



EES chapter 2 – Project rationale

Warburton Mountain Bike Destination

Table of Contents

2.0	Project rationale	1
2.1	Overview	1
2.2	Regional context and suitability for the project	1
2.2.1	Upper Yarra and Dandenong Ranges Regional Strategy Plan	1
2.2.2	Environmental setting and topography	2
2.2.3	Existing tourism economy	3
2.2.4	Current socio-economic status	3
2.3	Project benefits	4
2.3.1	Understanding the drivers of visitation behaviour	5
2.3.2	Increase in regional spending	5
2.3.3	Increase in regional income	6
2.3.4	Job creation	7
2.3.5	Health benefits	8
2.3.6	Consumer valuation	8
2.3.7	Avoidance of environmental impacts associated with informal trails	9
2.4	Achieving the project objectives	9

2.0 Project rationale

This chapter describes the rationale for developing the Warburton Mountain Bike Destination (the project) and discusses the key challenges for the Yarra Ranges region, the regional context and its suitability for the project and the predicted benefits of the project. The information in this chapter primarily draws on information in the ‘Developing Warburton as a World Class Mountain Bike Destination Study’ undertaken by TRC Tourism, the Warburton Mountain Bike Trails Master Plan, EES Referral Appendix K: Economic Health Benefits Assessment and **Technical Report E: Socio-economic**.

2.1 Overview

Cycle tourism is one of the primary markets fuelling growth in the Yarra Valley. Mountain biking in this locality started around 15 years ago and was concentrated in the Yarra State Forest in the vicinity of Mount Tugwell. A significant informal network of mountain bike trails currently exists within the region and there is evidence of increasing use of these trails by local and visiting riders.

Yarra Ranges Council has identified mountain biking as an opportunity for tourism growth within the region which would be achieved by formalising the activity in the area. The project has also been identified as crucial to the sustainable development of the Upper Yarra Valley and is even more important now as part of a post COVID19 recovery strategy.

The project would create iconic trails eligible for International Mountain Bike Association Gold Level Ride Centre status which would position Warburton as an internationally significant mountain biking destination. The trails offer a unique riding experience due to the well-suited local topography and environmental setting.

In addition, the project is uniquely placed to deliver a significant boost to the region and would provide continued opportunities for economic growth and employment, education and health and wellbeing.

The project is currently funded at \$11.3 million and has committed funding from the three levels of government and from locals in partnership with the Upper Yarra Community Enterprise. The delivery of the project and the repositioning of Warburton as an eco-tourism and outdoor recreation hub is expected to provide economic resilience and jobs growth while also supporting positive health and social outcomes for the community.

In the past, the economy of Warburton and the Upper Yarra Valley has relied on gold mining, forestry and manufacturing. These industries have progressively declined over the years and as a result of the Victorian government’s recent decision to phase out logging in native forests, the importance of the forestry industry will diminish further in Warburton. The local economy is also reliant on weekend daily visitation and short-break tourism from Melbourne, which has been impacted by the COVID19 pandemic. The project would assist the Upper Yarra Valley to transition from reliance on declining industries to a new and vibrant future with a greater focus on tourism. This transition would provide opportunities and benefits for the community of Warburton and the wider region.

2.2 Regional context and suitability for the project

Warburton presents an opportunity to develop a world-class mountain bike destination that will attract riders from across the world. A range of factors come together which make the setting unique within Australia and will be instrumental in its success. These include the policy support afforded by the Upper Yarra and Dandenong Ranges Regional Strategy Plan, the environmental setting and topography of the area as well as the existing tourism economy in Warburton and its potential for further development and growth.

2.2.1 Upper Yarra and Dandenong Ranges Regional Strategy Plan

The role of the Upper Yarra and Dandenong Ranges Regional Strategy Plan (Regional Strategy Plan) is to ensure that planning in the region continues to protect the special character and features of the region and applies to all land within the Shire of Yarra Ranges. The plan recognises the region as “a very important tourist asset for Victoria... making a considerable contribution to the local and regional economy. This contribution will be significantly increased by the sensitive expansion of facilities”.

