



Department of  
Local Government, Sport  
and Cultural Industries



# REPORT ON THE ALBANY TRAIL TOWN FORUM & WORKSHOPS

31 May – 1 June 2018

**Volume 1 – Forum Proceedings**



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## 1.0 BACKGROUND

Trails provide a valuable outlet for exercise, play, challenge, recreation and adventure. They improve community awareness and appreciation of the natural environment, contribute to personal and community wellbeing, attract skilled workers to settle in regional areas, and are a major driver of tourism visitation. Numerous examples from trail destinations nationally and internationally demonstrate that effective planning and management of trail networks, associated with strategic investment in trails and related infrastructure, can enhance and protect the environment while at the same time encouraging business investment that leads to sustainable long-term economic outcomes for regional communities.

The Western Australian Strategic Trails Blueprint 2017 – 2021 (Blueprint) is the guiding document for government and communities to develop, maintain and manage a broad range of trails across metropolitan and regional WA. It provides guiding principles, strategic directions and actions for consideration across the State for government, trail managers, landholders, trail support groups, tourism operators and the community to achieve the vision that:

*By 2021 more people will be using Western Australia's trail network resulting in greater community, social, cultural, economic, environmental, health and wellbeing outcomes for Western Australia.*

In 2018, to achieve this vision, the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries (DLGSC) in partnership with local and regional stakeholders, organised a series of Trail Town Forums across the State. These forums aimed to communicate a methodical and strategic approach to developing major trails destinations, building upon the recognised economic and local jobs growth derived through establishing and supporting trails and Trail Towns. The Albany Trail Town Forum, which was held on the 31 May 2018, followed similar Trail Town forums held in Pemberton and Collie.

The Albany Forum was co-hosted by DLGSC and the Great Southern Centre for Outdoor Recreation Excellence (GSCORE). It attracted over 100 participants from across the Great Southern region representing businesses, local government, state government agencies, industry and community organisations, local trail groups and clubs, and trail users.

The forum was structured into three parts. The first part focused on case studies of successful mountain-biking (MTB) trail towns. Mountain-biking is one of the fastest growing outdoor recreation leisure pursuits and has become a cornerstone of the State's trail investment program. These case studies provided important insights into the significant economic benefits of global, national and local trails and Trail Towns.

The second part of the forum focused on the strategic planning environment currently governing trail development in Western Australia. It was acknowledged that although there has been a considerable amount of strategic planning and business case development for trails at a state and local level, the Great Southern lacks an all-encompassing and broad-scale

Master Plan for trail and Trail Town development. The lack of a regional trail master plan is an impediment to furthering the economic, social, health and environmental benefits of trails.

The third part of the forum was an interactive workshop in which participants were broken into trail user activities (e.g. hiking, cycling, horse-riding) to consider several key questions about the future of trails development in the Great Southern. Participants were invited to reflect on their own trail experiences, their understanding of specific trail user needs, and their knowledge of regional trail opportunities, to develop recommendations for future trail investment.

Supplementing the Forum were two trail building workshops delivered by staff from the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA). The two sessions covered the theory behind trail development, construction and maintenance with an emphasis on the 8-stage sustainable planning framework adopted by DBCA and trail developers. Practical trail construction was the feature of the second workshop held at Camp Quaranup on the 1 June 2018.

## **2.0 WHAT IS A TRAIL TOWN?**

Supporting DLGSC in achieving the initiatives outlined in the Blueprint is the Trails Reference Group (TRG) which is a cross-agency organisation and community reference group that influences and guides the strategic planning, development, implementation and communication of the Blueprint. The TRG has identified the need to establish clear State-wide processes for the designation, branding and accreditation of Trail Towns, Trail Centres and Trail Networks across regional localities. The accreditation criteria are still being determined, but the following broad definitions apply to the classification of trail towns, centres and networks (see Figure 1).

