

# Trails Strategy

## Part 1 - Policy and Planning Context

July 2012





## About this document

This document is Part 1 of East Gippsland Shire Council Trails Strategy. Other Parts included in this strategy are Part 2 Issues and strategic guidelines and Part 3 Examples of resources. These documents have been prepared by @leisure on behalf of East Gippsland Shire Council, and in conjunction with staff and other stakeholders.

This strategy sets out:

- The benefits of trails
- Policy principles underpinning this plan
- A process for planning trails
- A trails hierarchy
- Methods and information required to prioritise trail projects
- Issues and strategic guidelines to address these. It also provides examples and a list of resources that can be used to design and construct trails. A checklist and summary of each is provided in Appendix 7.

Due to the depth of information already available, this document does not seek to provide details about the construction of trails, rather it provides links to where such information is available.

Groups interested in partnering with Council in the development and management of trails can understand Council preferences and policy objectives through reading the strategic guidelines in this document.

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## Executive summary

### Aims

This trail strategy has the joint aims of providing the high level strategic direction while also providing the guidance and resources necessary to enable local trail plans to be prepared as a part of 'place based' strategic planning.

### Focus

This Strategy provides a policy context for trail development together with a range of tools and resources that can be used to evaluate and prioritise projects at a community level to best meet the needs of individual communities.

This strategy has a substantial emphasis on ensuring that future trail planning and universal design principles are embraced to increase the range of people who can use trails and at the same time, reflects emerging trends for specific activities such as single track mountain bike trails.

East Gippsland Shire commits funding on an annual basis to support the expansion and upgrade of trails infrastructure and has been successful in attracting external resources for projects. However the resources are limited and there is a need to ensure that trails pursued, will actually result in the most significant benefit to the community. This strategy has been designed to support and guide that process.

### The previous plan

The predecessor to this trails strategy is the 1999 East Gippsland Bicycle Strategy. The Strategy was pivotal in seeing a number of significant cycling related trails and resources being implemented since 1999. Major achievements after this plan include the 'East Gippsland Rail Trail' from Bairnsdale to Orbost; the Mitchell River Walk in Bairnsdale; Metung Boardwalks; Foreshore Paths on Raymond Island; Cunninghame Walk in Lakes Entrance; Snowy River Walk in Orbost; and the Mallacoota Shared Pathway.

In addition to the recommendations of the East Gippsland Bicycle Strategy, a number of other significant trail projects have been implemented in recent years. These trail projects include the Gippsland Lakes Discovery Trail, Bruthen Walking Trails, Eagle Point to Paynesville Trail, Nowa Nowa Mountain Bike Trails, Cann River to Noorinbee Trail, and the Goongerah Shared Path.

### Benefits

Trails can provide a significant number of benefits to our communities. Benefits can be categorised as follows:

- Physical activity and health benefits;
- Life skills and independent mobility;
- Social and recreational benefits;
- Environmental benefits; and
- Economic benefits.

## Value of trails

Many communities across East Gippsland value trails. It is rare that a strategic or community planning project undertaken by the Shire does not recommend the development of trails. Information collated from a wide range of Council's strategic documents indicates that Council has given strategic support for the development of trails with an estimated construction value of \$25 million.

## Scope

The Strategy does not attempt to identify further trails, or to prioritise those already identified. Rather it has been developed to allow Council to work with communities to:

- Understand the types of trails that will best meet the identified needs of the community;
- Determine the most appropriate, accessible and sustainable trail design;
- Fund the development and maintenance of trails; and
- Appropriately manage and market trails so that the desired outcomes are achieved.

It is hoped that with careful planning, community engagement, timely implementation and an ongoing commitment to manage our trails, East Gippsland will continue to enjoy the many benefits of our existing and future trails.

An East Gippsland Cycle Tourism Strategy is also in development and this will relate directly to this Trails Strategy.

The following images are of the East Gippsland Rail Trail.



## Summary

### Principles

The principles underpinning this strategy are as follows:

1. Sustainability
2. Diversity
3. Accessibility and connectivity
4. Stakeholder ownership/stewardship
5. Marketing and communication
6. Equitable distribution

These principles will be used to determine priorities for funding.

### Benefits

The key benefits of off-road trails identified in this plan are:

1. Physical activity and health
2. Life skills and independent mobility
3. Social benefits
4. Environmental benefits
5. Economic benefits

### Trail hierarchy

Three hierarchies of trail have been identified based on:

1. Settings and visitor activity groups: urban, peri-urban or bushland.
2. Catchment/sphere of influence of the trail: local, district or municipal/regional.
3. Accessibility and degree of difficulty: accessible path of travel, relatively accessible, easy, more difficult or difficult.

### Planning process stages

There are nine stages in the planning process recommended:

1. Project planning
2. Trail feasibility and location
3. Community and stakeholder engagement
4. Routeway design and site assessment
5. Trail funding/business development/programming and prioritisation
6. Construction and development
7. Information, marketing and communication
8. Site management and maintenance
9. Monitoring and evaluation

### Resources and examples

Rather than duplicate the large quantity of construction guides and forms available, a number of examples and reference document are provided. These include:

1. Reference documents i.e. construction guidelines
2. Inventory and condition assessment forms
3. Trail grading systems
4. Siting and design of MTB tracks
5. Community and stakeholder engagement
6. Prioritising trail developments: evaluation criteria

## Summary: Strategic guidelines

### Strategic guidelines: economic and tourism development

#### ***Strategic guidelines: economic and tourism development***

1. Council should support trails that contribute to economic development and community capacity building.
2. Council should foster the development of businesses that support cycling trails, and related tourism businesses; (e.g. accommodation, repair services, personal services e.g. lunches, drying, storage or luggage transfer), events, guided rides, fitness trainers, and information products.
3. Council should encourage provision of cycle friendly facilities in private developments and community facilities: such as provision of parking, showers etc. and connections to trails.