The Regional Strategy Plan recognises “recent recreational trends need to be taken into account in the planning, development and management of the region’s open space. There is evidence of greater interest in unstructured outdoor activities such as walking and cycling within ‘natural’ settings”. A regional goal set out in the plan is facilitating further development of the region’s recreation and tourist attractions and facilities. The strategies for achieving this goal include:

- Encouragement of coordination of the planning, provision and promotion of recreation and tourism facilities in the region
- Encouragement of a diverse range of tourist activities and facilities in appropriate locations, consistent with identified themes
- Optimisation of employment and economic benefits to the region's residents from appropriate recreation and tourism developments
- Improvement of the region's competitive strengths in tourism, to encourage and provide for an increased number of local, interstate and international overnight visitors, and to increase their average length of stay in the region.

Additionally, the Regional Strategy Plan states that opportunities for recreation and tourism activities and facilities in the Upper Yarra Valley must be promoted. This includes “development of Mount Donna Buang as an all-season tourist destination, with an emphasis on... its magnificent scenery, and the opportunity for healthy outdoor activities, provided that the adjacent Watts River and Maroondah catchment are properly protected”.

The Regional Strategy Plan also seeks to protect the special character and features of the region and therefore particular regard has been given to biodiversity and heritage assets and socioeconomic factors during project design development.

2.2.2 Environmental setting and topography

Situated in the Upper Yarra Valley, on the banks of the Yarra River and flanked by mountains, the small town of Warburton represents a unique setting for a mountain biking destination. The landscape surrounding Warburton is dominated by the Yarra Ranges National Park and the Yarra State Forest. These areas contain important natural, cultural and social values that will be a key driver for visitation but require careful management to ensure their ongoing protection. The project aims to set a new benchmark in the stewardship of these values with industry leading planning, design, construction and operation. Yarra Ranges Council is committed to delivering the project in an industry leading manner across all aspects of the project. Therefore, protection of environmental and cultural values are key drivers of this project.

The environment in which the trails are located will be one of the defining attractions for riders. From the subalpine environment of Mount Donna Buang, through rainforest, towering mountain ash trees, steep fern gullies and open woodlands, the topography and scenery are diverse and compelling. The area of Yarra Ranges National Park that the trails are proposed to traverse is in the Conservation and Recreation and the Recreation Development Zones of the Yarra Ranges National Park Management Plan. The environment in this area differs from the Yarra State Forest. The subalpine environment gives way to large fern gullies and tall mountain ash trees, providing riders with a unique experience and ultimately enhancing their connection with nature.

The proposed locations of the trails provide a rich diversity in topography and would be constructed using the terrain to its maximum. There is over 1000 metres of elevation change in the north side and over 800 metres of elevation change on the south side which would further enhance the user experience. The trails to the north of Warburton on Mount Donna Buang (up to an elevation of 1250 metres), run through moderate to very steep forest covered mountain terrain with narrow crests and well incised gully systems running north to south, feeding the Yarra River below. The northern face of Mount Donna Buang is within Melbourne Water's Yarra River Upper (Rural) sub-catchment. The area is dominated by tall Eucalypt forest of various age classes, with isolated areas north of Mount Donna Buang Road comprising Cool Temperate Rainforest, where Eucalypt cover gives way to canopy species such as Southern Sassafras and Myrtle Beech. The trails to the south of Warburton wind their way down from Mount Tugwell at an elevation of 790 metres and Mount Little Joe, through heavily forested, moderately to steeply sloping low hill topography, to the proposed trail heads to be located at the Warburton Golf Course and Wesburn Park. The ridgelines in this area are broader with more rolling undulating hills. The vegetation in this area is drier, more open and has been subject to bushfires and fuel reduction burning.

In 2016, Cox Architecture was appointed to develop the Preliminary Master Plan which identified a descending trail from the Mount Donna Buang summit to Warburton Township (Trail 1 – Drop-a-K) as a key opportunity to develop an experience unlike anything available in Australia. With over 1000 vertical metres of elevation difference and an opportunity to have a trail that is descent only, this unique product could be established as an international drawcard that would drive the visitor economy.

2.2.3 Existing tourism economy

Warburton is located 70 kilometres from the Melbourne Central Business District on the Yarra River. The town of Warburton is home to just over 2,000 people and supports a range of shops, cafes and other local businesses, and is already a popular destination for visitors to the Yarra Valley. Features like the scenic Redwood Forest close to the town and the Warburton-Lilydale rail trail draw tourists from within the region and further afield. The proposed new mountain bike trails would be located within the hills surrounding the town, placing Warburton at the epicentre of the project. This design is similar to a “ski village” type design with the town as the central hub and trails radiating out into the hills on either side of the river valley. This is anticipated to promote vitality around town which will increase social engagement, provide for easy access and support the visitor economy.

