

OTAGO CENTRAL RAIL TRAIL

Plan for the future 2012-2022



January 2012

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Otago Central Rail Trail Plan for the Future 2012-2022

Vision – Otago Central Rail Trail

The Otago Central Rail Trail is:



Natural landscapes boasting a unique and visible heritage which is of gold and rail

Where visitors enjoy a world class experience, stay and participate in community activities

Where we work closely together – communities, businesses, organisations



A shared vision of the Rail Trail is essential if all parties are to work together on setting and achieving goals for long term, mutual benefit.

Introduction

The Otago Central Rail Trail is a significant recreational and tourism asset that has important conservation and heritage values. Its value to Central Otago is considerable. Visitors – mostly cyclists; some walkers and horse riders – now number in excess of 12,000 per year; and contribute more than \$12 million to the Central Otago economy, creating business opportunities and energising small communities.

Since its inception in 1994 the Rail Trail has been managed and marketed to good effect, but in a somewhat uncoordinated way by a variety of parties. They are the Department of Conservation as administrator and provider of basic infrastructure; the Otago Central Rail Trail Trust, fundraiser of significant funds for trail enhancement projects; the Operators' Group, representing a portion of business interests; individual operators; individual communities; Central Otago District Council, Dunedin City Council; Tourism Central Otago and Tourism Dunedin – marketing.

Developing a long term plan (5–10 years) that has a well coordinated approach, a common vision and goals is now essential if the Rail Trail is to meet the challenges and opportunities of the future. This has never been more important given the growth in visitor numbers; high visitor expectations and the need to balance them with conservation, heritage and community values; the development of other cycle ways e.g., New Zealand Cycle Trails project; the ongoing funding requirements for infrastructure maintenance and improvements; desirable enhancements; and, effective, cohesive marketing of the trail.

A community workshop facilitated by CODC to address these issues was held in Omakau on 20 May, 2011. It attracted about 100 participants, including representatives of interested organisations, businesses and the community. The outcomes are outlined here, in this draft Otago Central Rail Trail Long Term Plan.

Process

The draft OCRT Plan has emerged from a consultative process designed to encourage stakeholder and community participation. Emphasis has been placed on obtaining useful, reliable information and on gaining a wide representation of views from businesses, organisations and communities interested in and impacted by the Rail Trail.

The extensive range of opinions and information has been ordered and reviewed. Common themes and trends have been identified and from these, key recommendations for action have been developed. It is envisaged that this Plan will determine the direction of the Rail Trail for the next 5–10 years.

A representative Working Group was formed. Its role was to provide constructive and informed feedback to this draft Plan and the resulting recommendations for action.

While the Plan has no legal status for many of the organisations, businesses and individuals involved, it does provide an important insight into how the stakeholders and communities believe the Rail Trail can be best managed and marketed for the common good in the medium to long term.

The Working Group

Dorothy Piper – Operators' Group
Daphne Hull – OCRT Trust
Mike Tubbs – DOC
Clair Higginson – Vincent community
Barry Becker – Maniototo community
Anne Pullar – CODC
John Christie – Chamber of Commerce
Sophie Barker – Dunedin City Council
Geoff Ensor – Tourism Industry Association

A governance group will be set up in the future to drive this plan. This group will be made up of representatives from the key stakeholders.

Planning Process and Timeframe

Community Workshop at Omakau – May 2011

Draft Plan developed – June 2011

Draft Plan to the Working Group – July 2011

Draft Plan available for comment – late September 2011

Submissions / Comments close – 14th October 2011

Submissions reviewed by Working Group – November 2011

Changes to plan and sign off – January 2012

Get on with the actions – January 2012

Destination Management

Central Otago communities have embraced a destination management approach in planning for their futures. This is most evident in the community plan process facilitated by the Central Otago District Council, which has resulted in communities determining and reviewing their values, visions, goals and actions for the future.

Destination management is essentially about communities and cross agency co-operation in areas of planning and environmental management, provision of visitor information centres, management of infrastructure, marketing and site management.

Because the tourism industry is complex, involving a mixture of private companies, local and central government and communities, there is a need to build and maintain effective working partnerships between these players if a sustainable future is to be achieved. The notion of managing a destination calls for a whole-of-community approach, which is a relevant approach for all those involved in managing the Otago Central Rail Trail.



Otago Central Rail Trail Overview

The Central Otago Rail Trail is a 150 kilometre, recreational trail that follows the former Otago Central railway line between Middlemarch and Clyde. The gravelled trail has a gentle gradient of 1:50 making it ideal for recreational cyclists and walkers.

The Rail Trail takes people through the region's isolated and unique heartland to places preserved by the dry and harsh climate and not easily accessible by any other means. Thousands come every year from around New Zealand and overseas. Most cycle, some walk or ride horses. The whole trail can be completed in three to four days; some do it in less, some take longer, others do shorter segments and many participate in community activities along the way.

The former railway line had a rich 85-year history, which is part of the trail's attraction to visitors today. Starting at Dunedin, it took many years of backbreaking work to build the Otago Central Railway branch line. The railway was constructed to open up the anticipated rich agricultural hinterland, not to service goldfields which by the time the railway was built had dwindled to a few dredges and hard quartz mines. By the time it reached Cromwell in 1917, it was providing an important link between Cromwell and Dunedin. When gold declined, the line remained an essential transportation and freight service for the Central Otago farming sector and its communities. Later, even when road-based freight became more prevalent the railway continued to be important due to the construction of the Clyde dam during the 80s. However, the commissioning of the dam in the early 1990s signalled its demise.

The Department of Conservation took over administration of the rail corridor as recreational reserve in 1993. A group of interested community members formed The Otago Central Rail Trail Charitable Trust to raise additional funds. Six years of development followed, which included improving the trail's surface and decking all 68 bridges.

The Otago Central Rail Trail was officially opened in February 2000 and developments and improvements are ongoing.

Organisations Associated with the Rail Trail

Department of Conservation (DOC)

DOC administers the Rail Trail as a recreation reserve under the Reserves Act, other policies and the Conservation Management Strategy. It maintains the Rail Trail for the enjoyment of New Zealanders and provides information about it for all users on its website.

DOC provides the Rail Trail's infrastructure, including fences, bridges, culverts, signs, barriers, toilets and drainage and it authorises any commercial activity by concession e.g., guiding, irrigation and telecommunications.

DOC provides administration and executive support to the Otago Central Rail Trail Trust including financial services, merchandising, and it manages any work on the trail funded by the Trust such as surface upgrades, gangers' sheds, toilets, interpretation panels and signage.

The average annual expenditure by the DOC on the Rail Trail is estimated to be \$185,000 (staff 1.6 FTE and operating costs).

Otago Central Rail Trail Trust

The Otago Central Rail Trail Trust was an initiative of DOC's formed in 1993 by with representatives from local businesses and communities to raise funds for the enhancement of the Rail Trail. Trustees receive no remuneration or reimbursement of their costs; currently there are four trustees. The four trustees work as a governance body calling on professional providers and suppliers for leaflet production, website management etc.

Since its inception the Trust has raised more than \$2 million. This has been invested into many aspects of the trail including its initial development, the restoration of historic assets, surfacing and 10 railway-red gangers' sheds, which provide shelter and information.

The Trust raises funds in many ways. These include applying for grants, accepting donations and bequests and generating income through merchandising and supportive advertisers. Merchandise includes the very popular Otago Central Rail Trail Passport and clothing items from caps to vests. The Trust actively promotes the trail through a range of activities. Advertisers financially support the Trust's Official Otago Central Rail Trail brochure, Official Otago Central Rail Trail website and use of social media.

The "official" website of the Trust is managed by both the Trust and a professional marketing company based in Dunedin. They carry out search engine optimisation, analytics gathering and action, and social media activities. They are currently working on the rebuild that will utilise new technologies and leading edge user benefits.

Otago Central Rail Trail Operators' Group

The Otago Central Rail Trail Operators' Group is a registered society that was formed to provide a united voice for operators associated with the Rail Trail.

The role of the Operators' Group is to liaise and communicate any issues. It also aims to enhance and promote the Rail Trail experience in a professional manner and to raise quality standards.

Membership is open to individuals and businesses that derive income directly or indirectly from the Otago Central Rail Trail. It currently has approximately 70 members.

The Operator's group is governed by a board composed of eight members including a President and Vice-President. The board is elected annually by the membership. Secretarial services are provided by the Otago Chamber of Commerce.

