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Organisation: Northern Rivers Trains for the Future inc

Contact person: Karin Kolbe

Postal address: PO Box 1292 Mullumbimby

State: NSW

Postcode: 2482

Country: Australia

Email address: [pres@toot.com.au](mailto:pres@toot.com.au)

Telephone: 02 6680 8516

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## **Rail Services for Northern NSW and linked to Qld Casino – Murwillumbah - Coolangatta**

The rapid growth of the Northern Rivers and its inclusion in Tourism Australia’s marketing as the ‘Green Cauldron’, means the long term social, economic and environmental sustainability of the region requires immediate services on the existing rail corridor between Casino and Murwillumbah, and a cross-border link from Murwillumbah to Coolangatta Airport.

### **Contents**

1. Executive Summary.....	2
2. The Landscape: Physical and Political .....	3
Existing Transport Corridors .....	4
3. The Challenges .....	5
Road Congestion, Heavy Vehicles and Safety .....	5
Rail Challenges .....	5
Airports .....	6
Tourism Development and Management.....	6
The Solution: Casino-Murwillumbah-Coolangatta Rail.....	7
Under-utilised transport infrastructure .....	7
Rail Freight Options .....	7
Rail Options for Tourists .....	8
Public Transport for the Northern Rivers .....	8
Action on Climate Change.....	9
Patronage .....	9
Indicative Costs .....	10
Seven Year Plan for Commuter Services and Link to Queensland.....	11
4. References .....	13
5. Acronyms.....	13
6. Acknowledgements .....	13
7. Appendix A Regional festivals and events.....	14
8. Appendix B Tourism Case Study: Byron Bay.....	15

# 1. Executive Summary

The Northern Rivers region of New South Wales is suffering growing pains. Although mainly rural in character, it is the most densely populated rural region in the country taking in the booming coastal shires of Tweed, Byron and Ballina as well as the key regional centres of Lismore, Murwillumbah and Grafton.

Immediately to the north is the fastest growing urban region in Australia, South East Queensland. There is disparity between the levels of transport links servicing the Northern Rivers compared to those in South East Queensland.

The existing transport corridors are congested, and largely due to geography, the congestion will increase. The safety, efficiency, amenity and viability of business, freight movements, tourism and residents is affected.

Tourism is a major industry of the area, and has recently been declared part of Australia's Green Cauldron's inclusion in the National Landscapes program and is part of Tourism Australia's significant global marketing initiatives

This document describes a proposal to upgrade rail links through the Casino-Gold Coast transport corridor as the spine of an integrated transport system for the Northern Rivers and cross border region of South East Queensland.

For the long term, a greater Brisbane -Gold Coast - Byron Bay - Casino - Acacia Ridge - Brisbane cross border loop would be created. This would provide the framework for flexibility in managing the future development and transport links across the two regions as well as providing additional capacity on the AusLink Network that will aid in the management of cross border transport flows for many decades to come.

The document describes the rail's role as the backbone of an integrated transport plan for the area.

A seven year plan for establishing commuter rail services on the line, and planning for the link from Murwillumbah NSW to Coolangatta Qld concludes the document.

## 2. The Landscape: Physical and Political



The Far North Coast's population is 228,000 and expected to rise by 60,400 by 2026 (*Far North Coast Regional Strategy 2006*, p 6).

Tourism figures dwarf the residential numbers: 4.6 million visitors came to The Northern Rivers Tropical NSW Tourism precinct in 2005 (*Far North Coast Regional Strategy*). Byron Shire alone had 1.1 million in 2007 (*The Byron Shire Economy Situational Analysis*).

The area's stunning natural beauty has earned it a place in Tourism Australia's latest marketing plan as the 'Green Cauldron'.

The populations surrounding the Northern Rivers are increasing too. It is estimated that by 2025, one quarter of Australia's population will live within the coastal region from Hervey Bay Qld to Coffs Harbour in NSW.

Brisbane and the South East Queensland region are also growing. Brisbane will become Australia's second largest city with an increase of more than one million people to around 3.7 million in 2026. (*Sydney-Brisbane Corridor Strategy*, p 19) The current population of South East Queensland is 2,680,000.