4. Council should support the development of trails, and trail head facilities, and those that support events to generate economic and social benefits for local people. These trails should feed off the main trail infrastructure already provided (e.g. the rail trails), and be in close proximity to urban centres where support facilities and accommodation are present.
5. Council should support other agencies, tourism bodies and clubs, in attracting and conducting trail based events, and providing information for event users that generate social and economic benefits e.g. utilising local services.
6. Council in conjunction with other land managers, clubs and tourism groups should develop a one stop shop website for trail information within the Shire.
7. Council should encourage and support the conduct of events and organised activities for cycling and walking, orienteering, trail running, equestrian and related trail activities, through marketing, logistics and where possible sourcing of funds. However the conduct of these should be the responsibility of clubs, peak bodies or event organisers.

#### ***Strategic guidelines: trail and routeway planning***

8. Council should assess all proposed trail routes prior to approval.
9. Trail proposals where Council investment is sought, should have support in a relevant approved strategy or plan.
10. Consider providing trails to scenic, distinctive features, unique to East Gippsland and attractions appealing to tourists.
11. Routes along existing tracks, and through disturbed areas are a priority over pristine or significant areas. Least disturbance occurs if existing tracks are modified rather than constructing new routes.
12. When siting and constructing trails, avoid further environmental impact where possible.
13. Include trail routeways in structure plans and subdivision plans, to ensure trails are provided and funded in new residential, commercial and industrial areas; in partnership with developers and VicRoads.
14. Briefs for structure, development and master planning projects should include identification of trail routes.

15. Ensure there is a good distribution of trails across the municipality, that are connected to existing rail or other trails, or urban areas.

16. In determining trail routes seek to ensure that functional, safety, aesthetic, environmental and destination requirements are met.

***Strategic guidelines: land management and tenure***

17. Ensure land ownership and management arrangements are identified early for all land affected by a proposed trail.

18. Continue to establish local committees of management for trails on Crown land.

***Strategic guidelines: routeway planning in bushland settings/sensitive areas***

19. Council will use the principles established by the IMBA as a guide to designing and locating mountain bike trails and ensure that track builders have relevant experience. See Part 3: Examples and Resources - ER4.

20. Trails must not go through sensitive areas unless specifically designed to address environmental impacts (e.g. through elevated structures).

21. Use loop, horseshoe or spur trails around sensitive areas whilst providing vantage points of features and managed points of access i.e. to riverbanks.

22. A trail should have a buffer and a single approach to a watercourse, so there is only a single impact point, rather than running on the waterway edge.

23. Mountain bike single tracks should not be provided in flora and fauna reserves or wilderness areas, where trail activity is inconsistent with management of areas dedicated for conservation.

24. Provide buffers between trails, riparian zones and wetland areas, to protect these fragile areas from trampling.

***Strategic guidelines: road reserves and private interfaces***

25. When planning trail alignments, consider the proximity of the trail to private property and seek landowner's support.

26. The trail corridor (especially in urban areas and when travelling at the rear or side of private yards) should be greater than 10m wide, to allow for buffers, views, surveillance, maintenance of the right of way, and to ensure the trail is not hard up against rear private fences.

27. Where urban trails are to be included in a road reserve, they should be provided along local roads rather than collector or arterial roads.

28. Trails along roads should be set away from the building line to enhance sightlines and response times.

***Strategic guidelines: vegetation***

29. Seek to design trails with appropriate corridor vegetation.

30. Carefully select species of trees for placement adjacent to trails, so as to avoid: issues with sightlines and interference from tree roots and from nuts, fruits and limbs falling onto the trail.

***Strategic guidelines: trail width***

31. All double track trails should have a treadway of a minimum of 2.5m wide to allow two cyclists to pass safely.

32. In high use areas, and where cyclists and walkers need to pass, the width of trails may need to be considerably greater than this (up to 4m wide).

33. Paths expecting commuter traffic should be at least 3m wide.



34. Paths with heavy commuter and recreational traffic should be at least 3.5m, or paths for cycling and walking should be separated.<sup>1</sup>
35. Single track trails in bushland settings maybe a minimum width of 300mm if they have a high degree of difficulty.
36. For a trail with a treadway of 2.5m the trail right of way needs to have an absolute minimum width of 0.3m or 1m preferred clearance on both sides of the treadway.
37. Trails in popular coastal locations should be greater than the minimum width recommended, and the right of way and the trail corridor should be planned to protect the trail from development and allow future increases in width.
38. A minimum vertical clearance of 2.5 m from the treadway is also required.

***Strategic guidelines: surfaces and accessible design***

39. The colour of trail tread materials should be sympathetic to the surrounds.
40. Trail surface materials shall be stable, firm, relatively smooth and slip resistant in wet or dry conditions. In shaded or dark locations wire may be needed over some timber path structures to promote slip resistance and increase durability.
41. Cross falls on trail surfaces should be no steeper than 1 in 40.
42. Trails in urban and peri-urban locations should minimise the use of steps and seek to provide gradients suitable for users with prams and mobility aids.
43. To aid accessibility, use hard surface materials in easy locations and extend the width of the trail to 1m to enable wheels of a mobility aid to be contained on the treadway surface.
44. Where stairs are necessary on trails, use deep treads and shallow rises to allow people with mobility aids to be assisted to use such trails.
45. Where boardwalks or timber slats are used on elevated sections of easy trails, ensure these have curb rails or wheel stops. In wet locations these curbs should have gaps left at regular intervals to allow water to flow off the trails.