### **Trail Town:**

A population centre which has been assessed and accredited as a destination for its trails offering through the provision of high quality:

- Trails (single or mixed use);
- Outdoor experiences that encourage extended visitation;
- Trail-user related facilities and services (including accommodation);
- Trail-related businesses; and
- Trail branding and signage.

### **Trail Centre:**

A managed multiple trail facility with dedicated visitor services supported by high quality:

- Trails (single or mixed use);
- Outdoor experiences that encourage single day visitation;
- Trail-user related services; and
- Trail branding and signage.

A Trail Centre can stand alone in an individual location or may be positioned within a Trail Town.

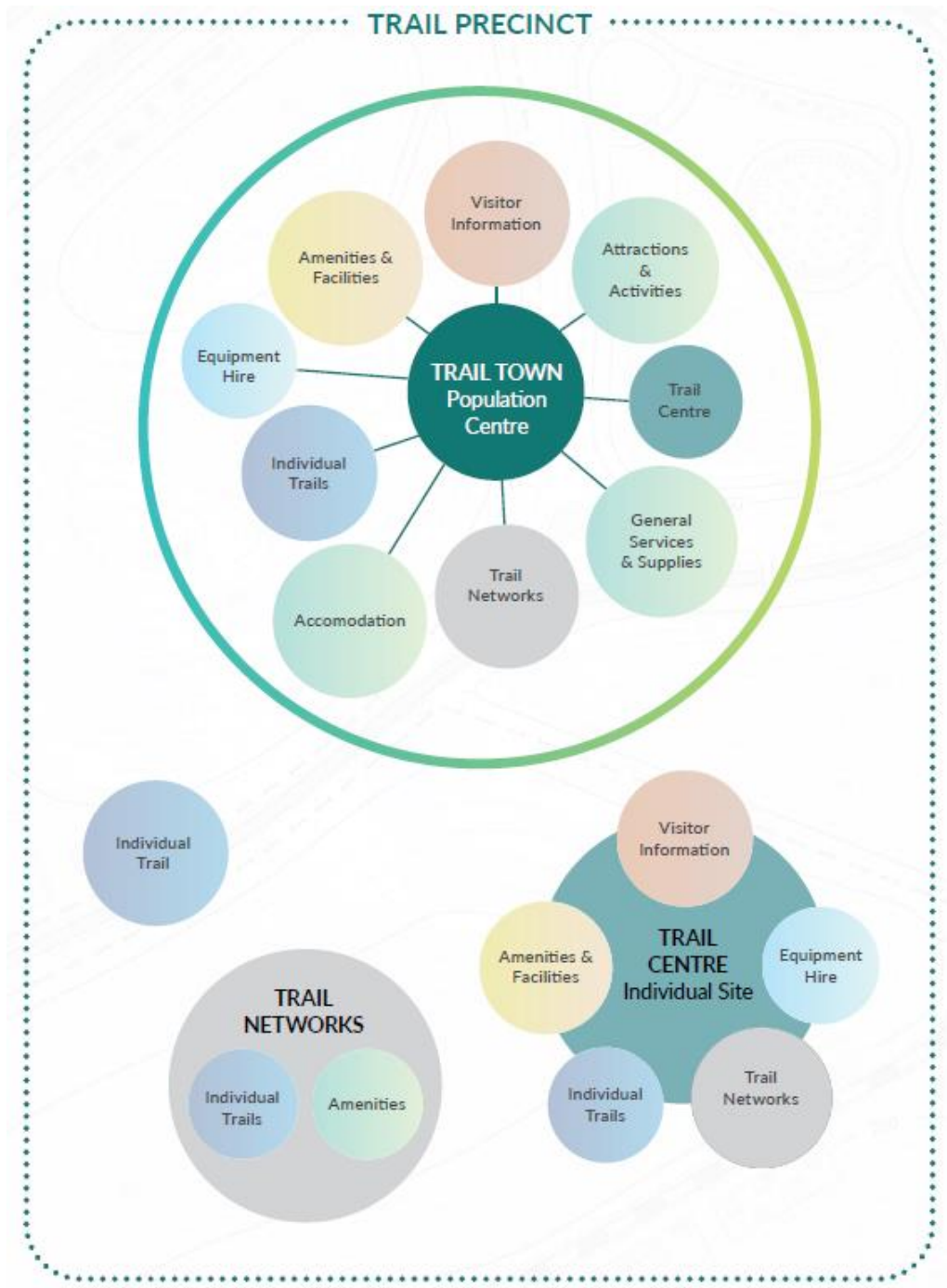
**Trail Network:**

A multiple trail facility with limited or no visitor services, supported by high quality:

