

Bellarine Peninsula Horse Trails Study

October 2010

Horse Routes Report

Prepared for City of Greater Geelong



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Greater Geelong has appointed SGL to investigate the need for and feasibility of developing a network of horse trails on the Bellarine Peninsula. Two key outcomes of the project are to assess demand for trails and the capacity of some or all of the proposed trails to be shared by horse riders, cyclists and/or walkers, and to recommend a management framework to ensure the proposed Bellarine Horse Trail Network is sustainable, affordable and responsive.

Horse Riding on Public Land

Horse riding is not permitted on the beaches between Ocean Grove and Point Lonsdale, however, it is permitted at Point Richards, St Leonards and Indented Heads, and also 13th Beach, which is outside the study area.

The main reasons for excluding horse riding on beaches and foreshore areas are risk management and environmental. However, it is known that horse riding occurs on both the Ocean Grove to Point Lonsdale and the Portarlington to St Leonards beaches.

An opportunity exists to establish policies which eliminate risks and environmental damage whilst at the same time permitting horse riding on beaches. Strict conditions will be required and policing of access will be necessary. It will require negotiated outcomes between the various committees of management. At a minimum horse riding should not be permitted during peak holiday periods, on or near dunes or during nesting seasons. Other restrictions can include requiring horses to be ridden at walking pace when within 50 metres of other beachgoers. Access to the beaches should only be permitted at designated access points.

Horse riding is permitted on the Geelong to Drysdale, but not permitted on the Drysdale to Queenscliff section of the Rail Trail. However, no documentation has been found which confirms this prohibition.

Two issues will restrict horse access to the Rail Trail; risk management and damage to native vegetation. As with the beaches, horses are regularly ridden on the Drysdale to Queenscliff section of the Rail Trail. Anecdotal evidence suggests that horse riders are unaware they are not supposed to be on that section. A lack of signs prohibiting horse riding compounds the problem.

As with the beaches it is possible to overcome the problems of risk management and environmental degradation by appropriate management of horse riding. For example by not permitting horse riding when the railway is scheduled to operate, and requiring horse riders to remain on designated tracks, and to avoid clearly marked native vegetation, including grasses. A key management strategy is to signpost areas of significant native vegetation.

During the Public Exhibition of the Draft Horse Routes Report, Bayside Bellarine Committee of Management, Barwon Coast Committee of Management and Geelong Steam Preservation Society made it clear that they would not accept horse riding on land under their control. Consequently, it is unlikely to occur in the short to medium term. With goodwill by all stakeholders, safe and environmentally sustainable horse riding can be established, in the long term, on beaches and the Drysdale to Queenscliff section of the Rail Trail.

Sheppards Road has been identified as a suitable road for horse riding. The road between Banks Road and Portarlington-Queenscliff Road is public road maintained by Council. Consequently, horse riding is permitted on this section of the road. Sheppards Road, west from Banks Road to the Rail Trail is an unused Government road over which an agricultural

license has been granted. Council has the option to have the license cancelled and reinstate it as a public road, and resume responsibility for care and maintenance of the road reserve. Sheppards Road to the east of Portarlinton-Queenscliff Road is an unmaintained road reserve and significant native vegetation, likely of “very high significance” has regenerated. If horse access were to be permitted, a formal trail may be required to minimise damage to vegetation. Removal of vegetation will require a permit and Ministerial approval.

Potential Horse Routes

Very few opportunities exist to create a safe circular horse route on the Bellarine Peninsula. The best option revolves around the Bellarine Rail Trail (refer to map in Appendix A):

Drysdale – Leopold Pony Club – Gilles Road – Basin Road - Princess Road – Swan Bay Road – Banks Road – Andersons Road – Lake Lorne

Given the width of the road reserves, the amount of native vegetation, including native grasses, most horse riding will be done on the road, rather than the road verges. The route can be extended by including the Bellarine Rail Trail, subject to negotiating a suitable outcome with the Steam Preservation Society, and by opening Sheppards Road between the Rail Trail and Banks Road.

Additional out and back routes can include:

Sheppards Road from Banks Road to Portarlinton – Queenscliff Road

Andersons Road from Banks Road to Manifold Road – Grassy Point Road – Batman Road or Coatsworth/Scotchmans Road

Knights Road

Horse riding is permitted on all these roads, although if a route is to be designated as being safe, advisory signs will be required, particularly where horse riders are required to cross a major road or complex intersection. As the roads are maintained for vehicular use, in some sections the size of the gravel stones used on the road surface may be uncomfortable for horses and hence unsuitable for horse riding.

Equestrian Clubs

Consultation with equestrian clubs in the Bellarine Peninsula has identified a series of issues which impact on horse riding:

- All equestrian clubs have a common goals of improving horse riding facilities. They recognise that Barwon Heads has a major OH&S problem due to lack of security fencing. It is also too small to accommodate their membership.
- A Grade 1 cross country course can be constructed at Drysdale, although this requires an extension of the Lake Lorne Reserve, into the adjacent reserve.
- Substantial work is required to bring the Portarlinton cross country course to a safe standard. Cross country courses are subject to ongoing vandalism and inappropriate uses by non horse riders.
- Development of an overnight camping area has the potential to attract additional events, particularly two day events.
- Horse groups on the Bellarine Peninsula have the opportunity to coordinate their activities and present a united front to Council, outlining their priorities for development.

- Ideally a coordinating group will incorporate all horse recreational interests, including trail riders.