The lack of adequate transports links across the border (further described below), and constrained by mountains, rivers and the sea, is impeding a safe and sustainable movement of people and goods between them. The role of the Federal government in bridging this border is of national significance.

## ***Existing Transport Corridors***

The Northern Rivers is located within the national (AusLink) Sydney-Brisbane transport corridor featuring the coastal road transport route (Pacific Highway), the inland road transport route (New England Highway) and the North Coast rail line between Sydney and Brisbane. There are also airports at Brisbane, Coolangatta and Ballina.

The AusLink *Sydney-Brisbane Corridor Strategy* ('the Strategy') describes objectives for managing traffic flows on the three inter-capital transport links between Sydney and Brisbane that are part of the AusLink Network. The three routes are the inland road route (New England Highway), coastal road route (Pacific Highway) and the North Coast rail line between Sydney and Brisbane (*SBCS*, p 3). As a region, the Northern Rivers fits entirely within the Corridor.

A Casino-Gold Coast transport corridor runs east-west from Casino along the Bruxner Highway and Lismore-Bangalow Road to the coastal shires of Byron and Ballina. These east-west traffic flows in and out of the region integrate with the traffic flows travelling to and from South East Queensland along the Pacific Highway. Limited public transport services exist at the local level to varying levels, however there are few useable services connecting regional centres on a regular or affordable basis.

Topography has played a major role in the development of the region, in particular the patterns of development and transport links. This has led to the Casino-Gold Coast transport corridor becoming the busiest east-west transport route between the Hunter and the Queensland border according to AADT figures.

The existing Casino-Murwillumbah corridor lies unused despite the fact that 86% of residents in the Lismore and Byron Shires live within 5 km of the Casino-Murwillumbah line (ABS, 2006).

### **3. The Challenges**

The area faces challenges in transporting people and freight, managing tourism, providing public transport and dealing with climate change. These challenges are examined and in section 4 our rail proposal is discussed in further detail.

#### ***Road Congestion, Heavy Vehicles and Safety***

Many of the issues identified in the Sydney-Brisbane Corridor Strategy relating to congestion, safety and under performing infrastructure are readily apparent within the region. The Strategy acknowledges that the current situation is expected to get worse.

Main transport corridors and settlement patterns have been largely predetermined and the general alignment of such corridors is unlikely to change significantly. This is particularly so in relation to the Pacific Highway corridor where the mountainous border region reaches closest to the coast. This narrow coastal corridor carries 90% of cross border traffic flows within the Sydney-Brisbane corridor. The Strategy noted that ‘road congestion and capacity constraints, which are already evident’ along the ‘coastal’ route between Brisbane and Tweed Shire ‘are expected to become increasingly severe’ (SBCS, p 23 see also *Brisbane Urban Corridor Strategy*). 151,000 vehicles per day are projected for the Pacific Highway at the NSW/Queensland border by 2026. (SBCS, p 23 citing Pacific Motorway Upgrade, Smith St to Tugun Bypass, QDMR)

In addition, growth along the ‘coastal side of the corridor’ is likely to lead to ‘congestion, capacity, safety and traffic issues’ that ‘will challenge the performance and adequacy of the transport system’ in a ‘number of key regional locations’ including ‘the Gold Coast and Northern NSW down to Byron Bay’. (SBCS, p 28). For towns such as Byron Bay, Ballina and parts of the Tweed Coast, amenity and safety are seriously compromised. Delays involved in travelling in and out of some regional locations such as Byron Bay and Tweed Heads impact on the economic efficiency of business across the region.

Heavy vehicle use on the Pacific Highway is expected to increase by 3.4 per cent every year to 2025 (Working Paper 66, BTRE p 60). ‘Interstate freight between Sydney and Brisbane is expected to almost triple in the next 20 years’ (SBCS, p i). The strategy notes that ‘as well as the congestion effects, this growth will have an adverse effect on the amenity of towns and cities along the route and on road safety along the route’. (SBCS, p 23)

#### ***Rail Challenges***

A further challenge identified by the Strategy is the need to manage ‘congestion, efficiency and safety issues on the rail corridor to improve the competitiveness of rail’ on the North Coast rail line and to manage the ‘interaction with the metropolitan networks in Sydney and Brisbane (on the standard/dual gauge freight line) and managing shared access for passenger and freight trains’ (SBCS, p 28).