- Trails (single or mixed use);
- Outdoor experiences that encourage single or part day visitation; and
- Trail branding and signage.

A Trail Network may be a stand-alone facility or form part of a Trail Town or Trail Centre.

Figure 1: Trail Town, Centre & Networks<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Western Australian Strategic Trails Blueprint 2017-2021, page 20.

### 3.0 CASE STUDIES

#### **Blue Derby, Tasmania**

Chris Hughes, Break O’Day Council, Tasmania

The small town of Derby in North East Tasmania was faced with a declining population because of the collapse of the mining and forestry industries. Trails were identified as an economic opportunity to grow the local and regional economies. The Commonwealth Government committed \$2.5 million towards a total \$3.1 million project to construct 100km of looped mountain bike trails in two adjoining north eastern local government areas near Derby (Dorset Council) and Weldborough (Break O’Day Council). The first sections of trail were opened in 2015.

The economic impact on the region has been significant. The area recorded over 30,000 visitors in 2016. This was directly attributed to mountain biking. New businesses have sprung up (at least 55 Airbnb properties are now listed in the region) and existing businesses have expanded and innovated to cater to the needs of MTB visitors. There has been unprecedented growth in real estate values in Derby, with prices rising 200-300 per cent. The Dorset Council estimates that the economic impact of the initial \$3.1 million investment has been \$18 million. The impact has not all been positive. Some community members have expressed concern about the loss of the region’s traditional identity and “small town feel”, but many others recognise that these changes are outweighed by economic and jobs growth with young families moving to the area.

Funding of \$4.5 million has now been secured for Stage 2 which will see 46 km of new trail constructed to link the Blue Tier Trails to the Bay of Fires, and 11 new trails totalling 66 km around St Helens on the coast. Conservative estimates of the impact of these new projects predict \$18.5 million in economic benefit and 85.8 FTE jobs; with less conservative estimates \$32.4 million with 154.7 FTE jobs.

Blue Derby’s goal is to become Australia’s number one Trail Town destination. “Together the two trail networks would form the largest, purpose-built trail Mountain Bike Trail network in Australia, capable of attracting mountain bike tourists from all over Australia and potentially overseas and becoming a nationally significant tourism attraction” (World Trail, April 2016).

#### **Break O’Day Council: Lessons Learned**

Critical success factors for the project:

##### 1) Local Leadership

- Co-operation between multiple local government authorities
- Consistency of focus and vision
- Establish a skills-based (expert) steering group to oversee construction and operation of the trail network but allow the membership to evolve over time

as the project transitions from the development phase to construction phase to operational phase

- Ensure that all stakeholders have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities
- Lock down the intellectual property and brand at the start

## 2) Consultation

- Involve business community at all stages, including strategic planning
- Engage community interest groups – “there can never be enough consultation”
- Be patient and persistent

## 3) Design and Construction

- Know the characteristics of the target market
- Do not compromise on design and construction for the sake of cost
- Ensure that the trail head is linked to the town
- Build maintenance into the ongoing planning and management

### **World-wide Snapshot of successful Trail Towns**

Rod Annear (Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, WA) provided a snapshot of trail networks and Trail Town profiles across Canada, US, Europe, New Zealand and Australia highlighting economic and employment growth. One example was Whistler, British Columbia (BC), Canada. A Ski Resort in winter, it has become a mountain biking destination in summer. Mountain bikers are typically aged 30 to 45 years old, are well-educated and well resourced - they know what they want and are prepared to pay for it. The economic impact of mountain biking is significant. Annual figures show: 533,000 rides; \$44.6 million direct visitor spend; \$75.9 million economic activity in BC; 389 jobs; and \$14.1 million in taxes.

