

## O'Keefe Rail Trail Plan



2024

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## Contents

1.0 Purpose of the Plan.....	1
2.0 Overview of the trail .....	3
3.0 Vision and proposed outcomes .....	8
4.0 Governance and management .....	11
5.0 Growing participation .....	12
Activation of the trail .....	12
Supporting business growth .....	12
Promoting the trail.....	12
6.0 Level of infrastructure development on the O’Keefe Rail Trail .....	15
7.0 Maintenance / Service Standards .....	19
8.0 Risk management.....	23
9.0 Signage .....	25
10.0 Prioritised projects .....	29



We acknowledge both the Dja Dja Wurrung people and the Taungaurung people as the Traditional Owners of the land. We recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture and pay our respects to Elders past, present and future. We look after this land while recognising the ground we’re walking or riding upon.

## 1.0 Purpose of the Plan

The purpose of this plan is to develop a sustainable regional trail plan to guide the ongoing development and management of the O’Keefe Rail Trail and to promote increased usage by local residents and visitors to the region. To ensure that the Rail Trail can achieve its full potential as a recreational and tourist trail and at the same time be sustainable, this plan outlines some key actions to improve the way the rail trail is governed, managed, maintained, promoted, funded, activated and evaluated. The drive for this plan was identified an action of the City’s *Walk, Cycle Greater Bendigo* strategy.

This plan has 10 key focus areas and is structured in the following way:



To ensure that relevant issues and opportunities were identified and so that a sustainable management plan could be developed, engagement was undertaken with several key stakeholders and the broader community.

Engagement included:

- 7 written submissions from individual community members or groups
- 290 completed community surveys
- 4 surveys from tourism operators located near the rail trail
- 22 participants involved in key stakeholder meetings (FBKRT; City of Greater Bendigo staff; Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA); Parks Victoria; Sport and Recreation Victoria; and Coliban Water).

Some of the key areas identified included:

- Positive aspects of the rail trail, e.g. safe off-road cycling and walking experience away from cars; bush environment; relatively flat surface; and opportunities for short loops
- Suggested infrastructure upgrades, e.g. toilets and drinking water
- Mapping and signage
- Promotion, marketing and development of packages / experiences
- Potential safety issues, e.g. Bobs Street and McIvor Road crossings
- Potential realignments and extensions to the trail
- Usage data
- Potential governance, management and maintenance improvements.

These issues and opportunities have been considered and formulated into the directions and actions contained within this Management Plan.

In addition to community engagement, the results of previous evaluation reports, surveys and plans (e.g. information about road crossings and lack of signage in specific areas) were also considered and helped to formulate key action areas.

A background report has been prepared which incorporates the evidence base behind this plan, i.e. community engagement analysis and a literature review.



## 2.0 Overview of the trail

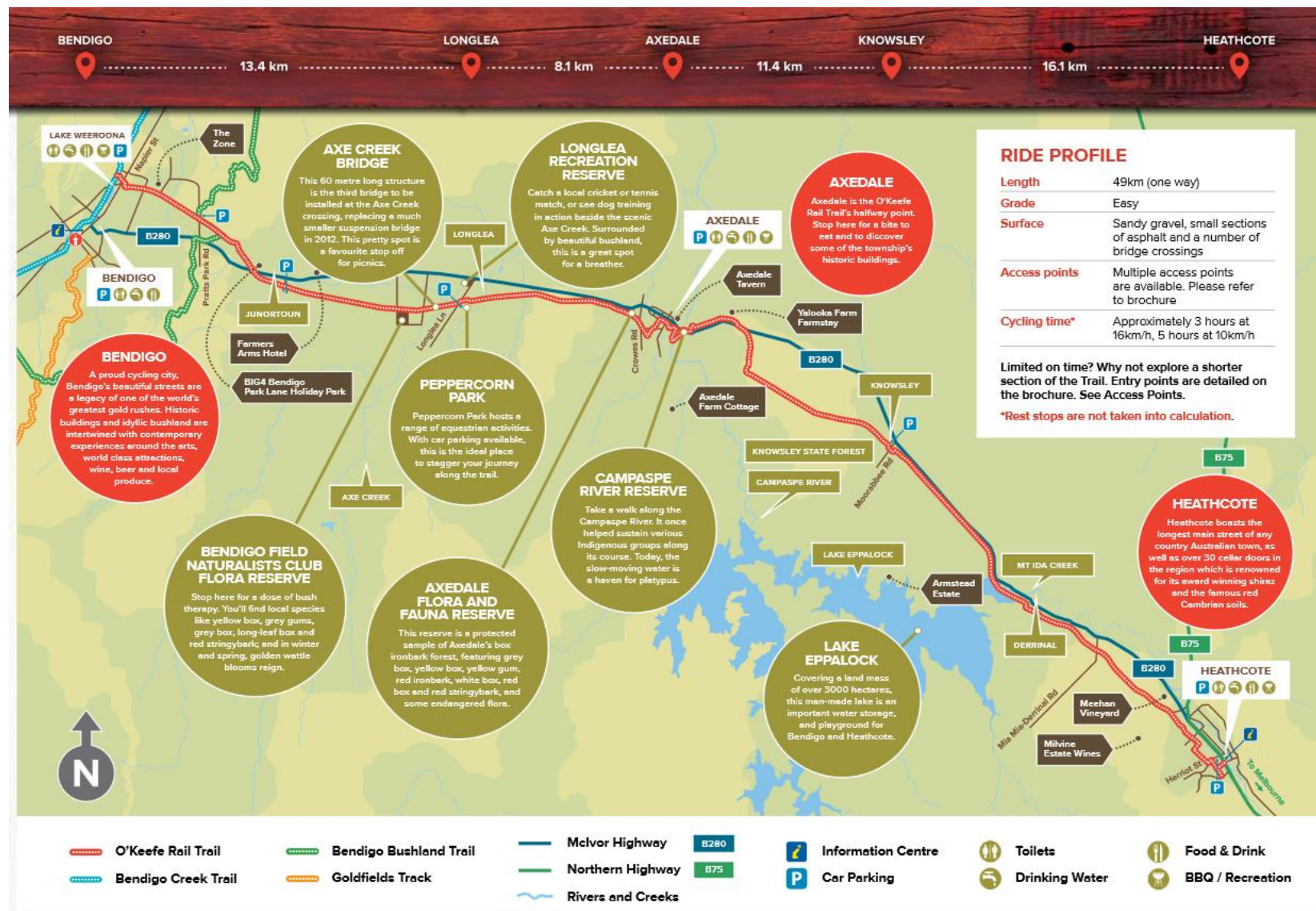
The O’Keefe Rail Trail is one of the City of Greater Bendigo’s primary nature-based attractions for both local residents and visitors to the region. The 49km long rail trail is located along the decommissioned rail corridor between Bendigo and Heathcote, passing through Axedale.