A freight challenge is ‘the ability of the corridor and intermodal terminal capacity through Sydney and north to Newcastle and Acacia Ridge in Brisbane to respond to the increased freight task’ (SBCS, p 28). 76% of all interstate freight carried in the Sydney-Brisbane Corridor was carried by road freight in 2004. Rail 11%, Sea 12% and Air 1%. (SBCS, p 7)

## ***Airports***

The Sydney-Brisbane route is Australia's second busiest route with 3.9 million passenger movements in 2005 (SBCS, p 8 citing BTRE 2005).

The Sydney-Gold Coast air route is the fourth most travelled route in Australia (SBCS, p 8).

'Passenger transport between Sydney and Brisbane is expected to grow by 25 per cent to 5.6 million trips by 2025, with air transport increasing its dominance of interstate trips to 90 per cent compared to the current 72 per cent. (SBCS, p 22).

## ***Tourism Development and Management***

Tourism is a major economic driver for Sydney, Brisbane and the Gold Coast as well as tourist destinations all along the coastal route and significant car-based tourism destinations in the hinterland. Tourism contributes in excess of one billion dollars per year into the economies of local regions along the corridor. (SBCS, p 8). More specific to our region: "Tourism is an economic driver of this region, contributing around \$646m to the economy and generating around 6,000 jobs" (Working Paper for the Regional Industry and Economic Plan, Northern Rivers Region, p 73).

The Minister for Tourism, Martin Ferguson, and Minister for the Environment, Peter Garrett, recently announced the Australia's Green Cauldron's inclusion in the National Landscapes program. Australia's Green Cauldron stretches from Byron Bay to the Gold Coast and west towards the Great Dividing Range and has been included in this program because of the area's unique and distinctive natural and cultural experiences; including the world's second largest shield volcano crater; immense environmental biodiversity; and the World Heritage-listed Mount Warning, which has special meaning for Indigenous communities. Martin Ferguson, said: "Attaining National Landscapes status means this special region will benefit from increased exposure in Tourism Australia's significant global marketing initiatives."

"The most fundamental aspect of the Northern Rivers ability to support a thriving tourist industry is the 'quality of the tourist experience'. This will depend on a number of factors, including the natural attractions and quality of products and services available in the region. Government and the industry have an important role in:

- Protecting natural values for and from tourism (scenic areas, coastal values, water quality);
- Addressing congestion impacts (particularly during major events, e.g. Byron Bay Blues Festival);
- Developing product in and promoting different parts of the region to better distribute the load on infrastructure;
- Infrastructure capacity (small coastal villages can sometimes have inadequate car parking, sewage facilities etc. to cope with peak tourist influx).

At present a range of government and industry initiatives have had mixed success in properly addressing these issues." (Working Paper for the Regional Industry and Economic Plan, Northern Rivers Region, p 75)

# **The Solution: Casino-Murwillumbah-Coolangatta Rail**

## ***Under-utilised transport infrastructure***

The currently unused Casino-Murwillumbah rail line runs within the Casino-Gold Coast corridor and has the potential to relieve traffic congestion around communities in the ‘coastal’ corridor between Brisbane and Ballina and to create a multi-modal cross border transport corridor by linking the line to the Gold Coast rail services (Queensland Rail services to Coolangatta are due to commence around 2018).

- 86% of residents in the Lismore and Byron Shires live within 5 km of the Casino-Murwillumbah line (ABS, 2006).
- Rail connects 8 of the 10 largest population centres within the Northern Rivers.
- In most cases the line runs through the centre of the towns it connects making the line well adapted for commuter and tourist services.

Creation of a commuter rail corridor between Casino and Brisbane that frees up capacity on an overstretched road system at a number of ‘key regional locations’ within the coastal corridor and along key east-west corridors links.

Creation of an alternative route for interregional and intercapital passenger rail services that would otherwise have to share the North Coast rail line with freight services between Casino and Brisbane. Rail freight capacity on the standard/dual gauge line is freed up and passenger traffic is directed through the main population centres along the coastal route.

