Introduction

Kentish and Latrobe councils jointly propose to develop a world-class mountain bike and family cycling park in the Kentish and Latrobe municipalities, with a link to Devonport, that will attract national and international mountain bike tourists, host state and national events, and provide a headline tourism attraction for the North-West Coast of Tasmania.

100km of mountain bike trails, designed by world-leading mountain bike trail developers World Trail and TRC Tourism, will include the most popular mountain bike disciplines and cater for all levels of mountain biking ability, including Green Standard trails for beginners, Blue Standard trails for recreational mountain bikers, and Black Standard extreme trails to attract national and international mountain bike tourists, elite riders and national events.

Mountain bike industry experts believe Tasmania needs 3-4 major mountain bike facilities to be considered a mountain bike destination. The Mersey Trail Network would not only create a third major facility (after Blue Derby and Mount Wellington) but would extend the benefit of this emerging tourism industry to the North-West Coast. When also considering the trails proposed for the West Coast, this design would create the critical mass of trail experiences required, spreading the economic benefit to every region of Tasmania.

TRC Tourism has identified that the Mersey region has outstanding potential as a mountain bike destination, particularly if collaboratively marketed with the Blue Derby trails in Tasmania’s North-East.

Track Facts

More than 100km of trails

2-4 days’ riding

Enjoyable off-road trails through beautiful countryside link population centres of Devonport, Latrobe, Railton and Sheffield (and in future Cradle Mountain)

62km of single-track in 2 stacked-loop trail clusters – Warrawee Reserve (at Latrobe) and Kimberleys Lookout (between Railton and Sheffield)

40km of overland cross-country trails linking the towns. This trail includes spectacular summits with 360 degree views to gentle and tranquil riverside rides for families and children

The trail system includes trails for the four most popular MTB disciplines: Cross-Country (84% of MTB participants), Downhill (38%), Gravity Enduro (57% and the fastest growing discipline), and Pump Track (18%).
The Mersey facility will include:

- A cluster of 52km of stacked loop trails, featuring cross country, gravity enduro and downhill disciplines, in the Kimberleys Lookout region between Railton and Sheffield
- A cluster of 12km of stacked loop trails, of varying disciplines and difficulty, in Warrawee Reserve at Latrobe
- A cross-country trail linking the Kimberley and Warrawee trail clusters, via Railton (approx. 12km), which includes a unique flying fox across the Mersey River
- A return trail linking Kimberley’s Lookout to Warrawee Reserve via The Badgers Range (20km); featuring 360 degree views that include much of the northern Tasmanian coastline, the Western Tiers and Tasmanian highlands. This link trail will feature an 8km descent, which is attention-grabbing on the Australian mountain bike scene
- Off-road bike trail linking Latrobe to Devonport via the picturesque River Road alongside the Mersey River (5.3km). This track is part of the North-West Coastal Bike Pathway Project. It would make it possible to ride from the Spirit of Tasmania ferry terminal in Devonport, about 32km to Sheffield via Latrobe and Railton, without riding on a road
- A future proposed stage to Cradle Mountain would make it possible to ride from the Spirit ferries to Cradle Mountain, through some of Tasmania’s most spectacular and undisturbed wilderness.

The length of trails (approximately 100km) would require 2-3 days to complete, which is the critical mass required to encourage users to stay overnight in the district, thus further benefiting the local economy.

This facility is intended to appeal to multiple markets. It would provide local families, youth and enthusiasts with an outstanding facility for safe off-road cycling, thus contributing to local health and wellbeing and recreation outcomes.

It is also intended to contribute to economic development by creating a distinctive mountain bike attraction of appropriate size, quality and uniqueness to attract intrastate, interstate and international visitation to the Mersey region.

It is believed this facility could become only the 13th facility in the world to achieve the International Mountain Bike Association’s Silver Rating – which would place it as one of the pre-eminent mountain bike attractions on the planet. This rating is likely to stimulate significant international interest and visitation.