Although the trail’s surface is mostly sandy gravel, there are small sections of asphalt. The rail trail is used by a wide variety of local residents and visitors for walking, cycling, trail running and horse riding in some sections. Key attractions along the rail trail include Bendigo, Axedale, the Campaspe River, Lake Eppalock, Heathcote, replica railway stations, an original railway wagon and peaceful bush and farm vistas.



In addition to the predominantly sandy gravel trail itself, there is a variety of infrastructure along the 49km linear O’Keefe Rail Trail, including:

- 11 interpretive signs and numerous directional signs
- 3 bike repair stations (Wilkie Road in Junortoun, Axedale Hall Reserve and Heathcote)
- 4 water refill stations (Junortoun, Axedale Hall Reserve, Heathcote Dog Park – next to the trail head and Heathcote Visitor Information Centre)
- 3 toilet blocks (Lake Weeroona, Axedale Hall Reserve and Heathcote Visitor Information Centre, with additional toilet facilities being constructed at Longlea Lane)
- Picnic tables and seats (Lake Weeroona, Axe Creek, Axedale, Lake Eppalock and Heathcote)
- 2 shelters – one in Heathcote and one in Axedale (with a 3<sup>rd</sup> being constructed at Longlea Lane)
- Barbeques (Lake Weeroona, Axedale and Heathcote)
- Bridges
- 8 replica railway stations and platform sites
- 27 replica concrete railway mileposts
- Railway wagon at Axedale Station.





The original railway line on which the O’Keefe Rail Trail is constructed, was developed by Andrew O’Keefe in 1887 using funds from the Victorian Railways and opened in October 1888. The line featured 13 stations and platforms (not all operational over the life of the line) and 50 bridges. During the time in which it was operational, the railway line hauled timber for gold mining in Bendigo, firewood and charcoal for fuel, railway sleepers, quarried rock, clay, grain, produce and livestock. Due to the proposed construction of Lake Eppalock across a section of the railway line, along with a decline in service demand and maintenance neglect, the line was permanently closed in December 1958.

A 19km stretch of the O’Keefe Rail Trail was initially constructed between Bendigo and Axedale in the early 1990’s over a number of years and was officially opened in 1993. In 2015, the trail was extended an additional 30km to Heathcote. At a regional trail level, the O’Keefe Rail Trail connects with the 65km trail that circles Bendigo, the Bushland Trail, and indirectly links with the 210km long Goldfields Track that extends south of Ballarat via Castlemaine and Daylesford. There are also plans to potentially develop a link from Heathcote to Rushworth in the east and Kilmore and Wallan in the south.

Part of the O’Keefe Rail Trail around Knowsley has been constructed on private farming land. There is a legally binding licence agreement with three landowners. Should these landowners choose to sell their property in the future, the City of Greater Bendigo will have the first right of refusal.

A variety of events are held on the O’Keefe Rail Trail each year. These events and programs include:

- O’Keefe Challenge (comprising of full and half marathon running race, 10km fun run, 5km walk / run, relay running race, kids’ race and kids’ dash – run by the community)
- Light the Trail night ride from Axedale to Heathcote (26km)
- Ride for Dad (last held in 2014)
- Spring in the Bush (last held in 2013)
- National Tree Day events
- Friends of the Bendigo-Kilmore Rail Trail (FBKRT) member activities
- Scout Jamboree 2022 (will run events on the rail trail)
- Catholic Pilgrimage from Heathcote to Bendigo (in the planning stage).

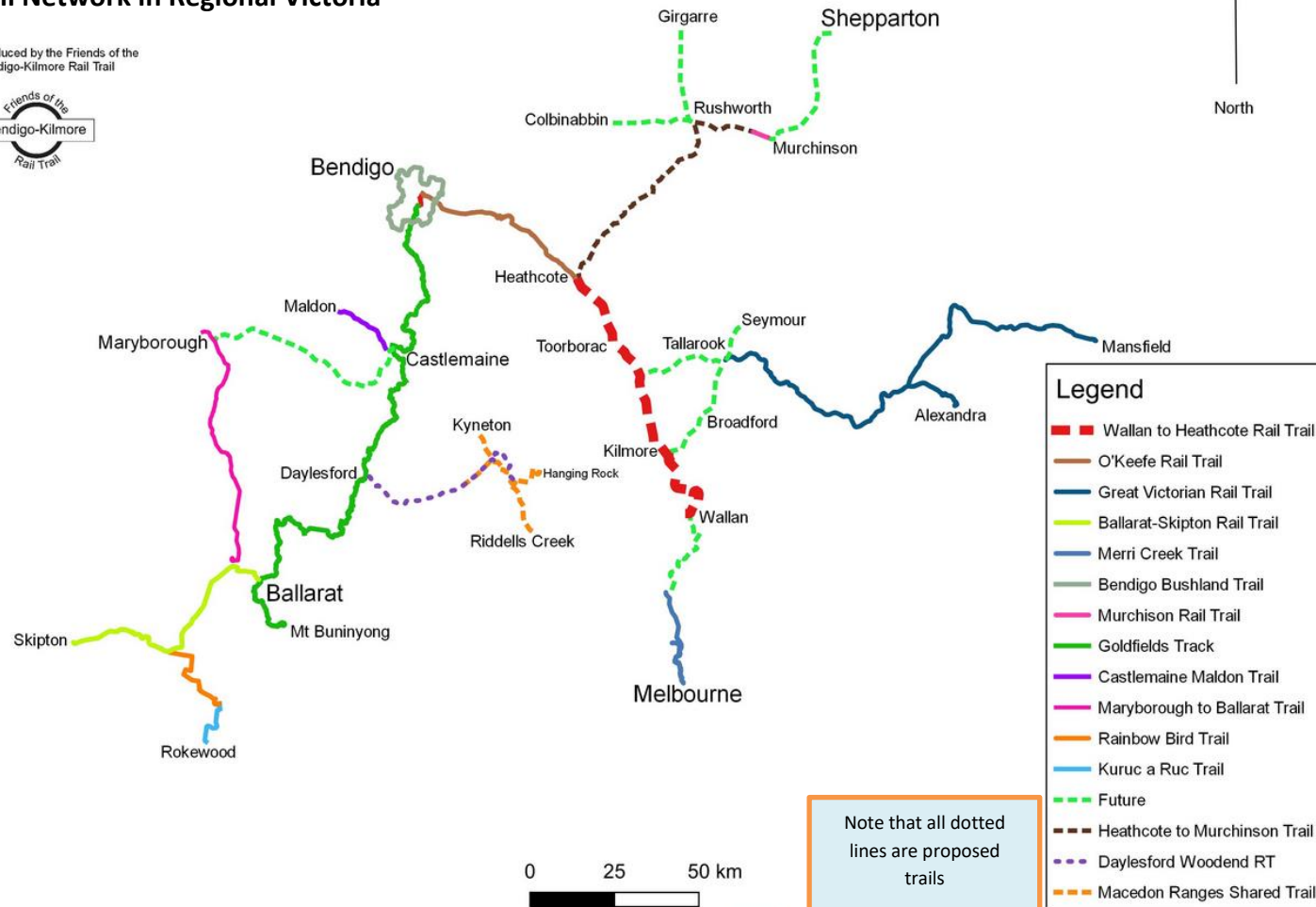
An economic impact study that was conducted in 2016 determined that the average domestic overnight expenditure by users of the O’Keefe Rail Trail was \$134 per person and was \$123 for domestic day visitors. The study stated that the overall annual benefit to the region in 2016 was \$669,000.