Successful international trail destinations share a number of features in common:

- Spectacular landscapes and vistas
- Opportunities to observe and enjoy the environment
- Broad range of trails that suit 75% of the market (i.e. they are not highly technical or extreme), including family groups and occasional users
- Strong use of mobility apps and signage

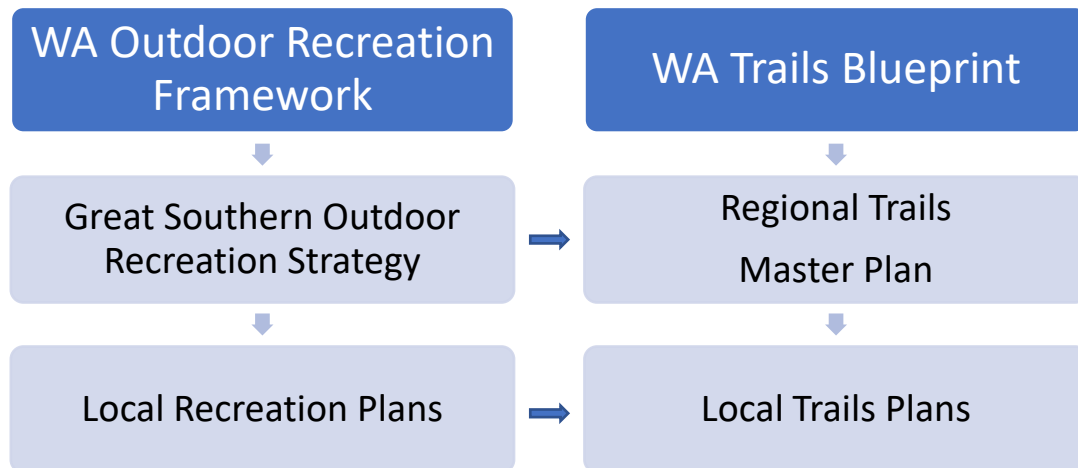
The **key lessons learnt** from these international examples are:

- Harness unique local landscapes and environment to create trails – it has to have a WOW factor
- Build quality trails in quality locations
- Need strong leadership and project champions (people and organisations) to drive the vision

## 4.0 TRAIL PLANNING AND INVESTMENT FRAMEWORK

### Great Southern Regional Trails Master Plan

Lenore Lyons (Executive Director, Great Southern Centre for Outdoor Recreation Excellence) provided an overview of Western Australia's trail planning and investment framework.



GSCORE is currently leading a project on behalf of all Great Southern local government authorities to develop a *Great Southern Regional Trails Master Plan*. The need for a regional master plan is highlighted in the WA Trails Blueprint, which recommends that regional plans be developed to support local trail plans. Funding agencies require applications for trail construction to be supported by compelling business cases that demonstrate the ways in which local trail plans support regional imperatives.

The Regional Master Plan will identify a ten-year program of infrastructure delivery for a range of different trail types and user groups across the region. It is a long-term planning document that provides a vision to guide future growth and development of trails in the Great Southern. It will be a critical tool in budget planning by State and local governments for trail development.

The Plan will address the lack of trails and significant trail gaps across the region. Local governments acknowledge that there is growing demand for trails from residents and visitors. As a region, the Great Southern has many walking trails of varying quality, type and length but very few equestrian trails, mountain biking trails, cycling trails, or aquatic trails (snorkelling, diving, kayaking/canoeing). There are few looped trails and trail networks, and there is an urgent need to consider the ongoing maintenance of existing trails. The long term aim of the Master Plan is to position the Great Southern as an international trails destination with the potential to attract national and international trail visitors and events.