It is further intended this facility would host annual mountain bike events including rounds of the national championship, which will have profound benefits for the local economy, and significantly market the North-West Coast as a wilderness-based adventure destination.
**Economic Benefit**

**Jobs:**
- Construction: 12 FTEs for one year (or 6 for two years)
- Post-construction: 60 FTEs
- Direct economic injection: $6.88m per year
- Indirect economic injection: $4.8m per year
- Contribution to GSP: $25.7m per year

Additional visitors directly attracted by mountain bike trails: 21,641 unique visitors for a total...

138,000 visits per year

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"North West Tasmania has the potential to offer a network of world class trails. Located on the door step of the iconic Cradle Mountain National Park and World Heritage wilderness area, the region’s scenic landscapes, varied terrain, natural and cultural tourism attractions and transport infrastructure provide a strong basis for building mountain biking experiences attractive to a range of visitors.”

TRC Tourism

Kimberleys Lookout Stacked Loop Trail Cluster

Warrawee Stacked Loop Trail Cluster
We mean it when we say World-Class

To achieve a world-class facility, Kentish and Latrobe Councils:

1. Identified what was required to be “world-class” and whether the region could achieve it.

2. Having identified “world-class” involves trail and non-trail features, the councils identified existing non-trail features and assets exceed International Mountain Bike Association expectations;

3. The councils engaged world-leading mountain bike consultants World Trail, international tourism consultancy TRC Tourism and IMBA consultant Marty Kreig to design world-class trails.

The proposed trail design, plus surrounding services and attractions, are sufficient to qualify the Mersey Trail project for a “Silver” Rating under the International Mountain Bike Association (IMBA) global trail rating system. There is only one Gold rated trail network in the world, and 12 Silver rated including only one in Australia (Mount Buller).

The trails will be built to Australian Mountain Bike Association (AMBA) standards to ensure it qualifies to host state, national and international events.

Events

The numbers on page 4 do not include the economic contribution or additional visitors related to annual mountain bike events. It is proposed to host three events per year (and in future a round of the national MTB series). It is estimated the three planned events would attract a combined 600-800 competitors, about 400 officials, partners and crew, and about 1,000 spectators.

The economy.id event impact calculator estimates this would:
- result in a direct and indirect economic injection to the region of $74,000 per annum
- attract about 1,000 additional visitors per annum
- provide free marketing of the state as a MTB destination
- assist in “smoothing” the seasonality of the local tourism industry as the events will be held in autumn, winter and spring.

Cost

Total project development cost: $4.1m
(Kentish trail cluster $2.1m, Warrawee trail cluster $1.1m, linking trails $902,850)

The cost-benefit equation:
A development cost of $4.1m would be more than offset by the $7m per year in additional direct and indirect local expenditure, $25.7m annual contribution to Gross State Product, 12 construction and 60 ongoing jobs, the profile it will bring the North-West Coast as a tourism destination, and the increase in visitors to the existing Derby and Mt Wellington facilities by contributing to Tasmania as a global mountain bike destination.
Why we’re doing this...

Strategic Benefits

1. Economic benefit to the region
2. Key part of a broader strategy to develop a wilderness-based adventure industry
3. Diversify tourism product and visitors to the North-West Coast
4. Build on the region’s strengths - Tourism is now the largest employment sector in the Kentish Municipality and fourth largest in Latrobe Municipality. Tourism injects $617.4 million into the region and supports 4,349 jobs in the North-West Coast; The North-West Coast’s tourism is built on wilderness attractions, food and wine and “getting away from it” – mountain bikers are interested in all three of these attributes
5. Extends the benefit of emerging tourism sub-industry (with exciting potential) to the North-West Coast
6. Mountain biking is as popular in autumn, winter and spring as it is in summer, assisting to overcome seasonality in the tourism industry
7. Mountain bikers are similar to snow skiing tourists i.e. high net worth, discerning tastes, high-spending, will travel internationally to pursue their passion, focus their annual leave on a snow skiing (in this case MTB) destination but they also engage in many other activities while there. They are looking for unique experiences
8. Will provide a “bridge” to help attract Blue Derby visitors to the West Coast Trails
9. The Australian domestic overnight cycling market grew 13% per year in 2009-2014 (Tourism Research Australia, 2014)
10. The Australian international cycling tourist market grew 6% per year in 2009-2014 (Tourism Research Australia, 2014)
11. Recreation and social benefits of a safe off-road riding experience
12. Advances local, regional and state health strategies by providing an opportunity for healthy outdoor activity.