The City has made a significant financial investment into the O’Keefe Rail Trail over the past 10 years, supported by a significant amount of volunteer support from the Friends of the Bendigo Kilmore Rail Trail (FBKRT). Ideally the City and FBKRT would like to see usage of the trail by local residents and visitors to the region continue to increase delivering a range of health, social, economic and environmental benefits, and so that the capital and volunteer investment thus far can be further capitalised on.



## Existing and Proposed Off-Road Trail Network in Regional Victoria

Produced by the Friends of the Bendigo-Kilmore Rail Trail



Within municipal boundaries, the O'Keefe Rail Trail connects to a variety of local recreational and commuting paths such as the Bendigo Creek Trail via its entry point near Lake Weeroona, as well as Bendigo Bushland Trail, Grassy Flat Creek Trail and urban trails within Heathcote. It is indirectly linked to the Long Gully Trail, Back Creek Trail, Goldfields Track, Junortoun-Strathfieldsaye Trail / Sheepwash Creek Trail and Strathdale-Junortoun Trail.

Various cycle trails are planned in Heathcote emanating from the Visitor Information Centre - the O'Keefe Rail Trail's most easterly entry point. From a long-term perspective, with regards the extension from Heathcote to Wallan, the majority of the trail extension sits within Mitchell Shire who will be the appropriate lead for development. Mitchell Shire have previously acknowledged that there are further challenges to work through within their municipality.

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### 3.0 Vision and proposed outcomes

The goals, proposed outcomes and action areas of Council's Council Plan (Mir Wimbul) and Walk, Cycle Greater Bendigo have been incorporated into the vision and planning principles for the O'Keefe Rail Trail.

The vision for the O'Keefe Rail Trail is:

**The O'Keefe Rail Trail is the first choice for local residents and visitors to actively explore the unique features and natural environment of the Greater Bendigo region.**

Proposed outcomes to guide future works and initiatives related to the O'Keefe Rail Trail are as follows:

Outcomes	What this means
Lead and govern for all	<p>The City of Greater Bendigo will take a strong leadership role with the O'Keefe Rail Trail and will ensure that appropriate policies and strategies are in plan to guide the management and operation of the trail and that a sufficient budget and human resources are available to undertake ongoing management and renewal responsibilities.</p> <p>Wherever possible, works and initiatives will be undertaken in partnership with communities, community-based organisations or the private sector to encourage community involvement and participation and to promote the utilisation of shared resources.</p> <p>Any works undertaken or initiatives implemented will ensure that relevant safety standards are met and that a detailed risk management assessment is conducted.</p> <p>A strong evidence base / demonstrated need must be identified prior to undertaking initiatives.</p>
Healthy, liveable spaces and places	<p>Any works or initiatives should be designed to provide positive health and wellbeing benefits for all trail users. These initiatives should also be designed to increase usage of the O'Keefe Rail Trail by local residents and visitors of all ages, genders, cultural backgrounds, socio-economic status and abilities.</p>
Strong, inclusive and sustainable economy	<p>Any works or initiatives should deliver positive economic benefits to the Greater Bendigo community and businesses along the trail or businesses who support the trail.</p> <p>Works or initiatives along the trail will aim to link towns to one another and to distribute revenue across the municipality.</p>
Aboriginal reconciliation	<p>Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung culture should be celebrated. There is potential to investigate opportunities for Aboriginal place naming along the trail.</p>



Outcomes	What this means
A climate-resilient built and natural environment	<p>Any works or initiatives undertaken must be designed to be as sustainable as possible. This may mean using locally sourced materials or recycled materials in construction and avoiding damage to surrounding flora and fauna and Aboriginal cultural heritage sites. It also means using quality materials with a long lifespan to help reduce environmental impacts caused from unnecessary manufacturing and disposal of materials.</p>
A vibrant, creative community	<p>The Rail Trail should embrace the UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy status and link to food and beverage experiences.</p> <p>Unique local features, e.g. bushland / water views or aesthetically attractive bridges should be incorporated into the trail to provide a point of difference with other rail trails around the state.</p> <p>Any works or initiatives need to be relevant to the local region. Historical railway infrastructure placed along the trail should ideally reflect the type of infrastructure that was used along the former rail line.</p>
A safe, welcoming and fair community	<p>The trail and infrastructure along it need to be designed for use by all ages and abilities to enable trail users to choose the length of trail that they traverse, i.e. the whole section or shorter sections. Universal Design Principles and Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliance needs to be factored into all works.</p> <p>The trail, its infrastructure and the supporting spaces along it need to be designed according to Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles to maximise safety and to ensure good passive surveillance.</p> <p>A number of different access points to the trail are available so that people can join the trail at key locations or close to their home if possible.</p> <p>Trail etiquette needs to be considered on signage and in promotional materials to encourage trail users to respect one another. Warning signs for motorists also need to be provided near key crossings to warn motorists to look out for trail users.</p>



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## 4.0 Governance and management

### **City of Greater Bendigo**

The land on which the O’Keefe Rail Trail is located is owned partially by the City of Greater Bendigo, partially by three private landowners and partially by the Crown. The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) has issued a licence to the City to enable it to utilise Crown Land areas around Heathcote and has appointed the City as the Committee of Management for reserved Crown Land from Junortoun to Napier Street. Similarly, the City has been granted a licence by the three private landowners to utilise a section of their land for the Rail Trail. Parks Victoria has no responsibility for the Rail Trail, but does play a role in some of the trails that link to the O’Keefe Rail Trail, e.g. Bendigo Bushland Trail and the Goldfields Track.

The City of Greater Bendigo is therefore responsible for the day-to day-management, maintenance, upgrade and marketing of the trail. DEECA doesn’t play an active role in the Rail Trail unless there is a requirement under the relevant Act to do so.

### **Friends of the Bendigo Kilmore Rail Trail**

The Friends of the Bendigo Kilmore Rail Trail (FBKRT) is an incorporated membership-based organisation operated by volunteers from a range of professional and trade backgrounds. It has an informal advisory role to the City of Greater Bendigo and undertakes ‘hands on’ works and advocacy to improve the quality of the trail experience. It regularly seeks grants and sources materials to provide facilities and improve existing infrastructure and experiences along the trail. FBKRT currently has a membership of over 70, all of whom pay an annual fee.