Central Otago District Council (CODC) and Tourism Central Otago (TCO)

CODC provides planning (covers signage, accommodation and other District Plan requirements), regulatory, economic development – e.g., Rail Trail surveys, and marketing support for the Rail Trail and associated products and services. It facilitates a destination management approach to community planning, which is explained further, below.

The CODC Business Development Unit provides important research and business advise in regards to the Rail Trail and areas affected by the Rail Trail.

TCO was mentioned often at the Workshop and so a greater explanation of its role is given here.

TCO is the Regional Tourism Organisation (RTO) for Central Otago. It works closely with Tourism New Zealand, local and national tourism organisations to coordinate and facilitate destination management including marketing of Central Otago as a visitor destination. TCO's primary role is to promote the whole Central Otago visitor experience.

With regard to the Rail Trail, TCO provides a marketing and liaison role through all its core marketing material including the *Central Otago Visitor Guide*, on the www.centralotagonz.com website, at trade and consumer shows and also by working with domestic and international media to garner positive media coverage.

TCO also promotes the Rail Trail as a visitor experience with international wholesalers and inbound operators and by introducing operators who work within the Travel Trade distribution channels.

TCO have an active cycling campaign working with commercial partners targeting the North Island's domestic visitor.

TCO is funded by CODC (from rates), sitting within the Community Services Department of the CODC and is one of 29 RTOs within New Zealand. RTOs are recognised as the voice for the industry in that region on all things related to tourism.

Dunedin City Council (DCC) and Tourism Dunedin (TD)

The Dunedin City Council's Economic Development Unit provides business development advice, and has a permanent part-time advisor in the role of tourism business development advisor.

Dunedin City Council manages the Dunedin i-SITE Visitor Centre.

The Dunedin City Council provides an annual grant as per the LTP to Tourism Dunedin, a Council Controlled Organisation, which is monitored through the Economic Development Unit.

Tourism Dunedin is one of 29 Regional Tourism Organisations in New Zealand. It receives an annual grant from the Dunedin City Council, and attracts additional investment from the local visitor economy for marketing activities.

Tourism Dunedin champions the Dunedin Visitor Strategy (2008 – 2015), and implements this with major partners such as Dunedin City Council, Dunedin i-SITE, Dunedin Host (Dunedin visitor economy networking and representation body), and Dunedin Venues.

Tourism Dunedin's key marketing activities are aimed at attracting visitors from the domestic, Australian, international (with emphasis on UK/Europe, North America, and China), cruise, and conference/conventions markets.

Tourism Dunedin partners local tourism operators on sales initiatives in New Zealand and Australia, and has promoted Rail Trail holiday packages with product consolidators.

Tourism Dunedin works in conjunction with Waitaki and Southland in an international marketing alliance in offshore marketing initiatives with Tourism New Zealand.

Tourism Dunedin develops domestic media and travel trade sales and hosting initiatives, and works with Tourism New Zealand to host international travel trade and media that they have attracted.

Dunedin is a beginning and completion destination for the Otago Central Rail Trail, and the investment and brand recognition of the Taieri Gorge Railway, as well as the township of Middlemarch, is seen as a significant component of the trail.

Tourism Dunedin is interested in the city's role as a hub for the cycle trails that are being developed regionally that can theme and connect with the Otago Central Rail Trail.

Queenstown and Dunedin are in the top six of New Zealand's most visited destinations by international holiday makers. The Otago Central Rail Trail is in a perfect position to offer not only an experience to cycle enthusiasts, but a route and transport alternative between the destinations.

Destination Queenstown

Destination Queenstown (DQ) is the Regional Tourism Organisation (RTO) responsible for the marketing of Queenstown as the Southern Hemisphere's premier four season lake and alpine resort.

As the neutral tourism contact point for the resort, they work with local businesses, including tourism operators (including operators who package the Otago Central Rail Trail and are members of DQ), the hospitality industry, accommodation providers, retailers, and service sectors to promote Queenstown as a unique destination that offers visitors truly memorable experiences. Their role is to co-ordinate, facilitate, motivate and develop the marketing of Queenstown.

i-Sites – Southern Region

i-Sites in the Southern Region provide local assistance to plan and book accommodation and transport on the Rail Trail. They also inform users of the Rail Trail of what sights there are, what food options are available, options that are best for them in regards to cycling/walking the Trail and any other useful and relevant information. I-Sites are a very integral part of the Rail Trail.

Summary of Recommendations for Action

Natural Setting

	Page Number
Encourage businesses, local communities, administrative agencies and trail users to protect, and even help restore, areas of native grass and scrublands along the trail.	17
Review the policies, regulations and plans that directly affect the setting and therefore the experience of visitors such as; locations of buildings, ribbon development along the trail, commercial building on the Recreational Reserve.	17

Heritage – Rail and Gold

Develop a log of existing railway heritage and interpretation on the Rail Trail.	19
That communities work together to brainstorm ideas for enhancing railway heritage on the Trail, while ensuring previous successful initiatives are integral to these discussions.	19
Consider the feasibility of the ideas, including their likely costs; prioritise projects and seek any necessary funding and/or help to action them.	19

The Visitor Experience

Investigate existing options for determining hospitality levels e.g., 'A World of Difference, Qualmark or a code of ethics etc, and how they could work for Rail Trail operators.	23
The Operators' Group identifies what training is required and investigates existing courses and promotes those which are appropriate. In the absence of an appropriate training course, investigate the feasibility of developing one.	23
Provide educational opportunities with regard to food preferences.	23
The Operator's group collaborate to provide visitor services over a full 12 month period.	23
Rail Trail operators continue to work more cooperatively to provide the best hospitality possible.	23

Communication and Information

The Operators' Group do a membership drive to ensure as many of the operators as possible are exposed to their communication.	25
That accurate information, through all mediums, is made easily available for visitors within the region or those intending to visit.	25
Better coordinate all specific Rail Trail information and regional information that supports the Rail Trail.	25

Visitor Management and Facilities

Assess access to water and formulate a plan of action to address any shortfalls.	28
Determine where access to ATMs/EFTPOS is/is not available and decide how this can be communicated to users. Support any communities lobbying for ATM machines.	28
Consider how best to support communities and agencies lobbying for better cell phone coverage in Central Otago.	29
Review the toilet facilities, consider any potential improvements, discuss them with	29

appropriate agencies and communities and seek funding, if necessary.	
Determine whether it is appropriate to hold events or to use the Rail Trail infrastructure in other ways during the low season. If so, initiate communication with communities about what it would be used for and how it would be managed.	29
Support the Clyde community to lobby for the underpass to the township.	29
Review visitor safety issues and concerns and take follow-up action as deemed appropriate.	29
Review the type and location of signs already in existence. Based on this information, develop a signage plan for the trail and coordinate its implementation.	30

Marketing, Promotions and Research

A marketing group made up of representatives of key groups including the Otago Central Rail Trail Trust, the Otago Central Rail Trail Operators group, the Department of Conservation, Tourism Central Otago, Tourism Dunedin and the Chamber of Commerce develop a targeted marketing and promotional plan for the medium to long term.	39
Determine what the full extent of the Rail Trail's relationship with NZCT will be and then work towards maximizing that opportunity.	39
Determine what the relationship will be with the other tracks and trails in the area e.g., NZCT trails, Alex to Clyde river track etc.	39
Identify research requirements for the future development of the Rail Trail	39

Management Structure

At the first meeting of key stakeholders, a Terms of Reference (TOR) be developed.	40
That an Otago Central Rail Trail stakeholders group be created that includes, but is not limited to, representatives from the following organisations: Otago Central Rail Trail Trust Otago Central Rail Trail Operators group Department of Conservation Tourism Central Otago Tourism Dunedin Chamber of Commerce Central Otago District Council Dunedin City Council	41
That the Otago Central Rail Trail stakeholders group help drive recommendations within the Otago Central Rail Trail Plan.	41

Natural Setting

The ambience and physical attributes of the Rail Trail are unique, even in New Zealand. They are major draw cards for visitors and contribute significantly to their quality of experience.¹ The natural landscape; wide open spaces; big skies; majestic mountain views; rocky tors; tussock grasslands; and dry, weather-beaten and weather-preserved landscapes culminate in a 'special' experience.

The Rail Trail takes people away from the main routes and centres into Central Otago's heartland. At the Workshop the overwhelming consensus was that the trail's character should be consistent with the natural wilderness all around it; much as it is now.

Becoming too commercial in appearance was identified as a potential threat that would detract from the natural setting and it was considered undesirable. Thoughts around this related to: not having too much signage (see Signs section), no hotel chains, keeping the Trail gravelled and not tar sealed and keeping it clean, tidy and easy to use.