“The electorate of Lyons, in which Kentish is located, is the eighth most tourism-dependent economy in Australia, as 2892 people, or 7.1% of the employed population, works in the tourism sector”

TRC Tourism
1. Cradle Coast Authority and the State Government have identified tourism as a key industry in the North-West Coast’s future.

2. Mountain biking is central to plans to develop an adventure tourism industry in the region. This development will attract adventure seekers who will also patronise other adventure activities in the region.

3. Making Tasmania a global mountain bike destination. This would be the critical third Tasmanian mountain bike destination (after Derby and Mt Wellington) providing the critical mass to make Tasmania a world’s mountain bike destination. It is supported by smaller boutique experiences such as West Coast, Dial Ranges, Clarence, Kate Reed (at Launceston) and Kingborough. This multi-site destination model is the same as 7Stanes in Scotland, which is one of the world’s pre-eminent mountain bike experiences.

4. A future Cradle Mountain Epic Trail, connected to this facility at Sheffield, would enable mountain bikers to ride from the Spirit of Tasmania to Cradle Mountain, without riding on a road. A true Wilderness Epic trail all the way to an internationally renowned wilderness attraction.

5. Advances local, regional and state economic strategies

**Tasmanian Visitor Strategy:**
**Tasmanian Economic Development Plan:** Aims to improve the prosperity of all Tasmanians through economic development which is socially and environmentally sustainable. The plan identifies tourism as a priority sector of the Tasmanian economy.

**Tasmanian Mountain Bike Plan (2009):** Aims to guide development of a world-class, diverse and sustainably-managed range of mountain bike riding experiences in Tasmania for the local, national and international markets.

**Mountain Bike Tourism Potential in Northern Tasmania (2011):** Maps the requirements to make Northern Tasmania a Mountain Bike destination.

Advances local, regional and state recreation, social & health strategies including:

- MTB strategies
- Recreation trails strategy
- Youth Health Strategy 2010-13
- Healthy Tasmania 5-Year Strategy (draft), (Dec 2015)

**North-West Economic Development Plan (2014):** Views the tourism industry as a key component in the region’s economic future. The plan identifies the need for new product in the North-West Coast; the need to diversify the North-West Coast’s tourism product and identifies adventure tourism, including mountain biking, as a significant growth opportunity.

**Cradle Coast Destination Management Plan (2014):** The Destination Management Plan identifies that many visitor attractions in the North-West Coast are reaching maturity and new product is required if the tourism sector is to grow.

**Kentish Economic Development Strategy:** The Kentish Tourism Plan, prepared as part of the Kentish Economic Development Strategy seeks to:

- explore and support development of an adventure hub in Kentish
- develop international-standard mountain bike facilities in Kentish
- network existing operations to create an adventure tourism hub and attract new adventure based experiences
- assist to attract new adventure tourism experiences in Kentish.
Benefits for Region and State

Why we’re doing this...

Benefits for North-West:
1. International standard sports facility on North-West Coast
2. Provides new iconic attraction for North-West Coast
3. Diversifies the region’s tourism product and experiences
4. Attracts new tourism market to North-West Tasmania
5. Attracts a high-yield visitor demographic
6. Economic benefit across electoral (Braddon and Lyons) and municipal boundaries
7. Create national & international profile for the Mersey region
8. Employment during construction
9. Ongoing post-construction employment and new and expanded business activity
10. Increased indirect employment in associated industries
11. Mountain biking is a growth industry with significant potential
12. Opportunity to connect to existing smaller facilities at Dial Range and West Coast
13. A key plank in medium-term plan to build wilderness-focused adventure tourism hub in Latrobe & Kentish
14. Host state, national and potentially world mountain bike events
15. Creates recreation & health outcomes for local users
16. Provides safe off-road cycling opportunity (there are very few in the North-West Coast)
17. Increases the North-West region’s profile as an experiential wilderness destination
18. Opportunity to attract new “sail & ride” experience for interstate visitors – they don’t have to bring their car.

