

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project
which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.



Ashburton District Plains Trail Feasibility Study

Final Report

Prepared for Ashburton District Council

1 August 2025

Everything parks, recreation, and community

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Tēnā koutou katoa

This report has been prepared for the Ashburton District Council by Anne Relling and Tom O'Neill from Xyst Limited.

Xyst advises clients primarily in the local government sector in the areas of parks, recreation and tourism and provides benchmarking services through Yardstick. We aim to provide practical advice that can improve the lives of people through the provision of parks, recreation and sustainable tourism.

Revision History

Rev.	Date	Author	Notes
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CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	6
INTRODUCTION.....	11
Brief.....	11
Methodology.....	11
BACKGROUND	14
Project history and context.....	14
Ashburton District.....	16
Existing recreational trails.....	17
MARKET ANALYSIS	18
Cycle tourism in NZ.....	18
Walking tourism	19
Market scope.....	19
Cycle trail user profile	20
Comparative trails.....	21
Learnings from other cycle trails.....	22
Cycle trail distribution.....	23
Economic, community and health benefits	24
COMMERCIAL OPPORTUNITIES	25
Bike shops.....	25
Commercial tour operators and logistics	25
Local activities	26
Eateries	27
Accommodation	28
STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT	33
Mana whenua.....	33
Trail advocates	34
Council managers.....	34
Other agencies:.....	35

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project
which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.

DEVELOPMENT OF A DESTINATION TRAIL 36

Elements of a Sustainable Trail 36

Governance and trail management..... 36

Trail design considerations 38

TRAIL ROUTE 41

Section 1 - Upper Rakaia River (Rakaia to Highbank Power Station)..... 41

Section 2 - Foothills (Highbank Power Station to Mount Somers) 53

Section 3 - Upper Ashburton River (Mount Somers to Ashburton) 68

Section 4 - Lower Ashburton River (Ashburton to Hakatere Huts)..... 80

Section 5 - Coastal (Hakatere Huts to Rakaia Huts)..... 92

Section 6 - Lower Rakaia River (Rakaia Huts to Rakaia) 100

Land use and tenure for preferred trail route 110

Securing access for a trail 113

RECOMMENDATIONS 114

Costings..... 115

Trail design considerations 116

Itineraries 117

Trail connectivity and bike hub towns..... 119

Governance and Management 119

Project plan..... 120

APPENDICES 122

Appendix A - Scope of Works..... 122

Appendix B – Local Activities, Eateries and Accommodation 124

Appendix C - List of Historic Items and Sites Adjacent to Preferred Trail Route
..... 128

Appendix D - Costing Detail..... 129

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project

which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.

Acronyms

ADC	Ashburton District Council
AECL	Aoraki Environmental Consultancy Ltd
BCI	Barrhill Chertsey Irrigation
BWT	Braided Waters Trust
DOC	Department of Conservation
ECan	Environment Canterbury
LINZ	Land Information New Zealand
MBIE	Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment
NZCT	New Zealand Cycle Trail
PCL	public conservation land
RDR	Rangitata Diversion Race
RDRML	Rangitata Diversion Race Management Ltd
ULR	unformed legal road

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In late 2024 the Ashburton District Council resolved to investigate the feasibility of a cycle trail connecting Rakaia, Methven, Mount Somers and Ashburton providing a loop trail on the Plains that would contribute positively to the local economy. This trail was picked ahead of other foothill trail proposals that were also considered by Council.

This concept has been around for 15 years and originated with the Braided Waters Trust who began investigations and submitted central government funding applications between 2009 and 2012. Although there was strong community support, especially in Methven where businesses face challenges outside ski season, lack of government funding and shifting priorities after the Christchurch earthquakes meant the project did not move forward.