46. In urban locations trails should be designed to conform to an 'accessible path of travel' adjacent to steep slopes or waterways. Ensure a trail has adequate width for the safest passage of a mobility aid or wheeled recreational vehicles.
47. Alternate routes may be promoted for people using wheelchairs or mobility aids where views of features can still be seen if the feature is not directly accessible by trail.
48. Where sealed and unsealed surfaces are used together, care must be taken to ensure loose materials do not migrate onto the sealed surfaces and cause slip hazards.
49. Vegetation that has high leaf, nuts or twig fall (e.g. spotted gums) should be planted well back from sealed trail treadways.
50. Ensure surface materials brought in from other places are free from weeds and pathogens.
51. Plan for break out spaces with facilities for resting and recuperation off trails.

***Strategic guidelines: asset management***

52. All trails that are to be constructed and managed by others with Council support, need to have a management plan approved by Council.
53. Council should ensure that trails are an element of Council's asset management plan.

<sup>1</sup>Bicycle Network Victoria Good Design Guides; Paths - Wide Enough for Everyone.

54. Ensure existing trails are maintained in a good condition and are not at the expense of new trail development.

***Strategic guidelines: wet trails***

55. Council should seek to educate riders about the damage to tracks in the wet: though codes of conduct, marketing and partnerships with club and peak bodies.
56. Siting of future trails along watercourses should minimise hazards to users, associated flooding and storm events.
57. Flood, emergency markers and warnings should be installed on trails in susceptible areas.

***Strategic guidelines: night riding; impacts on residents and wildlife***

58. Consider the potential impacts of trails on adjacent residents and on wildlife in park settings, when determining the location of trails and whether to light them.

***Strategic guidelines: managing conflicts***

59. Council should undertake some modeling of projected user numbers of trails before construction.
60. Motorised recreational vehicles should not be allowed on trails with the exception of motorised wheelchairs and mobility scooters if travelling at a walking pace on trails appropriate for them.

61. Conflicts between users should be monitored, managed by codes of conduct and addressed by partnerships where they eventuate.
62. When existing trails or routes are being considered for further trail development, consider activities that may be displaced by the development, especially those that may be dependant on the inherent characteristics of the area, before the route is constructed.
63. Short trail duplications in some areas may minimise conflict between users such as dogs and cyclists in urban areas, and in bushland trails. Cyclists must be encouraged to give way to walkers.
64. Council should have a code of conduct for different types of trails and different types of activities.
65. Prevent off-leash dogs being on trails. On key trails for cycling; require dogs to be walked off the treadway and on-lead.

***Strategic guidelines: dogs and wildlife***

66. Do not provide trails through off-leash areas or across known fauna movement corridors.
67. Some trails may need to be fenced adjacent to where livestock are farmed.
68. Fencing/trail design may need to respect the movement of wildlife i.e. wombats to protect fauna and safety of riders.

***Strategic guidelines: risk management***

69. Provide management access points along key trails and avoid maintenance vehicles entering at multiple locations and damaging vegetation.
70. Consider mobile coverage when planning remote trails and providing pre trip information.
71. Provide emergency vehicle access where technical sections of regional mountain bike trails are provided.
72. Provide standard emergency markers to assist with emergency services locating key trails.

***Strategic guidelines: onsite and offsite information***

73. Ensure information is provided for (onsite/offsite information) trail users about: degree of difficulty, accessibility (for bush trails; ride with others), hazards to look out for e.g. fallen limbs, washouts, land slips or inundation etc.

***Strategic guidelines: graded challenges***

74. Council will generally support technical features on trails where there are options for less proficient riders in the vicinity or in the same network, and where other agencies, clubs or user groups have the expertise to manage them.

75. Technical track features are important in catering for proficient free rider mountain bike riders. Providing challenges may minimise the chances of riders modifying or creating their own challenges.
76. Jump and MTB trail parks should have two or three runs of differing difficulty degrees that provide graded challenges, and allows modeling for young riders.

***Strategic guidelines: management of the treadway surface***

77. The surface of trails should be consistent with the nature of activity and challenges expected for each degree of difficulty assigned to the trail.
78. The surface of urban trails should be maintained without trip hazards, potholes, broken pavement, wash outs or fallen obstacles etc.

***Strategic guidelines: waterway crossings and clearances***

79. Road and waterway crossings should be well signed and carefully designed to minimise risk.
80. Vegetation should be trimmed to prevent user contact from low overhanging branches.
81. A minimum of 2.5m of overhead clearance should be maintained on all tracks.

***Strategic guidelines: MTB technical features***

82. Technical features on mountain bike trails need to be designed by experienced industry professionals.
83. Technical features should have a B line (rollover), C lines or ‘chicken runs’, so a rider can bail or choose a simpler path around an obstacle or drop.
84. Trail entry points need to be controlled so a rider cannot accidentally enter a technical track.
85. Free riding and downhill trails should, where possible be designed with fall zones.

***Strategic guidelines: unauthorised trails***

86. If an unauthorised trail is found, Council should assess the risks to the public, communicate with users, and then determine appropriate management, demolition or relocation of the trail.

***Strategic guidelines: monitoring***

87. Build in a monitoring program of existing trails through asset management and user/committee management plans.

***Strategic guidelines: information***

88. All trails should be mapped as part of planning and at the end of construction.

89. Routes should be included in Councils GIS as soon as they are constructed.
90. All trail routes should be published for potential rider information.
91. All trails should be given a name to enable clear and consistent information management.
92. Council could develop a trails website to become a one stop shop for all trail information within the Shire.
93. Council should encourage the visitor information centres, local accommodation outlets and businesses promoting general visitation to the area, to be involved in the promotion of trails.