Maintaining and preserving the natural state of the Rail Trail is a real challenge for the future. Visitor numbers have grown significantly and any marketing drives to bring more people over a longer season for longer stays will put pressure on the natural environment and require additional services. In the drive to attract more visitors, meet their needs and keep them informed about nearby services and activities, commercial appearance could easily become an unwelcome by product, if not checked. Wide open spaces and clustered communities are unique aspects of the Rail Trail that are valued greatly. It is imperative that these spaces and individual communities are retained so that the visitor experience and expectations are not challenged. Future challenges include ribbon development, commercial building and location of buildings and signs. These need to be regulated.

It is also important to recognise that the Rail Trail is an important dry-land biodiversity ribbon that is home to unique endangered plants and animals. These plants and animals need to be protected so that they do not, over time, become non-existent.

Objective:

Maintain the Rail Trail in a manner that is sympathetic to its natural setting.

Recommendations for action:

1. Encourage businesses, local communities, administrative agencies and trail users to protect, and even help restore, areas of native grass and scrublands along the trail.
2. Review the policies, regulations and plans that directly affect the setting and therefore the experience of visitors such as; locations of buildings, ribbon development along the trail, commercial building on the Recreational Reserve.

¹ Rail Trail User surveys 2008/2009, 2010/2011

Heritage – Rail and Gold

Central Otago has an incredibly rich and unique history: Maori and Māori, the boom and bust of gold that attracted thousands from all over the world, farming, the advent of the railway, the construction of hydro dams and reshaping of the land.

Much is still in evidence and this along with the stories, have become woven into our heritage and pioneering psyche. It is particularly true of the gold era where the customs and skills of diverse cultures live on, as in curling, and the relics and stone and mud brick buildings, preserved by the dry Central Otago climate.

The building of the railway branch line into Central Otago was another significant event – the sheer tenacity, back breaking work and engineering feats are awe-inspiring. Despite the railway's demise, significant elements remain, most spectacularly in the form of tunnels and viaducts.

Our heritage is important to us and because it is so unique, it is also of great interest to others from around New Zealand and overseas. The Rail Trail provides unparalleled access to the district's distinct heritage – rail and gold, in particular. This is a defining point of difference that sets it apart from other trails being developed (see Marketing section).

According to the 2010/2011 user survey, the most popular/common other activities undertaken by people completing the Rail Trail were: 1. Taieri Gorge Railway, 2. curling, and 3. visiting gold mining towns – in that order. This illustrates a switch since 2008/2009 (1. gold mining towns, 2. curling, 3. Taieri Gorge Railway). In both surveys, sightseeing was the fourth most common activity and in 2010/2011, visiting Old Cromwell Town was fifth, replacing, wineries (2008/2009). Heritage is clearly a very important visitor attraction.

At the Workshop there was huge support for putting a greater focus on railway heritage on the Rail Trail, it came in second only to maintaining the natural setting of the trail (Community Workshop 2011).

Currently, the Taieri Gorge Railway near the eastern end of the Rail Trail is an obvious attraction. As well as the tunnels, viaducts and bridges, other aspects that pay homage to the railway on the Rail Trail are the old station buildings at Middlemarch and Clyde (off-trail in the township – houses stationary engine museum), railhead on trail at Clyde, information/interpretation boards at old station sites and the Trust's addition of 10 railway-red gangers' sheds, which provide information and shade along the way.

Ideas to add a greater railway focus to the Rail Trail include bringing back some old stations (Kokonga and Lauder were mentioned, specifically), improving station sites and including static displays. There was also a suggestion for a railway station replica at Alexandra (with a reference to the proposal by Alexandra Lions).

New Zealand Historic Places Trust (NZHPT) is the lead agency in regards to heritage and should be consulted in anything regarding heritage sites. NZHPT is also able to provide best practise advice.

Objective:

Heritage and interpretation is represented on (and where appropriate, near) the Rail Trail.

Recommendations for Action:

1. Develop a log of existing railway heritage and interpretation on the Rail Trail.
2. That communities work together to brainstorm ideas for enhancing railway heritage on the Trail, while ensuring previous successful initiatives are integral to these discussions.
3. Consider the feasibility of the ideas, including their likely costs; prioritise projects and seek any necessary funding and/or help to action them.



The Visitor Experience

Visitor experiences generated a lot of discussion and ideas at the Workshop. Participants were asked to consider the experience people have on the Rail Trail; what we do well and what needs improvement; and whether infrastructure meets visitor expectations.

Points raised that are considered relevant to a visitors' current experience of the Rail Trail include: feel good aspects – enjoying genuine, friendly, New Zealand country hospitality, family time and health benefits; some people need to allow an extra day – those aged over 60 and children are pushed too hard and get grumpy; and a suggestion that there wasn't enough information provided by operators about available services and eateries.

When asked what the visitor experience should be in the future the main points to emerge were: consistency of hospitality and service; a smoothing out of seasonal peaks and troughs with a good on-trail support network; and longer stays that incorporated a wider Central Otago experience. Also mentioned was an underground highway crossing at Clyde, which is discussed under Infrastructure later in this section.

According to recent Rail Trail User surveys visitors on the trail rated their experience highly (and similarly) with an average of 8.9 (2010/11); 9 (2008/9) out of 10 for overall experience. Feedback was "generally very positive and highlights the things we would want the OCRT to be known for – the stunning scenery, the lack of cars, the sense of being away from it and the friendliness of the people (2008/09)." In the 2010/2011 survey's key findings (see appendices) it was noted:

As an observation, there seem to be less negative comments regarding operators than there were two years ago. It would be good to think that this reflects the increasingly professional focus and levels of service of businesses deriving income from rail trail visitors. However, given that there were a few negative comments there is still room for improvement.

On the whole, people enjoyed the Rail Trail irrespective of the time of year, their age, where they came from, what direction they travelled in and how long they spent on the trail. (See Appendix 1 – Key Findings, no.3 for table comparing overall visitor ratings in Rail Trail User surveys 2008/2009 and 2010/2011.)

The surveys show that far and away the most common way people first find out about the Rail Trail is word of mouth, meaning positive visitor experiences must remain a priority.

Hospitality

In terms the hospitality provided on the trail, workshop participants focused on what needed to be improved.

Overall and across many of the points raised was the implication that parties – including operators and communities – had to work more closely together to achieve improved and consistent visitor hospitality. Clearly understanding visitor needs is important. When survey respondents were asked about missing facilities or activities that would improve their experience they suggested better access to water and information – general and about activities; and they wanted more shade, signage and a greater variety of food and food outlets.

Quality Visitor Hospitality

One of the long term goals is to ensure that the Rail Trail becomes a 12 month product. This includes making sure that both quality accommodation and food is available at all times throughout the year. It's essential that the Rail Trail operators continue to work cooperatively to provide the highest levels of hospitality possible.

The issue of good, consistent hospitality was a reoccurring theme at the Workshop. Subsequently, the idea of staff training garnered strong interest. There was also a suggestion to develop a training course for operators; and there was a mention of Kiwi Host. Another related suggestion was to "licence" the Rail Trail brand, set core values and standards and take part in brand promotion and delivery – to add consistency in customer service (here too, training was mentioned).

Given the diversity, differing size and motivation of operators and businesses (from small, part-time lifestyle operators to commercially-focused bigger businesses), getting consistent world class hospitality throughout the Rail Trail is a challenging goal.

A variety of training courses already exist through various public (polytechnic) and private training institutions, and possibly the Chamber of Commerce and/or the Employers' Federation both of which would be able to advise on or arrange local or regional options. In terms of developing a training course, the Operators' Group may have the necessary expertise within its membership.

Tourism quality qualifications and trademarks are currently achievable through the likes of Qualmark and also Central Otago's 'A World of Difference' brand, which has a set of values and encompasses that wider Central Otago focus, a position that was considered highly desirable by participants.

Food

A better variety of food and food outlets is desirable according to respondents in the Rail Trail Survey 2010 / 2011, when asked what would improve their experience. There were a few positive comments; some neutral comments e.g., "what I expected"; but others complained about access to good food to eat and to buy, good food but poor service, there not being much variety, an unexpected lack of fruit, and the cost – expensive. Food also featured in the major findings of the 2008/2009 survey: The lack and quality of food outlets was also commented on. The lack of healthy food options was mentioned often.

The topic of food was raised under various questions at the Workshop, but none of the points got any real support. Those points are outlined in the table below.