The Friends group has a licence to manage the wagon on the trail near Axedale, but no formal lease, licence or management agreement associated with any other aspect of the Rail Trail.

### **Memorandum of Understanding**

To formalise the important relationship and to provide greater clarity of the roles and responsibilities of the City of Greater Bendigo and the Friends of the Bendigo to Kilmore Rail Trail, it is recommended that a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is developed and signed by both parties.

An MoU specifically states how each party will work with one another and describes the roles and responsibilities and contributions of each organisation in terms of the management, maintenance, marketing and further development of the Rail Trail.



## 5.0 Growing participation

In order to increase participation by local residents and visitors on the O’Keefe Rail Trail, a number of strategies should be undertaken.

### Activation of the trail

Activation of the trail essentially refers to introducing measures that will help make the experience more enjoyable or user friendly. Ways to activate the trail include:

- **Infrastructure** – developing the desired level of infrastructure that would attract more people to use the trail, e.g. shaded rest stops, picnic tables, wayfinding signage, water bubblers and toilets.
- **Events** – providing events along the trail that appeal to various markets, including family rides, people wanting a fitness challenge, fund raising initiatives, and environmental initiatives.
- **Story telling** – through interpretive signage, public art and railway infrastructure, tell the story of the O’Keefe Rail Trail’s history and provide information about Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung culture, post-European settlement history, flora, and fauna.
- **Loops** – creating rides of different lengths or loops with clear entry and exit points so that people don’t feel that they need to ride or walk the entire length of the rail trail, e.g. investigate a loop around the Derrinal waterfront precinct.
- **Public transport linkages** – promoting the ‘Bikes-on-Buses’ initiative so that trail users know that it’s possible to ride one way along the Rail Trail and place their bike on public transport to return (noting that each bus can only carry two bikes at a time).

### Supporting business growth

The most successful rail trails in other locations both in Australia and internationally are well supported by businesses along the length of the trail. Businesses may include accommodation, cafes, restaurants, pubs, wineries, breweries, farm gate sales / pick your own fruit, shuttle services, bicycle hire, tour guiding services, on-trail picnic hamper delivery and Cellar Door ‘wine to home’ purchase delivery service.

To ensure that the O’Keefe Rail Trail continues to grow and attract more local residents and visitors to the area, there needs to be a focus on supporting existing businesses to more effectively meet the needs of cyclists / pedestrians and to promote their goods and services to trail users. There also needs to be an environment that supports the growth of new businesses along the trail. To some extent business growth will be dictated by the private sector, however there is also a role for the City of Greater Bendigo’s, Economic Development and Tourism and Major Events Units to play in this space.

### Promoting the trail

To increase awareness of the O’Keefe Rail Trail, it is important that it is promoted effectively. A priority for the City of Greater Bendigo’s Tourism and Major Events Unit is to develop a marketing plan and to set aside an annual budget to undertake promotional activities. This marketing plan should align with the State Visitor Economy Master Plan, specifically the Nature Based strategic direction, and incorporate information about the target market and initiatives that are likely to

increase awareness of the trail with the target group and translate to increased usage of the trail. Some of the potential tools that may be incorporated into the marketing plan include:

- **Website** – investigate whether a dedicated O’Keefe Rail Trail website is needed/sustainable and if yes, apply for budget/grants to support this. Linked to the City of Greater Bendigo’s websites and other relevant websites such as the FBKRT and Rail Trails Australia
- **Maps and brochures** - maps and brochures of the rail trail that link to online resources via QR code that provide information about distances, elevations, supporting infrastructure (such as locations of car parks, toilets, water bubblers, picnic tables, etc) and businesses along the trail. These maps and brochures should be available in the Bendigo and Heathcote Visitor Information Centres and local bike shops and in motel / hotel compendiums as well as other key destinations including Visitor Information Centres in other cities. These maps and brochures also need to be made available online on the O’Keefe Rail Trail website, on relevant apps and the City of Greater Bendigo’s websites.
- **Itineraries** – suggested routes that provide people with ideas about different cycling and walking options, e.g. Bendigo to Heathcote with a stop at Axedale Pub and then accommodation and dinner in Heathcote or a short loop from Lake Weeroona out to Junortoun and back. These itineraries should also include multi-day options that link local experiences and the City’s listing as a UNESCO City of Gastronomy, e.g. one day on the O’Keefe Rail Trail with wine sampling in Heathcote, another day on the Bushland Trail experiencing breweries and gastropubs in Bendigo, and another day at the Mountain Bike Park in Harcourt (La Larr Ba Gauwa) sampling apple cider.
- **Signage** – directional signs on roads pointing to trail heads; trail head signs in central locations in Bendigo, Axedale and Heathcote; billboards in other towns
- **Traditional / electronic media** – Look for opportunities to highlight the rail trail, including editorial articles, blogs, social posts, advertorials, advertisements, cycling, walking and outdoor magazines and TV shows (eg. Trail Towns). These may be prepared by City of Greater Bendigo’s Tourism and Major Events Unit or may be prepared by journalists or influencers.
- **Social media** – use a variety of social media tools to promote the O’Keefe Rail Trail, (eg. Facebook, Youtube, Instagram, Snapchat and Tik Tok). This will necessitate the need for high quality images and videos.

Three marketing campaigns should be held annually, focussing on the three seasons in which the O’Keefe Rail Trail is at its best:

- Autumn – pleasant weather, Autumn leaves
- Winter – low rainfall, open fires, red wine
- Spring – pleasant weather and wildflowers.

The marketing campaign needs to be focussed on attracting visitors from intra-state and interstate. It also needs to focus on the trail’s points of difference from other trails – adventure, forest, lake, gastronomy, variety of other trails / experiences to link to.

Ideally both the Bendigo Tourism and Major Events Unit and Heathcote Tourism bodies will promote the trail in collaboration.

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## 6.0 Level of infrastructure development on the O’Keefe Rail Trail

In 2019, the Greater Bendigo Public Space Plan was adopted by Council. Part of this plan identifies the appropriate level of development for various areas of open space, including trails, according to its public space hierarchy, i.e. neighbourhood, suburb / township, municipal, regional or state / national. The O’Keefe Rail Trail is considered a regional key space trail, hence according to the City of Greater Bendigo’s Public Space Plan, such a facility should generally feature infrastructure relevant to its hierarchy.

The following table has been adapted to incorporate specific considerations for the Rail Trail. It should be used as a guide to inform the level of development of the Rail Trail into the future.