Recommendations

Improving the quality of horse riding facilities will involve three distinct approaches:

- 1 Relatively low cost actions which can be taken in the short term.
 - a In association with the horse riding community prepare a Code of Conduct for horse riders using horse friendly roads (and also for use on the Geelong to Drysdale section of the Bellarine Rail Trail).
 - b Designate the following roads as horse friendly: Drysdale – Leopold Pony Club - Gilles Road - Basin Road - Princess Street - Swan Bay Road - Banks Road - Andersons Road – Drysdale – Leopold Pony Club.
 - c Adequately signpost areas of remnant native vegetation along Gilles Road, Basin Road, Princess Street, Swan Bay Road, Banks Road and Andersons Road, particularly native grasses.
 - d Install advisory signs along Gilles Road, Basin Road, Princess Street, Swan Bay Road, Banks Road and Andersons Road at appropriate intervals to warn motorists of horse riders and to drive slowly (eg 40 kph).
 - e Promote the horse friendly route and code of conduct through Council’s normal media outlets (eg web site) and via the horse riding community.
 - f Monitor use of the route by horse riders, the incidence of accidents or near accidents involving horses and damage to native vegetation.
 - g Subject to satisfactory introduction of the horse friendly route (ie significant number of horse riders using the route, no negative feedback regarding the condition of the road surface or the speed of vehicles, no increase in accidents involving horses and no horse related damage to native vegetation), consider extending the horse friendly route with out and back links from Banks Road along Sheppards Road, and from Andersons Road to Burrows Road - Manifold Road – Grassy Point Road – Batmans Road.
 - h Adequately signpost areas of remnant native vegetation, particularly native grasses, along all designated horse friendly roads.
 - i Install advisory signs along Sheppards Road, Burrows Road, Manifold Road, Grassy Point Road and Batmans Road at appropriate intervals to warn motorists of horse riders. Advisory signs will also be required at the intersection of Andersons Road and Portarlinton – Queenscliff Road and Batmans Road and Portarlinton – Queenscliff Road to warn motorists of horse riders and horse riders of a major road. The intersection of Drysdale-St Leonards Road/Grassy Road/Bluff Road will require advisory signs for horse riders warning of the dangers of the intersection.
- 2 Negotiations with public land managers to improve access to off road horse trails.
 - a In the longer term consultation be undertaken with the various land management agencies (Bayside Bellarine Committee of Management, Barwon Coast Committee of Management and Geelong Steam Preservation Society), regarding the feasibility of permitting horse riding in designated areas under their control, subject to specific conditions.
 - b Consult with the Borough of Queenscliff relating to beach access at Point Lonsdale.
 - c Internally within Council, discuss horse access to beaches along Buckley Park.

- d Should approval from the respective land managers be forthcoming, horse riding only be permitted subject to the following conditions such as:
 - At times when trains are not running on the Bellarine railway.
 - At times of low use on beaches (eg winter and early morning in summer).
 - At times which are not environmentally important to native flora and fauna (eg when the hooded plover is not nesting).
 - At locations which are not potentially environmentally destructive (eg not within 20 metres of dunes, or 10 metres of remnant vegetation).
 - At locations which are not high risk areas (eg near caravan or camping grounds, designated picnic areas and play areas).
 - e A Code of Conduct for horse riders being developed which outlines their rights and responsibilities.
 - f Subject to horse riding being permitted on the Rail Trail, Council monitor use of the Rail Trail by horse riders, walkers and cyclists to determine whether significant demand exists to justify opening Sheppards Road between the Rail Trail and Banks Road.
- 3 Ongoing consultation with the horse community to plan and develop horse riding infrastructure in the medium to long term.
- a Council encourage the formation of a “Horse Riders of the Bellarine Peninsula” group comprising representation of all recreational horse riding. Its primary function being to coordinate the planning of horse related facilities and infrastructure and provide advice to Council on horse related matters.
 - b To start the process, Council to convene a meeting of all horse groups with the aim of establishing a coordinating group.

1 INTRODUCTION

This Chapter summarises the background to the Study as outlined by Council in its Study Brief, the project aims and objectives, the methodology used, and the structure of the report.

1.1 BACKGROUND

The City of Greater Geelong has appointed SGL to undertake a range of tasks associated with the preparation of a strategy plan that will assess the demand for a network of horse trails on the Bellarine Peninsula and if demonstrated, guide the development and extent of horse trails.

A group of local riders and other people involved in the equine industry on the Bellarine Peninsula presented Council with a community submission advocating for the development of a network of recreational tracks and trails on the Bellarine Peninsula (the 'Bellarine Rural Tracks & Trails Strategy 2007-2012'). The Bellarine Peninsula Horse Trails Study aims to validate and confirm many of the directions proposed in this submission and provide additional information in relation to capital and recurrent costs associated with the provision of a network of horse trails.

Two key outcomes are required by Council. The first outcome is an assessment of the demand for trails and the capacity of some or all of the proposed trails to be shared by horse riders, cyclists and/or walkers. In assessing capacity of proposed routes, impacts on biodiversity and principals of the State's Native Vegetation Framework 2002 must be considered. The second outcome is to recommend a management framework for any trail proposed that will ensure the long-term management and maintenance of any proposed Bellarine Horse Trail Network is sustainable, affordable and responsive.

The project will also investigate a number of critical issues in relation to the need, construction and management of horse trails in a semi-rural area experiencing increasing residential development.

1.2 AIM AND OBJECTIVES

1.2.1 Project Aim

The aim of the project is to investigate the need for and feasibility of developing a network of horse trails on the Bellarine Peninsula.

The preparation of the Study will need to consider such issues as:

- capacity of the proposed trails to be shared use;
- social, health and economic benefits of the proposed trail network;
- impact on the natural environment (with particular reference to remnant vegetation);
- quantum of proposed users;
- level of access to non-Council owned land and any conditions associated with approved access;
- optimum location of the trails;
- future management of the trail network; and
- capital costs and recurrent maintenance cost of the trail network.