Questions	Points raised at Workshop
Customer Service – What do we do well?	Coffee and food
Customer Service – What needs to be improved?	Better meals with carbohydrates Better meals without carbohydrates Healthier options
Customer Service – What experience should people have on the Rail Trail – future?	Better food
NZCT – if Rail Trail is to be a part of this, what are the risks?	Country food, city coffee
How should the Rail Trail be managed in the future?	Operators' Group board needs to represent the stakeholders, eg accommodation, food, transport, tour providers etc

Despite the lack of support for food-related questions it is worth investigating, given that it has been repeatedly raised by respondents in Rail Trail User surveys. Access to food, the variety of food available and the service relating to its delivery impact on the quality of visitor' experiences.

It is possible that with a lifting of hospitality standards, there will be a corresponding improvement in the type and variety of food and dining options available.



Objective:

Hospitality is consistently good along the whole Rail Trail.

Recommendations for action:

1. Investigate existing options for determining hospitality levels e.g., 'A World of Difference, Qualmark or a code of ethics etc, and how they could work for Rail Trail operators.
2. The Operators' Group identifies what training is required and investigates existing courses and promotes those which are appropriate. In the absence of an appropriate training course, investigate the feasibility of developing one.
3. Provide educational opportunities with regard to food preferences.
4. The Operator's group collaborate to provide visitor services over a full 12 month period.
5. Rail Trail operators continue to work more cooperatively to provide the best hospitality possible.

Communication and Information

Aspects of most interest related to offering customers a wider Central Otago experience with off-trail activities, and that information pertaining to these should be made readily available by tour operators and supporting businesses when people are researching their bookings. This went hand-in-hand with encouraging out-of-season day trips, longer trips and trips before and after the ('best' time) autumn season, which had a lot of support. This latter point seems logical and feasible given the findings of the user survey about customer satisfaction being high whatever the time of year (see above).

Other related points of interest include: behaving ethically to insure all Rail Trail customers and potential customers are given full, unbiased and accurate information.

While these topics cross over into promotion and marketing (see the section on Marketing), providing full, accurate and assessable information is an essential element of first and early contact customer service.

A quick Google search for Rail Trail, Central Otago brings up pages of listings. On the first page there is the “official” website of the Otago Central Rail Trail Trust; (www.otagocentrailtrail.co.nz), one that relates to the book *Otago Rail Trail Guidebook* (www.otagorailtrail.co.nz), a Wikipedia listing; Central Otago brand website ‘A World of Difference’ (www.centralotagongz.com) and individual operators’ websites. DOC also features the Rail Trail on its website (www.doc.govt.nz), but this didn’t present immediately.

The Otago Central Rail Trail Trust website is an important tool in the delivery of current and relevant information for people who are thinking about doing the Rail Trail. In 2011, from January to October there were 71,068 visits to the website alone. The majority of these visits were people from New Zealand, Australia, the USA and the UK. Page views reached 236,207. This just highlights how important it is having websites to communicate the message of the Rail Trail and provide the information needed.

Websites are an obvious and important tool for providing information about the Rail Trail. Certainly there is a plethora of them, which could be somewhat confusing for customers seeking the most reliable source of information. However, it is not possible to regulate others’ input onto the internet.

Recent Rail Trail User surveys (2008/09; 2010/11) found that far and away the most common way people found out about the trail was by word of mouth. South Islanders tended to already know about it; international visitors mostly found out about it in guidebooks or articles; some (mostly younger people) found out spontaneously on their travels and at i-sites. However: “On-line information was the most common source of information for people once they had decided to find out more” (2010/11).

TCO has a programme for hosting international media. The self-funding, official Otago Central Otago Rail Trail brochure, supported by advertisers and now in its fifth edition, is produced by the Trust. Requests for it via the Trust’s website are made from all around New Zealand and overseas. It is also available at i-sites in Central Otago and is distributed to i-sites throughout the country.

Objective:

Full and accurate information is available and accessible to users and potential users of the Rail Trail.

Recommendations for action:

1. The Operators’ Group do a membership drive to ensure as many of the operators as possible are exposed to their communication.
2. That accurate information, through all mediums, is made easily available for visitors within the region or those intending to visit.
3. Better coordinate all specific Rail Trail information and regional information that supports the Rail Trail.



Visitor Management and Facilities

General

DOC provides the essential infrastructure on the Rail Trail and the Trust assists greatly by raising significant amounts of money to enhance the trail and facilities upon it. Any revision, planning or improvements need to be coordinated with these two organisations.

At the Workshop the question was asked whether current infrastructure meets expectations. Common concerns raised include: a lack of ATM/EFTPOS facilities – with no ATM in Clyde and no facilities to get out cash between Alexandra and Ranfurly; cell phone coverage; signage (see section below); under utilisation of infrastructure during the off-season; access to water; and to a lesser extent, a lack of toilet facilities.

Interestingly, of these concerns none was raised as issues of significance in the recent Rail Trail User Survey 2010 / 2011. The average rating for overall satisfaction was 9 out of 10, which was on a par with the 2008/2009 survey. For aggregated ratings of Rail Trail User surveys comparing various aspects of mainly infrastructure – 2008/2009 and 2010/20, see the appendices.)

Safety requirements

Concerns were raised regarding safety on the Rail Trail, especially at road crossings. Highly visible signage warning cyclists of impending road crossings need to be provided and safety barriers were also mentioned (like those in place at Airport Road/Rail Trail intersection).

Motorists need to be aware of any loop tracks/extensions that may be formed in conjunction with the Rail Trail so that they are aware that cyclists may be travelling down a road where they haven't before done so. Should any loop tracks be formed, serious discussion and decisions regarding the formation of actual cycle tracks as opposed to just cycling on the road need to be had.

Toilets

The overall average rating for toilet facilities is 8.7 and comments varied from plenty, to not enough, too far between them, closed and unclean; in the previous survey there was a suggestion for more toilets at end of the Galloway and Chatto Creek stretch (2008/2009).

Water

Access to drinking water was rated by respondents in the 2010/2011 survey at 8.2 out of 10, which is a big swing in improved satisfaction from 2008/2009 when it received the lowest overall rating of 5.6.

The 2010/2011 survey noted: "...the increase in the rate of "access to drinking water" is especially interesting. While there is now water available at Oturehua the changes have not been that significant. It is possible that there is increased awareness of this issue."

However, in both surveys there were many comments relating to the lack of drinking water/taps and information on where to find it including: "Better 'no water' signage between Omakau to Oturehua" – 2010/2011

Water came up generally and variously at the Workshop. Topics include: water quality and visibility of notices to boil water; filling bottles, rather than buying water; encouraging users to take water with them; and no water for horses – especially between Omakau and Kokonga.

ATM / Cell phones

No direct questions were asked in the user surveys about cell phone coverage or ATM facilities and there were few mentions in respondents' comments. Although, there was a concern about the availability of phones for emergencies (2008/2009). The community workshop raised the issue of poor cell phone coverage and the need for ATM.

Many of the perceived infrastructure shortfalls to Rail Trail users also apply to local communities. Working with them could be an appropriate way to achieve improvements that are more widely beneficial, such as ATM/EFTPOS facilities and cell phone coverage.

Trail Surface

The trail is a packed gravel surface 3m wide with a maximum incline of 1:50.

Improvements to the Rail Trail's surface are ongoing with the Trust providing more than \$500,000 towards it during 2009/2010. User ratings are up slightly in the latest survey to 8.1 (from 7.9 – 2008/2009). However, the trail's surface still gets a lot of comments from users about it being rougher than expected and not as firm as expected, and that it requires some concentration when riding on it. NZCT has established grade criteria for each of its tracks. This is publicly available and a copy of the criteria relating to tracks graded 'easiest' is in the Appendices section.

Events

There are different types of events associated with the trail. There are on the trail events (eg races) and community events associated with the trail (not necessarily on it). There are 3 key events (Rail Trail Duathlon, GoldRush and Cycling Otago) held over the Nov-Mar period and this is to avoid ruining the visitor experience at this busy time of the year.

A comment made above about underutilisation of Rail Trail infrastructure during the off-season relates to a point made at the Workshop about there being potential for events and other use with a suggestion to match groups with seasonal conditions. Though this idea lacked specifics it did get quite a lot of support and is possibly something else that could be looked at in conjunction with communities.

Other

Development in terms of new infrastructure was raised at the Workshop with suggestions for loop tracks (off and back to the trail, perhaps to nearby towns or sites of interest e.g., St Bathans, Naseby, Ophir); first aid and padlocks (no specifics supplied) and the proposed underground crossing to Clyde township. The latter is already being lobbied for by the community and CODC with NZTA who determines how it will proceed and if it is eligible for funding. Another idea raised a few times in the 2010/2011 survey is worth a mention here – fix-it facilities for bikes along the way. There have also been suggestions of the Rail Trail being extended to Cromwell from Clyde. However it was felt that the integrity of the Rail Trail would be compromised if this happened. The Rail Trail currently follows the actual railway line from Middlemarch to Clyde. The line from Clyde to Cromwell is now under water therefore not able to be cycled along. The idea of loop tracks and extensions were supported as long as they were not branded as part of the Rail Trail.

