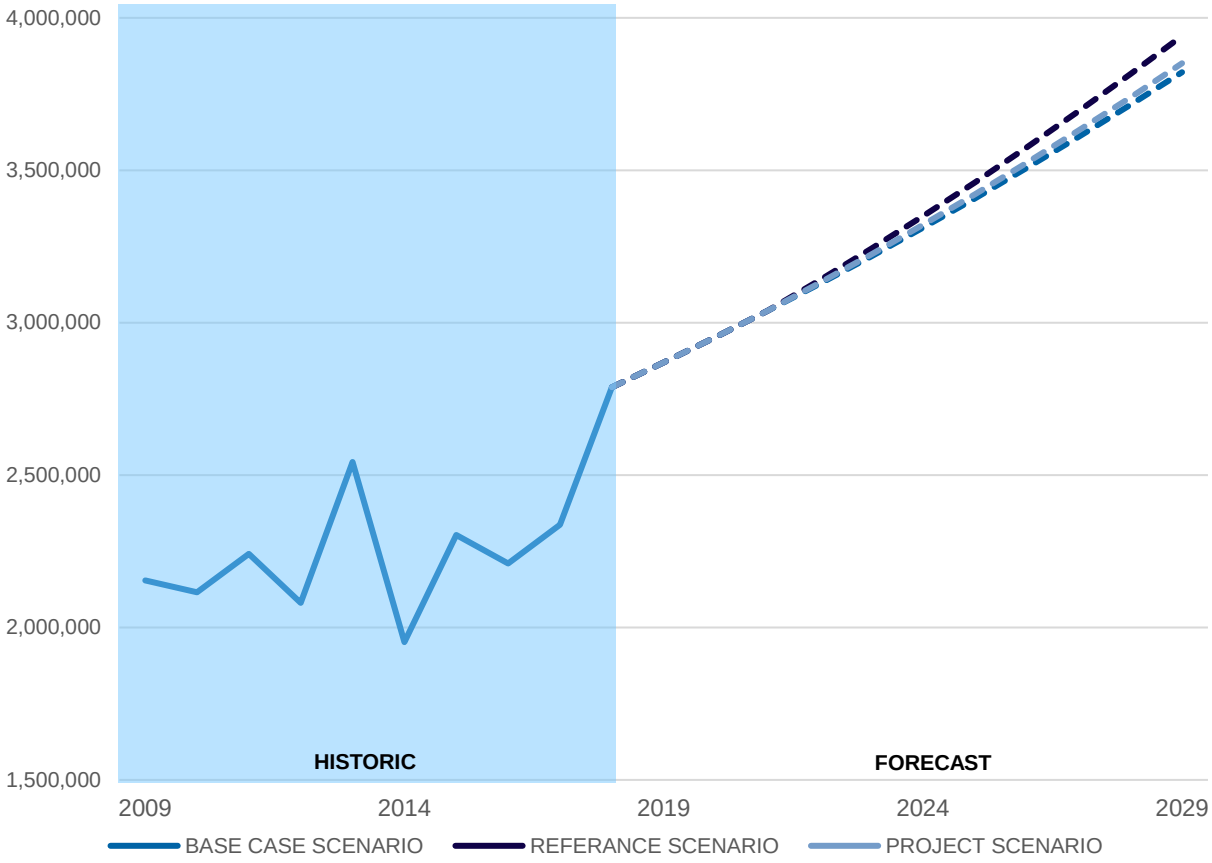
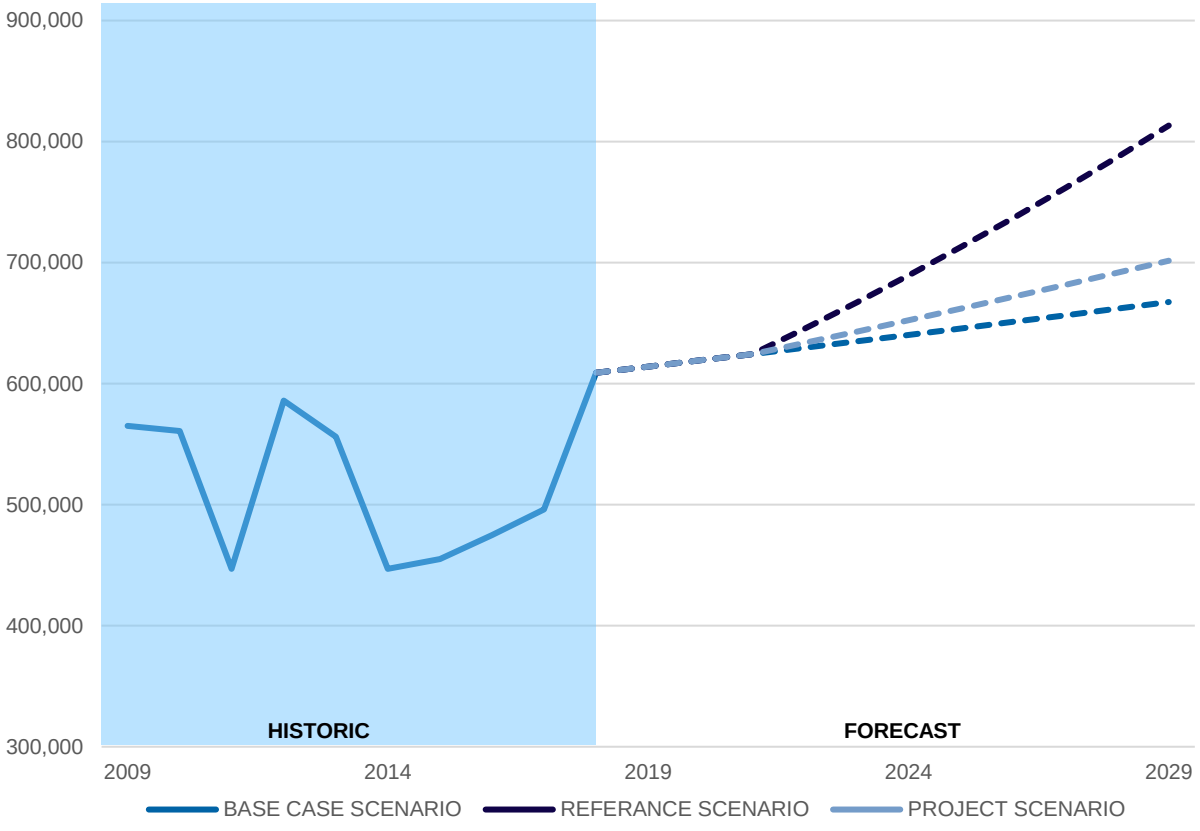


Figure 10: Historical and forecast day visits to East Gippsland – base, project and reference scenarios



As identified earlier, only the value-added component (25%) of the additional expenditure is included as a benefit. In addition, 90% of expenditure from overnight visitation by Victorians (and 100% of day trip expenditure) is excluded from the CBA as it is assumed that these visitors would have visited elsewhere in Victoria if the Bridge was not restored. EY Sweeney (2015) has found that of those travelling to regional Victoria to pursue a cycling experience, two-thirds are from the intrastate market (68%) leaving one third from the interstate market (32%). This ratio has been used in the CBA.

The above assumptions result in a benefit of $43,000 in 2022, rising to $418,000 in 2029. It is assumed that there is no difference between Option A and Option B in relation to increased visitor expenditure.

4.2.7.2 Improved brand value for Orbost, East Gippsland and Victoria

The restoration of the Bridge, creating an iconic landmark, will lift the reputation of Orbost and East Gippsland as a visitor destination.

Part of this benefit would become manifest in higher visitor expenditures made in the region due to the project; the value of which has already been captured above. As such, this benefit has conservatively not been monetised to avoid double counting.

4.3 Overall evaluation of socio-economic and environmental impacts

4.3.1 Cost-benefit analysis (economic evaluation)

4.3.1.1 Purpose and method

Using the principles of CBA, this section assesses the economic, social and environmental costs and benefits associated with moving from the Base Case to the two alternative restoration options outlined earlier in this part of the report.

The analysis identifies, quantifies and monetises relevant costs and benefits, before contrasting their trajectory over the life of the proposal. It subsequently discounts these costs and benefits into present-day values, enabling a net benefit assessment to be generated.

A CBA assesses the economic merit of investing in a project, i.e. it assesses if it is worth doing when a broad societal perspective is taken. CBA contrasts the project's economic, social and environmental benefits with its costs to establish if a net community benefit is on offer at the relevant societal hurdle rate. If the project meets this rate, it is considered to be economically efficient.

The CBA has been undertaken from a Victorian State perspective, as per Treasury Guidelines.

Real values in 2019 dollars have been utilised throughout. This means that dollar prices have not been escalated for inflation over time during the analysis period (15 years).

Three performance measures of project merit are generated via the CBA, details of which are summarised in the figure below.

Table 8: Decision guide for interpreting CBA results using performance measures

Performance measure	Estimation method	Decision rule
Net Present Value (NPV)	The present value of the stream of benefits net of the present value of the stream of costs, with the present value of costs and benefits determined by using an appropriate discount rate.	Accept options with a positive NPV Re-consider options with a negative NPV, and The greater the NPV the better.
Benefit-Cost Ratio (BCR)	The ratio of discounted present-day benefits over discounted present-day costs.	Accept options with a BCR that exceeds one Re-consider options with a BCR less than one, and The greater the BCR, the better.
Internal Rate of Return (IRR)	The rate that returns a zero net present value stream discounted using an appropriate discount rate	Accept options with an IRR that is higher than the chosen discount rate, and re-consider those that are lower. The higher the IRR relative to the chosen discount rate, the better.

Source: SGS Economics & Planning

4.3.1.2 Discount rate

The Department of Treasury and Finance provides guidance on the appropriate range of discount rates to be applied to various types of public sector initiatives. This advice is summarised in the extract reproduced in **Figure 11**.

