

# Agenda

## Special Meeting of Council

10:30am, Wednesday 10 July 2024

Towong Shire Council Office

32 Towong Street, Tallangatta, Victoria

### **Our Community Vision**

Towong Shire will be the ideal place to be: welcoming, vibrant and diverse communities with quality facilities and services.

This information is available in alternative formats on request

**Agenda for the Special Meeting of Council to be held at  
32 Towong Street, Tallangatta, Victoria  
on Wednesday 10 July 2024 commencing at 10:30am**

### Commonly Used Acronyms

Abbreviation	Title
Council Officers	
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
DIE	Director Infrastructure and Environment
DCP	Director Community and Planning
DCOD	Director Corporate and Organisational Development
MF	Manager Finance
SAE	Senior Asset Engineer
Government/Organisation	
CH	Corryong Health (formerly Upper Murray Health and Community Services)
DFFH	Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
DJSIR	Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions
DTP	Department of Transport and Planning
DEECA	Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action
GMW	Goulburn Murray Water
HRGLN	Hume Region Local Government Network
MAV	Municipal Association of Victoria
NECMA	North East Catchment Management Authority
NERPEN	North East Regional Procurement Excellence Network
NEW	North East Water
NEWRRG	North East Waste and Resource Recovery Group
RCV	Rural Councils Victoria
RDA	Regional Development Australia
RDV	Regional Development Victoria
THS	Tallangatta Health Service
VGC	Victorian Grants Commission

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## 1 Opening Prayer

"Almighty God, we ask that you be present at this meeting to assist us in our service to the Community through Local Government.

We pray that our decisions will be wise and taken with goodwill and clear conscience.

Amen."

## 2 Councillor and Officer Presence at the Meeting

### Councillor Attendance

Crs Whitehead, Anderson, Scales, Wortmann and Dikschei

Officer Attendance:	Title:
Ms Phelps	Chief Executive Officer
Mr Florence	Acting Director Community and Planning

## 3 Apologies and Granting of Leave of Absence

## 4 Disclosure of Conflicts of Interest

Section 130 of the Act requires that a 'Relevant person' (which means a person who is a Councillor, a member of a delegated committee who is not a Councillor or a member of Council staff) disclose any conflict of interest in the manner required by Council's Governance Rules and exclude themselves from the decision making process in relation to the matter including any discussion or vote on the matter at any Council meeting.

Council's *Governance Rules* state as follows:

### ***A2 Obligations with regards to conflict of interest***

*Councillors, members of delegated committee, and Council staff are required to:*

- a. Avoid all situations which may give rise to conflicts of interest;*
- b. Identify any conflicts of interest; and*
- c. Disclose or declare all conflicts of interest.*

### ***A3 Disclosure of a conflict of interest at a Council meeting***

*A Councillor who has a conflict of interest in a matter being considered at a Council meeting at which he or she:*

*A3.1 is present must disclose that conflict of interest by explaining the nature of the conflict of interest to those present at the Council meeting immediately before the matter is considered; or*

*A3.2 intends to be present must disclose that conflict of interest by providing to the Chief Executive Officer before the Council meeting commences a written notice:*

*A3.2.1 advising of the conflict of interest;*

*A3.2.2 explaining the nature of the conflict of interest; and*

*A3.2.3 detailing, if the nature of the conflict of interest involves a Councillor's relationship with or a gift from another person, the:*

*a. name of the other person;*

*b. nature of the relationship with that other person or the date of receipt, value and type of gift received from the other person; and*

*c. nature of that other person's interest in the matter, and then*

*immediately before the matter is considered at the meeting announcing to those present that he or she has a conflict of interest and that a written notice has been given to the Chief Executive Officer under this sub-Rule.*

*The Councillor must, in either event, leave the Council meeting immediately after giving the explanation or making the announcement (as the case may be) and not return to the meeting until after the matter has been disposed of.*

## 5 Economic and Tourism Development

### 5.1 Regional Tourism Investment Fund - High Country Rail Trail submission (DCP-05/02/0007)

#### **Disclosure of Interests (S.130):**

This report was prepared by Ms Kerissa Heritage, Economic Development Tourism Officer.