An application for funding to develop the Master Plan has been submitted and, if successful, the project will commence in October 2018, with plans to undertake a comprehensive community consultation program in late 2018-early 2019. The goal is to complete the Plan in 2019.



### **Trail Town Planning: Bring in the Experts**

Kelvin Barr (Common Ground Trails) gave a presentation on the Dwellingup Trail Town project. He stated that one of the key lessons learnt from the Peel and South West regions is that regional master planning is critical if trail projects are to attract State and Federal funding. He argued that community input, particularly from trail users, is an essential element of the planning cycle. At the same time, it is important to seek external professional advice.

In the case of Dwellingup, a committee comprised of local stakeholders (local and state government, business and community groups, and trail users) were charged with designing a Trail Centre. The committee met numerous times over many months. Draft plans were reviewed and revisited on countless occasions with no clear design emerging. Finally, the group had a 'light bulb' moment. The committee realised that they needed to bring in expert knowledge, experience and understanding if they were to develop a quality plan.

They appointed consultants who provided expert advice on trail centre design, linkages, users requirements, architectural services, people and vehicle movements and flows, environmental considerations, financial considerations, pump park design, skate park design and site layout. The final plan was very different to what the committee had originally envisaged – and has received strong endorsement from community members and trail users.

Kelvin argued that strong leadership and focus, as well as funding to engage professionals with planning expertise, are essential to keep the project on track and provide a much better result than if the project was designed entirely by local stakeholders.

## **5.0 INTERACTIVE WORKSHOP**

The final part of the Trail Town Forum was an interactive workshop in which attendees were invited to provide their ideas and suggestions for trail development across the Great Southern. Participants were broken into the following trail user groups:

- Bushwalking/hiking
- Trail running
- Equestrian/Horse riding
- MTB (X-country, downhill, enduro)
- Cycling (road, BMX, bike-packing)
- Paddling (canoe, kayak, stand-up paddle board)
- Aquatic (snorkeling, diving, and open water swimming)

Titled "Blue Sky Thinking", the interactive workshop encouraged attendees to envision the future of trails in the Great Southern. The workshop was facilitated by Lenore Lyons from GSCORE. She began the session by pointing out that much of the day's discussion had focused on planning. She argued that the time for planning would come, but for the moment, she wanted every person in the room to spend time dreaming up their collective vision for the region. She summed up the difference between visions and plans (see Figure 2)

Figure 2: Vision versus Plan

A vision describes <u>what</u>	A plan shows <u>how</u>
The vision is aspirational	A plan shows how it gets implemented
A vision is about the possibilities	A plan is about the policies
A vision is the dream	A plan is the blueprint

Each group was asked to consider a series of questions:

- Where are the world’s best trails for your activity?
- What makes them the best?
- It’s 2040: What kind of trails do we need and what will be different about the way people use trails?
- If you had the power and resources to build the best trails here in the Great Southern, what would you build?

Participants were committed and engaged in the forum, reflecting their passion and enjoyment of trail activities. The comments and suggestions collected through the interactive workshop are contained in Volume 2 of this report.

## 6.0 SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

The attendees at the Albany Trail Town Forum came from diverse backgrounds and locations across the entire region and there was significant representation from different trail user groups. The opportunity for participants to have input into the direction in which the Great Southern region is heading with trails and Trail Town development was well received. Participants supported the vision to position the region as a trail destination and agreed that Master Planning was important to achieve the best outcomes for both residents and visitors.

The presentations by Rod Annear (DBCA) and Chris Hughes (Break O’Day Council) provided much food for thought. They highlighted the opportunities and the subsequent economic and social growth attributed to trails, particularly through mountain biking. In their feedback, attendees expressed strong interest in learning about other trail town destinations, particularly those that focus on other trail activities such as hiking, horse-riding, and paddling.

At the end of the forum, it was widely acknowledged that the Great Southern, with its environmental and cultural values and exceptional natural attractions, is ideally placed to develop into an international trail destination. As a trails destination the Great Southern region should further develop the wide range of trails available on the coast and in the hinterland. There is an opportunity for the region to capitalise on the diversity of its landscapes and trail types. For example, a trail network that links cycling, hiking/running and paddling trails as part of a day or multi-day itinerary. This could create the region’s “point of difference” when compared to other destinations.