The restoration of the Rail Bridge falls into Category 1. The benefits of the project are diffuse and external in nature. The CBA calculations have been made using a 4% real discount rate.

Figure 11: DTF recommended discount rates

Categories	Types of Investment	Basis	Rate (real)
Category 1	Provision of goods and services in traditional core service delivery areas of government, such as public health, justice and education. The benefits of these projects can be articulated but are not easily translated to monetary terms. E.g. schools, hospitals, police stations and civic open spaces.) Other projects in this category include projects evaluating potentially catastrophic scenarios for which considerable uncertainty surrounds estimates of costs and benefits.	Projects falling within this category should use a real risk-free rate plus a very small risk premium. Based on long-term average government bond rates, **an appropriate real discount rate for these projects is four per cent.**	4%
Category 2	Provision of goods and services in traditional core service delivery areas of government (i.e. non-commercial investments), but those for which the benefits attributed to the project are more easily translated to monetary terms. E.g. public transport, roads and public housing).	These projects should be discounted using a risk-free rate plus a modest risk premium depending on the project's sensitivity to the economy. Based on long term average government bond rates, **an appropriate real discount rate for these projects is seven per cent.**	7%
Category 3	Commercial investments with similar risks as the private sector. While there should ideally be limited government involvement in this area, government should require a rate of return on commercial investments comparable to that which the private sector requires given the degree of risk associated with the area of activity.	These projects should use a **market rate of return** as the default discount rate, commensurate with the risk profile associated with the industry and specific characteristics of the project. Given that there is the potential for such investments to be significantly more risky than an average market return, **project proponents should liaise with DTF regarding the appropriate rate.**	Consult with DTF.

Source: Department of Treasury and Finance

4.3.1.3 Term and residual values

The CBA has been prepared using a 15-year investment horizon, beginning in 2020.

Wherever assets are expected to have a longer asset life (for example, the capital value of the Bridge) a depreciated value could be included in the final year of the CBA to reflect continued delivery of beneficial services beyond the evaluation period of this evaluation. However, this was set aside in the CBA, making for a conservative appraisal framework.

4.3.1.4 CBA results

The results of the above analysis are brought together in the table below which highlight the benefits of the project to Victoria.

The results show that both project options deliver positive benefit-cost ratios. Option B delivers the greatest net benefit in terms of present values, due to the reduced restoration and maintenance costs, and the benefits flowing 6-months earlier due to the shorter restoration time.

The difference between the two options is minor, however, and the final decision on which option to pursue should also be informed by restoration requirements, practicality and the views of the community and heritage experts.

Table 9: CBA results over 15 years (against BAU) - $2019

	Option A	Option B
Present value: Costs (discount rate of 4%)		
Restoration costs	$3,355,000	$3,050,000
Ongoing costs - maintenance and marketing	$1,896,000	$1,426,000
Total Costs	**$5,251,000**	**$4,476,000**
Present value: Benefits (discount rate of 4%)		
Increased economic activity from tourism	$2,575,000	$2,595,000
Recreation and user experience	$2,522,000	$2,560,000
Health and well-being	$677,000	$688,000
Educational benefits	$397,000	$400,000
Protection of heritage: non-use value	$175,000	$165,000
Total Benefits	**$6,346,000**	**$6,408,000**
BCR	**1.21**	**1.43**
NPV	**$1,095,000**	**$1,932,000**

Source: SGS Economics & Planning Pty Ltd

The largest quantified benefits in the CBA are the increased economic activity due to an increase in visitation generated by Bridge restoration, and the Bridge being a new recreation for the local Orbost and Victorian community (user experience and recreation benefit). Other quantified benefits are improved health and wellbeing outcomes from the new recreation asset increasing participation in physical activity in the local community; educational benefits derived from the interpretation of the history of the Bridge, the economic story of town and Aboriginal cultural history; and the value from protecting Victoria's heritage.

No one benefit leads to the Options being beneficial on their own. All benefits (economic, social and cultural) need to be realised.

It would take around ten years after restoration for both Options to break-even, i.e. have a BCR of one.

4.3.1.5 Testing the robustness of the options analysis

Testing of robustness is warranted, taking into account the potential for optimism bias in the visitation scenarios. Robustness of the evaluation findings also needs to be appraised in the context of potential variations in the cost of delivery.

The following contingencies are explored in the sensitivity analysis:

1. Restoration costs exceed anticipated outlays by 20%

2. Per annum maintenance costs (excluding marketing) are 50% higher[10]
3. Per annum maintenance costs are 50% lower
4. Year on year visitor expenditure forecasts fall short of expectation by 20%

The results of this analysis are summarised in **Figure 12**. The results show that even with a 20% increase in restoration costs, or a 50% increase in per annum maintenance costs, or a 20% reduction in expenditure forecasts, the Options still have a positive NPV and BCR.

Only when a worst-case scenario is applied (higher capital and maintenance costs combined with lower visitor expenditure) does Option A become non-beneficial. Even under this worst-case scenario, Option B maintains a positive BCR and NPV.

Figure 12: CBA Sensitivity analysis

	Option A 4% Discount Rate		Option B 4% Discount Rate	
	Economic NPV	Economic BCR	Economic NPV	Economic BCR
Project Case	$1,095,000	1.2	$1,932,000	1.4
Contingency (1)	$424,000	1.1	$1,355,000	1.3
Contingency (2)	$632,000	1.1	$1,726,000	1.4
Contingency (3)	$1,558,000	1.3	$2,137,000	1.5
Contingency (4)	$580,000	1.1	$1,413,000	1.3
Contingency (1+2+4)	-$554,000	0.9	$630,000	1.1

Source: SGS Economics & Planning Pty Ltd

[10] This increases ongoing costs for Option A to $362,500 per annum (including marketing) after ten years, and $212,500 per annum for Option B.

5. Current Program Funding

5.1 Funding history

No State Government funding has previously been provided for the project.

5.2 Expenditure history

There has been no previous expenditure on this project.

5.3 Existing funding base over forward estimates

There is no existing funding base that has been provided for the restoration.

6. Funding sought

6.1 Proposed funding sources and alternatives

<FEGRT to complete>

6.2 Internal reprioritisation

Not relevant to this project.

6.3 Budget impact – output funding sought

Not relevant to this project.

6.4 Budget impact – capital funding

A costings sheet including all cost assumptions, is attached to this submission.

6.4.1 Budget impact – CAC and depreciation equivalent revenue

Not relevant to this project.

6.5 Revenue impacts

6.5.1 Existing revenue

Not relevant to this project.

6.5.2 New revenue

Not relevant to this project.

7. Deliverability

7.1 Assessment and management of risks and sensitivities

It is important to identify relevant risks so appropriate mitigation and management strategies can be put in place. There are two categories of risks that have been identified and assessed as part of this evaulation:

- Risks in not proceeding with the project
- Risks in delivering the project

The risks associated with not proceeding with the project primarily relate to the loss of the Rail Bridge, government policy objectives and social outcomes.

The risks which may occur across the course of the project have been analysed by Project Phase: Establishment, Permit/ approvals, Construction and Operation.

7.1.1 Risks in not proceeding

The key risks in not delivering the project mirror the losses that will occur should the trajectory of the Bridge remain unchanged, being:

- A missed opportunity for the Rail Bridge to be incorporated into the East Gippsland Rail Trail and the resulting extension of the Rail Trail into Orbost
- A missed opportunity to develop an important, authentic and iconic marketing tool for Orbost, the East Gippsland Rail Trail and East Gippsland generally
- A missed opportunity to expand economic opportunities associated with an expanded visitor economy in Orbost
- The loss of a heritage asset to Victorians
- The loss of a cultural landmark that has long played an important role in the economic, social and cultural fabric of Orbost
- A missed opportunity for the local and wider Victorian community to use and enjoy the Rail Bridge into the future.

There are two additional risks for the Government in not proceeding with this project, being:

- **A limited capacity to leverage existing government investments**. The project is proposed in an area in which government has already invested in various forms of infrastructure, including the East Gippsland Rail Trail, in particular. This investment is not fully utilised and bringing additional visitation to the Region would enable greater use of these sunk costs.
- **A missed opportunity in not meeting government policy objectives.** As outlined in section 3, the restoration of the Rail Bridge contributes to a number of government policy objectives. Not proceeding with restoration is a missed opportunity for Local and State government to contribute to these objectives.

7.1.2 Risks in delivering the project

Despite all the benefits that have been outlined, there are some risks in delivering the project. At this stage of the project, major risks in delivering the project have been identified, and potential mitigation and management strategies identified. The risk management framework provided overleaf will need to be expanded and further developed to implementation.

The most significant risks for the Victorian Government proceeding with the project are:

- **Total funding for the project is not secured or not secured within the necessary timeframe.** Funding will likely need to be sourced from a number of places to meet Victorian Treasury guidelines. It will be important, therefore, for the FEGRT to continue to engage with key stakeholders, outlining potential benefits and opportunities of the project. It will also be important to continue to articulate the quantum of additional funding required, and tasks to be undertaken.