Warburton is well positioned as a tourist destination as it is located only 70 kilometres from Melbourne with over four million people living within an hour’s drive. The local economy is reliant on weekend daily visitation and short-break tourism from Melbourne. In addition, the proximity to an international airport increases the ease of travel for overseas riders.

Further development opportunities exist in the Yarra Valley and Warburton region to capitalise on existing mountain bike trails and transform the region into an eco-tourism and outdoor recreation hub. Outdoor recreation hubs in the region are already at capacity. The project will help meet the current demand for outdoor recreation, outdoor education, support existing tourism and generate further economic and social benefits for the region.

2.2.4 Current socio-economic status

Warburton and the Upper Yarra Valley has experienced significant economic hardship in recent years and is experiencing a downturn in the economy. A once vibrant area supported by significant extractive, tourism and manufacturing industries is now a community in economic stagnation. The Victorian government’s recent decision to phase out logging in native forests will provide further challenges to the community. In more recent times, the local economy, which is reliant on weekend daily visitation and short-break tourism from Melbourne, has been significantly impacted by the COVID19 pandemic. Research commissioned by Yarra Ranges Tourism to understand the impacts to the tourism and events sector in the Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges indicates that in the year ending 2020, tourism expenditure fell by 65%. Predictions compared to 2019 for visitor economy direct spending and total jobs lost due to spending suggest that in the 2020/2021 financial year up to 3,358 jobs are predicted to be lost due to a 37% reduction in spending.

The project will contribute to jobs and generate substantial positive economic benefits for the Yarra Ranges Local Government Area (LGA) over a 10-year period from 2022 to 2031. The labour force in Warburton and surrounds in 2016 comprised 1,267 people of which 1,177 (93 per cent) were employed (617 full time and 512 part-time). The unemployment rate in Warburton and surrounds is higher than that of the Yarra Ranges Council region as a whole (five per cent). Compared to other parts of the Yarra Valley, Warburton has a higher level of economic disadvantage. The majority of Warburton residents travel outside of town (greater than 10 kilometres) for work. Comparatively, Warburton has a high proportion of residents with low incomes, high unemployment rate and a high rate of disadvantaged youth.

Investment in infrastructure that provides health benefits is crucial to combat health issues in the region. Within the Yarra Ranges area, 50 per cent of people were characterised as ‘Pre-Obese’ or ‘Obese’ in a health survey of residents in 2014 (DHHS, 2016). Fifty-six per cent of residents did ‘insufficient’ levels of weekly exercise (less than 150 minutes of moderate exercise per week), including three per cent who were classified as ‘sedentary’.

Yarra Ranges Council has a number of ongoing initiatives that aim to promote positive community socio-economic outcomes. An example of this is through the “Let’s Talk about Warby Project” which supports families with young children in the Warburton area by setting future priorities that enable action and innovation.

The total output (gross revenue) generated by businesses and organisations in the Warburton Valley is estimated at \$1,371 million per annum. Construction accounts for \$285 million (20.8 per cent of the total output) followed by agriculture, forestry and fishing at \$227 million and rental, hiring and real estate services at \$217 million. Total employment estimates for the Warburton Valley as at the 2016 Census is 5,181 jobs. The agriculture, forestry and fishing industry sector supports the largest number of jobs (approximately 705 jobs) followed closely by the construction and education and training sectors. The total wages and salaries estimate for the Warburton Valley precinct is approximately \$315 million per annum. The education and training sector makes the largest contribution, and this is estimated at approximately \$50 million.

Total output: the gross revenue generated by businesses and/or organisations in each of the industry sectors in a defined region.

Local expenditure: the value of intermediate goods and services purchased by local industry sectors within the precinct.

Regional imports: the value of goods and services imported into the Warburton Valley from outside. Imports reflects local demand for goods and services which are not available in the Warburton Valley, or are not available locally at the right price, quality or quantity.

Value added: Value-added data represents the marginal economic value that is added by each industry sector in the Warburton Valley and is calculated by subtracting local expenditure and expenditure on regional imports from the total output generated by an industry sector, or alternatively, by adding the wages & salaries paid to local employees, the gross operating surplus and taxes on products and production.