1.2.2 Project Objectives

The objectives of the project are:

- 1 To quantify the need for the development of a network of horse trails on the Bellarine Peninsula.
- 2 To research the capacity of horse trails to be shared with cyclists and walkers, and to develop design guidelines for the siting and construction of shared-use trails.
- 3 To evaluate the impacts on biodiversity values and apply the avoid, minimise and offset principals of the State's Native Vegetation Framework 2002.
- 4 Evaluate the existing section of the Bellarine Rail Trail which is currently used as a shared use horse / bicycle / walking trail.
- 5 To identify the optimum location to establish a shared-use trail which can be used to trial and assess the feasibility of providing shared trails.
- 6 To undertake a comprehensive consultative process with identified stakeholders and interested parties, and with other organisations and individuals considered experts, or have had past experience in the provision and management of horse trails in other locations.
- 7 To analyse the social, environmental and economic impacts/benefits from the provision of a network of horse trails on the Bellarine Peninsula.
- 8 To determine the best location and priority order for the development of a network of horse trails and associated infrastructure on the Bellarine Peninsula.
- 9 To identify a preferred management model to develop, manage and maintain a network of horse trails and associated infrastructure on the Bellarine Peninsula, including defining what Council's specific roles and responsibilities might be.
- 10 To prepare an implementation plan for the provision of a network of horse trails and associated infrastructure on the Bellarine Peninsula, inclusive of estimated capital costs and indicative timeframe.

1.3 METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this project has five phases. At the conclusion of Phase 3 a determination as to whether adequate demand for a Horse Trails Network was to be made. As a result the project will either proceed with Phase 4B (if adequate demand is not demonstrated) or Phase 5 (if adequate demand is demonstrated). However, based on feedback during Phase 3, a modified Phase 4C was adopted and implemented in lieu of Phases 4A or B and Phase 5.

Tasks associated with each phase are:

Phase 1: Project Clarification

Phase 2: Define Vision and Objectives

- 1 Review Background Information
- 2 Council Staff Interviews
- 3 Land Management Agency Interviews
- 4 Situation Analysis Paper
- 5 Visioning Workshop
- 6 Assessment Criteria
- 7 Issues and Directions Paper

Phase 3: Research

- 1 Community Demand

- 2 Existing and Potential Routes
- 3 Trends in Horse Trails
- 4 Environmental
- 5 Social Benefits
- 6 Best Practice
- 7 Demand Assessment Report

Phase 4A: Strategy Plan

- 1 Potential Routes
- 2 Assessment
- 3 Preliminary Horse Trail Strategy
- 4 Presentation

Phase 4B: Strategy Plan

- 1 Preliminary Horse Trail Report
- 2 Presentation
- 3 Draft Horse Trail Report
- 4 Horse Trail Report

Phase 4C: Horse Routes Assessment

- 1 Evaluate shared use of the Bellarine Rail Trail
- 2 Investigate the potential to horse routes and trails
- 3 Assess potential routes
- 4 Investigate use of existing horse riding venues
- 5 Review routes identified by horse riders on the Bellarine Peninsula
- 6 Prepare a preliminary draft Horse Routes Report
- 7 Present draft Horse Routes Report to the Project Working Group and Project Control Group.
- 8 Prepare and present final Horse Routes Report to Council.

Phase 5: Strategy Finalisation

- 1 Draft Horse Trail Strategy
- 2 Public Exhibition
- 3 Bellarine Peninsula Horse Trail Strategy

1.4 STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

The Bellarine Peninsula Horse Trails Study comprises two documents:

Background Report which present the outcomes of research conducted during Phases 2 and 3.

Horse Routes Report which presents the outcomes of research conducted in Phase 4C.

2 HORSE ACCESS TO PUBLIC LAND

This Chapter reviews research conducted to ascertain whether horses can use beaches, the Bellarine Rail Trail and unused road reserves.

2.1 BEACHES

Bellarine Peninsula beaches and foreshore areas are managed by three organisations.

2.1.1 Barwon Coast

Barwon Coast Committee of Management is responsible for the section of coast and foreshore between the mouth of the Barwon River to Buckley Park. Horse riding is not allowed on the beach in this area between Ocean Grove and Buckley Park. The rationale given by the Committee is that:

- Beaches are very busy and it is not appropriate for horses and beachgoers to use the same area.
- Beaches are environmentally sensitive, particularly dune areas.
- Birds nest on the beaches, and may be destroyed by horses.

Horse riding is permitted at 13th Beach, which is outside the study area. It is primarily used by thoroughbred horse trainers, rather than recreational trail riding. An area of 1 km has been set aside for horse riding. No permit is required to ride on this section of beach. It is understood that horse access to this area of the beach was at the instigation of the relevant State Government Minister of the day.

It should be noted that very few potential horse access points exist along this stretch of coast. The main access point is via an access ramp at the end of the Ocean Grove Sea Wall. Further east, the dunes are a major physical barrier.

2.1.2 Buckley Park

Buckley Park abuts the Barwon Coast area at Collendina and includes the area to Point Lonsdale. Buckley Park is managed by the City of Greater Geelong. Horse riding is not permitted in Buckley Park. The Buckley Park Management Plan acknowledged that while horse riding occurs in Buckley Park, it recommended “enforce current regulations where there are no existing areas set aside to allow horse access within the Buckley Park Foreshore Reserve”.

It is known that horse riding does occur on these beaches, with horse riders tending to access the beach at Point Lonsdale.

2.1.3 Bellarine Bayside

Bellarine Bayside Foreshore Committee of Management is the manager for Portarlington, Indented Head and St Leonards foreshore areas. Horse riding is permitted at Point Richards, St Leonards and Indented Heads. According to the Committee, very little recreational riding occurs. It is mainly walking the horse in water by thoroughbred trainers. Recreational riding is not permitted on any beaches of foreshore areas.

The Committee has not received any requests for horse riding on beaches or foreshores, although it is known that some horse riding is occurring on beaches. The main issue to overcome is risk management due to the interaction of horses with other users.

2.1.4 Great Ocean Road Committee

Although not part of the Bellarine Peninsula, it has a similar coastal area as the Barwon Coast. This Committee permits horse riding on Fairhaven Beach.

Blazing Saddles is a commercial operation offering trail rides, including along Fairhaven beach. They worked with the Committee to develop policies for safe beach riding. Horse riding is not permitted from Christmas to late January and Easter, that is during peak holiday periods. They also do not allow horses to canter or trot within 50m metres of people. Blazing Saddles has obtained a permit from the Great Ocean Road Committee to conduct horse rides on the beach.