At the time of preparation of this report, the officer did not have a general or material conflict of interest in any matter to which the report or advice relates.

#### **Purpose of Report:**

The purpose of this report is to seek approval to apply for funding of \$1,274,123 from the State Government's Regional Tourism Investment Fund to construct a shared pathway to extend the High Country Rail Trail between Corryong and the Back Cudgewa Road/Murray Valley Highway intersection. A Council contribution of \$424,708 will also be required to meet the grant criteria.

#### **Summary:**

In 2020, Council secured funding to develop a masterplan for the High Country Rail Trail (HCRT). The Masterplan was completed in early 2022 and provides a comprehensive roadmap for extending the HCRT from Shelley to Corryong, and elevating the trail in entirety to a world-class standard.

Research conducted by tourism economics specialists, Urban Enterprise, demonstrates that upon completion, the trail will deliver considerable economic benefits.

The State Government's Regional Tourism Investment Fund (RTIF) is currently open. RTIF has a favourable funding co-contribution of 1:3. The HCRT aligns well with the funding guidelines.

**Recommendation:**

That:

1. An application to the Regional Tourism Investment Fund for \$1,274,123 be approved; and
2. A contribution of \$424,708 to meet the Fund's requirements be approved.

**Attachment:**

Nil

**Background/History:**

In 2020, Council secured funding to develop a masterplan for the HCRT. The Masterplan was completed in early 2022 and provides a comprehensive roadmap for extending the HCRT from Shelley to Corryong, and elevating the trail in entirety to a world-class standard. The development of the Masterplan was led by the HCRT Project Steering Group (PSG).

The proposed construction of the HCRT has been broken into segments to allow a staged approach to completing the project. In order, the Project Steering Group identified two segments as priority for development:

1. Corryong to Colac Colac.

Delivery – 5.4km of sealed trail. A high demand use area benefiting tourists and local community. This section of trail is a pre-existing asset, however has been damaged following the Black Summer Bushfires and subsequent flooding. Currently the surface is gravel.

2. Colac Colac to Back Cudgewa Road/MVH intersection.

Delivery – 3.2km of gravel trail. Connecting Cudgewa, Colac Colac and Corryong. The trail will provide a recreational asset for the Cudgewa and wider Upper Murray community, and a safe, healthy, alternative route for commuting between townships.

In recent years, numerous rail trails across Victoria that reuse defunct railway corridors as multi-use trails or linear recreational parks have been highly successful in generating tourism investment, social and health benefits to disinvested communities.

The existing visitor experience offered by the HCRT falls short when compared to other trails in the region.

Victoria's High Country currently attracts over 160,000 cycling visitors each year and generates an estimated \$131 million annually. This spending trend is expected to continue to grow by 5.5%, compared to 1.2% growth for total visitors.

An opportunity exists to attract visitation from existing cycling markets, and leverage the well-established Ride High Country brand managed by Tourism North East. The HCRT in its current state and usage levels has not generated substantial private investment. Funding to extend and improve the amenity of the trail to a world-class standard, is required to jumpstart activation and enable private sector investment.

The State Government's Regional Tourism Investment Fund (RTIF) provides an opportunity to seek funding to commence the implementation of the HCRT Masterplan.

The Regional Tourism Investment Fund 2024 (RTIF) is part of the \$170 million Regional Tourism and Events Fund (RTEF) that will ensure Victoria's regional tourism offering continues to be the very best by supporting new events, attractions, and more accommodation for visitors.

The RTIF will help build tourism infrastructure projects that improve the visitor experience and increase visitor spending across Victoria – creating new jobs, benefiting tourism operators and regional communities.

The fund provides 3 grant streams. The HCRT project would fall under Stream 2 which will deliver large-scale projects and has a minimum grant amount of \$1,000,001 and maximum of \$5,000,000. Towong Shire is considered a Tier Two locality, and therefore the investment contribution is RTIF \$3.00 : TSC \$1.00.