This feasibility study was undertaken to investigate the viability of an "Ashburton Plains Trail", to understand the challenges and risks expected if developed and to identify the benefits a new destination trail could bring. An assessment of the technical, financial and operational aspects for this trail project has been undertaken by Xyst to help Ashburton District Council weigh up whether to put their support behind the proposal. Specifically Xyst:

- completed background research including previous Braided Waters Trust material, the cycle tourist market, findings from established cycle trails, existing trails, commercial opportunities and land ownership constraints
- investigated a trail route on the ground that would be appealing and achievable, and informed by knowledgeable locals
- carried out engagement with mana whenua and stakeholders
- reported on these findings, describing the proposed trail route with highlights, challenges, costings and made recommendations for a process going forward

Analysis of the cycle tourism market in New Zealand¹ indicates it is strong with further growth expected. A typical cycle trail user is a mature, social cyclist who values nature, heritage, and comfort, usually has beginner to intermediate skills, and increasingly uses electric bikes. Preferred trails are therefore, easy, well maintained, off-road, rich in natural environment and history, with good quality accommodation, food and local amenities. In essence riders are looking for an authentic taste of rural New Zealand. Common denominators for the popularity of a trail appear to be good promotion, quality of experience and quality of the trail itself.

¹ sourced from www.mbie.govt.nz/dmsdocument/19854-2021-evaluation-of-nga-haerenga-great-rides-of-new-zealand-pdf

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project

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A review of the commercial opportunities showed that Ashburton and Methven are well serviced by accommodation and eateries, however, there is a shortfall or limited range in Rakaia, Mount Somers and Staveley. Should a trail development take place, opportunities could arise for new businesses to establish, or existing businesses to expand their operations to cater to cyclists. It is likely any accommodation shortages would be first catered for by Airbnb or similar due to the relative ease of establishment. There is also a good range of other activities and attractions that would complement a new destination trail improving the overall appeal and help draw in a wider range of visitors to boost district tourism.

Engagement with stakeholders was undertaken of which they can be separated into four categories:

- mana whenua
- trail advocates (some who were previously involved with Braided Waters Trust)
- Council managers
- other national or regional agency or company stakeholders

All stakeholders provided valuable information that has been incorporated into this report and in particular the trail advocates helped set the scene before site visits, guiding the investigation of a trail route. In summary, there is general support in principle for the development of an Ashburton Plains Trail voiced from stakeholders. As is often the case further detail is required to allow for truly informed feedback and a discussion of the impacts. A feasibility study only allows for a conceptual proposal therefore the need for ongoing dialogue with all interested parties is essential. Some of the issues raised which will require further discussion are:

- health and safety aspects (noting there is no liability to private landowners arising from recreational use under NZ legislation)
- archaeological and cultural sites to be considered
- other trail proposals with similar merit
- use of short sections of district roads as part of trail route

Affected private landowners were not contacted as part of this study to ascertain their support (or otherwise) for a trail being sited on their land. This would be a significant and critical area of work in a following phase if the project were to progress.

All communities would like to see their trails as successful, well supported and sustainable - so they are in place for the long term as a valuable recreational asset and help to boost the local economy. The essential elements for the long term success of the trail, include aspects such as: high quality user experience, market appeal, physical resilience, community and business support, and strong governance and management.

Governance and management of a significant trail are an important early consideration. Destination cycle trails in New Zealand are managed under various structures including central government (such as DOC), local government, trusts or other community organisations. Where there are multiple landowners involved, the most common models are either a trust or local government. Within the

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regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project

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Great Rides collective, having a governing trust has proven the most popular as they are considered more connected to communities, more responsive, solely focussed and in a better position for external fundraising.

Creating a high quality user experience and ensuring the trail is resilient are important factors when planning a new destination trail. As evidenced from the market research for cycle tourism, destination cycle trails should aim to include great scenery, natural, cultural and historic features where possible. In trail development every effort needs to be made to minimise the impact on the environment and providing opportunities to improve biodiversity has been proven to enhance the visitor experience. Resilience against climate change induced storm events needs to be considered from the initial trail design, through both the trail siting and construction methodology.

The original brief was to investigate a full loop trail from the foothills to the sea using both the Ashburton and Rakaia riverbanks, as well as the coastline. The resulting trail would link Rakaia, Methven, Staveley, Mount Somers and Ashburton.