- **The project is not considered a priority for East Gippsland Council in local or regional strategic documents.** It is essential that FEGRT engage with local and regional bodies to ensure the project listed as a priority in future iterations of these key documents. This will ensure the project is best positioned to respond to additional funding opportunities as they arise.
- **Restoration is more expensive than envisaged.** This risk can be mitigated by taking a conservative approach to cost estimates in future work and include sensitivity testing to ensure an adequate amount of funding is sought.
- **Responsibility for management and maintenance is not resolved. T**he Committee of Management over the trail has very limited or no recurrent funding to maintain the current asset or any restored asset. It will, therefore, be important for FEGRT to work with all relevant parties prior to restoration and agree upon a management plan for the Bridge. A suggested management approach is detailed in section 7.3: Readiness and implementation process.
- **Marketing partnerships aren't established to get the message out resulting in limited visitor demand.** This risk can be mitigated by ensuring stakeholders are aware of potential benefits and opportunities of the project and for FEGRT to support tourism boards and others involved in developing a marketing campaign to develop marketing information.
- **The project doesn't attract private investment to deliver additional activities results in limited tourism offer.** This would mean that although the EGRT now connects directly into Orbost, visitor services remain limited. This risk can be mitigated by ensuring market sounding is undertaken before restoration works occur, which then informs the scope of the project.
- **Weather and extreme events cause damage resulting in higher maintenance costs or loss of the Bridge.** This risk can be partially mitigated by ensuring maintenance allowance includes adequate provision made for the impact of severe weather conditions.

The following framework has been used to identify, classify and manage the risks that may arise in delivering the project. It comprises a consequence scale (1-3), and a likelihood scale (1-4). This risk assessment should inform the next steps and planning for the next stage of the project.

Table 10: Risk scoring matrix

			Consequence		
			Insignificant	Moderate	Catastrophic
			C4	C3	C1
	Almost Certain	L4			
	Likely	L3			
	Unlikely	L2			
	Almost Unprecedented	L1			

Key to Risk Exposure: Severe Moderate Low

Table 11: Risk register

Phase	Risk	Likelihood	Consequence	Exposure	Management/ Mitigation
Establishment	No or limited support from the local community	Unlikely	Moderate	Moderate	Continue to engage with the community, outlining potential benefits and opportunities of the project
	Funding not secured, or not secured within the necessary timeframe	Likely	Catastrophic	Severe	Continue to engage with key stakeholders, outlining potential benefits and opportunities of the project. Continue to articulate the quantum of additional funding required, and tasks to be undertaken.
	Organisational support from land managers doesn't occur	Unlikely	Catastrophic	Moderate	The land managers have indicated support, providing funding is available for capital expenditure and ongoing maintenance. Continue to engage with landowners and other stakeholders, outlining potential benefits and opportunities of the project. Work with landowners to address specific concerns.
	Limited support/ appetite for the concept from private donors	Unlikely	Catastrophic	Moderate	Engage with private sector early and consider and address concerns
	Similar alternative trail and tourism development occurs nearby resulting in less demand	Unlikely	Low	Low	Engage with the government to potential benefits and opportunities of project and ensure restoration aligns with other developments in the region. Other developments may increase overall demand.
Permit/ Planning	Approvals from Local Government/ State take longer than planned and / or require more costly studies to support	Likely	Moderate	Moderate	Engage with the government to potential benefits and opportunities of the project
Construction	The restoration takes longer than envisaged resulting in additional costs	Likely	Moderate	Moderate	Take a conservative approach in developing timelines for work and include sensitivity testing
	Restoration more expensive than envisaged	Likely	Catastrophic	Severe	Take a conservative approach to cost estimates in future work and include sensitivity testing to ensure an adequate amount of funding is sought
	Contracts and tender process for restoration not designed in a way which appeals to	Unlikely	Catastrophic	Moderate	Ensure market sounding is undertaken and informs the scope of tender documentation

	market and hence limited competitive responses				
	Unforeseen damage to environment or heritage occurs in the construction phase	Unlikely	Catastrophic	Moderate	Develop appropriate plans to ensure historical and environmental impacts documented and managed. Include cost provision for mitigating unforeseen impacts.
Operation	Responsibility for management and maintenance not resolved	Likely	Catastrophic	Severe	Work with all relevant parties prior to restoration and agree upon a management plan for the Bridge
	The quality of the EGRT adjoining the restored Bridge does not meet expectations	Likely	Moderate		Work with stakeholders to improve the EGRT to a higher quality to capitalise on the restoration
	Marketing partnerships aren't established to get the message out results in limited visitor demand	Likely	Catastrophic	Severe	Ensure stakeholders are aware of potential benefits and opportunities of the project. Support tourism boards and others involved in developing a marketing campaign to develop marketing information.
	Don't attract private investment to deliver additional activities results in limited tourism offer	Likely	Catastrophic	Severe	Ensure market sounding is undertaken and informs the scope of the project
	Substitutes existing visitation, rather than generating additional visitation to East Gippsland	Unlikely	Moderate	Moderate	Ensure marketing extends broadly, and 'offer' is clearly differentiated
	Weather and extreme events cause damage resulting in higher maintenance costs or loss of the Bridge	Likely	Catastrophic	Severe	Ensure maintenance allowance includes adequate provision made for the impact of severe weather conditions
	Inadequate maintenance of Bridge because of funding resulting in safety issues	Unlikely	Catastrophic	Moderate	Ensure funding application includes adequate provision made for maintenance

	and potential closure				
	Operation of existing landowners (e.g. farmer underneath the Bridge) limits amenity and enjoyment	Unlikely	Catastrophic	Moderate	Engage with landowners and surrounding landowners to ensure understanding of project requirements and benefits

7.2 Impacts

Table 12 outlines the impacts and opportunities of the proposal on a range of items.

Table 12: Impacts and opportunities

Item	Impact and opportunity
Social impacts	Positive social impacts for the town of Orbost through recreation, health and social capital benefits (as identified in the benefits section). There is an opportunity to improve the social outcomes in the town.
Economic impacts	Positive economic impacts. The economic cost of restoration is outweighed by the economic benefits from increased visitor expenditure (as revealed in the CBA analysis).
Climate change impacts	Neutral. Cycling and walking are climate friendly recreation activities, but visitors may drive long distances to reach the Bridge.
Regulatory impacts	Nil
Environmental impacts	Minor impacts, both positive and negative, as outlined in the CBA.
Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities	Nil
Legislative changes required	Nil
Local Government impact	Positive. A large share of the benefits of the project (as outlined in the benefits section) accrue to the East Gippsland LGA.
Regional impacts	Positive, through an increase in tourism to the entire region as visitors to the Bridge tour through other areas of the Greater Gippsland Region.
Impact on Aboriginal communities	The Snowy River and the flats have always been important to Aboriginal people. The restoration project recognises this and the FEGRT have engaged with Aboriginal community members and organisations in the area. There will be ongoing involvement by the Aboriginal community both in the restoration and maintenance efforts and to tell the Aboriginal story of the floodplain via interpretation. A letter of support from the Moogji Aboriginal Council is attached in the Appendix. Consultation with the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation indicated strong support for the restoration of the Bridge and a desire to work with agency and community partners to develop the organisation's involvement in maintaining the whole EGRT and interpreting Aboriginal culture to its users.

7.3 Readiness and implementation process

<FEGRT to complete, however to include the suggested maintenance approach as suggested by the GLaWAC>

7.4 Timelines and milestones

<FEGRT to complete>

8. Staffing requirements

8.1 Staff/Contractors

No additional VPS staff required for the project.

8.2 Consultants

<FEGRT to complete>

9. Exit strategy

<FEGRT to complete>

10. Attachments

10.1 Costings for two project options

Table 13: Costings matrix for the two project options

No.	Option Description	Capital cost	Const'n time	Maintenance	Impacts		
					Heritage	User experience	Environment
1	Full restoration – 'like for like': repair / replace (as necessary) piles, crossheads, beams & kerbs; remove ballast & decking & replace with new timber decking. Add handrails & safety rails/wires/mesh to OH&S standards. Install sealed carpark, access ramp, interpretation and signage	$2.45m ex-GST (2015) – ($1.7m approx. to remove decking & ballast & install new decking & safety rails) Large dimension timbers may be scarce & expensive. Amended 2019 cost estimate to $3.5 million	1-1.5 years	Low for first 10 years, but regular inspections required. Replacement of individual planks or short sections of decking may be required after 10 years.	Conserves heritage fabric & values; adding handrails etc. - visual appearance altered but needed to achieve adaptive reuse for cycling / walking.	Transverse decking not a good riding or walking surface. Could be improved by laying screenings (traditional) or matting over timber.	Requires disposal of ballast, decking & damaged kerbs & piles / sections of piles.
2	Full restoration of structure & alternative decking: repair / replace (as necessary) piles, crosshead, beams & kerbs; replace timber decking with decking & safety rails etc. made of alternative materials. Install unsealed carpark, access ramp, interpretation and signage	$750,000 for structure (or more, as above) (2015) + removal of decking & ballast + capital cost of replacement decking & rails + installation Amended 2019 cost estimate $3.0 million	1 year	50% less than timber over 50-year life span (Wagners)	Conserves heritage fabric/values of supporting structure; non-timber components facilitate adaptive reuse for cycling / walking.	Better user experience for riding, walking & use by wheelchairs or mobility scooters.	Requires disposal of ballast, decking & damaged kerbs & piles / sections of piles. Long-term issue re disposal of composite material.

Source: FEGRT (2019) and TRAM Engineers & Services (2015)

10.2 Letters of support

Figure 13: Letter of support from Tammy Bundle, CEO of Moogji Aboriginal Council

Moogji Aboriginal Council
East Gippsland Inc.

52 Stanley Street
PO Box 617
ORBOST VIC 3888
ABN: 40 573 268 875

P I 03 5154 2133
F I 03 5154 2120
E I reception@moogji.com.au

31/5/19

To Whom It May Concern

Moogji Aboriginal Council East Gippsland Inc supports the Rail bridge campaign by the "Save the Snowy Rail Bridge" committee to restore the Heritage Bridge to its former glory.

This rail bridge and the Snowy flood plain has significant historical and cultural importance to the local Aboriginal community.

Moogji Aboriginal Council East Gippsland Inc has membership with the "Save the Snowy Rail Bridge" and fully supports the funding by Government and other sources to enable the project to proceed.