The total local expenditure estimate for the Warburton Valley is \$363 million per annum. The construction sector has the highest level of local expenditure, purchasing \$134 million (37%) of locally sourced goods and services followed by the agriculture, forestry and fishing and rental, hiring and real estate services sectors. There is a high level of local expenditure on intermediate goods and services proportionate to total output which indicates a well-developed local supply chain. This also indicates that any expansion in the top three sectors which generate the largest amount of gross revenue in the region (i.e. construction, agriculture, forestry and fishing and rental, hiring and real estate) would typically deliver broad based benefits for the region's economy.

The total regional import estimate for the Warburton Valley is \$311 million per annum. The construction sector represents the greatest expenditure on regional imports at \$66 million, followed by manufacturing (\$60 million) and agriculture, forestry and fishing (\$50 million). The total value-added by the industries operating in the Warburton Valley is estimated at \$697 million per annum. Rental, hiring and real estate services makes the largest contribution to value-added (\$158 million), followed by agriculture, forestry and fishing (\$121 million) and construction (\$84 million).

Taking into consideration current contributions to the socio-economic status of the Warburton Valley in terms of employment, value-added and local expenditure on goods and services, key propulsive industries have been identified, including, construction services, other agriculture, retail trade, education, residential building construction and sawmill product manufacturing. These propulsive industries have the potential to significantly influence economic growth and social change in the area.

The region requires investment in appropriate infrastructure, to generate significant jobs and economic growth. Investment in the project is anticipated to contribute to jobs and economic growth through an increase in visitors to the region. Yarra Ranges Council identified the need to create a Place Plan to help guide decisions about the town and to explore how it may change over time. Yarra Ranges Council engaged with the community from December 2018 to May 2019 to learn what the community thought the town would look like in the coming 20 years. The Warburton Place Plan – Engagement and Directions Paper identified a number of dormant sites in the area where there appears to be an appetite by property owners to revitalise these sites should the project go ahead.

2.3 Project benefits

The project has the potential to bring substantial economic and social benefits to the local and regional economy through direct and indirect expenditure from visitors and local residents and associated job and wealth creation and through the increasing health and wellbeing of those people that use the mountain bike trails. The project would also contribute to the reduction in environmental impacts associated with the building of informal trails within natural areas.

Warburton's local economy and small businesses thrive on the visitor economy and an investment in the Warburton Mountain Bike Destination will contribute to continued growth, both during construction and through ongoing operations. A significant number of jobs and an increase in regional income will be generated during the construction phase of the project. The benefits of the operational phase of the project would be driven by expenditure of users/visitors to towns adjacent to the trail network and in

the broader region as well as spending associated with major state and national events that could be staged.

The construction and ongoing operation of the project is expected to generate the following economic benefits:

- In 2031 users would be injecting \$48.609 million into the local economy
- Generation of 84 jobs during the construction period and 229 direct and indirect jobs when the project is fully operational in 2031
- Increase of around \$143.272 million in regional income over 10 years
- Indirect health benefits for Victorian users estimated at \$47.1 million over 10 years
- User value benefits estimated at \$26.681 million over 10 years.

The project is expected to bring the following social benefits:

- Enhanced community access to infrastructure that encourages increased levels of physical activity as well as health and wellbeing outcomes
- Assist in addressing high levels of obesity, dementia and poor mental health that are significant issues for the community
- Revitalisation of the local communities
- Reduced levels of unemployment
- Support a transition from a mature native timber industry to a nature-based tourism industry
- Creation of a stronger community connection to the environment with the trail network showcasing some of the high-quality ecosystems in the region.

2.3.1 Understanding the drivers of visitation behaviour

Research was undertaken in May 2021 by Instinct and Reason in order to understand the values of mountain bike park trails in pristine and scenic environments such as a national park (i.e. Trail 1 and the alternative to Trail 1, i.e. Trails 45 to 47) to visitors. The research indicated that the trail experience (particularly that offered by Trail 1) and scenery within the National Park accounted for 15 per cent of visitation choice.