For the purposes of this initial trail loop investigation, the trail has been divided into six sections:

Section 1: Upper Rakaia River (Rakaia to Highbank Power Station)

Section 2: Foothills (Highbank Power Station to Mount Somers)

Section 3: Upper Ashburton River (Mount Somers to Ashburton)

Section 4: Lower Ashburton River (Ashburton to Hakatere Huts)

Section 5: Coastal (Hakatere Huts to Rakaia Huts)

Section 6: Lower Rakaia River (Rakaia Huts to Rakaia)

For the Coastal section (Section 5), constructing a trail directly along the coastline was determined to be impractical. Instead, rural roads running parallel to the coast would need to be used to form a loop. As these roads do not provide direct access to the sea coast, incorporating a coastal section into the Ashburton Plains Trail is not advised.

A U-shaped route is proposed for the Ashburton Plains Trail, using Ashburton and Rakaia as trailheads instead of forming a loop. This approach improves climate resilience, balances costs and benefits, and targets the intended market. This would mean that only three of the proposed sections (Sections 1-3) are recommended for inclusion as part of the Ashburton Plains Trail. The lower Ashburton River, the coastline between Hakatere Huts and Southern Rakaia Huts, and the lower Rakaia River trail route (Sections 4-6) are proposed to be excluded from this concept.

The proposed trail route including alternate routes (Sections 1-3) is shown in Figure 1

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regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project
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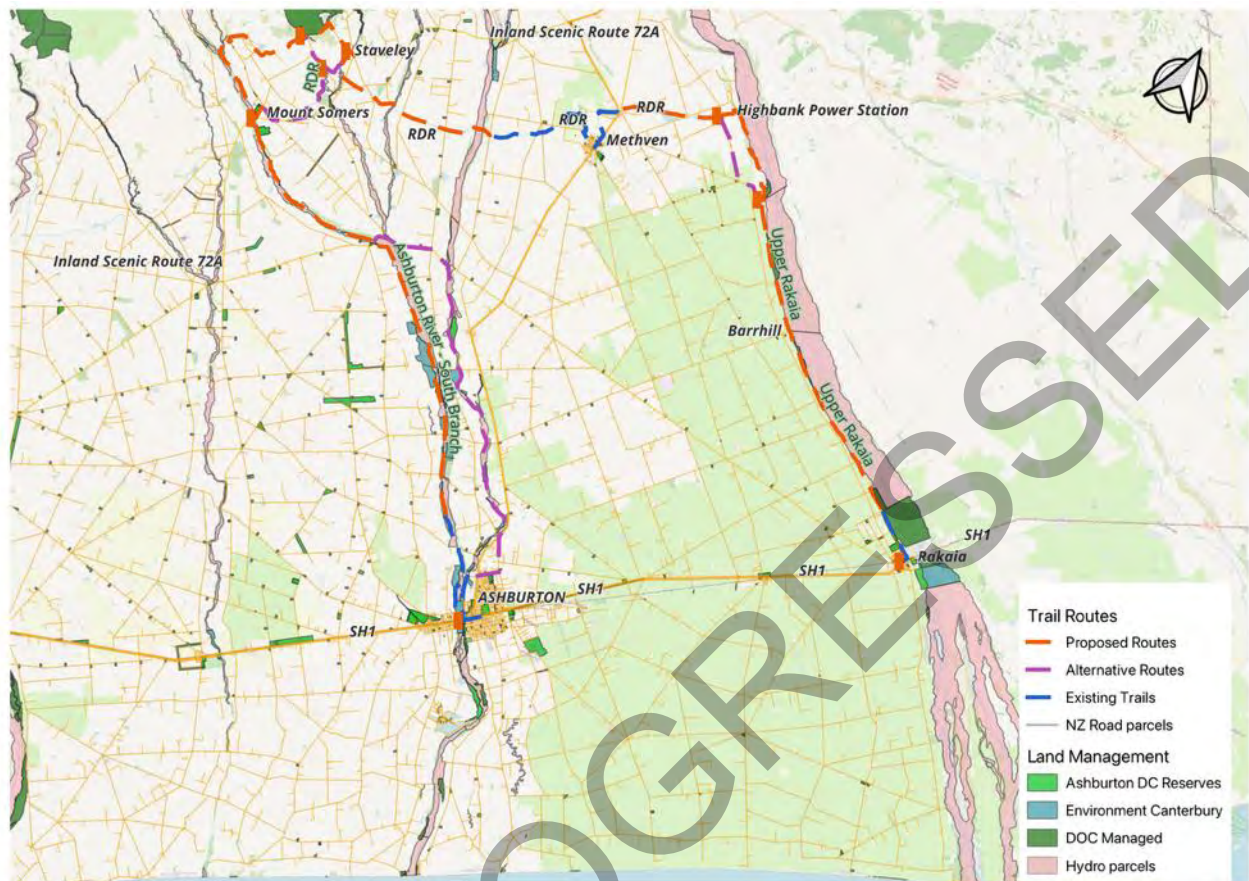