This project will provide a much needed Economic boost for the Orbost community during the construction phase and as well as the long term as community asset to attract tourism and employment. Moogji Aboriginal Council East Gippsland Inc will participate as major Stake-holder in the project should it proceed.

Yours sincerely

Tammy Bundle
CEO
Moogji Aboriginal Council
East Gippsland Inc

Figure 14: Letter of support from Joe Rettino, Mayor of East Gippsland Shire Council

Contact: Kate Nelson
Telephone No: (03) 5153 9500
Email: feedback@egipps.vic.gov.au

Corporate Centre
273 Main Street (PO Box 1618)
Bairnsdale Victoria 3875
Telephone: (03) 5153 9500
National Relay Service: 133 677
Residents' Information Line: 1300 555 886
Facsimile: (03) 5153 9576
Email: feedback@egipps.vic.gov.au
ABN: 81 957 967 765

7 June 2018

To whom it may concern

Letter of Support for Orbost's Historic Railway Bridge – Cultural and Economic Impact Study

East Gippsland Shire Council wishes to indicate support for the development of a Cultural and Economic Study to determine the benefits associated with restoring and improving the iconic Snowy Floodplain Rail Bridge at Orbost.

The bridge is a prominent historical feature located adjacent to the Princes Highway and has the potential to stand as an icon for the region. If restored it will have the potential to not only enhance existing trails in the area promoting an active outdoor lifestyle and improved connectivity, it can also provide a unique tourism opportunity for the town.

Council considers this a very worthwhile project and has committed funding through our Community Grants Program to support the development of the impact study as we consider this is a critical first step in understanding how best to realise the outcomes sought.

Please do not hesitate to contact Kate Nelson, Director Community and Strategic Development if you would like to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely

CR JOE RETTINO
Mayor

Figure 15: Letter of support from Darren Chester, Federal MP for Gippsland

Darren Chester

Federal Member for Gippsland

April 26, 2018

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I am writing to express my personal support for community efforts to secure funding for the restoration of the Orbost – Snowy Floodplain Railway Bridge.

By way of background, the bridge was constructed more than 100 years ago and was an impressive engineering feat. Unfortunately it has fallen to disrepair and is on the verge of being demolished by neglect.

It commands a high profile location beside the Princes Highway and would be an iconic feature of the East Gippsland Rail Trail if restored.

The East Gippsland region has been severely impacted by government decisions which undermined the local timber industry and it is endeavouring to develop employment through the visitor economy.

Gippsland relies heavily on the tourism industry and additional regional attractions would encourage more tourists to visit Orbost on their travels and give an economic boost to the town.

The restoration of the Snowy Floodplain Railway Bridge would encourage people to travel through the region to get a better appreciation of the region's unique heritage.

I commend this project as one most worthy of consideration of support and should you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me by telephoning (03) 51446744.

Yours sincerely

DARREN CHESTER
The Nationals

All correspondence to: PO Box 486 Sale Victoria 3853 **Telephone:** 1300 131 785
Email: darren.chester.mp@aph.gov.au **Website:** www.darrenchester.com

Figure 16: Letter of Support from Tim Bill, State MP for East Gippsland

Tim Bull MLA
Member for Gippsland East

Tuesday 29th. May, 2018

May Leatch
Friends of East Gippsland Rail Trail
PO Box 3
ORBOST VIC 3888

Dear May,

I write in relation to the initiative by Friends of the East Gippsland Rail Trail for a business case to assess the economic feasibility of the proposed Orbost Snowy Floodplain Railway Restoration Project.

This project aims to make Orbost's' historic rail bridge suitable for cyclists and walkers and to integrate it into the East Gippsland Rail Trail.

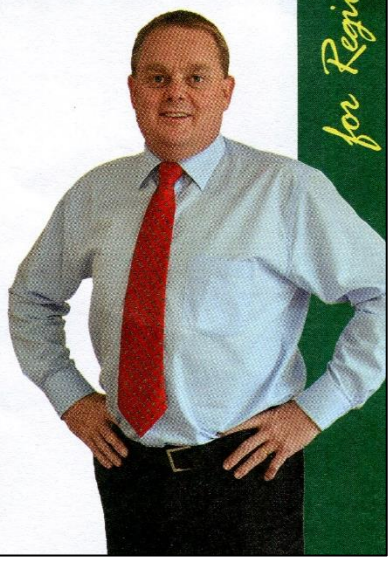
The East Gippsland Rail Trail between Bairnsdale and Orbost is recognised as one of Victoria's premier cycling experiences. It attracts increasing numbers of cyclists who are drawn the variety of forest and farmland that it passes through, its unique timber trestle bridges and its rich variety of wildlife.

The long timber rail bridge at Orbost is currently by passed by the Rail Trail due to years of decay and lack of maintenance.

For these reasons, I would hope that your application for a grant from Regional Development Victoria to examine the feasibility of the bridge's restoration is given strong consideration.

Kind regards,

TIM BULL MP
Member for Gippsland East.



143 Main Street, Bairnsdale Vic 3875 PO Box 1278, Bairnsdale Vic 3875 ph: 03 5152 3491 fax: 03 5152 2023
email: tim.bull@parliament.vic.gov.au web: www.timbull.com.au facebook: TimBullMP twitter: @TimBullMP

Figure 17: Letter of Support for Terry Robinson, CEO of Destination Gippsland

INSPIRED BY GIPPSLAND
DESTINATION GIPPSLAND LTD

Liz Mitchell
Snowy River Cycling
snowyrivercycling@bigpond.com

May 23rd, 2018

Dear Liz

Support for Orbost Snowy Floodplain Railway Restoration Project

I write to confirm our support for the Orbost Snowy Floodplain Railway Restoration Project. We believe this initiative will generate benefits to the visitor economy and local community for Orbost and East Gippsland.

This project aligns with Destination Gippsland's strategic and marketing plans to develop a higher yielding market based on experiences in nature such as cycling. It also is consistent with our recent brand research with a focus on our region's incredible natural assets including our welcoming local communities and villages. The project will provide confidence for others to invest in regional areas, provide job opportunities for young people and contribute to a stronger local economy.

Destination Gippsland is the Regional Tourism Board for Gippsland responsible for marketing, industry and product development, infrastructure and investment priorities. Our organisation has the policy and financial support of six local governments, Regional Development Victoria, Parks Victoria and Visit Victoria and is governed by a skills-based board. We have advocated for financial support for cycle tourism related projects across the region including infrastructure for rail trails, mountain biking and strategy development and will continue to support this type of project where we can.

I wish you all the best for the project and future funding applications. If you or representatives from funding bodies require further information about our organisation or support for this proposal, please do not hesitate to contact me on 0428 595 634 or email trobinson@destinationgippsland.com.au

Yours Sincerely,

Terry Robinson
Chief Executive Officer

Destination Gippsland Ltd ABN: 57 131 138 184
30 Ridgeway Street (The Old Shire Hall), Mirboo North, Victoria | Postal Address: PO Box 203, Mirboo North, Victoria, 3871
T: +61 3 5668 2141 | Email: admin@destinationgippsland.com.au | www.destinationgippsland.com.au

Figure 18: Letter of Support from Stephen Chapple, Regional Director of DELWP, on behalf of Minister Lily D'Ambrosio

Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning

PO Box 500, East Melbourne,
Victoria 8002 Australia
delwp.vic.gov.au

Ms May Leatch
mayleatch@dcsi.net.au

Ref: MIN035325

28 SEP 2017

Dear Ms Leatch

ORBOST-SNOWY RIVER RAILWAY BRIDGE, CYCLING AND WALKING TRAIL PROPOSAL

Thank you for your email of 29 August 2017 to the Hon John Eren MP, Minister for Tourism and Major Events, about the Orbost-Snowy River Railway Bridge. As this subject is the responsibility of the Hon Lily D'Ambrosio MP, Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, your correspondence has been forwarded to me to respond on her behalf.

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) fully supports the restoration and reinstatement of the bridge as an extension of the East Gippsland Rail Trail. DELWP also acknowledges restoration of the historic bridges and future management of the trail requires substantial investment.

The Committee of Management, East Gippsland Shire Council, DELWP and other agencies are meeting on Monday 16 October 2017 to discuss a vision for the future sustainable management of the trail. Representatives from the Friends of the East Gippsland Rail Trail are welcome to participate in this discussion.

If you would like more information or if you would like to attend this meeting, please call Carmel Henderson, Program Manager, Regional Planning and Approvals at the Bairnsdale office on (03) 5152 0451 or contact her via email carmel.henderson@delwp.vic.gov.au.

Thank you for raising this matter with the Minister.

Yours sincerely

Stephen H Chapple
Regional Director,
Gippsland

Any personal information about you or a third party in your correspondence will be protected under the provisions of the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*. It will only be used or disclosed to appropriate Ministerial, Statutory Authority, or departmental staff in regard to the purpose for which it was provided, unless required or authorized by law. Enquiries about access to information about you held by the Department should be directed to or FOI Unit, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, PO Box 500, East Melbourne, Victoria 8002.

VICTORIA State Government

Figure 19: Letter of Support from Orbost Chamber of Commerce

Snowy River Country
ORBOST & District
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY

PO Box 558
Orbost 3888
23 May 2018

To Whom it may concern

Re : Support for the restoration of the Snowy floodplain railway bridge at Orbost

We understand that the Friends of East Gippsland Rail trail are working to have the viaduct across the Snowy River flood plain at Orbost restored. The Orbost & District Chamber of Commerce & Industry totally support any action which will build on the economic benefits which have accrued to the town and the district since the rail trail from Bairnsdale to Orbost was constructed. We are also concerned at the possible loss of this Heritage listed structure

The viaduct across the Snowy River flood plain is an icon in the district and is visible to traffic as it travels along the Princes Hwy. It is quickly falling into disrepair and if work is not done on it there is a risk that sections will start to collapse and the structure will gradually be lost.