***Strategic guidelines: trail signage***

94. Provide directional signs at:
  - All junctions of trails (unless the surface and hierarchy of one of the options is clearly lower than the main trail).
  - All junctions between trails and roads
  - Any adjacent road system to guide cyclists to a path
  - Suitable locations on major long distance trails and peri-urban trails to direct cyclists to important services such as toilets, water and food stops
95. Signs should be provided before a trail user gets to a junction in the trail.

96. Directional signage should highlight major known destinations first, before local specific locations e.g. Bairnsdale 5km, John Smith Reserve 1.5km.
97. Signs are desirable at key hazards:
- Where the trail is located close to water and at water crossings, signs should indicate water depths
  - Where vegetation has been sprayed
  - Where any seal ends
  - Where there are works being conducted
  - Where there have been washouts/landslips etc.
98. Key hazard signs should include:
- A location emergency marker
  - Who to call to report hazards
  - Brandings

***Strategic guidelines: interpretative information***

99. For trails likely to attract high use and visitors, as well as those serving sites of biological or cultural significance, consider providing robust interpretative signage.

***Strategic guidelines: community engagement***

100. Trail projects initiated by and with community engagement should be given higher priority than those without.
101. Where possible, Council should encourage other partners and providers to survey users about their perceptions of existing trails.

***Strategic guidelines: communication***

102. Council should undertake regular communication with users, user groups, providers of related services, land management agencies and schools, about trails and trail related services.
103. In the planning of new trails Council should consider engaging with families, through schools.
104. Encourage users to pinpoint black spots, gaps in trail routes and circuits, and identify opportunities for new extended routes.

***Strategic guidelines: volunteers***

105. Where possible, Council will establish local committees to manage trails. These may be committees responsible for multiple trails in the one locality.

## 1. Introduction

### What are trails?

**The term trails in this document is used to refer to: tracks, off-road paths or routeways on public land, used for recreation.**

**Trails may be designed for a range of different visitor activity groups. A number of different recreation user groups need trails: for activities like running, cycling (BMX and MTB), walking, dog walking, skiing, horseriding, children riding wheeled toys, skating and scooter riding.**

Trails include dedicated shared paths in urban areas, as well as cross-country and downhill mountain bike, walking/running trails in more remote natural areas, and scenic/iconic tourist walks and rail trails.

**Trails provided specifically for equestrian use, skiing/snow sports, water based activities and motorised recreation vehicles are outside the scope of this plan.**

On-road bicycle routes are not considered trails, however the location of these routes should be considered when planning offroad trails, to ensure connectivity of trails to the onroad network for cyclists.

### Why support the development of trails in East Gippsland?

**Trails provide an opportunity for people to enhance their health and wellbeing, and experience the significant, unique and picturesque natural assets of the Shire.**

The East Gippsland Shire features beautiful coastal scenery, extensive lakes and river systems, rugged high country, and national parks and forests renowned for their biological diversity, landscape character and recreational opportunities.

The Shire is large and with more than one third of the Shire being Crown land, National Park, forest or other public land, accessible for outdoor recreation.

Trails are a key tourism asset for East Gippsland and the wider Gippsland region.

**There are a considerable number of existing trails.**

There is already an extensive trail network within East Gippsland, much of which is on Crown land. This includes bushwalking trails; rail trails, trails for cross country, freeriding and downhill mountain bike riding. Examples of trails include: East Gippsland Rail Trail, Gippsland Lakes Discovery Trail, Nowa Nowa Trails, and trails at Bruthen, Mallacoota, Marlo, Omeo, Mount Taylor, Bairnsdale and Colquhoun Forest.

Trails are important for tourism and have local economic benefits. Trails are destinations for visitors, and provide valuable opportunities for people to experience the unique attributes of East Gippsland. East Gippsland is marketed as being a 'naturally magic' place to live, invest or simply to visit tourist icons.

Examples of tourism businesses linked to Victorian trails are shown in the following image.



The Munda Biddi Trail in WA is a good example of an off-road cycling trail that is well marketed and generates around 25,000 visitors per annum, which generates approximately 13 million dollars to the local economy<sup>2</sup>. Approximately 20% of users are from interstate or overseas. Currently the trail runs for some 600km, with campsites every 34-45km and away from towns. This is to encourage cyclists to stop in local towns and use the local amenities and facilities.

<sup>2</sup> See [www.mundabiddi.org.au/](http://www.mundabiddi.org.au/)

In 2010, East Gippsland attracted 1.1 million visitors, of which 492,652 were domestic daytrip visitors, 591,334 were domestic overnight visitors and 31,344 were international visitors.<sup>3</sup>

Club, peak body and visitor information indicates a range of social and competitive trail-running and mountain bike events are currently held in the Shire.

Bicycle events and competitions provide important challenges for trail users as well as incentives for people to keep fit. These have social and economic benefits.

There are likely to be regular running/walking and cycling events held in the Shire. Examples include competitions and MTB events organised by Gippsland MTB Club.

Previously the Wilderness Bike Ride and the Great Victorian Bike ride have been held within the Shire.

<sup>3</sup><http://www.discovereastgippsland.com.au>

### Trails are important for health and environmental purposes

A number of studies suggest that over half of all adults in Australia do not meet the recommended levels of physical activity necessary for health benefit. **Providing convenient access to trails is an important strategy to assist people in learning physical activity patterns and accessing other physical and social opportunities.**

The Cycling Promotion Fund indicates that transport is responsible for 34% of household greenhouse gas emissions, and that countries with high levels of cycling have lower levels of obesity.

An East Gippsland Cycle Tourism Strategy is currently being prepared and will be complementary to the Trails Strategy.