Benefits for Mersey region (Latrobe, Kentish and Devonport municipalities):
1. Ongoing additional employment as a direct result of mountain bike visitation
2. Job creation during construction
3. New business opportunities
4. Improves viability of existing businesses
5. Diversifies the region’s economy and tourism product
6. Provides a world-class sport & recreation facility throughout the Mersey region
7. Facility deliberately designed to include enough trails for 2-4 days of riding, encouraging users to stay in the region and support the local economy.

Benefits for Tasmania:
1. Addition to Gross State Product of $25.7m per year
2. Meets emerging visitor demand for experience-based tourism
3. Provides the crucial third facility, creating the critical mass required to make Tasmania an international mountain bike destination
4. Benefits Launceston and Hobart by assisting to attract more mountain bike tourists who will also visit those facilities, thus increasing economic activity and jobs in those areas that would not occur if the Mersey facility did not exist
5. Major attraction that increases the interstate and international tourism profile of Tasmania
6. Provides a new iconic tourism destination for the Tasmanian tourism product
7. Attracts a high-yield and fast-growing visitor demographic.

“Investment in the proposed Mersey Mountain Bike Trail Network will provide a major tourism and recreational product of state significance, capable of generating new and complementary tourism investment in North-West Tasmania and contributing to the economic growth of the wider region”
Benefits for Region and State

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“[The Mersey] mountain bike network will... add to the region’s tourism offering and strengthen Tasmania’s positioning as a world-class mountain bike destination” TRC Tourism

“Investment in the proposed Mersey Mountain Bike Trail Network will provide a major tourism and recreational product of state significance, capable of generating new and complementary tourism investment in North-West Tasmania and contributing to the economic growth of the wider region” TRC Tourism
Why the Mersey region is an ideal location for a Mountain Bike Development...

The three key attributes that combine to produce a world-class mountain bike destination are: location; trail quality; and surrounding facilities.

Location:
The Mersey trail is 5km from the Bass Highway and within 10 minutes’ drive of the Spirit of Tasmania and Devonport Airport, both being major state access points with daily connections to Melbourne. It will be possible to ride from the Spirit terminal at Devonport directly to the mountain bike facility.

The trail is one hour from Launceston Airport, which has daily connections to Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and connecting international flights.

The site is connected to four population centres with a combined population of 42,881 (ABS, 2014).

Trail quality:
Successful mountain bike facilities around the world feature high-quality trail infrastructure, diversity of trail types and difficulty levels, riding opportunities to fill 2-4 days, IMBA recognition, transport and accessibility, quality pre-trip information, facilities at trailhead or nearby, sustainable trail and infrastructure management, and events.

The Mersey development will meet all of these features.

Trail design by leading international consultant World Trail, IMBA design consultant Marty Kreig and international tourism consultancy TRC Tourism, ensuring a facility that is world-class by IMBA rating standards and distinctive among global mountain bike experiences.

The world-class trailhead facilities will include closed loop bike washdown, event hosting infrastructure, plus BBQs, toilets and change room, shelter, picnic tables and other facilities at a picturesque riverside location. The development will be capable of:

- hosting World Cup, national and state events
- attracting a broad clientele of riders
- catering for the most popular mountain bike disciplines with the potential for the Cradle Mountain Epic Trail. Epic trails are a fast-growing new discipline in mountain biking.

“The attraction of [the Mersey facility] will lie in its proximity and ease of access... proximity to Cradle Mountain and the integrated tourism offering. The natural environment and food and wine experiences will be attractive to many”

TRC Tourism
Surrounding facilities:
Key off-trail experiences sought by mountain bikers include:

- An attractive landscape, natural beauty and cultural attractions
- Range of bike-friendly accommodation options
- Cafes, food, beverage and retail businesses, including bike-related services
- Quality commercial tours (guided and self-guided)
- Community engagement and support
- Strong positioning as a mountain bike destination via coordinated destination marketing and promotion.