Restoration of the viaduct would have two major benefits. Firstly, it would ensure that the structure remains as an icon of the district with its Heritage values. Secondly, if the structure were restored so that it were useable for walkers and riders, it would become a popular walking and cycling destination.

The economy of the Orbost district is struggling following the major reductions in the timber industry. Tourism is one the options to assist the community and the local economy. The rail trail from Bairnsdale to Orbost has become an important contributor to the local economy over the last 10 years and is gradually increasing. If riders could actually ride across the viaduct for the last few kilometres into Orbost after their 100 km ride from Bairnsdale it would be a major addition to the ride and would be seen as the pinnacle of their tour. In addition walkers from Orbost could enjoy the experience and walking track loops to the lookout at Grandview could be extended to give further options for locals and tourists.

The Orbost and District Chamber of Commerce and Industry support the Friends of East Gippsland Rail trail in their endeavours to restore the viaduct.

Sincerely

Garry Squires
Secretary
Orbost & District Chamber of Commerce & Industry
0417588210

Figure 20: Letter of Support from Orbost and District Historical Society

Orbost & District Historical Society Inc.
PO Box 284 Orbost VIC 3888

17 July 2017

re: HERITAGE GRANT application to East Gippsland Shire Council, Snowy River Floodplain Bridge, Orbost

The Snowy River Floodplain Bridge (also known as the Orbost Railway Viaduct) is a key heritage icon in the Orbost area.

It has a future only if it can be restored, repaired and re-purposed as a walking and cycling trail and integrated into the existing East Gippsland Rail Trail. Otherwise, its future survival is grim and its loss will be a sad reflection on all of us who care about cultural heritage.

Its potential as a key asset for this region and part of the visitor economy is obvious.

The Orbost & District Historical Society has previously given financial assistance to the 2015 survey of the bridge by railway engineers. Also in 2015, we gave a presentation to Council on the values of this key heritage feature to the Orbost region.

The next step is to commission an economic study for the restoration project. In this context, we support the present application to Council by the Friends of the Rail Trail for a small grant which will help in achieving this next step.

Yours sincerely

M. Leatch.

May Leatch
Secretary
03 5154 2474
mayleatch@dcsi.net.au

10.3 Permits and approvals required for project implementation

10.3.1 Lands Act 1958

The land the rail bridge has been constructed on is unreserved Crown land, together with a Government road which the bridge is stratum over. The Department of Environment Land Water & Planning (DELWP) has issued a licence under Section 130 *Land Act 1958*, for the area under and surrounding the bridge base to the adjoining land owner for grazing purposes. The continuation of the licence either in full or in part will be reviewed if the bridge is restored.

If the Snowy floodplain rail bridge restoration project is funded and commissioned by an organisation other than the DELWP, such as the East Gippsland Rail Trail Committee of Management or the Save The Snowy Rail Bridge Inc., approval from DELWP as landowner would be required.

DELWP will need to be satisfied that the organisation managing the bridge will be in a position to fund ongoing maintenance and renewals.

The inclusion of the bridge in the East Gippsland Rail Trail Reserve would require the land to be formally reserved under the *Crown land (Reserves) Act 1978*, for Public Purposes (Rail Trail) and appoint the existing Committee of Management over it.

10.3.2 Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 and Aboriginal Heritage Regulations 2018

The *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* sets out the requirements for identification, recording, protection and management of Aboriginal cultural heritage.

The Act provides for a preliminary Aboriginal heritage test, to determine if an activity requires a Cultural Heritage Management Plan (CHMP). The requirements for the test are set out in Schedule 6. The results of the test must be signed off by the Secretary responsible for the administration of the Act, in consultation with the Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP) for the relevant area. The RAP for the land on which the bridge is located is the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC).

A CHMP is mandatory when required by the Aboriginal Heritage Regulations 2018 or by the Secretary, other than where a preliminary Aboriginal heritage test indicates one is not needed. The RAP must be notified of the preparation of a CHMP and given the opportunity to evaluate and approve or refuse to approve it.

The Regulations set out the circumstances in which a CHMP is required, and prescribe standards for its preparation. Under regulation 7, a cultural heritage management plan is required for an activity if all or part of the activity area is an area of cultural heritage sensitivity and if all or part of the activity is a high impact activity.

Areas of cultural heritage sensitivity include all registered cultural heritage places (places listed on the Aboriginal Heritage Register) and the land within 50 metres of them, except where it has been ‘subject to significant ground disturbance’; and all waterways and prior waterways and the land within 200 metres of them, except where it has been ‘subject to significant ground disturbance’.

High impact activities include (amongst other things) construction of a building or the construction or carrying out of works that would result in significant ground disturbance; or are for, or associated with, the use of the land for a carpark; or the works are a linear project with a length exceeding 100 metres; or a bicycle track with a length exceeding 500 metres; or rail infrastructure.

Section 15(2) of the Regulation provides that:

“The construction or carrying out of the following works is an exempt activity—

(a) works on, over or under an existing roadway or existing rail infrastructure;”

It is likely to be a matter for interpretation whether this applies to all of the land under the Snowy floodplain rail bridge, apart from that which has already been disturbed.

It is probable that at least a preliminary Aboriginal heritage test will be required for the Snowy floodplain rail bridge restoration project, and possibly a Cultural Heritage Management Plan.

10.3.3 Planning and Environment Act 1987

10.3.3.1 East Gippsland Planning Scheme

Zones

The rail corridor, including the land under the bridge, is zoned Public Park and Recreation Zone (PPRZ). Under the provisions of the zone, a permit is not required for buildings or works carried out by or on behalf of a public land manager under specified Acts of Parliament.

The land immediately adjoining the bridge is zoned Farming Zone – Schedule 1 (FZ1). This land may be utilised for access to the bridge for repairs and construction, but no permanent works are anticipated to be located on it, so no permit is likely to be required by the provisions of the zone.

Overlays

Heritage Overlay (HO)

The bridge is listed in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay in the East Gippsland Planning Scheme at place number HO306. There are several provisions that could trigger the need for a planning permit, including: construction of non-domestic disabled access; and carrying out works, repairs or routine maintenance that change the appearance of the heritage place or which are not undertaken to the same details, specifications and materials.

The major issues would be the use of non-traditional materials for the new decking (if adopted) and the installation of railings and safety mesh/wiring.

Land Subject to Inundation (LSIO)

One of the purposes of the LSIO is: To ensure that development maintains the free passage and temporary storage of floodwaters, minimizes flood damage, is compatible with the flood hazard and local drainage conditions and will not cause any significant rise in flood level or flow velocity.

Triggers for the need for a permit include: a fence; bicycle pathways and trails; and a non-domestic disabled access ramp.

The schedule to the LSIO provides that a permit is not needed for: open type fencing (excluding paling, mesh or color bond fencing, and brick and concrete walls); or works associated with roads, roadsides or any other access way (public or private) that do not alter the existing surface level; or works associated with roads, roadsides or any other access ways (public or private) carried out by a public authority that have received written consent from the floodplain management authority.

The West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority (WGCMA), manages referral responses to planning applications on behalf of the East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority. Discussions with WGCMA indicate that restoration of the bridge structure and construction of a carpark would be unlikely to require a permit. The access ramp may require a permit, depending on where it is located. A survey will be required to determine the height of the bridge deck relative to the level of a flood with a 1% annual exceedance probability (the 1:100 year flood). If the bridge deck is lower than the predicted flood level, the addition of the railings and safety netting/wiring will be subject to detailed evaluation.

Design & Development Overlay, Schedule 7 – Highway Corridors, Princes Highway and Great Alpine Road (DDO7)

One of the design objectives of the DDO7 is to encourage high standards of design and the use of appropriate materials in building and works to be constructed within the highway corridors.

A permit is not required for buildings and works if they do not require a permit under the zone. Works 'by or on behalf of a public land manager' (under various specified Acts of Parliament) are exempt from the need for a permit. The Lands Act 1958 is not listed, although the exemption may still apply. If the exemption applies, no permit would be required under the DDO7.

10.4 Community workshop summary

10.4.1 Workshop agenda (both sessions)

- Overview of the project and introduction of the SGS team [FEGRT]
- Presentation on lessons learned from elsewhere: [SGS]
  - The importance of trails
  - The value of iconic places
- Small group discussions: [All]
  - What do you value about the rail bridge?
  - What are the project benefits?
  - What are the opportunities for stakeholder involvement?
- Project next steps [SGS]
- Opportunities for further input [FEGRT]

10.4.2 Direct quotes

Group 1:

- Attendee 1 – The tourists are very interested in the Bridge, clearly the interest is there. I would absolutely hate it if it fell down
- Attendee 2 – I love the bridge, but my concern is who would be liable if someone fell down?
- Attendee 3 – I think the bridge should be saved. It would benefit the town a lot
- Attendee 4 – The future of Orbost is in Tourism. The bridge can benefit the town a lot in that regard
- Attendee 5 – I love wooden bridges and want it saved. I'm a bit of a hoarder.
- Attendee 6 – It really is an amazing bridge. I just have this desire to get up on it.
- Attendee 7 - I remember travelling past it as a child when it was still in good condition. It's a huge landmark for the local area. Its iconic. Restoring it will deliver health benefits for the town.
- Attendee 8 – The bridge is important for tourism. We need to rebuild the towns economy and we need to start somewhere.
- Attendee 9 – All of the above. I like the bridge as it's made of wood and it would have taken a huge amount of human effort to construct.
- Attendee 10 – I helped with the rail trail leading to the bridge.
- Attendee 11 – Bridges like that are never going to be made again. It's all hand made. It would lovely to see people using it again.
- Attendee 12 – I can see visitors already loving it, even though it's falling down. Imagine if its restored.
- Attendee 13 – I feel quite strongly about it. The Bridge is the story of the town. Nothing can replace the timber industry, but the bridge celebrates that heritage. It's also a wonderful vista as you enter the area, makes you feel like you've arrived home. The bridge is also a branding opportunity.
- Attendee 14 – What does doing nothing say about us all? It would be a sign of great depression. If we restore the bridge, it would be a very proud moment. We would be a town that cares.
- Attendee 15 – I'm here to learn about the project and give input as a community member.
- Attendee 16 – The Snowy River Bridge means so much. It's the Bridge that crossed the Snowy! I just love it. Its important also to remember that we are not restoring it back to its original condition – just needs to be able to hold a bike, not a locomotive.
- Attendee 17 – Its really beautiful architecture. It would be criminal to let it fall over.
- Attendee 18 – I would restore all the bridges in the region if I could.