### **Communities in which trails are not adequately provided, potentially lack:**

- A range of recreational opportunities for local residents of all ages and abilities (including older adults, people with disabilities and young children) to enjoy
- Opportunities to meet and engage with other members of the community
- The physical and mental health benefits that can be attributed to physical activities such as cycling, walking, running, skiing, horse riding or canoeing
- Safe commuter options for people wishing to walk or cycle to work or school
- Safe places for young children to learn to ride bicycles and basic codes of use that are the precursor to road rules
- Opportunities for children to gain independent mobility and develop wayfinding skills
- Convenient opportunities to come in contact with nature (e.g. birds); derive restorative benefits, stimulation or sense of peace through exposure to green and picturesque natural environments

- Opportunities for environmental education and encourage environmental stewardship through informal access, interpretive signage and programmed activities
- The benefits to the local economy arising from use of trails by visitors

Appendix 2 identifies the key benefits that can be attributed to trails.

### **Not all trails are on Council land**

**This strategy focuses on trails provided for residents of the Shire and on land managed by or on behalf of East Gippsland Shire.**

However, much of the public land in East Gippsland is Crown land and is either managed by committees on behalf of the Crown or Council, or by other government land management agencies such as DSE or Parks Victoria. Trails are likely to travel across Council managed land as well as other public land, managed by different land management agencies and hence partnerships and strong co-operation with other agencies and community groups will be important.

**Scenic and regional trails targeting visitors will require connections to local residential areas, to enhance opportunities and usability.**

### **Demand for trails**

**Trail-based activities have greater expressed demand, than any other one type of outdoor recreation facility.**

Based on current participation rates in activities using trails, 3,225 resident children 14 years and under, and 21,700 adult residents, are likely to use trails if they are convenient, consistent with an individual's ability and activity preferences and routes include those community facilities commonly used as well as recreational destinations.

**The proportion of people undertaking walking, cycling and other wheeled leisure activities is increasing in comparison with other types of activity.**

Based on participation rates for people over 15 years applied to East Gippsland Shire's population, cycling has the fourth highest number of participants of forty different sport and physical activities.

The potential demand for trails in the Shire can be estimated at 25,000 people whom walk, bushwalk, cycle or run. (This doesn't include skating or children wheeled recreation vehicles and toys).

The likely number of residents participating in trail activities in East Gippsland is shown in the following table. These exclude skating activities.

**Table 1: Potential numbers of trail users, East Gippsland (2011)<sup>4</sup>**

Activity	Total
Walking	15,082
Cycling	4,509
Running	3,044
Walking (bush)	1,805
Total	24440

<sup>4</sup>Calculated by applying ERASS 2009 Victorian participation rates against Victoria in Future 2008, Department of Planning and Community Development, population projections for 2011.

Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show that for the tenth year in succession, Australians have purchased more bicycles than cars, purchasing 1,154,077 bicycles in 2009. Sixty five percent of bicycles sold in Victoria are mountain bikes.<sup>5</sup>

**The demand for these activities in comparison with other physical activities increases with age.**

The population of the Shire is increasing slowly at an annual average rate of 1.8%, with growth concentrated in the coastal and lakeside towns and in Bairnsdale.

**Providing trails is good for everyone, however there are some groups that Council should target. These include: children, older adults, people using mobility aids, young people who may not have access to transport, and those who seek physical challenges and options to get outdoors.**

<sup>5</sup>Bicycle Sales in Australia, Cycling Promotion Fund, 2006.

- Children have a high need to establish skills and patterns of sustainable transport and physical activity, independence and mobility, and have limited transport.
- Older adults and people with a disability need trails to promote independence and mobility and getting out and about. This is due to limited transport, and desire for a safe accessible path of travel.
- Young people need personal challenges and options for physical active outdoor recreation and sporting activity.

**Demand for walking and cycling by middle aged and older adults is as strong as for younger age groups.**

There is anecdotal evidence to suggest the strength of bicycle sales and growth in cycling participation is largely in the over forties. This is driving a demand for a greater range of bicycles in particular the comfort/hybrid/step through and recumbant/tandem style bicycles.

Over 50% of East Gippsland residents are aged over 40 years, with 24% aged over 60 years.



Trails provide a strong incentive to exercise (for up to 85% of users) and are used by many as a means to spend time with family and friends (89%)<sup>6</sup>.

A study in NSW National Parks showed males aged 18 to 44 years are more likely to cycle on an unsealed road or track, while females over 45 years are significantly less likely to participate. This study also shows a likely increase in the number of females 18 to 24 years riding offroad.

Australian Sports Commission research into children in sport, shows a reduction in physical and outdoor activity that does not appear to be driven entirely by community preferences, more by inconvenience and lack of environments that support and motivate children and adults to be active and outdoors.<sup>7</sup>

Trends in cycling (and MTB) participation and bicycle sales are provided in Appendix 5.

<sup>6</sup>South Australian Trail Manual. Urban Regional Planning Solutions and Harlen Graphics, 2011

<sup>7</sup>University of South Australia, Children in Sport, Page 20 for Aust. Sports Commission 2004

## Definitions

For the purpose of this strategy a trail is a defined route or off-road pathway, which has been specifically designed for recreation. Recreational activities considered here are non-motorised (however other trails can be designed for trail bikes and off-road vehicles).

Trail standards and styles will vary depending on the intended visitor activity group, frequency of use and local conditions.

A glossary of terms is provided in Appendix 1.