Objective:

The infrastructure adequately meets the requirements of Rail Trail users.

Recommendations for action:

1. Assess access to water and formulate a plan of action to address any shortfalls.
2. Determine where access to ATMs/EFTPOS is/is not available and decide how this can be communicated to users. Support any communities lobbying for ATM machines.
3. Consider how best to support communities and agencies lobbying for better cell phone coverage in Central Otago.
4. Review the toilet facilities, consider any potential improvements, discuss them with appropriate agencies and communities and seek funding, if necessary.
5. Determine whether it is appropriate to hold events or to use the Rail Trail infrastructure in other ways during the low season. If so, initiate communication with communities about what it would be used for and how it would be managed.
6. Support the Clyde community to lobby for the underpass to the township.
7. Review visitor safety issues and concerns and take follow-up action as deemed appropriate.

Signs

Signs were a topic of some discussion at the Workshop. Comments related to: having information signs not commercial signs; accuracy of and more distance signs; better signage on whole trail e.g., places of interest – ‘you are here’; off-trail road safety for cyclists – signs/barriers; more signage e.g., Ophir, St Bathans, Poolburn, Ida Valley, to Alexandra and Clyde town centres.

CODC, DOC the Otago Central Rail Trail Trust and the Operators group have worked together to establish a set of ‘Guidelines for Independent Rail Trail Signage’. The signage is monitored by DOC and the Operators group is responsible for the currency of information and the condition of the signs.

The type of signage currently present relates to location, distance, various information and interpretation. This is in keeping with what participants want to see, but they seem to be asking for more consistency and accuracy.

Rail Trail user surveys found that respondents were particularly impressed by interpretation panels, scoring them an average overall rating of 9.7 out of 10.

General signage rated 8.7 out of 10 and attracted a lot of comments. People would have liked more distance signage, safety signage e.g., at road crossings (with one suggestion railway crossing look alike signs), and some service signage e.g., indicating water.

Overall Workshop participants were keen to ensure the trail doesn’t become commercialised in appearance i.e., built up and with too much advertising-type signs. Regulations governing signage are outlined in the CODC District Plan. Currently, as a general rule, any potential advertising signage on the Rail Trail would be subject to resource consent, except where it is on private property, but even then those signs have to meet specified conditions. For more detailed information about regulations relating to signage, consult the District Plan.

Objective:

The Rail Trail has adequate informational and interpretation signage, uncluttered by commercial signage.

Recommendations for action:

Review the type and location of signs already in existence. Based on this information, develop a signage plan for the trail and coordinate its implementation.

Marketing, Promotions and Research

For the purposes of this section we have defined marketing as the determining of who the market is using the trail e.g. age groups, where they live etc. Promotions are the actions carried out to try and attract people to use the trail. Promotions of the Rail Trail are conducted variously by organisations and operators, using a variety of initiatives. At the workshop it was acknowledged that promotions is uncoordinated and that parties needed to work more closely together on this, particularly in light of the New Zealand Cycle Trails project.

The New Zealand Cycle Trails project (a government and Green Party partnership initiative) began in 2009 with the aim of developing a network of cycle trails as a healthy, enjoyable way for people to see the country and to provide economic, social and environmental benefits to communities. A criterion was established and 18 trails were chosen for development. Two of them are in Central Otago: Clutha Gold (Lake Roxburgh Dam–Teviot District–Millers Flat–Beaumont and on to Lawrence); Roxburgh Gorge Trail (Alexandra–along Clutha Mata-au River through the gorge–Roxburgh Dam), which links with the Clutha Gold Trail and Otago Central Rail Trail. Development of all trails is expected to be completed in 2012.

How the Rail Trail is managed and funded will be an important determinant to its success going forward. The challenges are considerable, particularly in regard to funding, strategic marketing and coordination of stakeholder roles and responsibilities. Workshop participants very strongly support the concept of all stakeholders – businesses, organisations and communities – working together.

Central Otago communities actively engage in destination management and cross-agency cooperation is already well established in the region, which bodes well for the Rail Trail.

Key organisations and their roles are outlined below and in the Overview section of this plan. They include DOC, OCRT Trust, OCRT Operators' Group, CODC and TCO and Tourism Dunedin. This is not an exhaustive list of interested parties.

User surveys show that overwhelmingly, people initially find out about the Rail Trail by word of mouth and then use the internet to get more information. The power of word-of-mouth promotions should not be underestimated; it is clearly having a significant impact. This makes it essential for the Rail Trail experience to remain a good one so that such positive feedback continues. The user survey also provides some indication of the market using the trail (who is using, age group, where they are from and expectations of trail) and where promotional activities could be focused.

Current State

Current promotional initiatives for the Rail Trail include: the Trust's Official Rail Trail website and brochure; information on other websites; generic representation by TCO within the wider context of Central Otago via VIN centres (see Appendix 5), hosting media, attending trade shows and industry forums, networking with wholesalers; fielding enquiries; individual operator advertising and initiatives; and word of mouth by past users. DOC also promotes the trail via its web site.

A summary of current promotional activities is as follows:

Dept of Conservation	Otago Central Rail Trail Trust	Tourism Central Otago	Visitor information network	Operators	Tourism Dunedin
Website	Enquiries	Media visits	Enquiries – Rail Trail and Central Otago in general	Promoting themselves and selected operators	Promote individual operators
Brochure	Brochure	International inbound operators	Brochure distribution	Enquiries	Website
	Media visits	Trade shows – TRENZ and other trade users	Bookings for trail, accommodation and other activities	Promotion of Central Otago and the Rail Trail	
	Website	Brochures – for Central Otago		Bookings and referrals	
	Social media	Website		Promotion and packaging of Operators products	
	Passport	Social media		General and specific enquiries	
		Consumer shows		Media	
		Cycling instands		Operators own websites and brochures	
		Dedicated image library			

The way the Rail Trail is managed at the moment, in a nutshell: DOC administers it as a recreational reserve and providing the essential infrastructure; OCRT Trust fundraises (\$2 million to date) for enhancements to the trail, liaising closely with DOC and managing the official website and brochure, which are self funding; Operators' Group represents operators' interests; CODC and DCC provide services and a regulatory framework; TCO and TD have generic marketing and liaison roles.

There is no direct funding for promoting the whole of the Rail Trail. Currently the OCRTT has the visible role with their services promoting the trail, TCO and TD contribute generically from their budgets within their roles as promoters of their whole regions; Operators promote their businesses individually and collectively under the umbrella of Central Otago and the Rail Trail. Operators support the Trust website and brochure and work alongside TCO with respect to tradeshows, media and other promotional activities initiated by TCO. The Operators' Group has \$7,000 (as at May 2011), which could be potentially earmarked for marketing.

A coordinated, structured, targeted and well executed promotional strategy has the potential to reach more customers and to promote agreed key messages/points of difference, consistently. Key messages emerging from the Workshop related to – Central Otago landscapes/scenery, remoteness, heritage – gold/rail, walkers too; people and customs e.g., curling.

On a regular basis the Trust emails a newsletter to a data bank of approximately 3500. This is mainly generated by New Zealand and overseas leaflet requests via the website that since mid 2007 to early October this year total 5000. Many of these leaflet requests come from businesses and organization requesting bulk numbers. The Trust's data bank also includes comprehensive lists of advertisers, accommodation providers, i-Site managers, bike shop owners, government bureaucrats and journalists.

Deciding who to target and how is very important. Currently nearly 80 percent of users are domestic, but there was good support at the Workshop for attracting more overseas visitors as well.

To successfully implement a promotional strategy takes commitment (especially in terms of time) and money. Both present challenges that need some guidance from those involved with the trail.

Workshop Discussion

At the Workshop there was a strong belief that everyone should be working together on means of funding, particularly for marketing/promotions, and that Rail Trail users shouldn't be directly charged. The most well supported suggestions for gaining additional funds related to operators leading the way – with operator levies and CODC and TCO by way of a direct contribution to the Trust. Making Rail Trail passports compulsory was also popular. Other suggestions include TD contribution, applying for grants, text donations, donation boxes on the trail, self funding promotions (not specified what), merchandise (currently done by the Trust), government (NZCT) and sponsorship. There was no mention of how much is required.