Additionally, surveys undertaken by environment services company Xyst in order to understand the drivers for visitation to Derby, Tasmania indicated that spectacular scenery and natural values is a main driver for doing the Blue Tier / Bay of Fires trails (for the Warburton Mountain Bike Destination, Trail 1 would be equivalent). The Blue Tier / Bay of Fires trail are also a significant driver in increasing the length of time riders spent in Derby. Furthermore, marketing and branding of these specific trails brought attention to the town even for visitors that were not planning on riding on those trails. Early morning shuttle buses to the top of the trails were also found to be a motivator for staying additional days in the town.

2.3.2 Increase in regional spending

Based on the modelling of trail operations, the annual number of trail users would increase from 131,217 in the first year of operation (2022) to 174,738 after five years and reach around 221,545 after 10 years of operation (2031). Around two thirds would be day visitors and one third overnight visitors. This represents a significant increase in visitors to the region. It is anticipated that once the trails are operational, there will be an increase in spending in the region by trail users.

Estimated spending in the Yarra Ranges area by trail users would increase from \$28 million in 2022 to \$48.6 million in 2031. Figure 2-1 provides a breakdown of the projected spending in the region by day and overnight trail users based on modelling for the project.

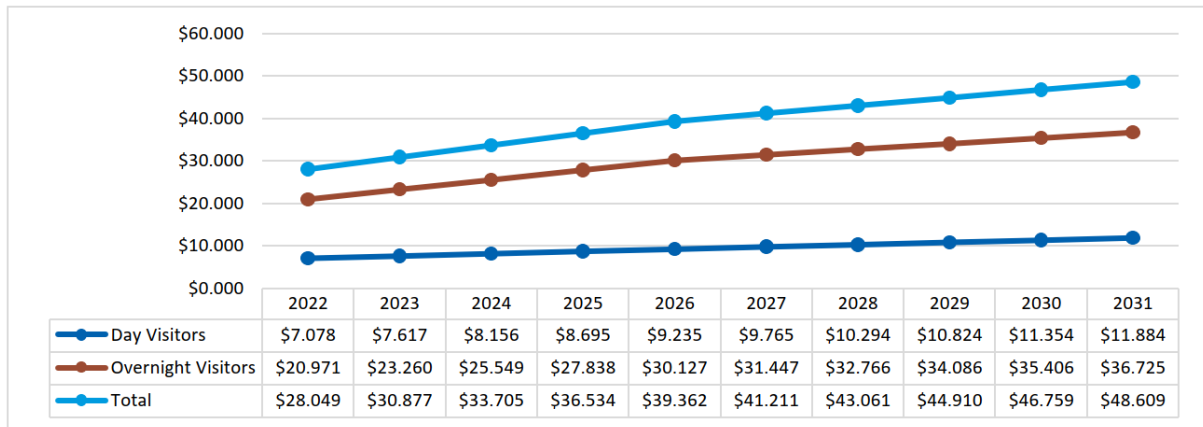


Figure 2-1 Projected total annual spending in the region by trail users (\$ million - 2021 prices) (Source: MCA Modelling July 2021)

It is anticipated that the total expenditure would comprise:

- Spending on trail-linked activities (including spending on bike related expenses and other spending such as food and beverages) in proximity to the trails
- Spending on accommodation (for overnight stayers) and meals during their stay
- Spending on other recreational and tourism services.

While some of this spending would be serviced by existing businesses, an increase in regional spending will encourage new businesses to service a growing visitor market. This is particularly the case with biking related spending (for example bike hire, guides/trainers and shuttles).

2.3.3 Increase in regional income

Construction of the project will provide a boost to regional income assuming that most of the construction workforce will be from the Warburton and Yarra Ranges area. A total regional income of \$9.054 million would be injected into the economy over the two stages of construction (construction stage 1 – 110 kilometres of trail and construction stage 2 – 82 kilometres of trail). Table 2-1 provides a breakdown of the regional income over the two stages of construction.

Regional income

Regional income is the total net income generated from the project and covers wages and salaries of employees and profits of businesses within the region. It includes income generated directly within the business and indirect income, which is generated in other regional businesses (wages and profits) from the multiplier impacts of employee spending on the region. In the modelling of income generated, income tax and GST on spending, are both treated as leakages from the region.