### The anatomy of a trail <sup>8</sup>

A trail includes the following elements:

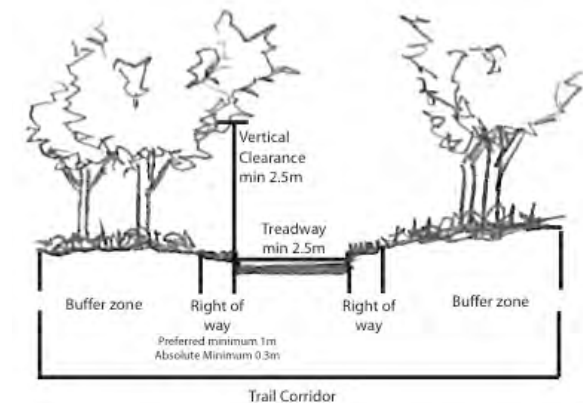
- **The tread (or treadway)** – the surface on which you walk or ride
- **The right of way** - that is cleared for the passage of the user

<sup>8</sup>Trail Building and Maintenance Robert Proudman & Reuben Rajala (Appalachian Mountain Club), 1981 2nd Edition

- **The trail corridor** - which includes the tread, right of way and a buffer or protection zone on either side of the tread.

This buffer insulates the walker/rider from activities detrimental to the experience, and the environment of the trail as viewed. This is also the zone of travel influence.

Buffers are very important especially in riparian zones to protect these fragile areas from trampling. See following image.



## Types of trails and users

Different types of users seek different facilities and experiences according to:

- Benefits sought
- Fitness levels
- Mobility levels
- Age, life cycle stage and health
- Time available for their activity
- Activity preferences
- Equipment (bicycle, skateboards, wheelchair or mobility aid)
- Setting preferences

Use will also vary according to the nature and characteristics of the trail and land it passes through, including:

- Gradient or degree of difficulty of the trail
- Type of surface
- Width of the trail
- Other factors such as:
  - whether the trail is shaded
  - whether the trail is lit

- whether the trail has associated facilities such as toilets and car parking/trailhead
- whether the trail connects to a residential area, community facilities, amenities or other destinations
- the visual quality of the corridor that the trail passes through

The key visitor activity groups based on the location/setting in which trails are provided, types of activities and facility requirements are as follows:

- Urban residents exercising or getting around
- Peri-urban/inter settlement walkers and cyclists
- Bushland walking or mountain bike riding

## Urban residents exercising or getting around

Facilities serving this market include:

- Park perimeter trails around large parks or sports fields
- Shared trail circuits through residential areas
- Shared trails along open space corridors or links to other trails



## Peri-urban/inter settlement walking and cycling trails

Trails serving this market include:

- Regional trails such as rail trails
- Trails between townships
- Coastal walks
- Large circuits or connections between settlements or signed networks including local, access roads, fire or management tracks etc.



## Bushland walking/mountain bike trails

These are characterised by:

- More remote trails, as destinations for specific activity enthusiasts
- Those typically purpose-built for activity, or season
- Those typically graded by Australian Walking Track grades or IMTBA and ski degree of difficulty grades (see ER3)
- Those connected to urban fringe trails or supported by trailhead facilities including parking etc.  
This type of trail may include trails principally designed as ski trails.



Interpretative information concerning cultural or physical features can be included on any one of these types of trails. For this reason 'cultural trails' have not been classified separately as one type of trail.

**This strategy endorses the value of providing trails to serve each visitor activity group and trails in each setting type or context.**



## Other types of trails

**This strategy deals with three main types of trails:**

- Urban shared paths for residents exercising or getting around
- Peri-urban/inter settlement walking and cycling trails
- Bushland walking/mountain bike trails

Other types of trails that are activity specific such as equestrian trails, canoe trails, and ski trails are not dealt with here, although it is noted that there are equestrian users of rail trail within the Shire.

Trails may be single track or double track which may allow for one or more people to use them at the same time.

Common forms of trails are the loop, the horseshoe and the line. The suitability of each will be determined by the nature of the trail's location.

Other path and activity definitions are provided in the glossary of terms, in Appendix 1.

## Hierarchy of trails

A hierarchy of trails will be required to ensure a diversity of activities can be accommodated, and trail opportunities are provided to the greatest range of the population, in a range of contexts, for local residents and visitors, and to ensure that the cost of trail development is in line with demand and likely usage.

A hierarchy of trails will also ensure a range of different activities and experiences can be provided. These might range from solitary cliff top walking tracks to more social group rides on the rail trail. In towns where there are skate facilities for example, wider sealed trails are required in order to connect these facilities with schools and local residential areas.

The following figure indicates this hierarchy on three key dimensions: catchment or sphere of influence; setting and visitor activity group; and degree of difficulty and accessibility.