The Workshop also considered the risks and opportunities of being part of the NZCT project, and ideas were put forward for promotional activities for the Rail Trail. Participants were keen for the Rail Trail to be the country's premier trail and were concerned that it could lose its 'specialness' and become too commercialised if it were a part of the NZCT project. Equally, being a part of the project also afforded opportunities for shared national and international marketing and combined-product promotions. There was strong support for emphasising what is unique about the Rail Trail and for all parties to work together to promote it.

Promotional suggestions that gained the most interest include: a strong digital presence – one website, social media; promoting proximity to nearby popular tourist destinations – Wanaka, Queenstown (no mention of Dunedin) and airports; developing Clyde as an attraction in the way that the Taieri Gorge Railway is and using it as a gateway to Cromwell and Bannockburn; associating with other 'great rides' overseas, publicity in overseas publications; and promotion at cycling events e.g., in Adelaide, Melbourne and Taupo.

It was also made clear that participants wanted people visiting the Rail Trail to spend longer doing it; engaging in more off-trail activities and enjoying a wider Central Otago experience. They wanted more people to come during the shoulder seasons and to develop more products in conjunction with other operators. Liaison between operators and consultation with the Operators' Group, TCO and Tourism Dunedin would be appropriate with regard to these objectives.

Future Promotion Possibilities

Given that currently most people initially find out about the Rail Trail via word of mouth and then go to the internet for more information, a strong digital presence is indeed important. Venturing into social media would require expertise, planning and persistence.

Identifying key organisations for networking and shared promotions can be a cost-effective way to gain mutual benefit – these could include NZCT centrally and the two trails being developed under its auspices

locally (see above). Those trails will connect with one another and the Roxburgh Gorge Trail will connect with the Rail Trail, a fact that is already mentioned on the NZCT website (www.nzcycletrail.com).

Up until now the focus and funding allocated for NZCT has been on development. However, this is changing. NZCT has produced an elaborate trade manual and was represented at New Zealand's premier tourism marketing event, Tourism Rendezvous New Zealand (TRENZ), held in Queenstown this year. The decision has been made to align the rail trail with the NZCT and this application has been sent. When the trail is accepted points to explore will be is the Rail Trail entitled to equal promotion on the NZCT website and in any other initiatives nationally and internationally? There is definitely a case for alignment with the other trails due to the government's backing and financial support of the project to date, but careful consideration needs to be given in terms of the potential costs for the Otago Central Rail Trail e.g., signage, branding, potential loss of identity (New Zealand's No.1 cycling trail).

Statements made on the NZCT website highlight the Rail Trail's compatibility for promotions purposes: "these trails will showcase the best New Zealand has to offer, including showcasing iconic landscapes, connecting communities, providing cultural experiences and providing sustainable jobs." – everything the Rail Trail already does. It also says, "it is envisaged that the Great Rides will be progressively linked with other cycling routes and facilities, and will cater for a range of cycling abilities, types and purposes.

Other relationships worthy of nurturing could be district and city councils and tourism organisations, which may include the Dunedin City Council and Tourism Dunedin. They offer the potential for linking operators and facilitating cross-marketing and multi-operator packages.

Promotions and how it is funded requires a rethink on how key stakeholders communicate and work together to manage the Rail Trail successfully for mutual benefit.

Funding

An area of funding shortfall was identified in marketing. Suggestions that TCO and TD should contribute funds specifically and directly to the marketing of the Rail Trail runs contra to the purpose of those organisations, which is to promote their regions generically, both nationally and internationally. (See Overview section)

In terms of the OCRT Trust, its role in promoting the Rail Trail has been valuable, but it's essential motivation has been to raise money for infrastructure and trail enhancements, which it has done very successfully. It currently has four members all of whom work on a voluntary basis and do not recoup costs to themselves.

Funding a cohesive promotions strategy is a challenge. Fundraising by the Trust has always been focused on track enhancement and aspects that do cross over into promotions like the website and brochure are self funding. To ask the Trust, which consists of only four voluntary members, to fundraise specifically for marketing is probably a leap and a stretch. Some suggestions made at the workshop for raising more money, like making the passports compulsory don't draw the distinction between marketing and infrastructure in terms of allocation of funds.

Is it fair or even feasible to extend the Trust's brief to raising significant funds to support a promotional strategy? If Rail Trail passports were to be made compulsory (how would this sit with visitors?) would the funds continue to go to the Trust or should they be tagged for promotional purposes? What about new initiatives e.g., text donations, what would they be tagged for – would users be happy their donations were being used for promotional purposes or would they rather see their money spent on track enhancement (infrastructure)? Who would implement the promotions strategy and manage/administer the finances?

A suggestion was that it could be the Operators' Group. Some points to work through would it be the board or a special promotions team? Would this team have fair representation of all operators, including sizes and types of businesses? Would it have additional representatives e.g., from communities, the Trust, DOC etc? What, if any of the current marketing/promotional activities (e.g., Trust's official website and brochure) would shift and become the responsibility of the promotions team?

A suggestion in support of funding this was made to levy operators. Some operators already invest in marketing their products and services and this has spin-offs for other operators and communities on the Rail Trail. With an operators' levy – the big questions are how could it be done equitably – who would pay and how much, what would the money be used for, who would decide and who would administer this new system. There would seem to be an obvious role here for the Operators' Group – and there was some support at the Workshop for all operators to be members of this group. Would a levy be sufficient or other initiatives required, too? What is the expectation; how much money is enough?

Government funding via NZCT in particular, may become available, but will likely come at a cost in terms of meeting criteria and regulations applied to the project's 18 existing Great Rides.

To further market and promote the Otago Central Rail Trail, a targeted marketing and promotional plan needs to be developed through the coordinated approach by key stakeholders already involved with marketing and promoting the Trail.

Research

The Otago Central Rail Trail Trust has in 2005 and 2008, commissioned an Economic Impacts and Trends report to establish the impact of the Otago Central Rail Trail on accommodation providers and general businesses in Central Otago, Maniototo and the Strath Taieri.

Both reports have resulted in key findings on how respondents believe needs of users are being met, what improvements would be considered desirable and likely trends in future use and requirements.

Another important research tool that is used as a guiding indicator on the economic impact, visitor experience and numbers on the Rail Trail is the Rail Trail User Survey. This survey assists in providing some much needed quantitative and qualitative data that can be used to better match the needs of people doing the trail and those who provide the services they want and need. These user surveys also assist in targeting the Otago Central Rail Trail Trust to the appropriate people and ensuring that the promotional efforts of Tourism Central Otago and other groups are to the best effect.

Rail Trail user surveys are essential reading for understanding who the trail currently attracts, how they find out about it, what their expectations and satisfaction levels are, how much they're spending and on what, as well as what improvements they would appreciate. See Appendix 1 for the Key Findings of the 2010/2011 survey, and visit www.codc.govt.nz to view user surveys for 2008/2009 and 2010/2011.

The Market currently is (from the Rail Trail User Survey 2010 / 2011):

- 78% of users are domestic – comparable to 80% in 2008/2009.
- Domestic riders estimated average age – 45, international riders – 37; many from Europe were school age or in their 20s.
- 54.2% of users were male, whereas in 2008 53% were women – this is a 7% swing in the gender split, which borders on being a significant change in the make up of users of the trail.
- The largest cluster was from the upper North Island.
- Domestic users are very much more in evidence in autumn; international visitors are spread more evenly.
- Expectation of experience is not significantly affected by direction of travel, where people come from, number of times on the trail and age of riders – average rating for users' expectations being is met was 9 for both surveys.
- The average number of user nights in Central Otago is 3.6, slightly less than 2008/ 2009 survey (3.8).

Top Five Activities

2010 / 2011

1. Taieri Gorge Railway
2. Curling
3. Gold mining towns
4. Sightseeing
5. Old Cromwell Town

2008 / 2009

1. Gold mining towns
2. Curling
3. Taieri Gorge Railway
4. Sightseeing
5. Visiting wineries

Notably, there is a 23% increase in per person expenditure compared to 2008/2009 (total expenditure was \$472.61 per person per trip). The largest component of expenditure is on package expenses (as it was in 2008/2009). See Appendix 1, Key Findings for further explanation.

	Number	\$ per person	Days on RT	\$ per person per day
Travelling from Middlemarch				
Completing part of the Trail	71	\$ 211	1.8	\$ 118
Completing all of the Trail	134	\$ 488	3.6	\$ 136
Total	205	\$ 392	2.9	\$ 135
Travelling from Clyde				
Completing part of the Trail	29	\$ 450	2.2	\$ 204
Completing all of the Trail	376	\$ 673	4.0	\$ 168
Total	505	\$ 660	3.9	\$ 169

Source: Rail Trail User Survey 2010/2011 – see full survey at www.codc.govt.nz for more information



While these research sources have been valuable, there was some discussion that more in depth qualitative and quantitative research may be required for the future development of the Trail.