Feature	Details	Rail Trail Considerations
<b>ACCESS</b>		
Car parking (on-site)	Integrated and minimal impact on use of the space	Car parking will only be provided at trail heads and well utilised entry / exit points. Wherever possible, existing parking will be used as opposed to constructing new parking, e.g. parking around Lake Weeroona.
Car parking (off-site)	Available on-street or elsewhere within short walking distance	The use of existing off-site car parking will be encouraged.
Design to prevent illegal vehicle access	Bollards, railings, fences, landscape features, grading, etc	Bollards will be used to prevent illegal vehicle access to the Rail Trail.
Emergency or maintenance vehicle access	Should be determined in consultation with relevant emergency services	Emergency or maintenance vehicle access will be provided. Consideration will also be given to installing emergency marker signage to assist with location of injured cyclists / walkers.
Internal roads (optional)	Should generally be avoided excepting emergency/ maintenance access needs. Road should be suitably integrated and have minimal impact on use of the space	Internal roads will be avoided excepting emergency/ maintenance access needs. Road will be suitably integrated and have minimal impact on use of the space
Public transport proximity	A rail station or bus stop within short walking distance	Links are proposed between Bendigo Railway Station and Ewing Park Trailhead, Back Creek and Bendigo Creek Trails.
Universal access car parking (on-site or on-street)	Car parking compliant with relevant Australian Standards and requirements of the National Construction Code	Universal access car parking (on-site or on-street) should be provided at trail heads in Bendigo, Axedale and Heathcote.
Universal access design	Site design compliant with relevant Australian Standards and requirements of the National Construction Code	Infrastructure along the trail should be designed according to Universal Access designs and other

Feature	Details	Rail Trail Considerations
		relevant standards, codes and regulations.
<b>FACILITIES AND FIXTURES</b>		
Barbecues		Barbeques will only be available at trail heads in Bendigo, Axedale and Heathcote.
Bicycle racks / storage		Bicycle racks will be available at or near trail heads in Bendigo, Axedale and Heathcote, along with the shelter at Longlea Lane and proposed shelter between Axedale and Heathcote.
Bins – recyclables		Recyclable bins will be available at trail heads in Bendigo, Axedale and Heathcote.
Bins – waste		Waste bins will be available at trail heads in Bendigo, Axedale and Heathcote.
Drinking water bubblers	Where a reliable and cost-efficient water supply is / can be available	Water bubblers will be available at trail heads in Bendigo, Axedale and Heathcote. Ideally a water bubble will be made available between Axedale and Heathcote (at Knowsley), however drinking water locations are dependent upon access to treated water and sufficient funds in the maintenance budget to maintain these features. There is no potable water at Knowsley. Five water bubblers (counting one around the Knowsley area if possible) will enable a distance of approximately 10km between each facility or the equivalent of a 30-45 minute bike ride or a 1.5-2 hour walk (note that promotional materials / signs also need to state that people need to take their own water with them).
Pedestrian-scale lighting	Additional to lighting provided by street or building lighting	No lighting will be provided on the Rail Trail.
Picnic tables		Picnic tables will be provided at trail heads in Bendigo, Axedale and Heathcote and spaced at intervals along the Rail Trail (approximately a 15-minute ride apart or near a specific attraction)
Seating		Seating will be provided at trail heads in Bendigo, Axedale and

Feature	Details	Rail Trail Considerations
		Heathcote and spaced at intervals along the Rail Trail (approximately a 15-minute ride apart or near a specific attraction)
Shade structures / shelters	Covering activity areas and seating areas where structures are more appropriate than trees for shade	Shade structures will be provided at trail heads in Bendigo, Axedale and Heathcote, with one located between Bendigo and Axedale (currently being constructed at Longlea Lane) and another located between Axedale and Heathcote.
Toilets		Toilets will be provided at Lake Weeroona in Bendigo, Axedale Hall Reserve and Heathcote Visitor Information Centre. An additional toilet will be made available between Bendigo and Axedale (at Longlea Lane) and ideally between Axedale and Heathcote at Knowsley, however there is no potable water at Knowsley. Five toilets (counting a potential one around the Knowsley area) will enable a distance of approximately 10km between each facility or the equivalent of a 30-45-minute bike ride or a 1.5-2 hour walk.
<b>FEATURES</b>		
Interpretive signs		Interpretive signage should be placed at locations where such information will appeal to a significant number of trail users. However, it is important not to create signage clutter. Some interpretive information will be better provided through websites. Signs also need to align with design and locational principles and processes included in the City's Place Interpretation and Naming Policy. Requests may need to go through the City's Place Naming Committee to ensure consistency.
Location / place sign		Location/place signs should be provided at each town entrance along the trail. It is important not to create signage clutter. Signs also need to align with design and locational principles and processes



Feature	Details	Rail Trail Considerations
		included in the City's Place Interpretation and Naming Policy.
Public artwork		A limited amount of public artwork will feature at key locations along the Rail Trail, e.g. at the underpass at Campaspe River Reserve in Axedale and in the format of a railway carriage near Axedale. It is important not to over-develop the trail as its prime purpose is physical activity.
Water features		Other than natural water features, e.g. Lake Eppalock, the Campaspe River and Lake Weeroona, there will be no water features along the Rail Trail.
Water sensitive urban design (optional)		Best practice water sensitive urban design will be considered at the concept design stage of individual projects impacting the Rail Trail.
<b>LANDSCAPING</b>		
Irrigation		There will be no irrigation on the Rail Trail.
Food-producing plantings		There will be no food-producing plantings on the Rail Trail.
Ornamental garden beds		There will be no ornamental garden beds on the Rail Trail.
Shade trees		Explore opportunities for increased plantings along sections of the Rail Trail where appropriate.
Wild / low-maintenance area		Land next to the Rail Trail will be wild / low maintenance. The surrounding Rail Trail corridor should be naturalised as much as possible, including native grasslands.

## 7.0 Maintenance / Service Standards

Proactive maintenance of the O’Keefe Rail Trail is primarily guided by the City’s Road Management Plan (2022).

Council’s Asset Management System (AMS) records inspection dates, defects, works programmed and completion dates. Location information is recorded in Councils Geographic Information System (GIS). Council uses a mobile computing solution to accurately record the inspection date/time of each asset, and the spatial location of any defects.

Reactive maintenance is logged into the City’s Pathways system.

The FBKRT undertake minor maintenance tasks such as repainting signage, removing litter and removing small fallen branches. They currently report larger maintenance issues to the City either via formal feedback mechanisms via customer services or directly to City staff.

The following service standards have been developed to guide the maintenance of regional trails such as the O’Keefe Rail Trail. An annual budget bid is available to undertake the maintenance levels required.