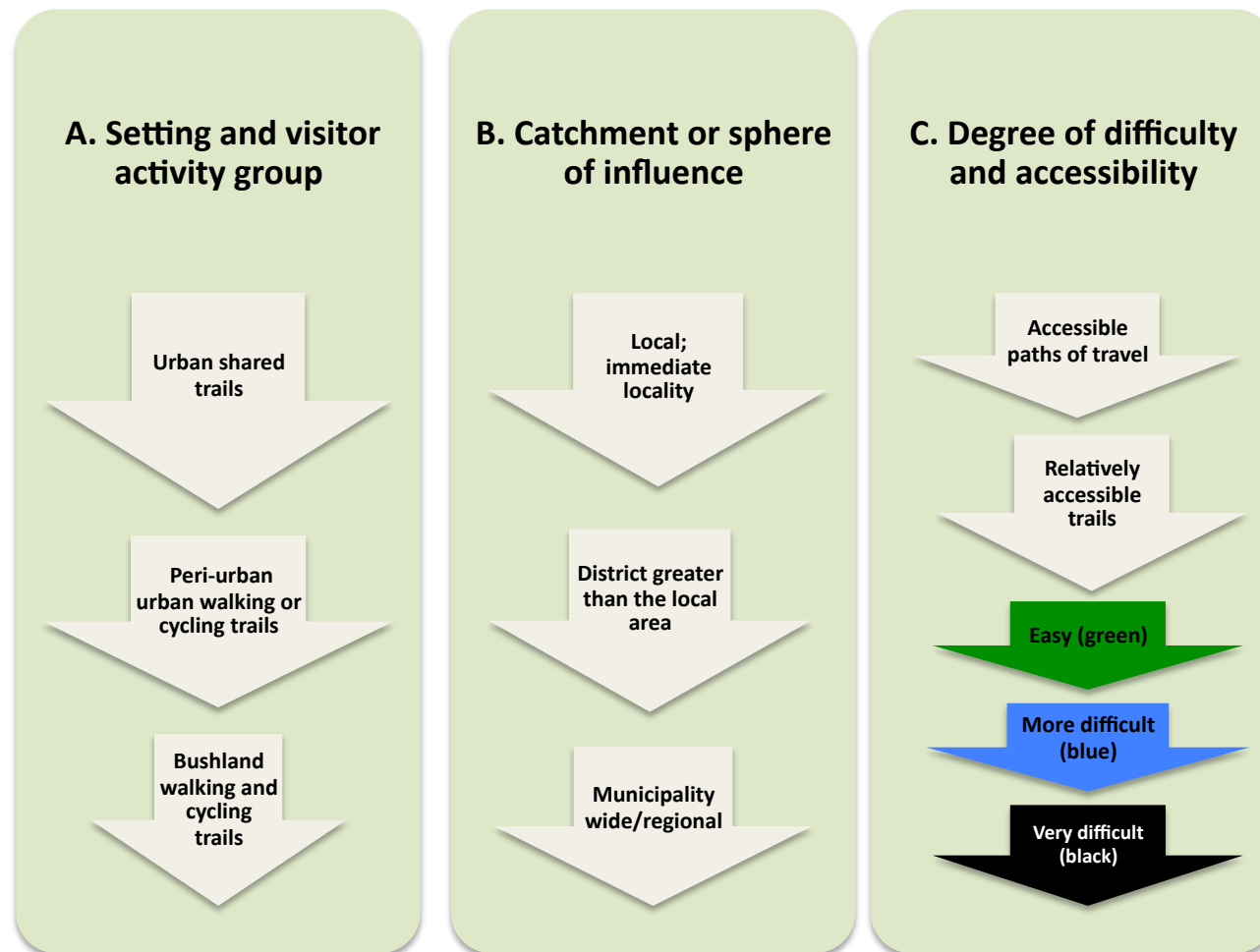
This hierarchy can be helpful in determining the priority for new trails; who is served, what might be the gaps, and who contributes to the costs of trails and the contribution of users.

For example, for urban trails with a local catchment, developers of new residential, commercial or industrial areas would be expected to contribute to trail development, where as for a regional trail in a peri-urban setting, state government may contribute because of regional development or tourism objectives or because they are the land owner.

The degree of difficult and accessibility classification helps establish who the target audience is.

Council can classify each of its trails according to this hierarchy, which will then assist with determining gaps and opportunities.

Figure 1: Hierarchy of trails (A. Setting and visitor activity groups; B. Catchment or sphere of influence; C. Degree of difficulty and accessibility)



The previous diagram can help answer the following questions:

- Which setting does the trail fall into?
- What catchment does it serve?
- How accessible the proposed trail will be?

Council should seek to have trails in all boxes shown in the illustration above, to ensure a diversity of trail experiences will be provided in keeping with demand and resources available. Typically the demand for trails will be the greatest at the top of the hierarchy in each case; i.e. urban greater than remote bushland trails; local rather than regional trails, and easy or low degree of difficulty greater than very difficult.

Types of trails in this hierarchy are referenced throughout this document.

## Hierarchy of settlements in East Gippsland

The population of East Gippsland localities may also assist in determining the model of provision and the scale of trail developments and networks.

Four tiers of townships could be described in East Gippsland, based on resident and visitor population.

**Table 2: Hierarchy of townships in East Gippsland**

Tier	Population	Towns
Tier 1	5,000+	Bairnsdale, Lakes Entrance
Tier 2	1,000 to 5,000	Paynesville, Orbost, Mallacoota
Tier 3	500 to 1,000	Metung, Bruthen, Lake Tyers Beach
Tier 4	100 to 500	Omeo, Cann River, Swifts Creek, Buchan, Nowa Nowa

There is likely to be a high demand for trails in areas where there is a high influx of visitors on a seasonal basis. Key towns with significant visitor populations are those with the highest resident population.

See Appendix 3 for key towns and their population in 2006.

## 2. Policy and principles

### Strategic influences and policy support for trails

The Federal and State government, through its various strategies, and local Councils through their strategic plans, provide a comprehensive framework to guide policy the distribution of resources. In addition, State and Local government are responsible for the implementation of a wide range of legislation, planning controls and local laws which impact on new and existing trails.

These may have a significant influence on funding as well as the location, construction, and ongoing management of the trails. Due to the complexities of public land in East Gippsland a scan of relevant legislation and policy is an important part of the planning process for trails.

It is important that careful consideration is given to all relevant government legislation and strategies when planning a new trail or enhancing an existing one.

### Federal government

In order to drive forward progress on cycling and co-ordinate activities across the country, AustRoads and the Australian Bicycle Council (made up of representatives from the Commonwealth Government, each state and territory, as well as the cycling industry and cyclist user groups) are preparing *Gearing up for active and sustainable communities: Australian National Cycling Strategy 2011-16*. It has six key priorities and objectives:

- **Cycling promotion:**  
Promote cycling as both a viable and safe mode of transport and an enjoyable recreational activity
- **Infrastructure and facilities:**  
Create a comprehensive network of safe and attractive routes to cycle and end-of-trip facilities
- **Integrated planning:**  
Consider and address cycling needs in all relevant transport and land use planning activities
- **Safety:**  
Enable people to cycle safely

- **Monitoring and evaluation:**

Improve monitoring and evaluation of cycling programs and develop a national decision-making process for investment in cycling

- **Guidance and best practice:**

Develop nationally consistent technical guidance for stakeholders to use and share best practice across jurisdictions

### State government

A number of Victorian Strategies support the content of this plan.