- Attendee 19 – Whole rail trail system in East Gippsland is underutilised. No one knows it here. The bridge provides an iconic site to raise the profile of the whole system.

Group 2:

- Attendee 1 – The bridge has long been seen as an unused asset of the town. The town needs these things; the town is struggling. I have a young family and it would be amazing for them if it remains standing and they can use it.
- Attendee 2 – I always want the bridge to be there, I don't want it to fall over. To make it useable for the community would be amazing. It would be an iconic feature for the rail trail.
- Attendee 3 – The bridge and tourism is Orbost's future. With Wilson's Prom closed over the long weekend due to fires, we had an influx of tourists to Orbost and they loved the bridge, every sees it; previously they didn't even know it existed.
- Attendee 4 –I want the bridge to last long into the future. It's an iconic feature of the towns history.
- Attendee 5 – it's a wonderful asset for the town. It needs to be better used.
- Attendee 6 – the town has lost everything (economically). Getting riders to come visit would be great. They take their time and experience things. I want to work to reverse animosity against the project.
- Attendee 7 – It's a fabulous asset. Tourism not only benefits hospitality/tourism businesses, but all businesses in town. I run a vet and have tourists coming in with their animals.
- Attendee 8 –Tourism is another plank in the economic future for the area.
- Attendee 9 – I enjoy bike riding and love the bridge structures in the region. The bridge has a grand claim, it should be an iconic destination.
- Attendee 10 – I'm a long term Orbost resident. I have seen the town really decline. I work in timber, which is contracting. The Bridge can be an attraction for the town.
- Attendee 11- I've lived in the town all my life. A part of coming home is coming down the hill and seeing the bridge. It's home.

10.4.3 Benefits, values and other opportunities

Table 14: Benefits of the bridge restoration project

Benefit category	Group 1	Group 2
Local benefits	Morale, pride, confidence	Town wellbeing
	Celebrating the Orbost community's achievements and identity	
	Community members and visitors alike being able to use the bridge	
	Being able to protect the Bridge from collapse and to be able to show the bridge to the next generation	
Tourism benefits	People will travel to ride on the Rail Trail with the Bridge incorporated into it	There is unlimited potential for tourism benefits
	It can attract people just wanting a short walk/ ride	Bridge engineers would be interested in visiting the Bridge and learning about the structure
	Local people want to experience the bridge	Tourists who use motorised bikes will be able to utilise the Bridge
	It has the capacity to attract a wide market of people	The Bridge will entice people to stop and visit Orbost
	The Bridge Adds another attraction to the area that makes an appealing tourism offer	The Bridge can be a centre for events such as marathons or a longest lunch
	Develop Orbost as a gateway town to the Wilderness	School groups could come and learn the Bridge's history
		It would be an iconic attraction for the area

		People who stop for the Bridge can then experience the area's temperate climate, do some bird watching
		Orbost is a gateway to the wilderness- The Bridge can be the start of a journey
		The Bridge will need proper signage
		All of the added tourism will generate income, jobs and training opportunities for the Orbost community
Economic benefits	People will stop more in the town rather than driving through, spend a night in accommodation, make retail and food purchases	Increased accommodation spend- could potentially develop some camping parks to accommodate motorhomes
	People will return to the area again after first sightseeing by chance	People will hire bikes for day trips
	People will come to Orbost to then stay on the EGRT for many nights- these are often high value visitors	Hospitality business will see an increase in expenditure
	Retail strip: Nicholson Street will enjoy benefits	The Bridge will bring newcomers to the town who may not have stopped before
	Untapped potential; based on natural values- bridge is the key to unlocking this	Increased visitation overall to the town of Orbost
		Branding and promotion opportunity- the Bridge is an iconic image
		Photography opportunity for visitors
		Could be Linked to other attractions in the area
		A reason to stop- progressing to overnight visits
Health and wellbeing	Health benefits when linked to the EGRT	Can facilitate Forest bathing (also linked to tourism)
		Mental health benefits
		Physical health benefits (cycling, walking, running)

Table 15: How does the community value the Rail Bridge?

Group 1	Group 2
Intrinsic values very important	Appreciation of the effort in the past
The Bridge represents Orbost' history: timber, boom times, community, hard work. It's the founding element of the area	Use value- facilities, cyclists, scooters
This bridge belongs to us. It came from us	Health and wellbeing value
Uniqueness, iconic, interesting feature of the landscape	Visual value: Site will look incredible
Architectural value; hand made	Curiosity value- people stopping
A beautiful vista, valley of plenty, entry way	Narrative value -the story of the town/ region
Branding and promotion. Tool. Sellable feature	Some people won't fully appreciate its value until its gone
Cultural- festivals	Historical value, connections to the past- connection to the outside world, can celebrate with apps/ audio books/ signage
Area has Aboriginal values- the Bridge could also showcase this and include interpretation	Marketing and branding- a landmark and getaway.
Community health. Resilience	

Table 16: Other ideas/ opportunities for collaboration/ involvement in the project

Group 1	Group 2
Other groups who will be interested in the project: • Scouts • Rotary • Walking Clubs • Traditional Owners • Hospital, prevention • Emergency services • DELWP/ State politicians • The Shire • Tourist information centre • Destination Gippsland • Sporting Clubs • The community • Local paper • Tourists • Non residents • Conversations with those who are unsure • Train buffs • Vic Forest • Comm development group- Gary Squires • Orbost Exhibition Centre • Flora and Fauna Groups • Bridge enthusiasts • Rail trail groups • Cycle groups • Other timber groups • Staged approach? • Extreme group challenge	Other groups who will be interested in the project: • Aboriginal communities • Retailers in Orbost • Local schools • Historical society • The hospital and other health care providers • Young people of Orobst • Parks Victoria • DELWP • Older people of Orbost • Storytellers of Orbost Provide the following elements in the build: • access for mobility scooter • clever use of technology (sound, vision, touch) • appropriate lighting

10.5 News articles on community advocacy projects relating to the Rail Bridge restoration project

Figure 21 'Big red bike rides its way to Orbost', Snowy River Mail, March 6th 2019, page 3

S.R. Mail 6/3/2019.

Big red bike rides its way to Orbost

It's extremely large and painted bright red, with wheels a little like those from a cart, only they're probably not, a black metal seat that not even a giant could sit on, and handle bars made from tube steel - it's the *Big Red Bike*.

Sitting quietly next to the Save The Snowy Bridge display in Nicholson Street, Orbost, this Big Red Bike is a new addition to the town.

Designed as a sculptural installation to assist the Save The Snowy Rail Bridge project, the bike has been sponsored by the Snowy River Arts Network.

Mixed media artist, Jeannie Holker, designed the bike.

"I was extremely fortunate to find the iron wheels which are from an old piece of machinery," Jeannie said.

"Although these wheels were pretty rusted, they were ideal, and their size determined the size of the bike frame.

"I then had to find someone who could fabricate the design, and that's where Neil Findley, from Findley Engineering, in Orbost, came in.

"Neil is not only very skilled in working with metal, but he also added his own design features to create the Big Red Bike. The final structure is very much a tribute to Neil's skills."

Speaking about the Save The Snowy Rail Bridge project, vice president, May Leatch, said, "I know that other rail trails in Victoria and overseas sometimes add sculpture or artistic responses to their trails at particular points of interest".

"These add a lively energy to the trails, and add to the visitor experience," May said.

Neil Findley and Jeannie Holker and the *Big Red Bike*, a new addition to the Save the Snowy Bridge campaign. (PS)

Figure 22 'Study of justification for historic bridge', Snowy River Mail, February 27th 2019, page 3

Study of justification for historic bridge

The historic Snowy Railway Bridge restoration and re-use project will be the subject of a study to look at all aspects of the justification for the project, the social-economic values and the business case.

This study is being done by SGS Economics & Planning for the Friends of East Gippsland Rail Trail (FEGRT). It is expected to begin at the end of March and will take several months to complete.

FEGRT secretary, Sue Peirce, said the study has been funded by East Gippsland Shire Council, Regional Development Victoria (RDV), Orbost & District Historical Society, FEGRT, and many private donors.

Ms Peirce added the study is the necessary next step in the process to have this landmark bridge at Orbost saved and put to a compatible use.

"We have first to prove that the project has merit, and that the estimated cost can be justified," she said.

"These are the areas that the study will be looking at.

"The study is being overseen by a project advisory group, which consists of representatives from the council, RDV, Friends of East Gippsland Rail Trail, Orbost & District Historical Society, Department of Land Water and Planning (DELWP), Committee of Management of East Gippsland Rail Trail, Orbost & District Chamber of Commerce, and Save the Snowy Rail Bridge Inc.

"Helen Martin, from Shearwater Associates, is the project manager for the study.

"During the process of the study, the consultants will visit Orbost several times to gain a full understand of the project, assess community attitudes, and to make sure that all the pros and cons are considered.

"They will also do research on other heritage, rail trail, tourism, and restoration projects in Victoria and elsewhere. The values of the bridge will be assessed from many perspectives.