Table 2-1 Regional income generated during the construction of the project (\$ million –2021 prices) (source: MCA modelling and estimates, August 2021)

Construction of the project	Direct regional income	Indirect/induced income	Total regional income
Stage 1	\$5.650	\$1.130	\$6.780
Stage 2	\$1.895	\$0.379	\$2.274
Total	\$7.545	\$1.509	\$9.054

The increase in regional income (in constant 2021 prices) generated annually by the operation of the trails and visitor spending is anticipated to total \$10.3 million in 2022, increasing to \$17.7 million in 2031. The increase in income generated by day visitors is expected to be \$2.6 million in 2022 and \$4.4 million in 2031. Overnight visitors would boost regional income from \$7.6 million in 2022 to \$13.3 million in 2031. Figure 2-2 shows the regional income increase by visitor type.

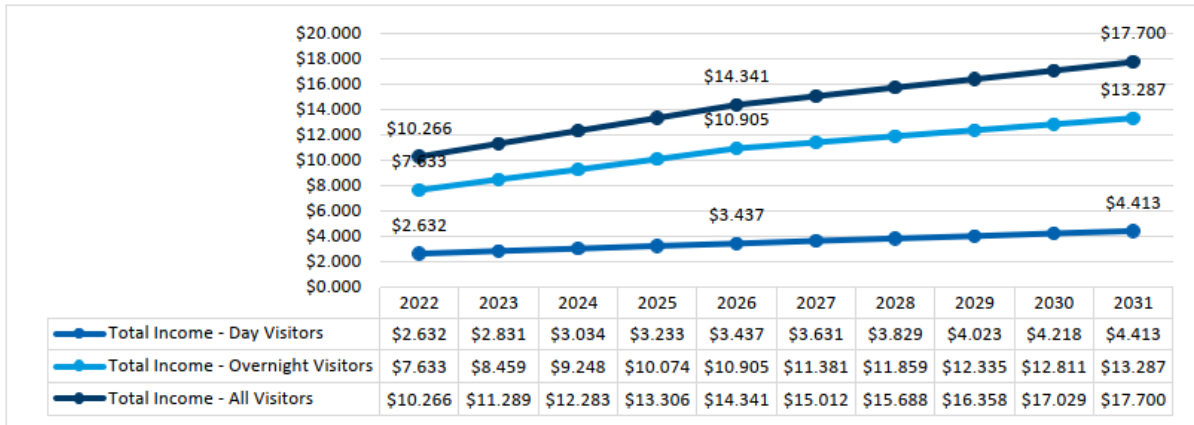


Figure 2-2 Trail operations increase in regional income by visitor type 2022 - 2031 (\$ million - 2021 prices) (Source: MCA modelling and estimates, September 2020)

2.3.4 Job creation

Construction of the trails would be undertaken by teams of three to four persons with up to eight teams dispersed across the different trail extents at any one time. A total of 84.1 Full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs (70.1 direct jobs and 14.0 indirect/induced jobs) would be generated during the construction period. The 70.1 direct jobs comprise 50.3 jobs in on-site construction and 19.8 jobs in materials/equipment supply. The workforce is anticipated to come from local areas, typically Warburton, with construction crew staying in Warburton. Figure 2-3 provides detail of the direct and indirect jobs created by the project.

