



# Trains North Newsletter

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October 2024 – Editor of this issue - Karin von Storkirch

## Train petition to NSW parliament

The petition of 10,740 signatures, asking for reinstatement of passenger train services north of Armidale to QLD, was presented to the NSW Legislative Assembly by MP Adam Marshall on 7th February 2024. He noted that over 7,000 signatures were from his Northern Tablelands electorate. Marshall recounted the history of the Main North Line, mentioning support for reinstatement of train services by Tenterfield Shire Council. He said typically freight would need to underpin the line's viability due to the expense of a passenger service. Trains North share this view. He stressed the importance of keeping the railway line in public hands for future rail services.

Marshall stressed that a train better suits the needs of an ageing population and disabled residents rather than bus coaches. He acknowledged the 'tidal wave of community support' behind the petition and concluded that this was 'not the end of the debate', but rather the beginning. The Minister for Regional Transport and Roads, Jenny Aitchison, replied to the petition. She referred to regional transport providing better outcomes for 'education, health, opportunity and jobs'. The minister encouraged input to the Strategic Regional Integrated Transport Plan. (See below).



Marshall, Tierney, King, Aitchison & Crosthwaite

Aitchison expressed her appreciation to Trains North President Matthew Tierney and TN Tenterfield Local Area Vice President Allen Crosthwaite for their long-distance travel to

attend in the public gallery. She met with them for cordial discussions, and they are pictured here along with Trains North member, Joy King, also from Tenterfield.

## Delay to New England Rail Trail

On 24 April 2024 a meeting of Armidale Regional Council was held in which councillors were asked to approve construction of a 9.8km NERT 'mini-trail' from Armidale to Dumaresq funded by a \$5.4 million federal Bushfire Local Economic Recovery grant. Instead they voted 6 to 5 to delay the decision due to a sudden major change in the scope of the project and a corresponding lack of information to justify it. The plan was greatly scaled down from the original proposal of a 68.8km NERT from Armidale to Ben Lomond.



The amendment to delay the NERT decision, moved by Cr Margaret O'Connor, was supported by Crs Paul Packham, Debra O'Brien, Susan McMichael, Dorothy Robinson and Brad Widders. Prior to the meeting Trains North members, with banners outside the council chambers, advocated for restoration of the railway line and train services north of Armidale. During the meeting Trains North President Matthew Tierney and Armidale citizen of the year Brian Flint spoke against the NERT.

At a subsequent council meeting on 13 May 2024 proponents of the NERT successfully moved a rescission motion which overrode the previous decision and seemingly approved the construction of the mini trail in the absence of Cr Debra

O'Brien with the Deputy Mayor casting an additional deciding vote. However, the State Government has the final say and this in turn depends on community consultation.

## NSW state transport review

The Strategic Regional Integrated Transport Plan (SRITP) for New England and Northwest 'have your say' is open for public comment until **31 December 2024**. Trains North Inc is doing a group submission but individual submissions will boost our case. For a brief comment click on the interactive map. For a longer identified (or, if preferred anonymous) submission write a document. Both options are in this link:

<https://www.haveyoursay.nsw.gov.au/sritp/new-england-and-north-west>

Trains North supporters are encouraged to do one or both options. A two page guide with suggestions on content to include in your submission is attached to this newsletter.

## NSW freight policy reform review

Trains North is making a submission to the NSW freight policy inquiry. Members are welcome to make individual submissions online in [Have your say](#) on the [Interim Directions Paper](#) (IDP) by **5pm Wednesday 23 October 2024**. The IDP focuses on issues of great importance to the Trains North campaign. It examines the pros and cons of moving freight by road and rail and considers how both can be improved. The panel authors rightly perceive rail freight as a useful and viable complement to road freight. Rail freight can be more efficient, produce less greenhouse gas emissions and offer an alternative to trucks dependent on imported fuel. Road freight also has drawbacks such as requiring more expensive construction of roads to carry heavy trucks, the cost of repairs due to damage they cause and road trauma. However, the report makes no mention of the Main North Line from Sydney through Armidale to QLD. It is vital that we draw attention to this flood free line's potential for once more carrying freight by rail and offering an alternative to the North Coast Line and the stalled Inland Rail. In writing your submission you can draw on the dot point guide attached to this newsletter.