Our proposal is consistent with the a range of ‘challenges’ identified by the Strategy that are about ensuring ‘effective planning for growth’ in the broader region (SBCS, p 29). In particular the following are noted.

- ‘maintaining the social and economic integration of regional communities [including] the connections between the inland side of the corridor to the coastal route and major export infrastructure’ (SBCS, p 29)
- ‘providing safe and reliable interstate and local connections, especially to export industries and rural and regional communities’ (SBCS, p 29)
- ‘ensure that safe and efficient cross corridor intersections/interchanges are provided and maintained’ (SBCS, p 29)

## ***Rail Freight Options***

Freight on the Sydney to Brisbane corridor will almost triple over the period to 2029, rising from approximately 7 million tonnes to approximately 17 million tonnes.

This compares to an expected doubling of freight on most other AusLink corridors. (SBCS, p 22)

Economic and social linkages between communities along the Casino-Murwillumbah transport corridor and current patterns of regional and local freight movements through the

corridor suggests that a viable market may exist for the transport of goods to towns and centres within the corridor by the introduction of hybrid commuter/tourist/parcel services even if that is by light rail in the short term.

Sufficient land and sidings for the development of freight handling facilities exist at most centres along the line including Casino, Lismore, Byron Bay, Mullumbimby and Murwillumbah. Casino in particular, provides the opportunity to develop as a regional freight hub to encourage freight movement through the inland transport corridors. Casino is already a hub for road transport on the Bruxner Highway and a high level of road/rail integration would be achieved. Casino has sidings, land and maintenance facilities suited to the development of freight handling facilities.

### ***Rail Options for Tourists***

The refurbishment of the Casino-Murwillumbah rail line linked to Coolangatta Airport and the establishment of commuter rail services that meet the needs of tourists provides the following major opportunities to protect the ‘quality of the tourist experience’.

Integrate tourism development and management throughout the region with the development and promotion of rail pathway experiences for local, regional, interstate and international visitors. Such a strategy promotes tourism that is in sympathy with and protects ‘natural values’ as well as having practical benefits for communities by reducing congestion effects and reducing the need for additional infrastructure.

- Opportunity to develop hinterland tourism along the Casino-Gold Coast corridor with significant economic and social benefits for hinterland centres and economies.
- Opportunity to better manage congestion, protect natural values and enhance amenity by providing additional capacity during peak periods, festivals and special events.
- Opportunity for environmentally sustainable development of tourism in the many world heritage national parks in the region. Many locations connected by rail in the Northern Rivers are ‘gateway’ locations to world heritage and other parks. Rail services would provide the opportunity to develop a range of low impact group tours from such locations. The more visitors who choose to visit the parks in groups, the more ‘natural values’ can be protected.

Appendix A contains a list of events in the area with patronage numbers. Appendix B profiles Byron Bay.

### ***Public Transport for the Northern Rivers***

The area is poorly served by public transport, negatively affecting the least advantaged in society as well as tourists who arrive by air, regional bus or rail to Casino. A rail corridor with commuter services would form the basis of an integrated transport plan incorporating bus services, taxis, cycleways and walkways. Transport disadvantage exists throughout region. In particular, young people, jobseekers, families, students older people, disabled people and others without access to private transport. (A needs analysis of unmet transport

needs noting key economic and social linkages is available on the TOOT website at <http://www.toot.org.au/dmdocuments/needsanalysis.pdf>).

As 86% of the residents in the Lismore and Byron Shires live within 5 kilometres of the rail line (ABS, 2006) the Casino-Murwillumbah line is well placed to act as the spine of an integrated transport system for the Northern Rivers by way of regular commuter services with the following benefits.

Public transport would improve economic and social linkages across the region, notably the historic linkages between labour markets across the region. Stubbornly high rates of youth and long term unemployed within the region may begin to move closer to national averages and business efficiency may improve as the market for skills opens up.

Public transport would also provide additional relief from congestion during peak periods and large scale events especially within the coastal zone.

### ***Action on Climate Change***

The higher energy efficiency of rail and therefore lower greenhouse gas emissions compared with other modes of transport provides significant scope to make a regional contribution to reducing National greenhouse gas emissions.