The Latrobe, Kentish and Devonport region is well endowed with all of these features and the success of the trail can further grow business numbers, viability/profitability of existing businesses, and employment.

This project is rare among mountain bike experiences globally in that it links towns (and thus services, accommodation and urban attractions) along with spectacular scenery, riverside and mountain top rides, and environmental and cultural interpretation along the route. The facilities already available in the towns and alongside the trails, such as accommodation and attractions, place the Mersey facility well ahead of comparable venues, which are usually in remote locations. At the Mersey trails, riders could experience a day's riding, visit non-trail attractions, and ride to their accommodation, without leaving the trails.

Marketing will feature digital, social and traditional media, plus on-site signage; all promoting trail maps, features of the trail network, image galleries, attractions and facilities around the area, accommodation, and how to get there. It is proposed to work closely with the management of the Blue Derby trails and Mt Wellington Trails, to develop seamless marketing that promotes Tasmania as a MTB destination, with multiple MTB attractions.

“With refinement of trails and some additions plus links between hubs as recommended in this plan, the region can have outstanding trail infrastructure”

TRC Tourism

What makes us different...

The Wild Mersey development has several distinctive characteristics helping it stand out from other international mountain bike offerings.

- A pedal-powered flying fox to cross the Mersey River – believed to be the only flying fox on a MTB development in the world;
- The trails connect towns. Most MTB facilities are in remote locations with no services or facilities;
- A large number of accommodation, attractions and services are not only located close to the trails, but some are inside the development footprint;
- Unique and interesting local cultural and industrial relics along the trail will provide opportunities for interpretation;
- Tasmanian wilderness (particularly rainforest and wet sclerophyll forest) provides beautiful riding terrain, found nowhere else in the world, and stunning views from the top of Kimberleys Lookout and the Badgers;
- Varying terrain provides diversity of riding experience.
“With high quality trails, the opportunity to leverage major cycling events will be strong particularly when linked with the other mountain bike destinations on the Tasmanian circuit”

TRC Tourism

Market we’re attracting:

- **North-West and Tasmanian mountain bikers** – the trail expands the number and scale of mountain bike riding opportunities in the region and state for the 17,500 (and rapidly growing) Tasmanians who ride mountain bikes

- **North-West families** – the trail provides safe day-riding facilities for families and children

- **Interstate & international mountain bikers** – the trail meets their special riding interests and offers scope for a holiday to emanate from that experience

- **Event participants** – There are plans for four events each year with potential for more

- **Guided bike tours** – the trail delivers new experiences for guided tours including rides between towns, a diversity of attractions, and a mixture of trail types

- **Adventure-seeking tourists** – the trail complements adventure tourism proposals in Kentish and Latrobe municipalities for kayaking and caving experiences

The trail’s target is a new visitor demographic for Tasmania, attracting young and middle-aged adventure seekers, with high disposable incomes and a propensity for group travel.

Management:

Once the trail is constructed, maintenance and management will be undertaken by a Management Trust, comprised of local mountain bike enthusiasts, land managers (Parks & Wildlife Service and Forestry Tasmania) and Kentish and Latrobe councils.

It will be funded by annual maintenance contributions from Kentish and Latrobe councils, plus a portion of profits from annual events.

Case Studies

**Rotorua, New Zealand:**
Mountain biking generates $10.2m direct expenditure annually. In a town of 25,000 residents there are five bike shops and over 200km of trails. Over half of the visitors to Rotorua come specifically to go mountain biking. More than 50,000 riders are using the Great Lake Trail after just three years of operation.

**Dial Range, Tasmania:**
A 9km network built by locals has attracted 200 people per week in first summer, average 100 people per week since.

**7stanes, Scotland:**
A network of seven mountain bike locations throughout the south of Scotland. A 2007 study estimated just under 400,000 visitors annually to the total 7stanes network. Most trail users come from the UK, with an estimated 8% international visitors.

**Forrest, Victoria:**
4 businesses in 2003 when Victorian government closed the native forest industry. 20 businesses in 2013 due to development of a local mountain bike facility.