"The Friends of East Gippsland Rail Trail have been involved with this project for the past four years and we are really pleased that it has reached the stage where it is being taken seriously and can be properly evaluated. When the East Gippsland Rail Trail was made from Nowa Nowa to Orbost, it did not include the Orbost bridge. In fact, the rail trail stops just before the bridge.

"Since the bridge is public property and is such an icon, it seems logical to see if it can be saved. It is never going to carry a train again. Those days are gone, so if it is going to be saved it must have a use that suits the modern era and into the future, while at the same time preserving the important railway heritage."

A study to justify the restoration of the Snowy Railway Bridge is expected to take several months to complete. (PS)

Save the Snowy Rail Bridge group president, Liz Mitchell, said she was really pleased that this important study was getting underway.

"The study will assess the worth of the project to this region," Ms Mitchell said.

"If the study recommends that the project is worthwhile, then it allows us to compete with other towns and regions for grants which are available for encouraging tourists and development which enhances the viability of country towns.

"In other words, if we don't put in a bid for Orbost, we miss out and the money goes elsewhere."

S.R. Mail
27/02/2019

Figure 23 'Bridge a drawcard', Snowy River Mail, January 30th 2019, page 4

4

Bridge a drawcard

S.R. Mail 30/1/19

Orbost's Save the Snowy Rail Bridge display has welcomed many visitors over January.

Some of these have been local people and many more have been holiday-makers who are visiting this area, calling into Orbost after seeing the large banner on the bridge.

Among them were Kate and Nicole Butler. Kate lives at Marlo while her sister, Nicole, was visiting from Leongatha.

"It's a stunning welcoming feature for Orbost," was Kate's comment.

"I was so pleased to see the banner go up and to know that the campaign to save it is happening at last.

"To just let it fall down would be such a shame. It's a wonderful feature and the first thing that I saw when I came here.

"Orbost needs things like this to attract people and help the economy. It's a special attraction and it's important to save iconic features like this, it's part of history."

Marlo's Kate Butler, and her sister, Nicole Butler, visiting from Leongatha, popped in to see the Save the Snowy Rail Bridge display recently. (PS)

Save the Snowy Rail Bridge group vice president, May Leatch, said Kate's comments were typical of those made by many other visitors to this area.

"People driving through Gippsland have seen the gradual deterioration of the bridge and wondered why this was being allowed to happen," May said.

"Kate's comment about Orbost needing things to draw people in off the highway and to visit and stay in this region are very typical."

Figure 24 'Dawn's bridge mural', Snowy River Mail, January 9th 2019, page 3

Dawn van den Berg's mural of the Snowy River Bridge, which now adorns the wall of the Save The Snowy Rail Bridge shop front in Orbost, began with a charcoal design before progressing to painting with acrylic paints. (PS)

Dawn's bridge mural

Well-known Orbost artist, Dawn van den Berg, has been putting the finishing touches to her large and impressive mural in the Save The Snowy Rail Bridge shop front display and the results are inspiring.

Dawn is noted for her meticulous paintings and drawings, particularly of wildlife, so the challenge of doing a really large-scale impression of the historic railway bridge was "pretty different" from what she usually does.

In fact, Dawn said, it was the largest painting she had ever done.

While she was supplied with photos as a prompt, she otherwise had to use her design skills to bring her piece to life.

Her first task was to use charcoal to map out a design.

Next came the big job of painting in acrylics, which dry very quickly in hot weather, to create shapes and shadows, capturing the lines and angles of the historic bridge with its piles and trestles.

Dawn has always loved drawing and sketching, talents that have been enhanced by her training in graphic design at the Swinburne Technical College. These skills are not only handy for textile designs but also advertising, all sorts of illustrations, logos and maps.

Her ability as a wildlife artist, particularly birds, is legendary. When it came to finishing the large mural for Save The Snowy Rail Bridge, her final touch was to add a small bird to the painting.

As well as Dawn's fine mural, the shop front contains an historic display about the Orbost-Bairnsdale railway and information about the Save The Snowy Rail Bridge project.

A skilled painter of birds, Dawn ensured there was a bird included in the completed mural. (PS)

S.R. Mail
9/1/2019
p. 3

Figure 25 'Snowy bridge a mural feature', Bairnsdale Advertiser, January 11th, 2019

Bairnsdale Advertiser 11/1/2019

Snowy bridge a mural feature

Well-known Orbost artist, Dawn van den Berg, has been putting the finishing touches to her large and impressive mural in the Save The Snowy Rail Bridge shop front display and the results are inspiring.

Dawn is noted for her meticulous paintings and drawings, particularly of wildlife, so the challenge of doing a really large-scale impression of the historic railway bridge was "pretty different" from what she usually does.

In fact, Dawn said, it was the largest painting she had ever done.

While she was supplied with photos as a prompt, she otherwise had to use her design skills to bring her piece to life.

Her first task was to use charcoal to map out a design.

Next came the big job of painting in acrylics, which dry very quickly in hot weather, to create shapes and shadows, capturing the lines and angles of the historic bridge with its piles and trestles.

Dawn has always loved drawing and sketching, talents that have been enhanced by her training in graphic design at the Swinburne University of Technology. These skills are not only handy for textile designs but also advertising, all sorts of illustrations, logos and maps.

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As well as Dawn's fine mural, the shop front contains an historic display about the Orbost-Bairnsdale railway and information about the Save The Snowy Rail Bridge project.

Dawn van den Berg's mural of the Snowy River Bridge, which now adorns the wall of the Save The Snowy Rail Bridge shop front in Orbost, began with a charcoal design before progressing to painting with acrylic paints. (PS)

Figure 26 'Big letters to help save the bridge', Snowy River Mail, 19th December 2018

SRMail. 19/12/18

Big letters to help save the bridge

The campaign to save the Snowy Rail Bridge has entered a new phase with the installation of a huge 28 metre long by two metre deep banner onto Orbost's historic railway bridge.

Highly visible from the Princes Highway, it is expected that the banner will alert people to the campaign to restore the bridge so that it is preserved as an historic feature and landmark for the region, and also so that it can be used as a cycling and walking trail.

Printed in bold red lettering on the banner are the words #SAVE THE SNOWY RAIL BRIDGE.

Speaking on behalf of the Save the Snowy Rail Bridge Group, vice president, May Leatch, said the group is doing its best to alert people to the campaign, and to make sure that the proposal is taken seriously and properly assessed.

"The alternative is to do nothing, and just let a significant historic feature fall down," Ms Leatch said.

"Other parts of the state are able to get money for significant projects that build pride and enhance the visitor economy, and we want to do this for the Orbost district.

"This project will not deprive Orbost of money that could be spent on other services such as the hospital, or footpaths etc. since these come from different funding sources."

Save the Snowy Rail Bridge Group has installed a large banner that's easily seen from the highway to highlight the plight of the deteriorating icon. (PS)

Figure 27 'Railway Bridge Petition Presented', Snowy River Mail, 19th August 2018

Railway bridge petition presented

A step forward to having the historic Orbost Railway Bridge restored was taken on Friday, September 7, when Member for Eastern Victoria, Harriet Shing, presented a petition to parliament.

The electronic petition requests that the Legislative Council call on the government to allocate money for the restoration of this historic railway bridge at Orbost so it can be integrated into the East Gippsland Rail Trail and used for cycling and walking and also for promotions to assist the visitor economy.

Ms Shing came to inspect the bridge in March this year and gave her support for the restoration project.

"The present government has a commitment to regional Victoria and gives support for community efforts to protect heritage values and to enhance visitor experiences," she said.

"Restoration of the bridge and integration into the Rail Trail would enhance local pride and interest in this district. There is a tremendous sense of place with this bridge because it is so highly visible and emblematic of all visits to this region."

Ms Shing said the petition was well received and felt there was a lot of support for the idea of restoring the bridge to a usable condition.

The Save the Snowy Rail Bridge group, which is based in Orbost, is planning to engage with all candidates in the upcoming Victorian elections and to ask for their support for this important project for Orbost.

S. R. Mail 19/8/2018

Figure 28 'Save the bridge group inspects historic icon, Snowy River Mail, 15th August 2018

SR Mail 15/8/18

Save the bridge group inspects historic icon

Members of the Save the Snowy Rail Bridge group had a close-up view recently of the historic railway bridge at Newmerella.

Not only did they take some great photos, they also saw the condition of the bridge and gained an understanding of the scope of the work needed to restore the bridge to enable it to function as a cycling and walking trail and part of the East Gippsland Rail Trail.

The group also took a look at the work that has been undertaken by the Snowy West Landcare Group, including the restoration of the Old Coach Trail and other works around the rail trail at Newmerella.

Up close and personal, the Snowy River Rail Bridge is awe-inspiring. Its sheer length and scale are impressive, let alone the strength of the massive beams and piles. This historic bridge used to take the timber trains out of Orbost until the line closed in 1987 when road transport had became dominant. (PS)

A new project by Snowy West Landcare is the restoration of the Orbost Viaduct Trail, which when completed will lead to the start of the railway bridge, and the provision of seating at a new viewing point.

Speaking of the bridge restoration project, May Leatch said, "There is no doubt that if the restoration of the historic railway bridge is successful, this will be a big project for Orbost".

"Feedback indicates that while most people would like to see the bridge saved and restored, there is some anxiety that this might take money away from other projects such as footpaths, or health," Ms Leatch said.

"The State and Federal governments have many parcels of dedicated grant money, which are designed for particular purposes and types of projects. In the case of the railway bridge restoration, a funding stream dedicated to enhancing the visitor economy is what we would be aiming at. This money could be spent here or in other parts of the state, so why not here?"

Liz Mitchell, from Snowy River Cycling, spoke about the impact of the Otago Rail Trail in New Zealand - "This trail has completely transformed the economies of a string of tiny towns that had existed only for the railway line".