Figure 1, Recommended Ashburton Plains Trail route

To ensure the Ashburton Plains Trail becomes an appealing destination trail, it will need to capitalise on some of the following natural, scenic and historic features:

- unique braided rivers and associated native birdlife
- stunning backdrop of the Canterbury Foothills and the Southern Alps
- attractive travel along the often tree-lined water races
- beech forest section below Stevenson Hill
- crossings of multiple streams and rivers enroute
- multiple historic sites, including ammunition bunkers and lime kilns
- Canterbury Plains intensive crop and seed production

Development of the trail concept (Rakaia - Methven – Mount Somers – Ashburton) should be undertaken in stages, and these have been developed and prioritised based on recreational values, community benefits and likely popularity:

1. Section 2: Foothills - Highbank Power Station to Mount Somers
2. Section 3: Upper Ashburton - Mount Somers to Ashburton

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
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3. Section 1: Upper Rakaia - Rakaia to Highbank Power Station

Research has shown that daytrips or shorter rides are the greatest proportion of cycle trail use, and each of these trail sections could be used as stand-alone daytrips. Besides allowing for manageable construction projects, staging would also give an opportunity to build the first section and gauge the success from the following indicators: level of use and user satisfaction, increased spend for existing businesses and support from locals - before moving onto the next stage.

The total capital cost of this project is estimated to be \$8.6 million. Costs include: trail construction (new and any upgrade of existing infrastructure), bridges, toilets, signs, access barriers, consent costs and 10% contingency.

Trail section	Cost
Section 1: Rakaia to Highbank Power Station	\$2.6 m
Section 2: Highbank Power Station to Mount Somers	\$3.4 m
Section 3: Mount Somers to Ashburton	\$2.6 m
Total	\$8.6 m

Council involvement is needed to ensure the best connected route is chosen and built to a standard which delivers on market expectations to ensure economic return. The formation of a trust is recommended as the best option in this scenario and should consist of representatives from Council, landowners, commercial operators, trail champions and district promotion agencies.

Once developed there are ongoing costs for its operation and maintenance. It is estimated that trail maintenance may cost an estimated \$50,000 per year for each trail section. There are other ongoing costs also such as: an engineer's inspection of structures, contingency funds for natural hazard damage, depreciation of assets, trail manager cost and ten yearly trail resurfacing cost. A Trail Manager would be required to oversee the development phase, then would manage ongoing operations, maintenance, finance and marketing for the trail. The annual cost for the trail, if all three sections were completed, would be \$300,000 in its first year of operation and rising with inflation beyond that.

It is recommended that:

1. Council to consider and decide whether to support an Ashburton Plains Trail in principle.
2. If supported, it would be added as a project (for detailed design) to the next Long Term Plan to gauge whether the wider community is supportive via feedback in submissions.
3. If there is clear community support, Council would then facilitate the establishment of a Trails Trust or support an existing Trust.

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4. The Trails Trust with the support of the Council would then seek funding for an experienced Trail Manager to undertake detailed planning, pursue landowner support, finetune the trail route, obtain legal access, apply for funds, and prepare and manage the trail construction contract.