The Victorian Pedestrian Access Strategy and the Victorian Cycling Strategy promote sustainable transport across the state, and set out the Victorian government's vision for a more pedestrian-friendly transport system for Victorians. The aim of the Pedestrian Access Strategy is to encourage more Victorians to walk, especially for short trips.

**Victoria's Cycle Tourism Action Plan 2011-2015** has been developed by Tourism Victoria to position Victoria as the leading state for cycle tourism, as well as to outline how the Government will leverage and enhance opportunities in cycle tourism. This plan aims to assist Victoria's cycle tourism industry to leverage *Victoria's Nature-based Tourism Strategy* and continue to build strong consumer demand for cycle tourism experiences.

**The Victorian Trails Strategy 2005 – 2011**, provides a clear vision for the key guidelines of trail development, management, marketing and research.

Key guidelines of the Victorian Trails Strategy include:

**Trail network management –**

Cross-organisational coordination for appropriate trail network development and management, to provide for a range of trail experiences and opportunities.

**Trail marketing –** Coordinated and integrated marketing, including promotion of Victoria's trails, to optimise awareness of trail opportunities and their sustainable use.

**Trail research –** Coordinated research and facilitated information sharing to increase knowledge of trails and trail users.

## Local government

Key East Gippsland Shire strategies that have underpinned and provided direction for the development of this strategy include:

- East Gippsland Bicycle Strategy
- East Gippsland Environmental Sustainability Strategy
- Disability Action Plan
- East Gippsland Community Wellbeing Plan
- East Gippsland Strategic Tourism Plan
- Regional Youth Strategy
- East Gippsland Municipal Early Years Plan
- East Gippsland Arts and Culture Strategic Plan
- East Gippsland Positive Ageing Strategy
- Unlocking the Future - Long-Term Community Vision 2030

## Council objectives

The provision of a network of trails across the municipality assists in meeting the objectives and priority areas of Council's Wellbeing Plan, in the following ways:

- **Develop Personal Skills** - Allowing children to develop independence, mobility wayfinding skills, and to ride a bike safely, and gain skills associated with particular recreation activities such as MTB or bush walking that may become life long healthy and fulfilling recreational experiences.
- **Strengthen Community Actions** - Trails provide the opportunity for communities to plan and construct locally relevant facilities, and those that can generate social and economic benefits to communities. The process can be empowering and contribute to the equitable distribution of resources to all communities regardless of their size.
- **Create Supportive Environments** - Trails help connect people and create links between people and their environment.
- **Build Healthy Public Policy** - Trails are part of sustainable transport initiatives and provide an alternative to high carbon generating transport.

These principles will be carried over into this plan.



## Policy principles underpinning this plan

### ■ Sustainability

In order ensure sustainability of trails Council will need to follow a process of:

- assessing what trails are available and what could add value to existing trails before creating additional trails
- assessing the demand for a proposed trail, including the number of people likely to be served (determined by tier of town)
- careful selection and documentation of routeway as well as appraising capability and sustainability
- an appraisal of environmental and cultural significance of affected sites
- assessing resources are in place to plan, design and manage the resource

As use and carrying capacity of trails change over time, some trails may need to be decommissioned or demand managed, if they are found not to be sustainable.

Trails not only provide recreational opportunities but form part of a sustainable transport network and reduce kilometres travelled by private vehicles and encourage more active forms of transport.

### ■ Accessibility and connectivity

Council will seek to:

- provide a range of trails available to people with all abilities and accessible to residential areas
- enhance the connectivity of trails to existing services and urban centres, (community facilities, trail heads or key destinations, toilets, picnic areas, camping sites and cafes)
- develop circuits and looped trails in preference to point to point (line) trails
- provide a range of different types of trails to serve different activities
- ensure that classifications of trails and all information produced about existing trails includes information about accessibility for people using wheelchairs (as a minimum; treadway surface, presence of stairs and gradients)

### ■ Diversity

Council will assist the widest range of residents, communities and user groups to accrue benefits from a diversity of trail types, in different settings.

Council will seek to provide a good hierarchy of trails across the Shire; from accessible to challenging, those servicing local and regional markets, and those in urban, peri-urban and bushland settings.

Trails will seek to provide residents and visitor with a diversity of experiences along their routes.

### ■ Equitable distribution

Council will seek to ensure that all communities have access to some form of trail experience, for recreation and transport.

In supporting trail developments Council will seek to provide an equitable distribution of trails through the municipality, depending on the nature of setting and the size of towns.

### ■ Stakeholder ownership/stewardship

Other than urban trails, all trails will need to be managed and constructed in partnership with users, the landowner, or an entity established for their provision and management.

There will be trails provided by and on other government department's land. Council's role in these will be largely in promoting information about trails to residents and visitors, and encouraging environmental stewardship associated with each.

### ■ Marketing and communication

For any trail that Council supports through infrastructure planning or construction, Council should ensure that:

- the routes of trails are documented in Council's GIS for planning information and for promotional purposes
- offsite and onsite information about the nature of the trail, gradients, distance, surface and degree of difficulty etc., is provided so that users can make informed choices about use
- trail developments should, where possible seek to engage the local community, local businesses and champions, to support and promote a culture of cycling and walking, as infrastructure alone will not create significant behavioural change

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