To deliver the two priority sections of the HCRT, a total investment of \$424,708 is required by Council:

Trail Section	Total Costs	Potential RTIF Funding	Required TSC matched funding
Colac Colac to Corryong	\$526,228	\$394,671	\$131,557
Colac Colac to Back Cudgewa Road/MVH intersection	\$1,172,603	\$879,452	\$293,151
Total	\$1,698,831	\$1,274,123	\$424,708

Under the External Grants Application policy, Council officers must seek approval from Council for any projects greater than \$150,000 and/or where a Council



contribution of \$50,000 or more is required that has not been included in the annual budget.

**Relevant Law (s.9(2)(a)):**

Not applicable.

**Options – Best Outcomes for the Community (s.9(2)(b)):**

In the long-term, completion of the HCRT from Wodonga through to Corryong, will deliver substantial economic benefits to the communities of Towong; it is estimated to generate an injection of \$13.1m annually and support 73 new jobs. Without access to fully-funded grant programs, the best means to achieve this outcome is to construct the trail in segments over a period of time, at a cost that is affordable within the financial constraints of the Councils budget. The timeframe for delivery will be dependent on the number of suitable grant opportunities needed to complete the trail; access to external funding will be essential to its completion. With each extension, the improved HCRT will stimulate local businesses by increasing visitation to tourism-related services such as accommodation, dining, and retail.

Additionally, the trail serves as a recreational opportunity to residents, particularly those located at the eastern end of the Shire. The Trail will diversify the current sporting and recreational offering, delivering physical, social and mental health benefits to residents. It will provide a safe and healthy alternative means for the communities of Cudgewa, Colac Colac and Corryong to commute between the three townships.

**Sustainability Implications (s.9(2)(c)):**

Maintaining the proposed new section of trail at minimum cost will rely heavily on affiliated community groups. While community-driven initiatives are commendable, dependence on voluntary efforts may pose challenges in ensuring consistent and reliable upkeep. Volunteers may face time, resource, and expertise limitations, impacting the trail's maintenance standards. Moreover, sustaining long-term commitment from community groups may be challenging, leading to potential gaps in essential maintenance tasks.

There is a realistic risk that the Council may need to step in to assume some or all maintenance responsibilities.

Without voluntary assistance, maintenance estimates for the two sections are:

1. Corryong to Colac Colac (5.4km sealed): \$5,400pa
2. Colac Colac to Back Cudgewa Road/MVH intersection (3.2km gravel): \$4,800pa

It should be noted that the existing Colac Colac to Corryong section of trail is already Council's asset and maintenance responsibility. Sealing this section of trail will reduce annual maintenance expenses.

It will be important that officers work with volunteers/community groups to develop a robust, sustainable maintenance plan to reduce the potential costs incurred by Council.

**Community Engagement (s.9(2)(d)):**

The HCRT masterplan was informed by extensive community engagement, ensuring a comprehensive and inclusive design process. Numerous focus groups were convened, facilitating input from diverse perspectives, while individual meetings with landowners and stakeholders allowed for tailored discussions to address specific concerns and insights.

The transparency of the design process was exemplified by placing the final masterplan on a public exhibition in early 2023, inviting feedback from the community. The exhibit garnered numerous submissions highlighting the active participation and interest of the residents.

A project steering group oversaw the delivery of the masterplan, and in more recent months reconvened to determine the priority sections for development.

The HCRT has featured prominently in various Council plans, strategies and Community Recovery Committee plans, underscoring its status as a priority project for the region.

**Innovation and Continuous Improvement (s.9(2)(e)):**

The HCRT is an innovation in economic diversification; steering the region from solely relying on agriculture, towards a resilient economy supported by tourism. By repurposing disused rail infrastructure into a recreational trail, the project not only preserves historical elements but also fosters a new economic trajectory.

The new section of trail will be a magnet for tourists seeking adventure and scenic exploration, injecting vitality into the local economy. The development will tap into the region's natural beauty, cultural heritage, and recreational potential, offering a dynamic and resilient approach to economic development in the Upper Murray.

The trail will add considerable value to Council's asset, the Colac Colac Caravan Park; elevating and diversify the visitor experience.