"Once nearly extinguished after the line closed, these towns are alive again due to thousands of cyclists who ride the trail each year, who all need somewhere to stay and something to eat, and are happy to pay good money to be well looked after," Ms Mitchell said.

"I know from having ridden on many rail trails in Victoria, and also from having done bicycle tourism overseas, that small country towns are capitalising on what they have around them," Ms Leatch said.

"Particularly anything that combines culture, heritage and recreational opportunities."

Figure 29 'Support for bridge restoration', Snowy River Mail, 31st May 2018

Support for bridge restoration

A campaign to restore the Orbost-Snowy Floodplain Railway Bridge was garnered the support of Federal MP, Darren Chester.

Mr Chester said the century-old trestle bridge could become a feature of the East Gippsland Rail Trail and improve road safety.

"The 770-metre railway bridge was built more than 100 years ago, but has fallen into disrepair," Mr Chester said.

"Given its high-profile location beside the Princes Highway, the bridge has been an East Gippsland landmark for decades.

"Fixing the bridge would encourage travellers to stop and take a break, which would also have some road safety benefits.

"The Orbost-Snowy Floodplain Railway Bridge could become the eastern gateway for cyclists and walkers to the 100km trail between Orbost and Bairnsdale.

"Gippsland relies heavily on the tourism industry and additional regional attractions, such as an enhanced rail trail, would encourage more visitors to Orbost and give the town a welcome boost.

"More people would be encouraged to visit Orbost and Marlo and get a better appreciation of its unique history."

The bridge is on the National Trust of Australia's heritage register for its historical and cultural significance to Victoria. It is the state's longest timber railway bridge that is still standing.

A working party from Friends of East Gippsland Rail Trail and the Orbost and District Historical Society has been working to raise awareness of the importance of restoring the bridge.

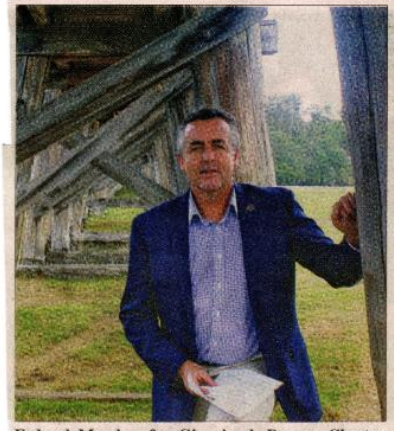
A 'Bring Back the Bridge' information and planning session will be held next Wednesday, June 6, from 5.30-7pm at the Orbost Library meeting room. All welcome.

WHAT ABOUT MARLO PATHWAY?

May Leatch, one of the locals driving the campaign, said one question she has been asked in relation to bridge restoration and its use as a cycleway / walkway was: How does this compare with the Orbost-Marlo pathway?

"Both projects show a vision for the future and promote healthy living, an awareness of nature, and the tourist economy. I support both projects and would like to see both achieved," Ms Leatch said.

Continued page 7



Federal Member for Gippsland, Darren Chester, has thrown his support behind a push to restore the railway bridge. (PS)

Cultural value

From page 1

"The difference is that the Orbost Historic Railway Bridge already exists. It is a publicly owned high-profile asset, which is clearly visible from the Princes Highway and is a memorable feature of all trips through East Gippsland. It is something that really puts us on the map.

"If restored, it would be an iconic feature of the East Gippsland Rail Trail and a clear marketing opportunity for the Orbost district. The rail trail from Bairnsdale to Orbost has become an important contributor to the East Gippsland economy during the past 10 years, and its impact will grow into the future.

"The bridge's historic and cultural values add another dimension to the purely recreational. This was obvious with the almost 3000 people who visited the Historical Society's Railway Exhibition in 2016.

"Many of these visitors came from other parts of Victoria and Australia to view this exhibition, clearly interested in railway history and engineering, and many staying to further explore the Orbost district.

"About 600 of these people put their names to a list of people who support the concept of the historic bridge being used as a cycling / walking route. They could see the potential.

"As it is, visitors can often be seen stopping to photograph the bridge, and no doubt, many of them would love to be able to walk or cycle over the bridge.

"We should all be concerned at the potential loss of this high-profile piece of our heritage. Indeed, many people make the comment, 'Why aren't they doing something?'"

S.R. Mail
31/5/2018

Figure 30 'Bridge Inspection', Snowy River Mail, 28th March 2018

Bridge inspection

Member for Eastern Victoria, Harriet Shing, met with members of the Friends of the Rail Trail at Newmerella on the Labour Day weekend, to take a close look at the historic railway bridge at Newmerella and to discuss its future uses.

After a short walk along the former railway track to the start of the historic bridge, Ms Shing said she needed no convincing of the significance of the bridge as a landmark for the region.

"It is a truly emblematic structure," she said.

Ms Shing also congratulated the local groups who have been working to enhance the Burn Road section of the East Gippsland Rail Trail for a number of years, including the construction of the Old Coach Trail.

She was informed of the latest project by Snowy West Landcare to construct a trail along the old railway line to the start of the historic railway bridge.

"The present Government has a commitment to regional Victoria and gives support for community efforts to protect heritage values and to enhance visitor experiences," Ms Shing said.

"Restoration of the bridge and integration into the rail trail is an opportunity to further enhance local pride and visitor interest in the Orbost district.

"There is a tremendous sense of place with this bridge because it so highly visible and emblematic of all visits to this region."

Ms Shing gave advice on the process of securing funds for restoration of the bridge and its use as a cycling and walking trail and said she would assist in whatever way possible through her office.

Ms Peirce said she was pleased with Ms Shing's positive and helpful approach.

SRM 28/3/18

Member for Eastern Victoria, Harriet Shing, with Friends of the Rail Trail representatives, May Leatch and Sue Peirce, at the Newmerella end of the railway bridge. (PS)

Figure 31 'Viaduct project gaining support', Snowy River Mail, 3rd August 2016

S.R. Mail 3/8/16.

Viaduct project gaining support

Member for Eastern Victoria Region, Melina Bath, has added her support to the Orbost Railway Viaduct Restoration Project during a visit to Orbost last Wednesday.

Ms Bath was invited to Orbost to inspect the historic railway viaduct and to meet with local people and groups interested in its restoration and use as a walkway and cycleway.

"It is quite easy to see the value of this project to Orbost and I certainly support the concept of its being restored and used appropriately," Ms Bath said.

"The restoration of the Orbost railway viaduct would provide economic benefits for the town and the East Gippsland region as it would offer an attractive destination for cyclists and walkers, enticing more visitors to the area.

"This historic wooden bridge is an iconic and highly visible feature of a trip to Orbost and something that is synonymous with Orbost and it would be a shame to lose it. I commend local people for their passionate efforts to save it."

At the meeting with Ms Bath, a number of people spoke about the project in terms of its historical engineering values as part of the Bairnsdale to Orbost railway line; its values as an emblematic brand feature for Orbost in tourism marketing; and as an asset which already exists and could be restored and used rather than destroyed.

Estimates of the cost of restoration were also presented. These costs include the decking and safety railings required for its use as a cycleway / walkway. Initially, the project involves the restoration of the larger section of the viaduct, which is about 770 metres long. This would link in with the East Gippsland Rail Trail and other trails at Newmerella.

This is the longest historic railway bridge in Victoria and would be a major project for the district. The structure is the responsibility of the State Government and is located on public land, which is leased to a local farmer. It is the aim of the project that the farmer's use of the land under and surrounding the viaduct would not be impacted in any way.

Ms Bath indicated that she would be happy to support the project through her role as a parliamentarian.

During her visit to Orbost, Melina Bath MP took time out to take a close look at the historic railway viaduct, which crosses the flats at Newmerella. Ms Bath chatted to Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning representative Brian Gustus, who advised the viaduct is publicly owned by the state of Victoria, as is the embankment which travels around Newmerella hill to the start of the viaduct. (PS)

Figure 32 'Survey gives viaduct confidence' Snowy River Mail, 10th May 2016

SRMail 10/5/2016. p.2

Support is growing for the restoration of the Orbost historic railway viaduct. (PS)

Survey gives viaduct confidence

More than 600 people have already put their names to a list of those who support the concept of restoration of the Orbost railway viaduct and its use as a cycleway and walking trail.

"This is a remarkable level of interest and shows the depth of feeling that people have for this iconic structure," Michael Oxer, from the East Gippsland Rail Trail management committee, said.

"The historical society's Orbost Railway 100 Years Exhibition highlighted the importance of our historic railway bridges.

"There are only a few of these bridges remaining because most have gone. Those that remain, like the Orbost Railway Viaduct, O'Grady's Bridge at Wairewa and Stony Creek Bridge near Nowa Nowa are all wonderful features of railway history. They are also seen by many visitors to this area."

Speaking on behalf of the Orbost Historical Society, May Leatch, said the rail trail, which follows the Bairnsdale to old Orbost-Bairnsdale railway line plays a critically important role in preserving railway history.

"In effect, the interest in cycling and walking during the past 20 years has done a huge amount to preserve railway history, along with the tourist interest of course," Ms Leatch said.

Mr Oxer and Ms Leatch recently met with Member for East Gippsland, Tim Bull, to alert him to the level of public interest in saving the Orbost railway viaduct.

"We will also be approaching East Gippsland Shire Council to discuss the importance and popularity of the viaduct and its restoration to the Orbost district," Ms Leatch said.

"We have a long way to go with this project," Mr Oxer said.

"The survey of people's views was the first step and this has now given us confidence to proceed further. I think that people recognise the importance of the old viaduct as an iconic image for Orbost."

People wanting to add their names to the list of people who support the concept of restoration of the Orbost railway viaduct can see a display in the Orbost Bakery window.

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