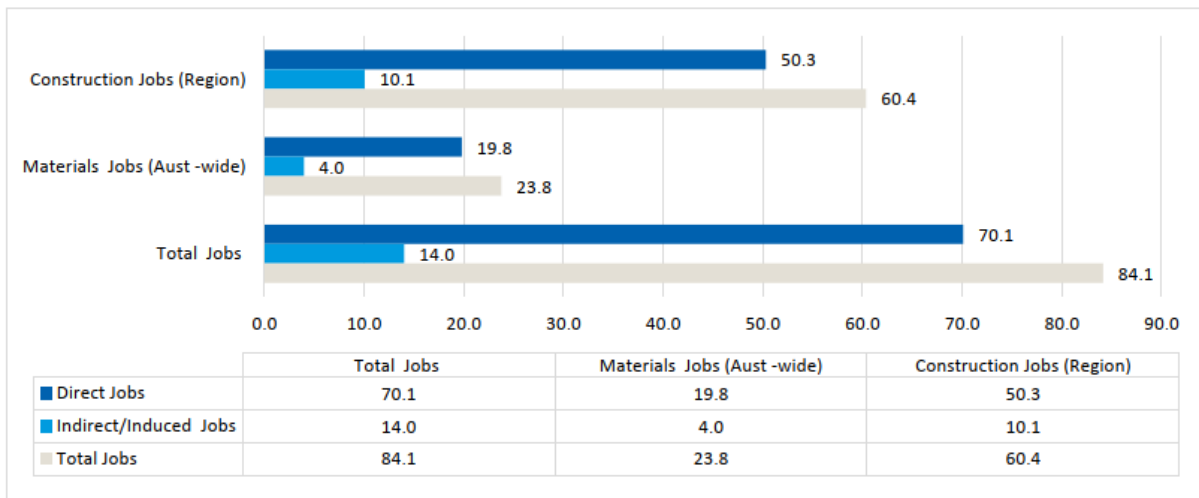


Figure 2-3 Total FTE jobs during project construction (stage 1 and 2) (source: MCA modelling and estimates, September 2020)

The operation of the trails would generate a total of 132.7 FTE jobs in year 2022, increasing to 228.6 FTE jobs (142.9 direct jobs and 16.4 indirect/induced jobs) in 2031. Of the direct jobs in 2031, day visitors would account for 51.6 FTE jobs, overnight visitors for 205.8 FTE jobs and events 13.8 jobs. The operation of the trails will result in the development of a local mountain bike service industry comprising recreation services/other services (mountain bike hire, guides, equipment etc.), transport, accommodation, food and beverage as well as many others. Table 2-2 provides the number of direct and indirect/induced jobs created by visitor type.

Table 2-2 Total FTE jobs generated by trails operations 2022 – 2031 (source: MCA modelling and estimates, September 2020)

Jobs generated by trail users/visitors	Y1	Y5	Y10
Day users/visitors			
Direct jobs	30.7	40.1	51.6
Indirect/induced jobs	4.0	5.3	6.6
Total jobs	34.8	45.4	58.2
Overnight users/visitors			
Direct jobs	88.1	126.5	154.2
Indirect/induced jobs	9.9	13.4	16.1
Total jobs	98.0	139.9	170.3
Events			
Direct jobs	0.0	7.4	11.1
Indirect/induced jobs	0.0	2.1	2.7
Total jobs	0.0	9.4	13.8
Total users/visitors			
Direct jobs	118.8	166.6	205.8
Indirect/induced jobs	13.9	18.7	22.7
Total jobs	132.7	185.3	228.6

2.3.5 Health benefits

Exercise is proven to reduce the risk of numerous chronic health conditions, reduce disease, increase life expectancy and increase productivity. There is also evidence that suggests people who live in environments that support walking and cycling have better health than those in neighbourhoods without active transport options.

An important benefit from the proposed mountain bike trail includes the health benefits to users from physical activity. The presence of the project would encourage members of the local and broader community to exercise more and become healthier.

A report by Marsden Jacobs Associates indicates that exercise of cycling or active walking in Victorian Parks has net healthcare benefits of \$15 per hour in terms of a reduction in lifetime health costs (adjusted for injury). Healthcare benefits are measured as the net (adjusted for injury) avoided costs to the national healthcare system (private costs and government costs) attributable to nature-based outdoor activity.

The indirect health benefit is estimated at \$47.1 million (in constant 2021 prices) over a 10-year period or an average of \$4.7 million per year. Note that the indirect health benefits have been calculated for Victorian users only and it has been assumed that an average cycle period is 2.5 hours with a net healthcare benefit of \$10.

2.3.6 Consumer valuation

There are a number of reasons for people to go mountain biking which include the following:

- Exercise and health
- Spending time with family and friends
- Exhilarating experience seeking

- Spending time in the outdoors and enjoying nature.

People are willing to pay for attractive recreational activities, both active and passive. Both local and broader community members would have new recreational opportunities if the project is approved.

Although access to the mountain bike trail would be free of charge, users derive a benefit from riding within the area that is not captured through a fee. In economic terms this is known as ‘willingness to pay’.

The willingness to pay for the trail has been estimated to be \$15 per trail ride. This equates to a total benefit of \$26.7 million (in constant 2020 prices) over a 10-year period for all trail users or an average of \$2.6 million per year.

2.3.7 Avoidance of environmental impacts associated with informal trails

The growing popularity of mountain biking has increased pressure on natural areas through the construction of informal mountain bike trails that are not approved. This pressure is due to a lack of dedicated mountain bike trails, particularly close to urban areas. In the vicinity of Warburton, a number of illegally built trails exist, for example at Mount Tugwell where a number of trails have been constructed illegally in the Yarra State Forest.

