

Why save the Pyalong Timber Railway Bridges?

Two significant ex-railway timber bridges at Pyalong have survived for over a century, yet are now under threat. The question is, are these bridges able to be saved and why? The Pyalong Restoration Group (PRG) plus the Friends of the Bendigo-Kilmore Rail Trail (KBKRT) community groups have their eyes firmly fixed on these two remaining bridges at Pyalong, which once formed part of the former Heathcote Junction-Sandhurst (Bendigo) railway line. To save them would be for the wider community benefit, for business and tourism, as well as for the Pyalong Township itself.

The North Central Review's article from 19 July edition, 'Historic Bridges Under Threat' reported the current situation surrounding the two large ex-railway timber bridges at Pyalong. It was interesting to read the reported comments of one individual about the worth of keeping these bridges.

What does the community know about these two bridges in question? Both bridges are magnificent examples of 19th century engineering design and construction, built in 1889 & 1890 by McDermott & Sons for the railway line that would link Heathcote Junction to the then Sandhurst (Bendigo). Surviving for over 120 years, these timber structures are still admired by many for the skill of those who designed, built and maintained them. Yet with no maintenance on the timber structures for about 50 years, they are now showing serious signs of neglect. To determine exactly what state the bridges are in, the PRG & FBKRT community groups worked with DSE (Seymour) in 2010 to have an engineering assessment of the bridges funded.

The Mollison Creek bridge is the major tourist icon attraction for Pyalong and district, and together with the Hansford Creek bridge they may also play an important role in the vision to build a major rail trail from Kilmore East/Heathcote Junction to Bendigo.

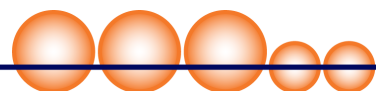
And what about this vision to build a rail trail, what will it achieve? Rail trails are very popular in Australia and other parts of world; they attract interstate & international tourism and are a local recreation facility used for walking, cycling and horse riding, as well as retaining native flora and fauna. These trails link small communities, improve individual's health, and very importantly inject economic benefits into small communities that create new businesses. The vision for this 100 km trail has taken significant steps forward, with the state government's June 2010 funding announcement to extend the current O'Keefe Rail Trail (Bendigo-Axedale) to Heathcote within three years. The government is contributing \$1.9 million and the City of Greater Bendigo Council \$1.3 million to this upgrade/extension that will create a 50km trail. Work is currently underway on this trail upgrade and extension.

The Mitchell Shire Council has also recognised this vision and has given 'in principle' support to the creation of this 100km rail trail, while it is currently joint builder of the Goulburn River High Country Rail Trail (GRHCRT). By adding a Bendigo-Kilmore trail in close proximity to the GRHCRT, this will see significant economic benefits flowing to Kilmore, Seymour, Pyalong, Tooborac, Wandong-Heathcote Junction communities as well as existing tourist attractions like the Bylands Tramway Museum.

The release of the engineering report on these two bridges is expected in the coming weeks, and hopefully that will provide an insight into what is required to retain and make the bridges safe. It is hoped that the residents of Mitchell Shire will support the 'Save the Pyalong Bridges' and the creation of a world class 100km rail trail in the future.

Garry Long
Convenor
Friends of the Bendigo-Kilmore Rail Trail

Friends of the Bendigo-Kilmore Rail Trail



Friends of the Bendigo-Kilmore Rail Trail Inc., A0054089L
Post: PO Box 578, Bendigo Vic 3552
Email: bendigokilmorerailtrail@gmail.com
Web: bendigokilmorerailtrail.com