2.1.5 Summary

The main reasons for excluding horse riding on beaches and foreshore areas are risk management and environmental. Both are legitimate reasons for precluding horse riding. However, it is known that horse riding occurs on both the Ocean Grove to Point Lonsdale and the Portarlington to St Leonards beaches.

An opportunity exists to establish policies which eliminate risks and environmental damage whilst at the same time permitting horse riding on beaches. Strict conditions will be required and policing of access will be necessary. It will require negotiated outcomes between the various committees of management. At a minimum horse riding should not be permitted:

- During peak holiday periods
- On or near dunes
- During nesting seasons

Other restrictions can include requiring horses to be ridden at walking pace when within 50 metres of other beachgoers. Access to the beaches should only be permitted at designated access points.

With goodwill by all stakeholders, safe and environmentally sustainable horse riding on beaches can be established on the Bellarine Peninsula.

2.2 RAIL TRAIL

The City of Greater Geelong has a license to construct a trail from Drysdale to Queenscliff. Under the terms of the license the Geelong Steam Preservation Society will “act in good faith to ensure access to the Trail for all trail users...” Council is required to “gain approval from the Society for any events or activities scheduled for that part of the Bellarine Rail Trail affected by the License”.

It is understood that horse riding is not permitted on the Drysdale to Queenscliff section of the Rail Trail. It is also the strong view of the Geelong Steam Preservation Society that horse riding should not be allowed on this section of the Rail Trail. However, no documentation has been found which confirms this situation.

According to Vic Track, an Order in Council appointed the Society as Committee of

Management for the Drysdale to Queenscliff section of the railway reserve. Essentially, this gave the Society the right to operate a tourist railway. It makes no reference to other activities. Vic Track has been unable to find any documents which either permit or prohibit horse riding on the Rail Trail. Advice from Vic Track indicates that the issue of horse access is one to be negotiated between stakeholders, ie Council and the Society.

Two issues will restrict horse access to the Rail Trail; risk management and damage to native vegetation.

- An obvious risk management issue is the potential to startle horses when trains toot their horns to warn people. Unless a physical barrier is constructed to prevent horses bolting in front of trains, the potential for serious injury exists.
- The Queenscliff end of the Rail Trail has large areas of high quality remnant vegetation. Horse can trample and destroy this vegetation if they are ridden off the formed trail.

As with the beaches, horses are regularly ridden on the Drysdale to Queenscliff section of the Rail Trail. Anecdotal evidence suggests that horse riders are unaware they are not supposed to be on that section. A lack of signs prohibiting horse riding compounds the problem.

As with the beaches it is possible to overcome the problems of risk management and environmental degradation by appropriate management of horse riding.

Based on the Bellarine Railway timetable, trains are scheduled on Tuesday and Thursday and during holiday periods. The first train is scheduled to leave Drysdale at 10.40 am. Consequently, it should be possible to permit horse riding before say 10 am all days and on Monday, Wednesday and Friday in non holiday periods or during railway events. These times can be clearly signposted and information promoting these times produced.

To eliminate environmental damage will require horse riders to remain on designated tracks, and to avoid clearly marked native vegetation, including grasses. A key management strategy is to signpost areas of significant native vegetation.

2.3 UNUSED GOVERNMENT ROADS

Sheppards Road has been identified as a suitable road for horse riding. The road between Banks Road and Portarlington-Queenscliff Road is public road maintained by Council. Consequently, horse riding is permitted on this section of the road.

Sheppards Road continues west from Banks Road to the Rail Trail. This section is an unused Government road over which an agricultural license has been granted to the adjoining property owner. As such it is not available for general public use, either as a road or for access. Council has the option to have the license cancelled and reinstate it as a public road. In this instance, Council will be responsible for care and maintenance of the road reserve.

Sheppards Road to the east of Portarlington-Queenscliff Road is an unmaintained road reserve. In other words it is still a public road, but has not been maintained by Council. Since it has not been maintained, significant native vegetation has regenerated. If horse access were to be permitted, a formal trail may be required to minimise damage to vegetation. If any vegetation is removed, it will require a permit under the planning scheme. This process will involve an assessment of the ecological value of the vegetation, and a requirement to off set any vegetation which is removed. It is believed the vegetation will be considered to be of "very high significance". In this instance Ministerial approval will be required to remove the vegetation.

3 ASSESSMENT OF HORSE ROUTES

Based on the investigations potential horse routes have been identified and assessed (refer to Appendix A for a map of the routes).

3.1 PUBLIC EXHIBITION

The Draft Horse Routes Report was placed on Public Exhibition from 4 June 2010 to 2 July 2010. The draft report was advertised widely and copies were available at Council's Customer Service Centres and on the Geelong Australia website. A total of 40 written submissions were received.

Responses were received from land management agencies, community groups and individuals. No new information was presented by any respondent. However, specific views of stakeholders were reiterated in particular:

- Both Barwon Coast Committee of Management and Bellarine Bayside Foreshore Committee of Management reiterated their opposition to horse riding on beaches under any circumstances. They inferred that this position was not negotiable.
- Geelong Steam Train Preservation Society reiterated its opposition to horse riding on the Drysdale to Queenscliff section of the Rail Trail. They stated that this position was not negotiable.
- Vic Roads made a number of comments regarding specific sections of the proposed network of "horse friendly routes". The most serious was to highlight the dangers of crossing from Manifold Road, across Bluff Road to Grassy Point Road. It is considered unsafe to cross at the five road intersection. The crossing will have to be conducted away from the intersection, to be considered safe.
- Horse riders supported the proposed network of routes, particularly the Drysdale to Queenscliff section of the Rail Trail.
- Horse and pony clubs supported the upgrading of their facilities.

3.2 SELECTED POTENTIAL ROUTES

1 Lake Lorne to Gilles Road to Andersons Road

This road is suitable for horse riding. Advisory signs will be required at the intersection of Andersons Road and Gilles Road to warn motorists of horse riders and horse riders of a major road.