## Steve Pearce speaks to Glen Innes

The late Trains North Vice President for Glen Innes, Steve Pearce, spoke to an Extraordinary

Meeting of Council on 16th May 2024. Here are edited highlights of his address:

*I am speaking on behalf of Trains North and against the New England Rail Trail. ... The employment of sophistry and manipulation of logic to blame Trains North and other return-of-rail-service advocates for the failure of Council to conduct early and adequate community consultations, and the subsequent failure to demonstrate substantial community support for the proposed rail-trail, reflects very poorly upon the Council.*



Vale Steve Pearce

*I refer to Council's 'customer survey' Q4: To what extent do you support or oppose the creation of the NE Rail-Trail? Combining categories Strongly Oppose with Slightly Oppose equals 42% opposed. Similarly, combining Strongly Support with Slightly Support equals 39% support.*

*I would suggest that these figures do NOT demonstrate substantial community support.*

*The attempt to circumvent these uncomfortable results by basically saying 'the trains are not going to return; therefore, the survey demonstrates significant support for the rail-trail', is both false and an insult to people's intelligence.*

*Further to this, a letter dated 8th May 2024, received by Trains North from the Minister for Regional Transport & Roads, Jenny Aitchison MP, indicates that Council has not yet fully satisfied the requirements of the NSW Rail Trails Framework.*

*Trains North undertook a written survey throughout the Glen Innes district to gauge community sentiments regarding the return of rail services, both freight and passenger. Last week councillors received a copy of the statistics from the survey base of 415 respondents. The response to the survey is overwhelmingly pro-rail (90%+). Under Q14: 92% (382 respondents) were NOT happy with the Council's 23rd November 2023*

*decision not to support the reinstatement of rail transport services.*

*There are various tactics employed to denigrate the views of pro-rail advocates, such as stating that we only promote passenger services, when in fact we advocate for freight as an essential, fundamental component of a successful Main North Line, as shown in Trains North brochures and correspondence.*

*Then there is the dismissal of pro-rail advocates as vocal 'dreamers'.*



Pro-train banner for the Armidale election

*The pro-rail community has every right to be vocal and to present a vision, to campaign strongly for the protection and eventual reinstatement of the Main North Line service, irrespective of the 'it will never happen' fraternity. Combined with the 10,740 signature pro-rail petition presented to parliament on 8th February, the Trains North survey demonstrates that pro-rail advocates are NOT in the minority.*

*The Main North Line is a major public asset, of not just local but regional, state and national significance. Trains North has a vision to protect that infrastructure and keep that asset to be reconnected into an integrated national rail transport network as a major rail mass-transport artery, to the benefit of communities, the economy, and the environment.*

*The response that 'it will never happen, so there is no point in fighting', is a circular argument. If every council and community on or near the rail corridor combined to campaign for the reinstatement of the Main North Line, this would present a powerful voice to State and Federal politicians. Trains North will continue to be vocal and campaign for the reinstatement of the Main North Line.*

Doug Scott, a stalwart from the Armidale branch of Trains North, also sadly died this year. We value the contribution he made to this campaign.

## **Trains North conference in Glen Innes**

Proceedings on Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> of August began with a moving memorial tribute to Steve Pearce by his friend Tina. The Trains North Vice President for Glen Innes died suddenly on 26<sup>th</sup> May just ten days after he had so ably presented the arguments for preserving and using the railway to a special meeting of Glen Innes Council. (See his speech above).

The conference was an opportunity for supporters from Armidale, Guyra, Glen Innes and Tenterfield to confer on developments in the campaign to see trains run again on the Main North Line north of Armidale.

The meeting heard presentations by Matthew Tierney, Siri Gamage, David Donnelly, Antoinette Gray, Deni McKenzie, Paul Ashley, Rob Lenehan, Margaret O'Connor and Sue Waters.