Objective:

Implement a research, marketing and promotion plan for the mutual benefit of Rail Trail users and Central Otago businesses, organisations and communities.

Recommendations for action:

1. A marketing group made up of representatives of key groups including the Otago Central Rail Trail Trust, the Otago Central Rail Trail Operators group, the Department of Conservation, Tourism Central Otago, Tourism Dunedin and the Chamber of Commerce develop a targeted marketing and promotional plan for the medium to long term.
2. Determine what the full extent of the Rail Trail's relationship with NZCT will be and then work towards maximizing that opportunity.
3. Determine what the relationship will be with the other tracks and trails in the area e.g., NZCT trails, Alex to Clyde river track etc.
4. Identify research requirements for the future development of the Rail Trail

Management Structure

Way forward

To drive the Otago Central Rail Trail Plan 2011 it has been recommended that an Otago Central Rail Trail stakeholders group be created. This group will include but not be limited to representatives from the following organisations:

- Otago Central Rail Trail Trust
- Otago Central Rail Trail Operators group
- Department of Conservation
- Tourism Central Otago
- Tourism Dunedin
- Chamber of Commerce
- Central Otago District Council
- Dunedin City Council

Once this group has been established and the terms of reference drawn up, it will then help drive recommendations within the Otago Central Rail Trail Plan 2011.



Objective:

The Otago Central Rail Trail Plan is driven in a coordinated way by key stakeholders of the Otago Central Rail Trail.

Recommendations for action:

1. At the first meeting of key stakeholders, a Terms of Reference (TOR) be developed.
2. That an Otago Central Rail Trail stakeholders group be created that includes, but is not limited to, representatives from the following organisations:
 - Otago Central Rail Trail Trust
 - Otago Central Rail Trail Operators group
 - Department of Conservation
 - Tourism Central Otago
 - Tourism Dunedin
 - Chamber of Commerce
 - Central Otago District Council
 - Dunedin City Council
3. That the Otago Central Rail Trail stakeholders group help drive recommendations within the Otago Central Rail Trail Plan.

Appendix 1:

Key Findings of the Rail Trail User Survey 2010 / 2011

Many of the significant outcomes of the most recent study are the same or very similar to those from the 2008 / 2009 survey.

Major Findings

1. The estimated economic impact of the Otago Central Rail Trail to the inland Otago economy is estimated as follows:

Impact Summary ²	Direct	Total
Output	\$8,159,042	\$12,277,024
GDP	\$4,213,793	\$6,245,289
Employment (FTE's)	96.0	121.3

Depending on the measure this is a 61% to 78% increase on the economic and social impact derived from the 2008 / 2009 survey. The main drivers for this increase are:

- Per person expenditure increased by 23% from \$472 to \$582.
 - The annual number of people recorded at Seagull Hill increased by 40% from 10,000 to 14,000 (this includes full and part trail users and is accounted for in this outcome).
2. The largest impacts are in the areas of accommodation, package operators as well as food and consumables. Conversely, entertainment and retail were minor beneficiaries of visitor spend, accounting for only 5% of the impact.
 3. Visitor ratings of their rail trail experience are very similar to the previous survey. While there was only one significant change (water availability³), eight of the nine measures queried showed an increase in rating or were the same as 2008 / 2009. The overall rating of the experience showed a small (insignificant) decrease from 9.0 – 8.9. The comparison of the visitor ratings is shown here:

	2010		2008	Trend
	Count	Rate	Rate	
Overall rail trail experience	198	8.9	9.0	↓
Accommodation	177	9.4	9.0	↑
Eating establishments	173	9.2	8.5	↑
Package operator	108	9.3	9.0	↑
Rail trail signage	196	8.8	8.7	↑
Interpretation panels	183	9.7	9.7	↔
The riding surface	192	8.1	7.9	↑
Access to drinking water	118	8.2	5.6	↑
Toilets	116	8.7	8.9	↓
Visitor Information Centres	57	9.5	9.4	↑

² Direct is the immediate (direct) impact of people using the trail while total considers the upstream and downstream impacts. All figures other than direct output are derived from multipliers based on standard input / output tables for Central Otago. Direct output is based on the per person expenditure measured in the survey multiplied by the number of people counted at the point of the survey. Therefore, it is a conservative count as while it should capture all people who do the full trail it does not capture all who only do part.

³ This is somewhat hard to explain, as other than a tap at Otarehua, the availability of water is fundamentally unchanged. Many people did, however, state that they were making their own arrangements, so it may be that people are now more aware and are making allowances.

4. As for 2008 / 2009, none of the factors we recorded (where people were from, what direction they were travelling in, their age, how long they were spending or how much of the trail they were doing affected the overall trail experience. Most importantly, this again includes the time of the year. People enjoy their experience as much in spring and summer as they do in autumn.
5. The make up of who is a rail trailer is very similar to the last survey – with one exception, which although not a statistically significant change is still interesting from a trend perspective. As for 2008 / 2009 the “typical” rail trailer is biking, is a person in their 40’s or 50’s from a larger urban area in New Zealand (especially upper North Island) doing the whole trail for the 1st time. The change is that men outnumbered women in the surveys by 54% to 46%, almost the opposite ratio as was observed last time.
6. International visitors tend to be younger, as do rail trailers from Otago, including locals.
7. More mature people spend longer on the trail and spend significantly more money (both in total and per day) than do younger people.
8. As for the last survey, age is the most important determinant of behaviour. Other factors such as expenditure, time on the Rail Trail etc... are generally best explained in terms of the age of the visitor.
9. The proportion of International visitors has stayed constant at about 20%. The greatest numbers of international riders come from Europe and not Australia. Internationals are less seasonally affected than domestic riders who have a strong preference for autumn in Central Otago.
10. West to east (Clyde to Middlemarch) is still the main direction of travel. Interestingly, two-thirds of people who were only doing a section of the trail were travelling in the opposite direction when surveyed.
11. Considering only people doing the full trail, people travelling from the Clyde end spend longer and spend more per day. This is largely an age thing, as Clyde seems to be the main portal for packaged rides, which are favoured by the more mature New Zealander (as opposed to the younger international). This trend was recorded at the first survey, but was not identified at the time analysis was undertaken.
12. Number of days spent on the Rail Trail and nights spent in Central Otago are largely unchanged from two years ago, as are the activities undertaken by visitors. Surveyed people spent an average of 3.6 nights in Central Otago (3.8 in 2008) and 3.5 days (3.7). The Taieri Gorge Railway, curling and visiting gold mining towns were major activities undertaken.
13. Word of mouth remains the main way that people have found out about the Otago Central Rail Trail. This includes international visitors. This is followed by ‘always known’ and travel guide books (almost exclusively international visitors).
14. Once having heard about the rail trail the significantly largest place people went for information was the internet. Word of mouth, package operators and (for internationals) i-SITES and brochures were relatively less important.
15. A question that was only asked for the final component of the 2008 / 2009 survey was asked for all three segments this time. This was “why are you doing the trail at this time of the year?” Spring riders felt that it fitted their personal circumstances or aligned with holidays. Summer was predominantly about holidays while autumn rail trailers were attracted by their expectations on the weather at the time of the year, which was closely related with the attraction of the season. Overall, personal circumstances and alignment with holidays were the main reasons cited.
16. As an observation, there seem to be less negative comments regarding operators than there were two years ago. It would be good to think that this reflects the increasingly professional focus and levels of service of businesses deriving income from rail trail visitors. However, given that there were a few negative comments there is still room for improvement.