2 Option 1: Andersons Road to Princess Street and along Princess Street to Basin Road

Andersons Road is sealed and has a 60km speed limit from Gilles Road to Princess Road. This road is suitable for horse riding. Advisory signs will be required at along Andersons Road and Princess Road to warn motorists of horse riders.

3 Option 2: Gilles Road to Basin Road to Princess Street

This road is suitable for horse riding. A pinch point exists at the intersection of Gilles Road and Basin Road, which may be a safety hazard. Advisory signs will be required at the intersection of Basin Road and Gilles Road, and Basin Road and Princess Road to warn motorists of horse riders and horse riders of a major road.

4 Princess Street to Swan Bay Road to Rail Trail to Banks Road

Princess Road is a low traffic road, and an 80 kph speed limit. Swan Bay Road has a 100 kph speed limit but has low traffic volumes. However, traffic on both roads is increasing and it is understood that vehicles are often driven at high speeds, which can be dangerous for horse riding. Native vegetation exists at various locations along both roads, which should be signposted to minimise damage. Horse riding can occur relatively safely both on the dirt road and on the road verge. Advisory signs will be required at along Princess Road to warn motorists of horse riders.

5 Alternative route along Rail Trail from Lake Lorne to Banks Road

This route will require a negotiated settlement with the Steam Train Preservation Society. It is likely this will need to include restricted horse access at non train times.

6 Banks Road to Andersons Road to Soho Road to Murradoc Road

Banks Road, is relatively wide and is suitable for horse riding. Andersons Road is suitable for horse riding as riders can ride on the road, and also on the verge for part of the way. Soho Road is suitable for horse riding, but leads to a major road (Drysdale – St Leonards Road). Advisory signs will be required along Andersons Road to warn motorists of horse riders.

7 Andersons Road from Princess Street to Burrows Road to Sheppards Road to Rail Trail (along roads and disused road from Banks Road to Rail Trail)

Andersons Road is suitable for horse riding as riders can ride on the road, and also on the verge for part of the way. The intersection with Portarlinton – Queenscliff Road has good sight lines for both motorists and horse riders, but will need to be crossed with care. Burrows Road is suitable for horse riding. Sheppards Road from Burrows Road to Portarlinton – Queenscliff Road is not a maintained road and has substantial native vegetation which is likely to be classified as “very high significance”. It is not appropriate for horse riding.

Sheppards Road from the Portarlinton – Queenscliff Road to Banks Road has low traffic volumes and is suitable for horse riding. Sheppards Road from Banks Road to the Rail Trail is under an agricultural license. Insufficient demand (horse riders, walkers, cyclists and motorists) is evident to warrant Council opening the road.

Advisory signs will be required along Andersons Road, Burrows Road and Sheppards Road to warn motorists of horse riders. Advisory signs will also be required at the intersection of Andersons Road and Portarlinton – Queenscliff Road to warn motorists of horse riders and horse riders of a major road.

8 Andersons Road to Manifold Road to Grassy Point Road to Batman Road to Ibbotson Road to Bluff Road to Grassy Point Road.

Manifold Road and Grassy Point Road are both suitable for horse riding as they both have low traffic volumes. Given the amount of native vegetation along both roads, horse riding will occur primarily on the road, and not the road verges. Sections of these roads are very narrow, providing limited room for horses and cars. Sections of the road surface may also be unsuitable for horse riding given the size of the gravel stones. Crossing Drysdale – St Leonards Road is a safety issue, particularly since it is a five leg intersection, which by its nature, has a complex layout. Sight distance on the northern approach is extremely poor, while the southern approach is satisfactory. However, for

movements south to north, extensive guard railing on the northern side limits opportunities for horses to clear the road if a car approaches quickly.

Ibbotson Road is suitable for horse riding from the residential areas to Drysdale – St Leonards Road. Bluff Road is not suitable for horse riding as it is a sealed road and cars travel at speed. Few safe areas exist for horse riders to avoid cars.

Advisory signs will be required at the intersection of Manifold Road and Drysdale – St Leonards Road to warn motorists of horse riders and horse riders of a major road.

- 9 Grassy Point Road to Coatsworth Road and Scotchmans Road to Geelong – Portarlington Road

Coatsworth Road and Scotchmans Road are both suitable for horse riding as they are relatively wide road reserves. However, the amount of traffic on both roads is increasing. Crossing Portarlington – Queenscliff Road is a safety issue, although adequate sightlines exist.

Advisory signs will be required at the intersection of Coatsworth Road and Portarlington – Queenscliff Road to warn motorists of horse riders and horse riders of a major road.

- 10 Grassy Point Road to Batman Road to Geelong – Portarlington Road

Batman Road is suitable for horse riding. However, it is understood that traffic volumes are expected to increase, which may make horse riding either unpleasant or dangerous. Advisory signs will be required at the intersection of Batman Road and Portarlington – Queenscliff Road to warn motorists of horse riders and horse riders of a major road.

3.3 SUMMARY

Very few opportunities exist to create a safe circular horse route on the Bellarine Peninsula. The best option revolves around the Bellarine Rail Trail:

Lake Lorne – Gilles Road – Basin Road - Princess Road – Swan Bay Road – Banks Road – Andersons Road – Lake Lorne

Given the width of the road reserves, the amount of native vegetation, including native grasses, most horse riding will be done on the road, rather than the road verges.

The route can be extended by including the Bellarine Rail Trail, subject to negotiating a suitable outcome with the Steam Preservation Society, and by opening Sheppards Road between the Rail Trail and Banks Road.

Additional out and back routes can include:

Sheppards Road from Banks Road to Portarlington – Queenscliff Road

Andersons Road from Banks Road to Manifold Road – Grassy Point Road – Batman Road or Coatsworth/Scotchmans Road

Knights Road

Horse riding is permitted on all these roads, although if a route is to be promoted as being safe, advisory signs will be required, particularly where horse riders are required to cross a

major road. As the roads are maintained for vehicular use, in some sections the size of the gravel stones used on the road surface may be uncomfortable for horses and hence unsuitable for horse riding.

