



Submission in response to:

Draft Tasmanian Mountain Bike Plan, Sept. 2009

The Hobart Trail Alliance (HTA) is pleased to see the increasing profile that mountain biking (MTB) is gaining at a government and planning level, exemplified by the preparation of the draft Tasmanian MTB Plan (the draft Plan). The HTA welcome this opportunity to respond to the draft Plan.

The HTA is a recently formed alliance of individuals from diverse backgrounds that share a mutual interest in access to legal, sustainable and enjoyable trails for mountain bikers.

HTA's Vision:

A well thought out interconnected network of sustainable mountain bike trails that cater to the various disciplines and skill levels of all mountain bikers which is well supported by the broader Hobart community.

HTA's Mission:

To work closely with land managers, mountain bikers and the local community to advocate, build and maintain a sustainable, challenging and enjoyable mountain bike trail network in the Hobart area.

This submission responds to the recommendations for each of the Future Directions outlined in the Summary of the draft Plan. However, there are two overarching points that HTA would like to present first and foremost:

The draft Plan overstates the supply of cross country trails.

The draft Plan notes that cross-country MTB is the largest rider group and hence demand. The HTA concurs with this and so, while the draft Plan argues that Tasmania has a greater supply of existing cross-country riding opportunities (largely because existing trails generally tend to naturally favour cross-country style riding), management and development for cross-country MTB should be a priority.

There are three related points made in the draft plan that require further consideration:

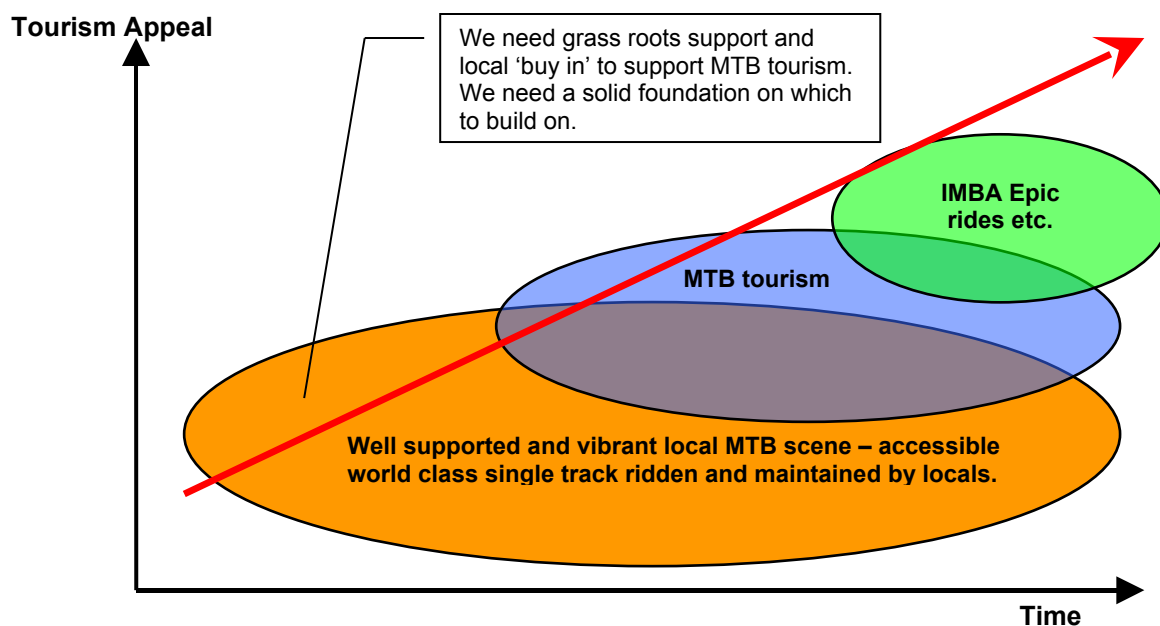
1. The predominant rider group is interested in cross-country, and particularly singletrack - mountain bikers the world over seek out narrow 'singletrack' trails and a network of fire trails is not an alternative.
2. The most abundant trail type is cross-country.
3. A significant proportion of the existing cross-country trails (especially the singletrack component) are informal, unauthorised or illegal.