Appendix 2:

NZ Cycle Trail Project Criteria for Easiest Trails

Grade	Grade Description	Type of Trail
1	<p>Description: Flat, wide, smooth trail. Trail feels safe to ride. Ideal as a first ride for non-cyclists, and those wanting an easy gradient or experience. Trail allows for cyclists to ride two abreast most of the time, and provides a social component to the ride. Cyclists will be able to ride the total distance of the trail without dismounting for obstacles.</p> <p>Gradient: 2-2 degrees for 98% of trail; maximum 4 degrees uphill and 8 degrees downhill for short sections.</p> <p>Width: 'Double trail' preferred = minimum of 2.5m for 90% of trail, where cyclists may ride side by side. 'Single trail' average width 1.5m, with 1.2m minimum.</p> <p>Surface: Sealed path (concrete or asphalt) or compacted/stabilised base course, with maximum top course aggregate of 20mm.</p> <p>Watercourses: All water courses bridged.</p> <p>Length: 3.5-4.5 hours/day (30-50 km/day)</p>	Easiest
2	<p>Description: Some gentle climbs, smooth trail. Suitable for beginner riders, the trail is predictable with no surprises. Social component with riders able to ride side by side at time, but possibly large sections of single trail.</p> <p>Gradient: 0-4 degrees for 96% of trail on any one day, maximum 6 degrees uphill and 10 degrees downhill for short sections.</p> <p>Width: Between 0.9m and 1.5m for single trail and minimum 2.2m for double trail sections.</p> <p>Surface: Compacted/ stabilised base course or similar, with maximum top course aggregate of 30mm.</p> <p>Watercourses: Watercourses bridged, except for fords with less than 100mm of water in normal flow which can be easily ridden.</p> <p>Length: 4-5 hours/day (30-50 km/day).</p>	

Source: <http://www.nzcycletrail.com/big-idea/trail-grade-descriptions>
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Appendix 3:

DOC Workshop Handout

OCRT Development and Maintenance Costs - May 2011

Since inception (17 years)

Department of Conservation Operating	3.35 million
OCRT Trust	980,000
Railcorp Properties - used on a weed control	90,000
“Taskforce Green” and “Tourism Green” support from 1993 – 1995	300,000
TOTAL	4.72 million

Current Annual Average Expenditure – Maintenance & Development

(Based on last 4 years)

Annual expenditure on maintenance includes work in and around;

- Structures and tracks (maintenance and upgrade)
- Amenity Areas (including car parks, Gangers sheds)
- Large bridge painting
- Financial and secretarial support to OCRT Trust
- Weed and rabbit control
- Fence maintenance & replacement
- Concession management
- Threatened plant monitoring and restoration
- Interpretation

Department of Conservation Operating	200,212
OCRT Trust	106,400

Note: Crown revenue from concessions - \$ 5,140 (2010/2011)

Future

(Department of Conservation - estimates only)

Annual Maintenance

Operating dollars and staff salaries	268,300
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Capital Works

15km resurfacing annually	93,000
Signage and general structure replacement	13,000

Rail Trail User Numbers

	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
<i>Whole trail use</i>	6260	8219	8923	9711	10941	10058	12157
<i>Highest use (Poolburn)</i>	7678	9350	14054	15137	18720	19546	24062

Whole of Trail use is based on an average over four 'remote' locations where users are likely to be travelling the entire trail. Numbers are from 1 July to 30 June of the following year.

Data for period 1 July - 31 March

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/2011
July to 31 March data	6109	6256	7530	5249	8148	8347

In the last 3 years 50% of visitors complete the trail during March and April, with the highest month of use including Easter and the school holidays.

Appendix 4:

OCRT Trust workshop handout

An Outline of Work Carried Out by the Otago Central Rail Trail Trust

Why the Trust was formed...

When the Department of Conservation in 1993 purchased the rail corridor of the Otago Central Railway between Middlemarch and Clyde, the challenge was to without impacting on or diverting funds from other priority conservation work transform this disused railway into New Zealand's first Rail Trail. To answer this edict from government, a group of Dunedin and Central Otago business and community figures formed the Otago Central Rail Trail Trust to raise the necessary funds. At the Trust's first meeting it was resolved that the Trustees receive no remuneration or reimbursement for their time or costs incurred individually or collectively. This agreement holds true to this day.

Over \$2 million secured by the Otago Central Rail Trail Trust...

From 1994 to the present time, the Trust has secured and raised over \$2 million for investment in ongoing enhancement of the Rail Trail experience. An initial \$850,000 assisted with the funding of ballast removal and surfacing with gravel, re-decking 68 bridges and restoring historic assets such as culverts. Trust funding also paid for all trail-side environmental toilets. Original and still serving Trustee, John Gibson of Patearoa, designed and built the narrow cattle grates, known as 'Gibson Grates', installed alongside cross trail boundary gates to allow walkers and cyclists easy movement along the trail.

In more recent times the Otago Central Rail Trail Trust has funded an additional 10 ganger's sheds; an appreciated addition to the trail. These distinctive railway-red sheds provide welcome shelter and a place to rest with each housing a large, colourful information panel pointing out what can be seen from the shed, photos and detail about local attractions, what to look out for up and down the trail and how far to the next toilet and township. The Trust was responsible for implementing and managing all stages, from information gathering to final production and installation.

During 2009 and 2010 Trust provided over \$500,000 for surface rehabilitation. A long-term project that very much involved DOC staff in resolving boundary and fencing issues, particularly in the Strath Taieri. This is where neighbour cooperation and support of the Otago Central Rail Trail continues to be essential and appreciated. It also underscores the successful relationship between the Trust and DOC Central and DOC Coastal.

Funds generation through Official Merchandise and Advertiser Support of the Official Otago Central Rail Trail Website...

Trust funds come from a range of sources including successful applications to funding providers, donations, bequests and importantly, income generation from two main areas. One is the sale of Official Rail Trail garments such as t-shirts, polo shirts, caps and vests and the ever popular Passport which I can tell you is being eyed by groups involved with developing cycleways. And two is advertiser support of the Official Otago Central Rail Trail leaflet, now in its fifth edition, and Official Otago Central Rail Trail Website which gauging from the number of leaflet requests from overseas is taking the Rail Trail well beyond Central Otago and New Zealand. The need for all who are involved with the Otago Central Rail Trail to continue supporting Trust income generation is now more vital than ever for the Trust to continue investment that will make an important contribution to ensuring the Otago Central Rail Trail retains its position as the greatest of New Zealand's great rides.

Daphne Hull, chairperson

Appendix 5:

Tourism Central Otago Promotional Activities includes the Otago Central Rail Trail

Tourism Central Otago (TCO) profiles the Otago Central Rail Trail (Rail Trail) as one of the key unique selling points and visitor experiences for the Central Otago region domestically and internationally.

Media Visits

- In past 12 months a total of 11 media groups visited
 - 1 focussed solely on Rail Trail in entirety
 - 2 included component of Rail Trail
- In October and November 2011, 2 media visits will include component of Rail Trail
 - Society of American Travel Writers – Post Conference Tour Itinerary (4 people)
 - Australian Travel Writers Post Conference Tour Itinerary (people to be confirmed)
- The Rail Trail is 'pitched' to all media (where appropriate), however some chose not to include it as it doesn't meet the requirements of their article and/or audience.
- TCO sponsored the cycling category in the AA 101 Must Do's revote promotion during late 2010 and early 2011.
- TCO provided editorial and images promoting the Rail Trail as a 'must do' through a range of AA publications / guides and website activities.
- The Rail Trail sat at number 2 experience during the peak voting period of the campaign (finished 4th).
- TCO did a full page advertorial in The News in support of voting for this campaign.

Rugby World Cup

- The Rail Trail experience is being promoted through the Rugby World Cup Virtual Media Centre, it is one of six stories submitted to the media centre on the region.

Marketing Material

- The Rail Trail Brochure, Central Otago Visitor Guide and the Central Otago Wine Map are the primary publications taken to all travel trade appointments and distributed at consumer and industry events.
- TWO of the five general itineraries currently provided by TCO are themed around cycling and the Rail Trail (the other themes are - food and wine, gold heritage, golf).
- TCO has dedicated cycling quickstand 'pop up' banner for use at events (includes Rail Trail image).
- TCO has commissioned 2 x photo shoots specifically for Rail Trail/cycling images.
- Central Otago features on current Dunedin and Queenstown Arrival Programmes (through Air New Zealand) – Rail Trail is highlighted.

Travel Trade

- All presentations for travel trade industry profile the Rail Trail.
- These presentations are conducted at TRENZ, when meeting with Inbound Operators, training reservations and travel industry staff.
- In past 12 months TCO has met with a total of 110 travel trade through TRENZ, sales calls to NZ based travel trade and visit to Australian wholesalers.
 - Where we have had a positive discussion on Rail Trail – this is noted on the database discussion notes.
 - 33 of these appointments record positive rail trail discussions and interest in specific operator product i.e. individual accommodation properties along trail, Rail Trail tour operators, curling, gardens to visit, farm tours etc.

Trade Familiarisations

- In past 12 months a total of 7 familiarisations for international travel trade
 - 2 focussed solely on Rail Trail in entirety
 - 3 included component of Rail Trail
- Trade came from China, Japan, Netherlands, Australia, Belgium and Wellington based Inbound Operator

19 August 2011