Because these trails are not professionally designed and built they have not been developed with regard to potential environmental impacts. As a consequence, these trails not only have had direct impacts on native vegetation and waterways but are the cause of extensive ongoing erosion. Yarra Ranges Council has worked with DELWP, the local mountain bike club and community to reduce the proliferation of illegal trails in the area using the Warburton Mountain Bike Destination as an incentive to stop illegal activity. In the event that the project does not meet the needs of riders it is likely that illegal trail construction will again escalate.

The construction and use of informal mountain bike trails has dramatically increased during the COVID 19 pandemic as the community has embraced outdoor recreation opportunities. During this time Australia has recorded record bike sales and, together with informal trail construction and use, this is likely to further increase demand for formalised trails.

The Warburton Mountain Bike Destination would contribute to avoidance of environmental impacts from illegally built trails by providing an extensive well-designed trail network to satisfy regional mountain biking demand.

2.4 Achieving the project objectives

Yarra Ranges Council’s objectives for the project and how each objective is being met is outlined in Table 2-3.

Table 2-3 How project objectives are being met

Objective	How objective is being met
Facilitate tourism growth and associated positive economic and jobs growth in the Yarra Valley region	<p>The project would facilitate tourism growth by formalising mountain biking in the area and transforming the region into an eco-tourism and outdoor recreation hub by providing quality and diverse sport and recreation facilities while protecting the environment and developing effective community partnerships. This would be achieved through the creation of a world-class mountain bike trail network to attract riders from across the world.</p> <p>The economic analysis completed by TRC in 2021 demonstrated that when fully operational, trail users would inject \$48.609 million into the local economy and the operation of the trails would result in 228.6 jobs created.</p>
Create iconic mountain bike trails eligible for International Mountain Bike Association Gold Ride Centre status	<p>The project aims to be the first Gold status Ride Centre in Australia, accredited by the International Mountain Bike Association. The minimum volume of trails required to qualify for Gold status is 160 km. This prestigious status is awarded based on both the available trails and supporting tourism infrastructure and services. There is currently only six Gold Status Ride Centres across the globe, providing an important drawcard for international tourism.</p> <p>The proposed design includes 177 km of mountain bike trail across 61 trails, trail heads and associated infrastructure and would be eligible for Gold status.</p>

Objective	How objective is being met
<p>Create spectacular riding experiences that have a competitive advantage over existing mountain bike destinations and leverage Warburton's beautiful township, rural valley and surrounding forested slopes</p>	<p>The proposed locations of the trails provide a rich diversity in topography, scenery and natural beauty and would be constructed using the terrain to its maximum. The final shape and feel of the trail would be dictated by the terrain and any interesting shapes or features that are present in the landscape would be used where possible to create a unique user experience. Maximising the use of the existing terrain would also result in avoiding the need for significant excavation or soil disturbance during construction of the trails.</p>
<p>Enhance the health and well-being of the community</p>	<p>The trails will benefit riders who use the trail by providing an enjoyable experience, as well as exercise and associated health and well-being benefits. Members of the local and broader community can be expected to exercise more and become healthier as a result of the construction of the trails. Assuming that the average cycle period is 2.5 hours, the present value of indirect health benefits is estimated to be \$47.1 million over a 10-year period for Victorian users.</p>
<p>Maintain the significant biodiversity and heritage values within the project area and provide opportunities for the community to connect with and appreciate their importance.</p>	<p>Yarra Ranges Council is committed to deliver an outcome that supports great economic and community outcomes while maintaining responsible environmental stewardship. Protection of environmental and cultural values are key drivers of this project. Verification of the protection of biodiversity and heritage values is a core element of this EES.</p> <p>Micro-siting of new mountain bike trails would be conducted to identify any specific environmental values within the identified 20 metre corridor and mark them as exclusion zone. Micro-siting would also include identifying and avoiding large trees.</p> <p>The mountain bike trails will provide an important opportunity to connect people with nature. There is growing recognition of the health and wellbeing benefits of time in nature and it helps create future environmental advocates through deepening connections with the landscape. Opportunities to provide information, interpretation and education to support this would be developed in collaboration with land managers.</p>