Infrastructure	Inspection regime	Routine maintenance	Structural issues / defects / safety issues
<b>Trail surface</b>	Inspected every 12 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Condition assessments will identify sections of trail surface that need to be upgraded within confines of existing budget. It is expected that a section of the trail surface will be upgraded annually (if required).</li> <li>Where the trail is shared with vehicles in certain sections between Axedale and Heathcote, additional maintenance may be required.</li> <li>Additional inspections may also be required after heavy rain events.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Degraded sections of the rail trail, e.g. potholes greater than 300mm in diameter and greater than 25mm in depth will be repaired within 1 month of reporting.</li> </ul>
<b>Bridges</b>	Inspected annually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A visual inspection will be undertaken annually.</li> <li>The structural integrity and condition of bridges will be inspected every 2 years.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where the structure of a bridge is compromised, the bridge will be closed. If trail users can be diverted around the bridge and still maintain usage of the trail, works will be carried out within 3 months of reporting. If trail users cannot use the trail as a result of a bridge that has a compromised structure, the bridge will be repaired within 1 week if possible.</li> </ul>

Infrastructure	Inspection regime	Routine maintenance	Structural issues / defects / safety issues
<b>Vegetation</b>	Inspected every 6 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overgrown vegetation such as long grass or weeds (e.g. bindis) on or next to the trail, or tree branches hanging over the trail, will be removed as per the annual works plan.</li> <li>Some areas that are particularly prone to long grass and weeds may need to be included in the annual works plan each year, whilst other areas may require maintenance less frequently.</li> <li>Native grasslands are being established as part of long-term sustainable management practices and these grasses need to drop seed most years prior to mowing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Potential safety issues such as large branches across the Rail Trail will be responded to within 2 business days of notification.</li> <li>Long grass that is reported as a high fire risk will be risk assessed within 7 business days of notification and responded to accordingly.</li> </ul>
<b>Bollards, fences, gates, cattle grids, culverts and drains</b>	Inspected every 2 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bollards, fences, gates, cattle grids, culverts and drains will be inspected every 2 years.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where bollards, fences or gates have fallen down, or where cattle grids have broken and there is a risk that trail users and stock could be injured, repairs will be carried out within 1 week of notification. Suitable warning signage will be installed until works are carried out.</li> <li>Where culverts and drains have been damaged, repairs will be carried out within 20 working days.</li> </ul>
<b>Signage</b>	Inspected every 2 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inspect signs to ensure that they are structurally sound. Undertake repairs and replace as necessary.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Missing signs need to be replaced according to their level of importance in wayfinding and safety. Those that are most critical (i.e. they could result in someone getting lost or injuring themselves by riding onto a</li> </ul>

Infrastructure	Inspection regime	Routine maintenance	Structural issues / defects / safety issues
			road) should be replaced within 1 month of notification wherever and suitable warning signage will be erected immediately until the signage can be replaced.
<b>Toilets</b>	Inspect daily	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Toilets need to be inspected and cleaned daily to ensure that a suitable level of supplies are available, bins are emptied and cleanliness is maintained.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Damaged, unsafe or deteriorated toilets need to be isolated immediately and repairs undertaken within 10 working days. Suitable signage needs to be provided to inform trail users that the toilets are closed. This information should also be provided on websites and social media sites associated with the trail.</li> </ul>
<b>Picnic tables / seats / shelters</b>	Inspected every 2 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The structural integrity and overall condition of picnic tables / seats / shelters need to be inspected every 2 years and in response to a customer request.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Damaged picnic tables / seats / shelters need to be isolated or removed immediately and repaired within 10 working days of notification.</li> </ul>
<b>Bike repair stations</b>	Inspected every 2 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bike repair stations will be inspected every 2 years and in response to a customer request.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A damaged bike repair station needs to be repaired within 10 working days of notification if possible. If not possible, suitable signage needs to be provided to inform trail users that the bike repair station is damaged. This information should also be provided on websites and social media sites associated with the trail.</li> </ul>
<b>Water bubblers</b>	Inspected every 2 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Water bubblers will be inspected every 2 years and in response to a customer request.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A damaged water bubble needs to be repaired within 10 working days of notification Suitable signage needs to be provided to inform trail users that the water bubbler is damaged. This information should also be provided on websites and social media sites associated with the trail.</li> </ul>



Infrastructure	Inspection regime	Routine maintenance	Structural issues / defects / safety issues
<b>Historical artefacts / public art</b>	Inspected every 2 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Historical artefacts such as the railway wagon on the trail near Axedale and public art need to be inspected every 2 years to ensure that these items are structurally sound and not likely to cause injury to trail users.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where historical artefacts or public art has been damaged, it will be repaired within 3 months of reporting if possible. If the object is damaged beyond repair, it will only be replaced if sufficient funds can be obtained to replace it.</li> </ul>
<b>Car parks</b>	Inspected every 2 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Car parks next to the rail trail need to be inspected every 2 years to ensure that the entry from the road and surface is adequate for people wishing to transport their bike(s) to trail heads via car.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where there are potholes greater than 300mm in diameter and greater than 25mm in depth, repairs will be undertaken within 3 months of reporting.</li> </ul>

## 8.0 Risk management

To ensure safety of trail users and continued usage of the rail trail by local residents and visitors, it is important that a risk management plan is prepared and regularly updated and that actions are identified to mitigate hazards. The key tool to use to assess and mitigate risk is the City's Risk Management Policy. This policy has been prepared using a Risk Management Framework aligned with the International Risk Management Guidelines and Principles (ISO 31000) and specified in the "Assurance of a risk management framework", Section 3.4 of "Delivering assurance based on ISO 31000:2009 Risk Management – Principles and guidelines, HB 158-2010".

Some of the potential risks and mitigation responses associated with the O'Keefe Rail Trail are:

Potential risks	Potential mitigation responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Damaged surface or infrastructure, e.g. washed away surface; large potholes; or a bridge that has become structurally unsound</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adoption and adherence to service standards, e.g. surface maintenance schedules, inspection of infrastructure schedules, clearing long grass / weeds, etc</li> <li>Establishing a regular maintenance budget</li> <li>Budgeting for trail renewal</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hazards along the trail that could potentially cause an injury or death to a walker or cyclist, e.g. tree across the trail; loose surface; water across the trail; a bushfire in the vicinity of the trail; a snake; an assault; wildlife / livestock collisions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Responding to reported incidents immediately</li> <li>Use of signage to warn trail users of specific issues / hazards</li> <li>Posting of information online to warn trail users of specific issues / hazards</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A trail user injured or killed at one of the road crossings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use of signage to warn trail users of specific issues / hazards</li> <li>Improving safety measures at locations which are deemed to be hazardous, e.g. road crossings and sections of the trail shared with vehicles</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conflicts of use by trail users, e.g. dogs off leashes, training cyclists using the trail at high speed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Education and signage around appropriate uses of the trail and how to share the trail</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trail users suffering from heat exhaustion and dehydration on hot days</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Installation of water bubblers and shaded rest stops</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Illegal use of the trail by motorcycle riders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use of signage to inform people of prohibited uses.</li> </ul>