Actual comparisons will vary depending on local circumstances, however the higher energy efficiency and capacity of rail are significant advantages that means rail consistently produces much lower emissions per passenger kilometre compared to road and air travel as demonstrated by the following comparison of g/CO<sub>2</sub> per passenger kilometre (Personal Carbon Trading: Excluding Public Transport, p 4).

Each regional road based passenger trip that can be converted to rail will stop up to 80% of greenhouse gasses from being emitted for that trip. Put another way, each car passenger is responsible for up to 5 times the amount of greenhouse gas emitted each kilometre as a rail passenger.

Construction of rail produces less greenhouse gasses than equivalent capacity road construction largely due to the decreased reserve necessary.

In the case of the Casino-Murwillumbah line, most of the infrastructure is in place and there are considerably less resources and energy required to repair the line to an operating standard.

NRTF believes that the emergence of proposals for carbon trading and other mechanisms to factor in the cost of carbon emissions in most areas of production and consumption is cause for reflection before committing significant economic resources towards transport options with high carbon emissions. In particular, future infrastructure projects should now be assessed in light of these likely new cost structures that are expected to reduce the relative cost of rail transport even further.

### ***Patronage***

As an indicator of unmet demand and the future viability of the line, a Southern Cross University (SCU) survey found that 72% of respondents would use a commuter service at least once a month. This translates into an estimated 2,875 passenger trips per day.

If the line was extended from Murwillumbah through to the Gold Coast, then 91.2% of respondents indicated they would use the service at least once a month.

### ***Indicative Costs***

A number of cost models have been proposed.

**May 2004:** New South Wales State Government claims \$188 mil over 20 years is required to restore the line to a Class 2 heavy rail standard. Although funded for 20 years, the investment in below rail infrastructure would extend the life of the line out to at least 50 years.

**September 2004:** Report by PriceWaterHouseCoopers (PWC) finds a railcar commuter service could be viable and that the operation of lighter axle load railcars would mean that the cost of repairing the line to a safe operating standard was considerably less (Feasibility Study For Passenger And/Or Commuter Services On The Murwillumbah To Casino Line). \$30 million is needed to redevelop the line to safe operating standard plus an annual \$2-3 mil operating subsidy. Further staged redevelopment of the line could include complete restoration to Class 2 standard.

This option provides flexibility in development and the potential to stage redevelopment costs while addressing the most urgent need to provide improved rail services in the Northern Rivers.

**September 2004:** At the federal election two proposals were put forward by competing candidates. Federal Labor offered \$150 million to restore the line to a Class 2 heavy rail standard and operate an XPT service for 10 years. The Coalition offered \$30 million over 2 years to fund the redevelopment of the line based on the PWC findings, but the offer was not taken up by the NSW Government.

**November 2004:** NSW Legislative Council Inquiry recommends a commuter service be developed based on PWC findings (Inquiry Into The Closure Of The Casino-Murwillumbah Rail Service).

**May 2006:** NRTF proposed TOOT Now! Plan for a redevelopment of the line and a 16 trains a day commuter service based on PWC costs. Receives positive community support,

**June 2006:** NSW state government offers to provide \$75 million if matched dollar for dollar by Federal government funding. Proposal is based on the proposal put forward by the ALP at the Federal election in September 2004.

**March 2007:** NSW Election and Coalition offers \$50 mil for a commuter passenger service

By way of comparison, over \$1 billion has been spent on upgrading the Pacific Highway between Bangalow and Tweed Heads over the last 15 years.

NRTF believes that it is time to rebalance investment towards rail and help to secure a sustainable economic, social and environmental future for the communities of the Northern Rivers.

## *Seven Year Plan for Commuter Services and Link to Queensland.*

NRTF notes that the PWC Feasibility Study 2004 remains the most comprehensive study of the costs of restoring the Casino-Murwillumbah rail line to a safe operating standard and as such provides a solid base from which to estimate actual costs. NRTF proposes a program of works over seven years to restore the line and introduce railcar commuter services, similar to the program set out in the PWC Feasibility Study 2004, while simultaneously planning and constructing a rail link to Coolangatta Airport.