The long years, uncertain outcome and social tension of the current campaign were compared with the relatively quick success enjoyed by the Friends of the Northern Railway in 1990 and 2003, keeping trains running to Armidale. Despite these challenges, it is imperative to save the railway for the future. Key tasks for Trains North were set forth.

The conference heard details of Glen Innes Severn Council's resolutions about the Rail Trail (bike path). Some Trains North members had met with Toby Warnes and other leaders of the Rail Tram and Bus Union and reported on their positive outlook for regional rail.

The conference was warned against unrealistic optimism about short term prospects for trains, while nevertheless pursuing the potential of the Main North Line as an interstate freight railway together with plausible short-haul uses of the line. That includes the proposed processed food plant at Llangothlin with freight rail to the south.

There was discussion of how best to support pro-train candidates in the forthcoming local council elections. And there was a report on the minimal progress made with establishing the Glen Innes to Glencoe part of the New England Rail Trail.

The meeting concluded with unanimous agreement to a resolution: This Conference

reaffirms the importance of the existing Main North Line railway north of Armidale to Queensland and encourages the community to identify and support candidates in the local council elections who support the railway so that the Northern Tablelands can once again enjoy the enormous social and economic benefits of freight and passenger trains.

Matthew Tierney thanked Sue Waters and the Glen Innes local group for organising the Conference which had been so productive. The event was covered by *Glen Innes Examiner*.

## New England North West elections

On 14 September 2024 elections were held in three councils central to the Trains North campaign with varied outcomes for the cause.

In Armidale 3 out of 9 councillors elected are on record as seeking restoration of the train line and services: ALP Susan McMichael, Eli Imad from Guyra and independent Rob Taber. The group of incumbent mayor Sam Coupland won 4 seats including Todd Redwood, Paul Gaddes and Kay Endres. They favour pulling up the Main North Line to construct a rail trail. Greens councillor Dorothy Robinson was returned. She has been equivocal about the train v rail trail debate, as has independent Brad Widders. Founding member of the Trains North campaign, Margaret O'Connor, lost her council seat after 12 years' service. Trains North greatly appreciates Cr O'Connor's work in promoting the reinstatement of the Main North Line. Mayor Coupland and Deputy Mayor Redwood both kept their positions.

In Glen Innes 2 out of 7 councillors elected are pro-train: Timothy Alt and Andrew Parsons. Four councillors favour a bicycle rail trail including: outgoing mayor Rob Banham, Margot Davis, Troy Arandale and Greens councillor Carol Sparks. The views of new councillor, Max Elphick, are unclear. In response to Davis being elected mayor, Banham resigned and his seat will go to the next candidate with most votes.

In Tenterfield all ten elected councillors are pro-train, in keeping with their council's unanimous resolution 20 December 2023 calling for restoration of train services. Vocal pro-train councillors are Peter Murphy, Kim Rhodes and Greg Sauer. QLD recently announced it is committed to restoring the heritage train service from Warwick to Ballandean after the bushfires.

Matthew Tierney expressed fulsome appreciation to Trains North members who stood as candidates in the council elections at great personal expense in energy, time and money, as well as to members who assisted in these campaigns.

## Annual General Meeting

All Trains North members and supporters are urged to attend the AGM at 7pm on Monday 28 October in the Lodge theatre, Corner of Barney and Faulkner Streets, Armidale or concurrently in the RSL Club Glen Innes. This meeting will consider past and future directions as well as elect committee office bearers: President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, and Local Area Vice Presidents including Guyra, Glen Innes and Tenterfield. To stand for office, nominate office bearers or vote in the election supporters need to be paid up members. To join, register on our website then pay or to renew your membership simply pay the \$10 fee to Trains North account at Regional Australia Bank and put your Trains North membership number or your name in the reference.

BSB: 932-000 Account Number: 100502758

## History of the train campaign

Matthew Tierney wrote an article on the campaign to keep or restore train services in our region from 1990 to 2003. 'Armidale station: Open for business', in *Armidale and District Historical Society – Journal and Proceedings*, No.67, 2024. This is a sequel to an article on an earlier train era in the journal, No.64, 2021.



Rail workers from a bygone age