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INTRODUCTION

Brief

Xyst was engaged to research and provide a study that would assist the Council's decision-making as to whether the Council should support a trail proposal, and if so, their level of involvement.

The scope for the study included the following areas of work:

1. Understanding the cycle trail market
2. Investigate route options
 - a. Rakaia – Methven
 - b. Methven – Mount Somers
 - c. Mount Somers – Ashburton
 - d. Ashburton – Rakaia
3. Seek high level support from landowners on the route
4. Understand the high-level investment required to build the route
5. Identifying commercial opportunities enroute
6. Identify connections between this route and other networks planned or already within the district
7. Develop a high-level project plan with a staged approach to developing the route
8. Produce a report that answers the above questions and makes recommendations to Council about the next steps

The full Scope of Works is included in Appendix A - Scope of Works.

Methodology

Note the proposed destination trail concept is referred to as the 'Ashburton Plains Trail' but only for the purposes of this report.

Stage 1 – Market research and analysis

In Stage 1, we undertook a detailed market analysis to identify who the trails potential users are. Our market analysis delves into:

- user profile(s)
- market preferences/expectations
- target market size/growth
- competitor analysis
- trail distribution

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project

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We then explore how the target user group is likely to engage with the trail, and the surrounding environment. There is a substantial amount of research available from MBIE on the Ngā Haerenga Great Rides of New Zealand that reviews the cycle trail market, benefits of trail operations and challenges faced. These insights were used to inform this report including the valuable learnings from 10 plus years of operation for many trails.

Stage 2 – Stakeholder engagement and commercial opportunities

Stage 2 involved the engagement of stakeholders and some commercial businesses in the vicinity of the trail to gain feedback and input over the proposed route and concept.

We began this stage by identifying the commercial opportunities on the route and noting where there are obvious gaps. This involved compiling a list of bike shops, activity providers, Airbnb data, commercial accommodation and eateries. These services will be critical in supporting those using the trail but also act as add-on attractions.

Xyst followed the lead of Council for engagement with mana whenua. To this effect, discussion was undertaken with Aoraki Environmental Consultancy Ltd to understand the views of Te Rūnanga o Arowhenua regarding a proposed Ashburton Plains Trail.

We also made contact with a number of key stakeholders to gain knowledge on previous trail route investigations, to understand challenges for development and to explore land tenure implications. Central government, regional government and companies with significant land holdings or infrastructure assets within the trail corridor were contacted - to ascertain an indication of support (or otherwise) for the trail concept and to understand any implications for siting on their land.

Stage 3 – Route investigation and site visit confirming alignment

Stage 3 involved a desktop route investigation, field observations, and mapping of potential route options.

This stage included gathering pre-existing information, including land ownership and management, terrain profiles, existing tracks and unformed legal roads (ULR). A review of the documents produced by the Braided Waters Trust concerning earlier investigations and planning for a Braided Waters Trail, and information held by Ashburton District Council, was undertaken. We took into account sea level rise, recreation, heritage, scenic, cultural and biodiversity considerations. These variables helped to determine design parameters and constraints that impacted trail options. We also identified pre-existing track connectivity and side-trails at this point.

On-site observations allowed us to undertake some ground-truthing (where access was possible), confirming the route options identified, and alternatives - in the event private land access is difficult. Site visits also helped to determine options that will align with trail standard guidelines and health and safety, ensuring a quality visitor experience is provided.

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
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Stage 4 – Contact landowners and seek high level support

Stage 4 was to contact land holders along the proposed trail to obtain high level support for the trail development.

Note this stage was removed from the scope during the project after further consideration by Council staff.

Stage 5 – Trail and associated facilities costings

Stage 5 provided a detailed a breakdown of the high-level investment required for trail development.

Key components of the costing included:

- track construction
- signage
- gates and fencing
- bridges and structures
- consents
- toilets

Costs estimates were developed using figures from other completed or contracted Canterbury trail construction projects of a similar nature over the last two years. These figures alongside Xyst's familiarity with the trail industry have help produce cost estimates for the trail's development. This will provide Council a high level indication of the costs (as of 2025) to build each segment of trail to the required standard for maximum community benefit.