4 EQUESTRIAN FACILITIES

Site inspections were conducted at each equestrian facility on the Bellarine Peninsula and a workshop meeting was held with representatives of each riding club. A survey was conducted on the Bellarine Rail Trail to assess horse use of the trail.

4.1 EQUESTRIAN CLUBS

Representatives of the following clubs attended a workshop to discuss equestrian facilities on the Bellarine Peninsula:

Portarlinton and District Pony Club
Barwon Heads and District Pony Club
Drysdale and Leopold Pony Club
Bellarine Adult Riding Club
Geelong Showjumping Club
Friends of Lake Lorne Reserve

The major horse riding facilities identified by the group were:

- Privately owned paddocks for horse riding.
- Pony club venues at Drysdale, Barwon Heads and Portarlinton. Drysdale has the only sand arena and currently usable cross country course.
- Private riding schools at Koombahla, Wallington Park and Fitzpatrick Agistment Centre.
- Bellarine Rail Trail.
- Point Lonsdale beach.
- 13th Beach.

The main gaps or deficiencies in existing provision are:

- No Grade 1 cross country course, and no cross country course with a water jump.
- Cross country course at Portarlinton has fallen into disrepair.
- Geelong Horse Trials were based on a private property on the Bellarine Peninsula. However, the property was sold and it has relocated to Ceres.

Issues to be addressed:

- It is not possible for all three pony clubs to use one venue, as their will be inadequate time for each club's meets plus the events they host.
- Barwon Heads has major safety issues as their facility is not fenced. Consequently, horse can be startled and bolt across other users of the reserve.
- Barwon Heads has inadequate float parking areas for its members.
- Barwon Heads have to use the Drysdale and Leopold Pony Club grounds to host events.
- Barwon Heads needs more space for its existing membership and activities. It is at its maximum membership.
- None of the pony clubs have facilities for overnight camping (eg showers), hence cannot host two day events.

- Barwon Heads has 55 – 6 members, Drysdale and Leopold has approximately 80 members (could increase to about 100), and Portarlington has plenty of capacity to increase its membership.
- Geelong Showjumping Club has a vision to host a World Cup, which will require a grass arena and overnight accommodation for horses and competitors.

Where to from here:

- All equestrian clubs have a common goals of improving horse riding facilities. They recognise that Barwon Heads has a major OH&S problem due to lack of security fencing. It is also too small to accommodate their membership.
- A Grade 1 cross country course can be constructed at Drysdale, although this requires an extension of the Lake Lorne Reserve, into the adjacent reserve.
- Substantial work is required to bring the Portarlington cross country course to a safe standard. Cross country courses are subject to ongoing vandalism and inappropriate uses by non horse riders.
- Development of an overnight camping area has the potential to attract additional events, particularly two day events.
- Horse groups on the Bellarine Peninsula have the opportunity to coordinate their activities and present a united front to Council, outlining their priorities for development.
- Ideally a coordinating group will incorporate all horse recreational interests, including trail riders.

4.2 RAIL TRAIL

An evaluation of use of the Bellarine Rail Trail was conducted on Sunday 6 December 2009. Only 33 completed questionnaires were obtained. Consequently a second round of questionnaire distribution was conducted on three days in January to increase the sample. An additional 40 completed questionnaires were obtained. Due to the limited number of responses and the sampling methodology the results must be treated with caution. The results provide an indication of attitudes and behaviour of users of the Rail Trail.

4.2.1 Methodology

The approach used was to:

- Distribute as many questionnaires (refer to Appendix B for a copy of the questionnaire used) as possible to users of the Rail Trail:
 - ▶ Over a four hour period on Sunday 6 December 2009.
 - ▶ Between 7.30 am and 9.00 am on Thursday 14 January 2010.
 - ▶ Between 7.00 am and 9.00 am on Sunday 17 January 2010.
 - ▶ Between 2.00 pm and 4.00 pm on Tuesday 19 January 2010.
 - ▶ Between 7.00 am and 9.00 pm on Friday 22 January 2010.
 - ▶ Between 7.00 am and 9.00 pm on Saturday 23 January 2010.
 - ▶ Between 2.00 pm and 4.00 pm on Thursday 28 January 2010.
- Target up all horse riders and as many other users as possible.
- When meeting an individual trail user, the interviewers was instructed to go through the questionnaire with them and you fill in the responses. When meeting a group go

through with one person or with the group and allow them to fill in their own questionnaire.

- Locations selected on the Rail Trail were: Christies Road, Leopold, Curlewis Road, Curlewis, Kensington Road, Leopold, Drysdale Railway Station, Andersons Road, Drysdale and Banks Road. If nobody was using that part of the Rail Trail for say 10 -15 minutes, the interviewer moved to another location. If there are lots of people at any location, the interviewer remained for a longer period. The interviewer was instructed to stop at other locations if people are using the Rail Trail.

A total of 33 questionnaires were completed on Sunday 6 December, most at the Drysdale railway station, as a Great Victorian bike ride was going past over that time and some riders opted for the rail trail rather than the road. The other points were quite deserted, the interviewer waited for 15 to 20 minutes and if no one was around went to another location.

In the January sampling periods, Christies Road, Drysdale Railway Station and Christies Road had 18, 11 and 11 respondents, respectively.

No horse riders were seen on any day the Rail Trail was surveyed. During the 6 December sampling period, every person surveyed was asked if they had seen horse riders on the rail trail today and no one had. People who use the trail regularly said horse riders usually only use the track early in the morning when there are no other people using it, and on a Saturday morning, and sometimes after school times, with the young people using the trail. Consequently, the January survey period was designed to be at the same time as horse riders reportedly use the Rail Trail. However, no horse riders were sighted during the January survey period.