NRTF is not aware of any recent assessments of the likely cost of constructing a rail link between Murwillumbah and Coolangatta Airport. NRTF believes that the indicative costs may be broadly estimated by reference to the per kilometre cost of similar projects such as the Queensland Rail extension of the southern line from Robina. However, NRTF believes action to secure a reserve now would result in a substantially reduced per kilometre cost due to the current use of the land for agricultural purposes compared to the extension south from Robina that runs through urban areas.

The essence of the PWC plan was to initiate a program of ‘catch up’ repairs and maintenance over seven year. After this the cost of ongoing maintenance would fall back to regular levels. A key outcome of the ‘catch up’ works would be to eliminate all speed restrictions on the line at the time of its closure. Until these restrictions have been substantially removed, the capacity of the line with regard to the number of return services a day is constrained.

While the general program suggested by PWC was for the speed restrictions to be progressively eliminated over the first four years of ‘catch up’, it remains an option to bring forward the most significant works and complete prior to any services running on the line. This would result in a higher level of services at the outset, but following an initial delay while the line is repaired. The following program and timetable is based on the program of ‘catch up’ works and refurbishment to reduce speed restrictions as set out in the PriceWaterhouseCoopers feasibility study.

Year	Existing Line	Services	Link to Qld
1	Start 7 year catch up program of works and regular maintenance	Once line operational 2 services per day may be possible	Begin planning
2	Continue catch up program and regular maintenance to further remove speed restrictions	Expand to 6 services per day	Continue planning
3	Continue catch up program and regular maintenance to remove all speed restrictions	Expand to 10 services per day	Begin resumption of land
4	Continue catch up program and regular maintenance	Expand to 16 services per day	Construct link
5	Continue catch up program and regular maintenance.	Continue services	Construct link
6	Continue catch up program and regular maintenance	Continue services	Construct link
7	Last year catch up program and regular maintenance	Continue services & extend into Qld	Open link

## **Years 8-20**

The following items should be considered in order of priority as determined by patterns of growth, population and transport need.

- Initiate a program of continual improvement works to restore the Casino-Coolangatta Airport rail line to a full Class 2 line.

- Increase capacity by construction of additional passing loops and eventually duplication of track where appropriate.

Possible future extensions to the network include:

- Coolangatta Airport - Tweed Heads - Tweed Coast

- Integration of network with Gold Coast Light Rail Ballina - Lismore (via Booyong or Goonellabah)

- Byron Bay - Lennox Head – Ballina.

## 4. References

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- Brisbane Urban Corridor Strategy (DOTARS, 2007)
- Inquiry into the Closure of the Casino-Murwillumbah Rail Service (NSW Parliament, Legislative Council, General Purpose Standing Committee No. 4, 24 Nov 2004)
- Far North Coast Regional Strategy (NSW Department of Planning, 2006)
- Feasibility Study for Passenger And/Or Commuter Services on the Murwillumbah to Casino Branch Line (PriceWaterhouseCoopers, 2004)
- National Greenhouse Gas Inventory 2004 (Australian Greenhouse Office, 2004)
- National Visitor Survey September 2006
- Personal Carbon Trading: Excluding Public Transport (UK Energy Research Centre, Dec. 2006)
- South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan and Program 2006-2026 (Queensland Government Office of Urban Management, 2006)
- ‘Study reveals demand for rail services’ (Media Release 19 March 2007, Southern Cross University, [http://www.scu.edu.au/news/media.php?item\\_id=866&action=show\\_item&type=M](http://www.scu.edu.au/news/media.php?item_id=866&action=show_item&type=M))
- Sydney-Brisbane Corridor Strategy (DOTARS, 2007)
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- Traffic Volume Data for Hunter and Northern Regions 2004 (Roads and Traffic Authority, New South Wales, 2005)
- Working Paper for the Regional Industry and Economic Plan, Northern Rivers Region, Northern Rivers Regional Development Board, Nov., 2003)
- Working Paper 66, Demand Projections for AusLink Non-Urban Corridors: Methodology and Projections (Bureau of Transport and Regional Economics, 2006)