Stage 6 – Final report and recommendations

Stage 6 entailed the preparation of this report incorporating all of the information gathered during Stages 1 to 5. Maps are included which display the preferred route as well as alternative routes considered.

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
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BACKGROUND

Project history and context

Previous investigations into the District Loop Trail began following the development of the Lake Hood trail and was conducted by the Braided Waters Trust (BWT). The Trust was established to coordinate and assist a number of small community groups within the Ashburton District that were interested in developing cycleways.

Opportunities arose from the 2009 National Cycleway project (under MBIE) to secure funding for cycleway development and for districts to belong to a National Cycleway brand. The Braided Waters Trust was established with a governance and management group to coordinate local groups as they presented one combined effort to the central government initiative. Funding was competitive and at a national level and ultimately the Braided Rivers Cycleway project was unsuccessful in moving forward, however it was strongly commended. Following the 2011 earthquakes, central government funding priorities shifted and momentum on the project was lost.

While the BWT was actively engaged with investigations between 2009-2011, the Trust made successive funding applications to the Ashburton District Council to assist with their application to MBIE. As part of this the following planning was undertaken:

- obtaining letters of support from organisations and businesses
- investigating potential routes
- identified value additions
- projected visitor numbers and target demographics
- identified local business opportunities
- outlined high-level trail building costs

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Figure 2, The proposed trail route (in red) in 2011

It should be noted that since the initial investigations in 2011 numerous successful trails have been built in the Southern Region, and learnings have been made. Equally, the Ashburton District has changed significantly over the last 14 years, and new considerations and community developments need to be accounted for.

Great Rides of New Zealand

The Great Rides brand was developed to promote New Zealand's premier cycle trails and sits alongside the Great Walks, the premier tramping trails. There are now 23 Great Rides spread nationally which account for bringing an estimated \$1 billion per annum to the regions, with over one million people riding them a year. The government has set a target of raising this economic return to \$2 billion per annum.

New Zealand Cycle Trail Incorporated (NZCT), a national organisation operating under the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, is responsible for providing long-term governance and management of the Great Rides. They provided substantive funding for the development of many Great Rides plus contribute to ongoing funding of Trail Manager positions, trail monitoring, trail maintenance, repairs and improvement projects - which ensures the sustainability of these trails for

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Councils and local communities. NZCT also delivers a targeted marketing programme both in New Zealand and overseas to promote these trails.

The most recent additions to the Great Rides were the Whakarewarewa Forest Loop and the Lake Dunstan Trail in 2022. There has been no indication that NZCT wish to add further rides to the Great Rides collective. They have stated they intend to further improve the existing Great Ride trails so they meet their advertised difficulty grading and to make them more accessible. This suggests if there were further additions they would likely prioritise inclusivity and ease of use for a wide range of cyclists. The Great Rides are promoted as “rich in breathtaking scenery and must-see attractions” by Tourism New Zealand therefore setting a high bar for participation.

Ashburton District

The Council’s vision is that Ashburton is the district of choice for lifestyle and opportunity. Community outcomes look to the future and take a ‘whole of community’ view. They integrate social, cultural, environmental and economic well-being. The guiding principles set out how Council will function and deliver activities and services to local communities.

The four community outcomes identified by Council include:

- a prosperous economy based on innovation and opportunity
- a district of great spaces and places
- residents are included and have a voice
- balanced and sustainable environment

Ashburton District has seen a strong economic growth period mainly due to a thriving agricultural industry, this sector having made the largest contribution to the local economy at 29% (of local GDP). In comparison, tourism is a much smaller portion of the district GDP at 4%, however, it is the district’s fourth largest employer. Key features of the district’s outdoor tourism sector are snowsports at Mt Hutt Skifield, jetboating the braided rivers, and walking the trails within the Hakatere Conservation Park, including the renowned Mt Sunday which was featured in the Lord of the Rings. The majority of tourism spend in the district is from visits to Mt Hutt, travellers passing through on the way to tourist destinations further south, and from visiting family and friends.