4.2.2 Results

As the number of respondents is relatively low (N=73), the results must be treated with caution. However, they give an indication of usage patterns. The sample included:

Males	60%
Females	40%
Under 40 years	25%
40 – 49 years	14%
50 – 59 years	25%
60 – 68 years	36%
Geelong residents	71%
Melbourne residents	20%
Interstate residents	6%
Country Victoria residents	3%

1 Use of the Rail Trail

74% of respondents were cyclists, 18% were people walking their dogs, and the balance (8%) were walking/jogging or running. No horse riders were seen or interviewed during the survey periods.

2 Time on the Rail Trail

The amount of time users spent on the Rail Trail was:

Less than 30 minutes	14%
Between 30 and 60 minutes	30%
Between 1 and 2 hours	47%
Between 2 and 4 hours	10%
More than 4 hours	0%

3 Frequency of use of the Rail Trail

The number of times respondents used the Rail Trail was:

On average more than once a week	43%
On average once a week	6%
On average more than once a month and less than once a week	14%
On average, between once every two months and once a month	4%
On average, less than once every two months (ie six times)	4%
This is my first time	29%

4 Experience when meeting other users of the Rail Trail

Respondents indicated their comfort level when meeting other users.

Other User	Always uncomfortable	Occasionally uncomfortable but usually OK	Usually comfortable	Always comfortable	Not applicable
Pedestrians	0%	6%	14%	79%	1%
Pedestrians with dogs	1%	8%	23%	66%	1%
Cyclists	1%	4%	14%	81%	0%
Horse riders	0%	9%	4%	49%	36%
Skater	0%	3%	0%	37%	60%

Respondents identified some difficulties when meeting other users. Problems encountered primarily related to dogs off leashes off leashes. Other less reported problems were cyclists not using their warning bells and horse dung on the trail.

5 Quality of Rail Trail surface

Respondents rated the surface of the Rail Trail as:

Very good	39%
Good	17%
Adequate	35%
Poor	7%
Very poor	1%

A number of respondents commented on the rough nature of the gravel surface, and inadequate maintenance. Respondents were mainly in favour of a sealed or bitumen surface, although a few did not support sealing.

6 Facilities

Respondents were asked if the rail Trail had adequate facilities and amenities. The major deficiencies identified were drink fountains and watering points.

	YES
Car parking	88%
Safe road crossings	85%
Float parking	75%
Rest points (eg seating)	75%
Toilets	70%
Watering points	65%
Drink fountains	39%

7 Comments

Almost all the comments were positive, although a small number suggested the surface of the track could be improved.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

This section presents a series of recommended actions which are designed to improve horse riding facilities on the Bellarine Peninsula.

Improving the quality of horse riding facilities will involve three distinct approaches:

- 1 Relatively low cost actions which can be taken in the short term.
- 2 Negotiations with public land managers to improve access to off road horse trails.
- 3 Ongoing consultation with the horse community to plan and develop horse riding infrastructure in the medium to long term.

5.1 LOW COST ACTIONS

Whilst these actions have been labelled as low cost they still require adoption within Council's budget, and collectively may be implemented over a number of years as funds become available.

- 1 In association with the horse riding community prepare a Code of Conduct for horse riders using horse friendly roads (and also for use on the Geelong to Drysdale section of the Bellarine Rail Trail).
- 2 Designate the following roads as horse friendly: Drysdale – Leopold Pony Club - Gilles Road - Basin Road - Princess Street - Swan Bay Road - Banks Road - Andersons Road – Lake Lorne.
- 3 Adequately signpost areas of remnant native vegetation along Gilles Road, Basin Road, Princess Street, Swan Bay Road, Banks Road and Andersons Road, particularly native grasses.
- 4 Install advisory signs along Gilles Road, Basin Road, Princess Street, Swan Bay Road, Banks Road and Andersons Road at appropriate intervals to warn motorists of horse riders and to drive slowly (eg 40 kph).
- 5 Promote the horse friendly route and code of conduct through Council's normal media outlets (eg web site) and via the horse riding community.
- 6 Monitor use of the route by horse riders, the incidence of accidents or near accidents involving horses and damage to native vegetation. The method of monitoring will be dependent upon Council's budget allocation. It is expected to focus on "reporting by exception", rather than an ongoing and regular program. Council staff, volunteer environmental groups and horse riders can provide relevant monitoring data during the normal course of undertaking their activities.
- 7 Subject to satisfactory introduction of the horse friendly route (ie significant number of horse riders using the route, no negative feedback regarding the condition of the road surface or the speed of vehicles, no increase in accidents involving horses and no horse related damage to native vegetation), consider extending the horse friendly route with out and back links from Banks Road along Sheppards Road, and from Andersons Road to Burrows Road - Manifold Road – Grassy Point Road – Batmans Road.
- 8 Adequately signpost areas of remnant native vegetation, particularly native grasses, along all designated horse friendly roads.

- 9 Install advisory signs along Sheppards Road, Burrows Road, Manifold Road, Grassy Point Road and Batmans Road at appropriate intervals to warn motorists of horse riders. Advisory signs will also be required at the intersection of Andersons Road and Portarlington – Queenscliff Road and Batmans Road and Portarlington – Queenscliff Road to warn motorists of horse riders and horse riders of a major road. The intersection of Drysdale-St Leonards Road/Grassy Road/Bluff Road will require advisory signs for horse riders warning of the dangers of the intersection.

5.2 OFF ROAD TRAILS

For environmental and risk management reasons horse access is discouraged on the Drysdale to Queenscliff section of the Rail Trail and prohibited on beaches between Portarlington and St Leonards, and Ocean Grove to Point Lonsdale.

It is imperative that environmental degradation does not occur, and the risk of injury to both horse riders and other users of open space areas is eliminated. Whilst it is clear the prohibition is one solution, it is also obvious that it does not work. Anecdotal evidence indicates that horse riders currently use these three off road areas. By not preventing this current use of off road areas, potentially environmentally damaging or high risk activities are being undertaken.