Potential risks	Potential mitigation responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High speed vehicles using shared sections of the trail injuring or frightening trail users</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitoring of trail usage through visits.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trail users getting lost in the sections of the trail shared with vehicles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Providing effective wayfinding signage</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Theft or vandalism to signs, infrastructure or railway items</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitoring of trail usage through visits and cameras.</li> <li>Insuring the trail against vandalism</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Insufficient Council funds available to carry out maintenance or upgrades</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishing a regular maintenance budget</li> <li>Budgeting for trail renewal</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cessation of Friends of the Bendigo Kilmore Rail Trail (resulting in a lack of activation of the rail trail)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regularly communicating with the FBKRT and landowners along the trail</li> <li>Introducing an MOU with the FBKRT</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A trail volunteer being injured while undertaking works on the trail</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensuring FBKRT volunteers adhere to relevant safety standards, e.g. OH&amp;S</li> <li>Insuring the trail</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Landowners who have granted a licence to the City to enable trail users to ride / walk on part of their land choosing not renewing the licence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regular communications with all key stakeholders in order to identify risks, issues or opportunities</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reputational damage of poor reviews by local residents of visitors to the area on online cycling / tourist websites or social media sites.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Commit to quality services and experience</li> <li>Ensure advertising of trail is reflective of its attributes and limitations</li> <li>Provide training to businesses along the Rail Trail about how to ensure businesses are bike / walking friendly and are welcoming to Rail Trail users</li> <li>Monitor and manage images on social media effectively.</li> <li>Monitor and respond to user reviews online effectively</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inappropriate infrastructure is gifted to the trail</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Refuse acceptance based on appropriate level of infrastructure document, signage policies, etc.</li> </ul>

Key components of the City's risk management policy and processes are included in the background document.

## 9.0 Signage

There needs to be a clear plan about what is required regarding signage on the trail to ensure that the signage that is installed is legible, accurate, necessary, located in the right place, suitable sized, durable, aesthetically pleasing, reflects the branding of the trail and does not cause clutter. Research indicates that a lack of signage can cause people to get lost and adversely impact the visitor experience and that conversely, excessive signage can detract from the visitor experience<sup>1</sup>. It is therefore recommended that a signage audit of the trail is undertaken and that signage adheres to the following principles and processes, as well as the City's Place Interpretation and Naming Policy:

<b>Type of sign</b>	<b>Details</b>
<i>Trail head sign</i>	A trail head sign should be located at the beginning of the trail at Lake Weeroona, at the Axedale Hall Reserve and at the trail head in Heathcote. These signs should feature name of the trail, map, trail distance, distance to other locations, length of time to travel to key locations, surface type, information about infrastructure (toilets, water, bike repair stations), location of nearby / adjoining attractions, contact details of managing authority, skill level required, etc.
<i>Directional sign</i>	Directional signs show trail users the direction and distance to a specific location along the trail, e.g. Axedale 10km (route fingerboards) or to a nearby experience / attraction (facilities fingerboards). These should be installed as fingerboard signage 30 metres before route junctions and route turnings. <sup>2</sup> These signs should also include estimated time by walking, estimated time by cycling, and iconography for landmarks referred to on the signs for purposes of language accessibility (as per the signage along the Long Gully Trail).
<i>Reassurance markers</i>	Another form of directional signage is a reassurance or route marker. These are small signs installed at various points along a trail, preferably to an existing pole or to a new pole, which reassures users that they are still on

<sup>1</sup> Rail Trails Australia (2004) Signage Development for Rail Trails: [https://www.railtrails.org.au/images/documents/ra\\_signs\\_ver\\_1.0.1.pdf](https://www.railtrails.org.au/images/documents/ra_signs_ver_1.0.1.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Austroads Research Report AP-R492-15 Bicycle Wayfinding (pg 77) [https://austroads.com.au/publications/active-travel/ap-r492-15/media/AP-R492-15\\_Bicycle\\_Wayfinding.pdf](https://austroads.com.au/publications/active-travel/ap-r492-15/media/AP-R492-15_Bicycle_Wayfinding.pdf)

<i>Type of sign</i>	<i>Details</i>
	the trail and still travelling in the correct direction. These signs may include an arrow to indicate direction and some sort of branding to indicate that the marker relates to the trail, e.g. logo, set of colours, etc. According to Austroads, route markers for recreational routes should be placed at 5km maximum spacing in rural locations and every 1km in urban locations. This spacing can be increased to 10km on lengthy rural off-road paths where there are no intersecting roads or paths along the route. <sup>3</sup>
<i>Tourist attraction signs</i>	Brown and white tourist attraction signs (approved by VicRoads) should also be provided near trail heads in Bendigo, Axedale and Heathcote and at any other significant point of entry along the trail where car parking is available.
<i>Interpretive sign</i>	<p>Interpretive signs should be placed at key locations along the trail where there is a significant view, type of flora or fauna, geological or ecological features, water body, historic site or location of an historic event. There should be a standard format for such signs, they need to be approved prior to design and installation and it is important not to provide signage clutter along the trail.</p> <p>It might be more appropriate for some interpretive information to be included on promotional websites, social media pages, apps or QR codes.</p>
<i>Warning sign</i>	Warning signs provide information about a specific hazard to trail users, e.g. road crossing ahead or livestock ahead. These signs should be located on both sides of the road where trail users are required to cross a road, prior to each cattle grid along the trail and any other sites where a warning is required. Similar warning signs should also be provided on roads / highways to alert motorists that trail users cross the road at that particular location.

<sup>3</sup> Austroads Research Report AP-R492-15 Bicycle Wayfinding (pg 70) [https://austroads.com.au/publications/active-travel/ap-r492-15/media/AP-R492-15\\_Bicycle\\_Wayfinding.pdf](https://austroads.com.au/publications/active-travel/ap-r492-15/media/AP-R492-15_Bicycle_Wayfinding.pdf)



<b>Type of sign</b>	<b>Details</b>
<i>Regulatory sign</i>	Regulatory signs provide information about the type of uses permitted or not permitted on the rail trail, e.g. motorised trail bikes are not permitted on the trail or dogs are only permitted on leashes. These signs should be installed at trail heads and any other significant point of entry along the trail, such as intersections with roads.
<i>Behavioural sign</i>	Behavioural signs provide guidance to trail users about how to best share paths with other users, e.g. give way to horse riders or keep to the left. These should be located in areas where trail conflict is most likely to occur, i.e. areas of high use, areas where the trail and trail corridor is narrow or where there is high concentration of a particular use, e.g. horse riding.
<i>Information sign</i>	Information signage provides trail users with details that they need to be aware of when using the trail, e.g. where the track may change to a different type of surface.
<i>Emergency marker signage</i>	Signs that have details of the exact location of a trail user can be invaluable when guiding emergency services to an injured cyclist or walker. These signs should be spaced out along the trail and be located in areas where injuries are more likely to occur, e.g. road crossings.
<i>Advertising sign</i>	Advertising signs provide information to trail users about businesses along the trail, e.g. pubs, bed and breakfasts, cafes, wineries, etc. There should be a standard format for such signs, they need to be approved prior to installation (including any relevant planning permit approval) and consideration should be given to a fee for all advertising signs on the trail. Such signs will typically be installed near relevant businesses. It is important not to provide signage clutter at trail exit points.
<i>Temporary sign</i>	Temporary signs are installed to inform trail users about a temporary condition such as water over the track, slashing of adjacent land or bridge