Council would like to encourage economic growth but also ensure the local economy remains sustainable with sufficient diversity across industries. There is a desire to attract more visitors to the district, particularly those who will stay overnight, and a destination trail could deliver on this whilst contributing to making this a district of choice for lifestyle and opportunity. Ideally the district is wanting to support activities that will move it away from a place of transit, to a destination.

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
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Existing recreational trails

The Ashburton District has a limited network of formed recreational trails, particularly on the plains. District wide, the most recognised trails are the Mt Somers Walkway (DOC), Sharplin Falls Track (DOC), Stour River (DOC), Mt Sunday (DOC), and the nationally significant Te Araroa Trail. All of these trails are located on public conservation land in the foothills of Ashburton District and cater solely to walkers.

Ashburton township is well served with a variety of trails. On the north-eastern side of the river, the Ashburton River Track extends to the Hakatere Huts, and the Mountain Bike Loop extends up to Melrose Road. On the southern side of the river, the Lake Hood track provides a key linkage to the Lake Hood community, and the South Bank Trail heading up the Ashburton River extends to Lagmhor providing a there and back journey. All of these trails are shared use and vary in standard from easy to intermediate. In the urban area, the much admired Ashburton Domain has a path network for walkers and cyclists.

In Rakaia, the local community developed the Rakaia Terrace Walkway, an easy trail available for walkers and bikers which follows the edge of a river terrace to the north-west of Rakaia township. It is a there and back trail however does also connect into neighbouring streets. Down at the coast, the Rakaia Huts community created the Dorie Community Trail which extends 5km up the river from the huts.

Nearby Methven township has the Methven Walkway which was developed and is maintained by the Methven Lions. Options exist to circumnavigate the town or take a longer route to the North Branch of the Ashburton River. The walkway predominately utilises an accessway alongside the Rangitata Diversion Race, a significant feature of the plains carrying water for irrigation, hydro power, aquifer replenishment and stock water.

Mt Hutt Bike Park, at the base of Mt Hutt skifield, has more than 40km of trail network consisting of cross-country, downhill and single track trails that is managed as an open park (no entry fee) by Bike Methven. They are currently working on extending the intermediate level trails around the park and creating a skills park in Methven.

There are a number of other 4WD roads, particularly on riverbed land, and informal tracks used by the local communities for walking and cycling, however those listed above are noted as those recognised by Council.

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MARKET ANALYSIS

The Council wishes to gain an insight into the potential cycle trail market in New Zealand and the typical cycle trail user. There is also a lot to be learnt by reviewing other established cycle trails, many of which have been in operation for ten plus years. With the substantial investment made by central government into the development of the Great Rides and the further funding for maintenance and marketing, there has been ongoing monitoring of the trails benefits, challenges and users. A number of research reports have been completed and are invaluable for projects such as this.

Cycle tourism in NZ

In 2021 a research report, Cycle Tourism Insights, was prepared by Angus & Associates for Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) and provides some key market information pertinent to this study. The research was developed to help “further develop cycle tourism and increase its value to communities across New Zealand”. It notes that cycle tourism is defined as a trip away from your usual place of residence, either for the day or multiple days, where cycling is a key part of the trip. Cycle tourism can encompass cycle touring, bike-packing, mountain biking on a trail or in a park, urban cycling and biking events. Despite the variety of cycle activities, predominant characteristics are involvement by “older cyclists, engaged and social cyclists, cyclists keen on comfort, and growth in the use of e-bikes”². After consultation was undertaken the authors concluded “there is an opportunity to position the network of cycle trails in New Zealand as world-leading, with the network in the lower half of the South Island seen as especially impressive”. Also there was emphasis on opportunities to “promote introductory options (easy and/or short), which give a taste of the cycle trail experience in an accessible way”.