Key points and issues highlighted by both presenters and participants during the workshop session include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Ensure that the community is engaged early and frequently: support is essential and is difficult to gain retrospectively;
- Inform the community and business sector of the impacts and outcomes of trail investment and the need to create good customer service principles and actions;
- Recognise the effort required, both voluntary and financial, to design and construct more trails and establish Trail Towns;
- Establish good linkages with experts in the field of trails and Trail Town development, either through DLGSC, GSCORE or directly with industry professionals;
- Determine the region's "DNA" or unique character and capitalise on that to make the Great Southern stand out above other trail destinations;
- Don't compete with other Trail Towns or destinations for business. Build on the intensity, growth and undersupply of trails, at a local and state level, to create linkages with other Trail Towns to create a network of Trail Towns enabling joint marketing and economic benefits;
- Focus efforts on linking trails to the CBD and capitalise on the strength of the natural infrastructure available in and around Albany;
- Development will have to be staged, however an immediate focus on MTB trails will yield higher levels of return and industry recognition due to the potentially high returns on investment and focus on MTB activity across the state, nation and the world;
- Create the 'Trail Town feel' through inexpensive and easily achieved initiatives such as street signage, business and street furniture;
- Build quality trails and infrastructure which will avoid expensive repair and maintenance costs in the long term;
- Sustainability of the trail sector or industry and the health benefits that accrue through trail activities need to be regularly highlighted to the community;
- Develop relationships with existing marketing and promotion organisations (such as Australia's South West) and seek their input and ongoing support;
- Think long term about events and festivals that will be a catalyst to growing and sustaining the trails industry; and
- While focussing on community trail needs, don't neglect all of the other tourism experiences and trail activities that needs to be grown and supported over time. They are all part of a package for economic growth, job creation, health and environmental benefits.

## 7.0 NEXT STEPS

As part of its support for the Albany Trail Town Forum, DLGSC employed a trail consultant to produce the Forum Proceedings Report. The consultant was also asked to propose several recommendations that would assist GSCORE and regional stakeholders to harness the energy and enthusiasm witnessed at the forum. These are the consultant's recommendations:

1. Establish a leadership/working group to support GSCORE with senior representatives from LGAs, key user groups, Great Southern Development Commission (GSDC), tourism sector, DLGSC and DBCA;
2. Meet with potential funding providers and discuss with them this Proceedings Report highlighting the level and diversity of interest, economic, social, health and environmental returns;
3. Continue to advocate for and secure funding for the delivery of Great Southern Regional Trails Master Plan;
4. An opportunity arises through the Great Southern Regional Trails Master Plan for a dedicated section on the MTB sector espousing the capacity of this activity to create considerable economic benefit. The MTB section of the report, which could be titled Great Southern Mountain Bike Strategy could be released as a separate but complimentary document to provide consistency at a state level with the WA Mountain Bike Strategy 2015-2020; South West Mountain Bike Strategy and the Perth and Peel Mountain Bike Strategy;
5. Engage with the tourism sector and in particular local and regional tourism bodies (Visitor Centres, Amazing South Coast (ASC), Hidden Treasures, and ASW) to promote opportunities and outcomes in trail and Trail Town activity;
6. Establish a quarterly or six monthly electronic newsletter to provide updates to forum participants so that they will be aware of progress with Master Planning and to maintain their interest and support; and
7. Keep trail groups, broader community and business sector (in particular accommodation, retail, cafes, restaurants) informed through regular updates of plans, focus and benefits of developments in the trails industry. With support from local business groups and chambers of commerce, this could be accomplished through a series of 'Business After Hours' functions focussing specifically on Trail Town and trail development.

GSCORE has undertaken to circulate this report to forum participants, local government and state government stakeholders, and interested community groups.