The related point that isn't clearly stated is that taking the trails in point 3 away from the trails in point 2 leaves the main rider group massively under serviced; essentially perhaps 50% or more of trail *quantity* would be lost, and 90% of *quality* trails.

It should also be noted that while cross-country trail riding is the largest part of the market, there are currently zero legal purpose-built, shuttle-able (public vehicle access to the top) downhill/freeride/north-shore runs in the state. This is somewhat incongruous given (as noted in the draft Plan) relatively higher participation for downhill state races than cross-country state races, and support for trail construction days by downhill riders. Clearly downhill MTB is a significant part of the sport's culture and must also be accommodated.

A vibrant and well supported local mountain bike community must underpin future tourism opportunities.

While mountain biking in Tasmania presents tourism opportunities, it is important not to ignore the needs of local riders. To this end, the initial focus should be on addressing regional and local trail planning and maintenance issues. Reputation is a major factor that contributes to MTB tourism, thus by working with locals to develop accessible world class trail networks, not only will word spread but the variety and depth of riding will encourage tourists to stay longer. When a process and practice for addressing local issues is clear, that is, 'we have our own house in order', then it may be appropriate to pursue and market MTB tourism and epic rides.



The draft Plan notes the various land management challenges with mountain biking in Tasmania. These have not arisen due to tourist riders, and will not be effectively addressed by a strategy focus on the development of MTB infrastructure and promotion for tourism. Voluntary trail care, like volunteering generally, requires local 'ownership'. If volunteers simply feel like a work force with little input into the decision making process, and little connection to the trail in question – then maintaining numbers and enthusiasm will be difficult.

Successful MTB tourism destinations (Whistler, North Shore, Crested Butte, Moab, Forest, Melrose, Mount Stromlo, Wanaka, Port Hills) have been instigated, driven and supported by passionate locals.

The HTA broadly agrees with the vast majority of the recommendations, except where noted otherwise below.

B. Hierarchy of Trails.

The HTA feels it is premature selecting and developing marketing plans for Iconic and Epic rides at this stage. The focus should initially be on addressing issues and problems at the local trail or Regional MTB Hub level; i.e. address local riders' issues and demands first. Furthermore, any trail selection and development should focus on networks; it is the interconnections within a trail network that make riding interesting, fun and encourage repeat visitation.

E. Innovative Trail Design & Construction

The HTA strongly supports all recommendations in this section. The draft plan contains a good outline of the results of poor location, construction and maintenance of trails, and these issues in the greater Hobart area are one of the reasons for the formation of the HTA. However, the recommended actions should address these issues at the levels noted above (B) first. In particular, while the development of Trail Care groups is supported, they may prove more effective if nurtured at the local level.

F. Resource Commitment

Clearly nothing can be achieved without adequate resources. But the alleged tourism opportunities should not drive the seeking or allocation of funding to the exclusion or marginalisation of the clear local needs. Additionally, by supporting local needs, better value for money can be achieved through the utilisation of passionate local volunteers.

G. Partnerships between land managers & users

Explicit recognition of the need for land managers and users to work co-operatively is welcome, and recognition of this by the HTA is another reason for its formation.

H. Leading MTB products & events

While events can clearly enhance the profile of MTB and particular areas, it is important to get the foundation right first. Some leading events obviously already exist but, before pursuing too many more big ideas we should resolve or stabilise existing problems, be they access issues, user conflict or impacts.

I. Marketing & promotion

The proposal for a central website for MTB information, with links to resources and services, is strongly supported.

J. Education

Further development, promotion and distribution of an appropriate rider code of conduct is welcome.

Thankyou for your consideration.

Ed Parker

On behalf of the Hobart Trail Alliance

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