<i>Type of sign</i>	<i>Details</i>
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	repairs for example. These should be installed only whilst the particular issue is current and removed once the issue has resolved. These signs need to be very clear and easy to read by people travelling at speed on a bicycle.
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A portion of the maintenance budget will need to be set aside for maintenance of signs due to vandalism and wear and tear, as well as the ultimate renewal of signs when they reach the end of their useful life. Careful consideration needs to be given to the type of materials used. Signs must also adhere to relevant safety standards. All signs need to be approved prior to design and installation.

## 10.0 Prioritised projects

The FBKRT established a list of trail priorities in 2019, which was presented to CoGB. This list was reviewed by FBKRT in early 2021 and 2023. Further, through the community engagement undertaken to prepare this plan, feedback was received from over 300 community members and numerous other stakeholders about their trail development priorities. The highest priorities of FBKRT, key stakeholders and the broader community have been combined to provide the following list of prioritised projects (taking into consideration available resources). Note that each of the capital works projects will be assessed in line with the City's Capital Investment Framework and that the FBKRT will have a key advocacy role in many of these projects.

### Indicative resources legend:

\$ = under \$50,000

\$\$ = \$50,000 - \$100,000

\$\$\$ = Over \$100,000

### Timeframe:

Priority projects = 1-5 years (high priority)

Aspirational project = 5+ years (medium and low priority)

Project	Details	Responsibility / Partners	Resources	Priority
<b>CAPITAL WORKS</b>				
<b>Longlea Lane Toilets</b>	Finalise installation of toilets at Longea Lane and	Active and Healthy Communities	\$\$\$	High
<b>Drinking water</b>	Install drinking water bubblers at the Heathcote Trail Head and explore opportunities to install another water bubbler between Axedale and Heathcote (around Knowsley area) pending access to water.	Active and Healthy Communities Coliban Water	\$\$	High
<b>Signage / wayfinding</b>	Undertake a signage audit of the rail trail to determine gaps and then install suitable signs as required. The review will consider branding and the full suite of signs.	Active and Healthy Communities FBKRT	\$\$-\$\$	High

Project	Details	Responsibility / Partners	Resources	Priority
		Engineering Department of Transport DEECA		
<b>Outdoor table-seat units</b>	Refurbish timber components on a number of the existing Rail Trail table-seat units	FBKRT	\$	High
<b>Shared sections</b>	Review the shared use of One Eye Forest (Heathcote) and Ingram Road (Axedale) with the intention of closing these shared roads to motor vehicles if feasible.	Engineering DEECA	\$\$\$	High
<b>Bobs Street crossing</b>	Undertake works to improve safety at the Bobs Street crossing.	Engineering Department of Transport	\$\$\$	Medium
<b>Napier Street road crossing</b>	Undertake works to improve safety at the Napier Street crossing.	Engineering Department of Transport	\$\$\$	Medium
<b>Mclvor Road road crossing</b>	Advocate to VicRoads to develop an underpass underneath Mclvor Highway to enable a safer experience for trail users.	Engineering Department of Transport	\$\$\$	Medium
<b>Knowsley Toilets</b>	Explore opportunities to install another toilet between Axedale and Heathcote (around Knowsley area) – noting that there is no potable water in Knowsley.	Active and Healthy Communities	\$\$\$	Medium
<b>Shelters / picnic facilities</b>	Install a shelter at the Lake Eppalock crossing	Engineering FBKRT	\$	Medium
<b>Linkages</b>	Develop a link between Grassy Flat Creek and Trotting Track Terrace in Junortoun through to Cousins Street in Strathdale	Engineering	\$\$-\$\$\$	Medium
<b>Linkages</b>	Improve connections between the O’Keefe Rail Trail and Bendigo Bushland Trail	Active and Healthy Communities Engineering	\$\$-\$\$\$	Medium

Project	Details	Responsibility / Partners	Resources	Priority
<b>Linkages</b>	Advocate for linkages to the following destinations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heathcote to Tooborac</li> <li>• Tooborac to Wallan</li> <li>• Heathcote to Murchison via Rushworth</li> </ul>	Parks Victoria Strategic Planning  Mitchell Shire Council  Campaspe Shire Council  Greater Shepparton City Council  DEECA  Parks Victoria Department of Transport	\$\$\$	Medium
<b>Artwork</b>	Install artwork at the Axedale underpass	Active and Healthy Communities  Axedale Primary School	\$	Medium
<b>Bridges</b>	Upgrade some bridges by installing an extra beam to ensure that they are able to carry emergency vehicles and repair vehicles, i.e. increase from 1 tonne capacity to 2 tonne capacity	Engineering	\$\$	Medium
<b>Car parking</b>	Formalise car parking areas at Knowsley and Derrinal	Engineering  Works	\$	Low
<b>OTHER</b>				
<b>Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)</b>	Adopt and sign the MOU between City of Greater Bendigo and Friends of the Bendigo Kilmore Rail Trail	Active and Healthy Communities	Staff time	High
<b>Marketing</b>	Develop a marketing plan to promote the trail to potential users both within Victoria and interstate, and review this plan regularly	Tourism and Major Events Unit	\$	High



Project	Details	Responsibility / Partners	Resources	Priority
<b>Evaluation</b>	Continue to undertake evaluations of trail usage and trail users in line with the O'Keefe Rail Trail Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Plan.	Active and Healthy Communities  Tourism and Major Events Unit	Staff time	Ongoing
<b>Management</b>	Conduct twice yearly meetings between all City of Greater Bendigo units with a responsibility for the Rail Trail.	Active & Healthy Communities	Staff time	Ongoing
<b>Management</b>	Meet twice yearly with FBKRT to discuss issues and opportunities related to the Rail Trail.	Active & Healthy Communities	Staff time	Ongoing
<b>Risk management</b>	Prepare a risk management plan for the Rail Trail.	Engineering  Active & Healthy Communities	Staff time	High
<b>Business development</b>	Work with existing businesses to increase to help them become more cycling / walking friendly and encourage the establishment of new businesses to support trail users	Tourism and Major Events Unit  Business owners	Staff time	Medium and ongoing
<b>Public transport</b>	Advocate to the Department of Transport for train carriages and buses that can carry more bicycles	Active & Healthy Communities	Staff time	Medium and ongoing