**Collaboration (s.9(2)(f)):**

The long-term success of the HCRT is reliant on extensive collaboration between Tourism North East, community groups and Council officers. The enthusiasm and commitment of various affiliated community groups, such as Parklands Albury Wodonga, the Tallangatta Advisory Group, and LifeCycle Upper Murray, demonstrates the shared dedication to preserving and enhancing the asset. Through ongoing collaboration, the trail can flourish as a sustainable and accessible recreational resource for visitors and residents alike.

**Financial Viability/Budget Impact (s.9(2)(g)):**

The development will generate an ongoing maintenance expense for Council. If Council are to maintain the trail at a world class standard, the proposed gravel pathway between Colac Colac and the Back Cudgewa Road/Murray Valley Highway intersection will generate a new estimated annual expense of \$4,800. Council already has a maintenance commitment for the the existing pathway between Corryong and Colac Colac. Sealing the existing gravel pathway is expected to generate an annual maintenance saving of \$2,700, leaving an annual net asset maintenance expense increase of \$2,100.

The active involvement of community groups affiliated with the HCRT will further minimise maintenance expenses. Such a collaborative approach will ensure the affordability of maintenance and foster a sense of community ownership and pride in the pathway. Currently, Upper Murray Landcare assist with maintaining the Corryong to Colac Colac section of trail. Lifecycle Upper Murray have stated their commitment to assist with maintaining any new section of trail developed.

**Regional, State and National Plans and Policies (s.9(2)(h)):**

Progressing the HCRT masterplan project aligns with numerous state and regional plans, including the:

1. *Visitor Economy Recovery and Reform Plan*
2. *Hume Regional Growth Plan*
3. *The Hume Strategy for Sustainable Communities*
4. *Victoria's High Country Destination Management Plan.*
5. *Victoria's High Country Destination Management Plan 2023 – 2033; and*
6. *North East Victoria Cycling Optimisation Masterplan.*

**Council Plans and Policies:**

Council Plans:

This report supports the following *Council Plan 2021-2025* priorities.

2. *Community Wellbeing - Encourage and support all people in our Shire to be healthy, happy, connected and resilient.*

2.4 *Support the development of recreational activities and infrastructure to encourage active lifestyles for all ages and stages*

3. *Economic and Tourism Development - Expand economic and employment opportunities across our Shire in a sustainable way.*

3.5 *Support businesses to expand adventure tourism offerings across the shire*

3.10 *Seek funding to complete the High Country Rail Trail*

Council Policies:

*External Grant Application Policy*

Under the External Grants Application policy, Council officers must seek approval from Council for any projects greater than \$150,000 and/or where a Council contribution of \$50,000 or more is required that has not been included in the annual budget.

**Transparency of Decision (s.9(2)(i)) :**

It is the officer's view that it is appropriate to consider this matter in a Council meeting that is open to the public.

**Risk Assessment:**

Development of the shared pathway (as a segment of the HCRT) with financial support from the State Government, presents a risk to setting unrealistic community expectations. The development may inadvertently convey to the community that Council is positioned to support the entire extension of the trail from Shelley to Corryong.

Furthermore, receipt of funding from the State may be perceived as available for investment in alternative segments or upgrades of the HCRT.

Council are not in a position to allocate further funds to the rail trail without significant state and/or federal government investment. Nor will Council be able to deviate from the scope in the State's funding guidelines.

To see the HCRT masterplan come to fruition in entirety, officers will need to actively seek grant funding. Securing these grants may pose challenges, and the process could extend over several years or even decades, which again, may not align with

community expectations.

Should funding be successfully sought through the RTIF program, it will be imperative that our communication manages community expectations regarding:

1. The location and scope of construction;
2. Realistic timeframes for delivery of the immediate, and long-term development; and
3. Council's reliance on external funding for further construction of the trail network beyond the stages identified within the scope of this grant application.

**Officer's View:**

Through extensive community engagement, and subsequent Council plans, the HCRT has been recognised as a strong economic opportunity for the municipality. Research has been undertaken which demonstrates that, with the right management model, the HCRT has the capacity to become a sustainable and significant asset for the community.

It is the officer's recommendation that an application to the Regional Tourism Investment Fund be approved, with a matched funding commitment of \$424,708.

## **6 Closure of Meeting**