

Fresh support for the rail trail

A RAIL trail between Heathcote and Wallan may be decades in the making but the Mitchell Shire Council pushed it along this week by voting to support the \$18 million project.

Councillors voted seven to one to proceed with work that will include creating a working group reporting half-yearly to the council and addressing the issues that worry the landowners who have opposed the trail.

Mitchell Shire mayor Rhonda Sanderson said the project was visionary but it was likely to take a long time to complete.

She said funding would have to come from sources other than the

council. The feasibility study for the trail, on the back of which councillors voted this week to proceed, included the proposed route of the trail, the cost by stage and the project's commercial benefits.

The council endorsed the route which extends the O'Keefe Rail Trail from Heathcote 78 kilometres south to Wallan.

The trail would provide a cycling link from Bendigo to inner Melbourne through the Merri Creek trail.

But the project doesn't yet have unanimous support.

Some landowners are concerned about the trail traversing their property, and others failed to respond to the

feasibility study consultants when they were asked.

Cr Sanderson said there were absentee landowners in her northern ward who accounted for the lack of response.

On Monday night, Mitchell Shire councillors agreed to investigate the potential for funding the project, and how to go about securing land for the trail.

Cr Sanderson said the example of the O'Keefe trail had shown that although some stakeholders "were scared about the project at the start", there was no challenges that could not be resolved.

"It is not going to happen overnight," she said, adding that development was likely to occur in stages.



GROWTH AREA: The trail looks set for a longer route.