It is clear from responses during the Public Exhibition that none of the stakeholders (Barwon Coast Committee of Management, Bellarine Bayside Foreshore Committee of Management and Geelong Steam Train Preservation Society) are willing to consider horse riding on the beaches or the Bellarine Rail Trail. Consequently, while the Consultants believe that a solution can be negotiated which will provide horse access to the areas under very specific condition, and eliminate the safety risks and environmental degradation, it is unlikely to occur in the short to medium term.

It is therefore recommended that:

- 1 In the longer term consultation be undertaken with the various land management agencies (Bayside Bellarine Committee of Management, Barwon Coast Committee of Management and Geelong Steam Preservation Society), regarding the feasibility of permitting horse riding in designated areas under their control, subject to specific conditions.
- 2 Consult with the Borough of Queenscliff relating to beach access at Point Lonsdale.
- 3 Internally within Council, discuss horse access to beaches along Buckley Park.
- 4 Should approval from the respective land managers be forthcoming, horse riding shall only be permitted subject to the following conditions such as:
 - At times when trains are not running on the Bellarine railway.
 - At times of low use on beaches (eg winter and early morning in summer).
 - At times which are not environmentally important to native flora and fauna (eg when the hooded plover is not nesting).
 - At locations which are not potentially environmentally destructive (eg not within 20 metres of dunes, or 10 metres of remnant vegetation).
 - At locations which are not high risk areas (eg near caravan or camping grounds, designated picnic areas and play areas).
 - A Code of Conduct for horse riders being developed which outlines their rights and responsibilities.

- 5 Subject to horse riding being permitted on the Rail Trail, Council monitor use of the Rail Trail by horse riders, walkers and cyclists to determine whether significant demand exists to justify opening Sheppards Road between the Rail Trail and Banks Road.

5.3 CONSULTATION

This project has identified that the horse community does not have a common “voice”. It is a mix of individuals and clubs.

The workshop of horse riding clubs conducted during this study indicated that a coordinated approach to the development of horse facilities is possible. However, unless groups are organised, either formally or informally, they tend to have limited influence. Thus whilst it is possible to quantify the number of members of pony and horse riding clubs on the Bellarine Peninsula, it is not possible to accurately determine the number of horse riders which ride on trails, roads and private property. It is known that many horse riders are members of multiple clubs, and are likely to ride safe trails if they exist.

It is not the responsibility of Council to coordinate horse riders, this is the responsibility of the horse riding community. Under the current structure, it is difficult for Council to determine relevant priorities for horse facilities. For example which is more important – to upgrade pony club facilities or work towards a network of safe on and off road horse friendly routes. As Council has budgetary constraints, it is in the interest of the horse community to ensure that available funds are spent in the best interests of all horse riders.

It is recommended that:

- 1 Council encourage the formation of a “Horse Riders of the Bellarine Peninsula” group comprising representation of all recreational horse riding. Its primary function being to coordinate the planning of horse related facilities and infrastructure and provide advice to Council on horse related matters.
- 2 To start the process, Council to convene a meeting of all horse groups with the aim of establishing a coordinating group.

APPENDIX A: POTENTIAL HORSE ROUTES



APPENDIX B: RAIL TRAIL EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE

CITY OF GREATER GEELONG BELLARINE HORSE TRAILS STUDY

We are doing a brief survey for The City of Greater Geelong, to assess the demand for, and feasibility of developing horse trails on the Bellarine Peninsula. An important aspect of the study is to evaluate use of the Bellarine Rail Trail. We are interested in knowing about your current use of the Bellarine Rail Trail and your interaction with other users.

1 How best describes your use of the Rail Trail today? (PLEASE CIRCLE ONE NUMBER)

Walking/jogging/running	1
Walking/jogging/running with dog	2
Cycling	3
Horse riding	4
Skateboarding, skating, scooter	5
Other (specify):	6

2 How long will use the Rail Trail today on this journey? (PLEASE CIRCLE ONE NUMBER)

Less than 30 minutes	1
Between 30 and 60 minutes	2
Between 1 and 2 hours	3
Between 2 and 4 hours	4
More than 4 hours	5
Other (specify):	6

3 How often have you used the Rail Trail in the last 12 months? (PLEASE CIRCLE ONE NUMBER)

On average more than once a week	1
On average once a week	2
On average more than once a month and less than once a week	3
On average, between once every two months and once a month (ie 7 – 12 times)	4
On average, less than once every two months (ie six times)	5
This is my first time	6

4 Overall, how would you describe your experience when meeting other users of the Rail Trail, either today or any other time you have used the Rail Trail? (PLEASE CIRCLE ONE NUMBER FOR EACH USER)

Other User	Always uncomfortable	Occasionally uncomfortable but usually OK	Usually comfortable	Always comfortable	Not applicable
Pedestrians	1	2	3	4	5
Pedestrians with dogs	1	2	3	4	5
Cyclists	1	2	3	4	5
Horse riders	1	2	3	4	5
Skater	1	2	3	4	5

5 If you had a difficult experience with any other user, can you please describe what happened, and how often it occurs.

6 How do you rate the surface of the Rail Trail for your activity today? (PLEASE CIRCLE ONE NUMBER)

Very good	1
Good	2
Adequate	3
Poor	4
Very poor	5

If you have any comments about the surface, such as whether it should be sealed, please use the space below:

7 Does the Rail Trail have adequate amenities or facilities for your activity today? (PLEASE CIRCLE ONE NUMBER FOR EACH AMENITY)

- Toilets
- Car parking
- Float parking
- Rest points (eg seating)
- Drink fountains
- Watering points
- Safe road crossings

YES	NO
1	2
1	2
1	2
1	2
1	2
1	2
1	2

Are any other amenities are required:

8 What is your gender?

Male	1
Female	2

9 What is your age?

.....

10 What is the postcode of your place of residence?

.....

11 If you have any other comments about the Rail Trail, please use the space below

THANK YOU! THAT WAS THE LAST QUESTION.