## 5. Acronyms

<b>AADT</b>	Annual Average Daily Traffic
<b>ABS</b>	Australian Bureau of Statistics
<b>BTRE</b>	Bureau of Transport and Regional Economics
<b>DOTARS</b>	Department of Transport and Regional Services
<b>NRTF</b>	Northern Rivers Trains for the Future Inc.
<b>QDMR</b>	Queensland Department of Main Roads
<b>QR</b>	Queensland Rail
<b>SBCS</b>	Sydney-Brisbane Corridor Strategy (AusLink document)
<b>SCU</b>	Southern Cross University
<b>TOOT</b>	Trains On Our Tracks is a campaign run by NRTF

## 6. Acknowledgements

This document is based on the 2007 NRTF paper *Connecting Communities, Linking Regions*. The following people have assisted in the production of the current and/or earlier document: Basil Cameron, Nick Casmirri, Amanda Hallinan, Karin Kolbe and Peter Westheimer.

## 7. Appendix A Regional festivals and events

Here are *some* of the region's festivals that draw national and international visitors.

Event	When	Where	Attendees	Walk to station	Notes
Blues Festival	Easter	south Byron Bay	17,000	yes	Rail line adjacent site
Splendour in the Grass	July	North Byron Shire	17,500	yes	Walking track from station to site
Writers Festival	July	Byron Bay Sunrise	12000	yes	Walk to proposed Sunrise Station
Lismore Lantern Parade	June	Lismore	25000	yes	Large attendance from across region
Tweed Valley Banana Festival	Aug	Murwillumbah	5000	yes	Station adjacent CBD
Casino Beef Week	May	Casino	8000	yes	Walk or bus
Fatherhood Festival	Aug	Bangalow	2000	yes	Adjacent to station
Taste of Byron	Sept	Byron Bay	5000	yes	Adjacent to station
Bangalow Billy Cart Derby	June	Bangalow	5000	yes	Adjacent to station
Football city/country	July	Lismore	10,000 +		Walk/bus from station

Monthly community markets and weekly farmer's markets are held in many centres across the region and draw between 2000 and 10000 visitors depending on location and time of year. Three of the largest each month, Lismore, Byron Bay and Bangalow are all on the rail line, as are Murwillumbah and Mullumbimby where monthly markets are also held.

National Parks also attract high visitor numbers — visitor numbers in 2001 were as follows.

Border Ranges National Park 60,000,

Nightcap National Park 70,000

Mount Warning National Park 45,000.

Lismore, Casino and Murwillumbah are well placed as 'gateway' towns for the development of low impact tourism in regional National Parks.

## 8. Appendix B Tourism Case Study: Byron Bay

It is estimated that 1.1 million tourists visited Byron Shire in 2007 with an expenditure of \$354 million and that 2,000 full-time equivalent jobs were created (Byron Shire Economy Situational Analysis).

Given the significance of tourism to the Shire's economy and the volatility of Byron Bay is an iconic tourist destination located on the most easterly point of the East Coast that is known for its natural beauty, surf beaches and concern for the environment.

Byron Bay is choking with traffic much of it driven by tourism. Delays of 20 minutes or more and queues of traffic several kilometres in length are regular occurrences on the roads in and around the town. This congestion and lack of amenity contributes to reduced economic efficiency and is beginning to tarnish the 'clean and green' image promoted by the tourism industry.

There are 21140 daily vehicle movements at the railway crossing in the centre of Byron Bay. (Traffic Volume Data For Hunter and Northern Regions 2004, p 85)

Currently transport links in and out of Byron Bay are restricted to a single north-south road route and the currently unused Casino-Murwillumbah rail line.

Future development of transport links in and out of Byron Bay is constrained by topography with the Pacific Ocean to the east and Cumbebin wetlands to the west.

Increasingly tourist visitors are day trippers arriving by road with significant numbers coming from South East Queensland due to the upgraded Pacific Highway/Motorway.

### Domestic day trips to Northern Rivers and Byron Bay

	<b>Northern Rivers</b>	<b>Byron Bay</b>
2005	2,706,000	554,000
2006	2,812,000	759,000
	<b>increase 4%</b>	<b>increase 37%</b>

National Visitor Survey September 2006

Byron Bay's railway station is right in town and could offer tourists an alternative means of arriving/leaving the area, as well as provide opportunities for day-trip to the surrounding areas.