

Letters to the Editor

It's a bit too soon

IT WAS interesting to read Wayne McKay's letter to the editor (*McIvor Times*, January 27), regarding the O'Keefe Rail Trail.

Could Wayne's expressed opinions be a little too early in overlooking the likely future impact that this rail trail will have on Heathcote?

With the O'Keefe Rail Trail only officially opened on December 21, 2015, the tourism marketing and user participation of this trail are all still developing.

General cycling and trail use by individuals and groups is rising at an exponential rate in Australia and worldwide, with Heathcote now having the chance to be part of all that. Events, like the 2016 Heathcote Community Games using the O'Keefe Rail Trail between February 20-28, do bring people and money to local towns.

The inaugural O'Keefe Rail Trail Marathon, set for May 1, has the potential to become an annual major attraction for Heathcote.

Such events need quality facilities plus positive community support, if they are to become successful.

Cycle tourism is shown to have strong economic benefits, especially for smaller towns like Heathcote and Axedale.

Unsure who "talk with someone in Axedale" about "white elephants" that Wayne is referring to; yet suggest a chat with the Axedale Tavern's owners will indicate the additional business trade that the O'Keefe Rail Trail is now providing Axedale and that business.

Axedale has shown itself to be a positive progressive community, one that has embraced the new rail trail and then has added valuable new attractions to it.

The Lions Club of Heathcote, whose members have been investing in the Heathcote community over many decades, has recognised the potential benefits that this rail trail will do for Heathcote.

This club understands that as well as caring for its community, it is tourism that has an important economic part to play for Heathcote's future.

The Lions Club has invested in building an impressive shelter on the rail trail at Herriot St, as a focal point for trail visitors and locals.

The Club also sees the benefits of improving their community's health and well being, by encouraging local people to use this local trail.

The Heathcote walking group regularly use sections of the new trail, which in its self is a positive outcome.

The continual improvement of public assets is important as Wayne highlights, while creating key attractions to add economic benefits for business and the community needs to be one of the high priorities.

The Council's expenditure for this trail's upgrade and extension was spread over five budget years, while the whole project attracted about 60 percent external funding from the Victorian Government.

Concern has been highlighted by some local Heathcote residents, indicating that there is now a lack of bike racks along High St at certain times.

Could the majority of those bikes, placed in front of local shops, cafes and wine venues by their riders, have come to Heathcote as a result of the new O'Keefe Rail Trail?

Garry Long

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