The Cycle Tourism Insights research indicated that the best prospective new trails would be trails that:

- are in urban areas or that include destinations/attractions
- take in notable natural environments and/or outstanding scenery
- are not overly physically demanding, are fully off-road, are relatively short, and are unlikely to be subject to a lot of poor weather
- only take a part day or a day to complete (or that have easily accessible sections of this length), and that are easy cycling i.e. Grade 1 or 2
- are well serviced by cafes, comfortable accommodation options, bike hire, transport links etc

² <https://www.mbie.govt.nz/dmsdocument/19857-cycle-tourism-insights-research-report-august-2021-pdf>

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Walking tourism

Although solely promoted as cycle trails, total trips undertaken on the Great Rides are fairly equally split between walkers and cyclists. The numbers of recreational walkers should not be underestimated when considering the development of a new trail. Sport NZ data shows that walking is generally the most popular leisure time activity for New Zealanders and appeals to all ages. Other than undertaking the Great Walks most walking by tourists is casual by nature on well-known trails, a daytrip or less and allows visitors to engage actively and meaningfully with the area they are visiting. This remains a market sector with high potential.

Market scope

The domestic cycle tourist market is strong, likely to stay that way and makes up the majority of Great Ride users. Recent data released shows domestic tourism household expenditure has decreased by 5.8% for the YE March 2024³ however this may not impact the cycle activity spending by the 'silver dollar' cohort (active over 50's, with moderate to high disposable incomes, who are time rich). Cycling is generally seen to be a low cost activity for domestic tourists, particularly if they are able to supply their own bikes. MBIE research shows that 46% of the NZ adult population and 35% of the Australian adult population are in the cycle tourism market. Australian and international participants in the cycle tourism market are a low proportion of Great Ride users at present, however, there is potential for growth. Tourism New Zealand has been promoting New Zealand as a destination for great cycling trips to Australians to increase this market share.

Local residents are a significant proportion of users on their local trails and often become their biggest advocates. Christchurch residents are considered to be a large potential source (400,000 population) of trail users for trails located in Canterbury, attracted by easy weekend escapes and limited mileage/travel cost. Also of note are migrants who are still exploring New Zealand and want to try a kiwi experience that is safe with family and friends.

Other cycle trail market groupings by both travel behaviour and travel purpose are outlined below.

Market groups by travel behaviour

Active relaxers – wanting easy cycle trails with the equivalent home comforts of good quality accommodation, cafes and dining experiences, availability of shuttle services and e-bike rentals. Note that airlines will not carry e-bike batteries due to the fire danger so if coming from the North Island users will need to rent. Potential for battery hire and battery 'libraries'.

³ <https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/tourism-satellite-account-year-ended-march-2024>

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Active adventurers – these are visitors interested in outdoor sports, engaging with nature, and health and fitness activities.

Family oriented travellers – mainly for active families with older children. Place importance on safety, cost and a favourable climate. They are looking for fun attractions and easy escapes.

Market groups by travel purpose

Visiting family and friends – cycle trails are a great way to socialise and connect. Those visiting Christchurch to visit family and friends potentially look for outdoor activities that work well as a group.

Event visitors – Christchurch is firmly establishing itself as a city able to host conferences and other large events with the completion of Te Pae, Te Kaha and Parakiore. There is an opportunity to entice event visitors to stay on to explore the region more fully.

Cycle touring and bike packers – often travelling the length of the country or one island following the less busy roads, mostly self-sufficient and enjoying the slow pace. Will often use dedicated cycle trails as an alternate, more pleasant and safer option than the road.

Cycle trail proponents should aim to appeal to a multi-dimensional market so there is less reliance on one or two groups and thereby supporting a sustainable approach.

Cycle trail user profile

The targeted cycle trail participant is generally between 40 and 65 years old, comprising of established professionals, semi-retired individuals, or active retirees from New Zealand, with a growing international contingent. Their primary motivation is seeking an active holiday that blends exploring New Zealand's stunning landscapes from a unique perspective while engaging socially - as users often undertake these adventures with partners, friends, or older family members. They seek an achievable challenge, value the opportunity to escape and appreciate nature, frequently combining their cycling with an interest in the trails' cultural and historical significance.

These cyclists are typically of an intermediate skill level, comfortable on diverse terrain and often use hybrid or touring e-bikes for enhanced ease and enjoyment. They prioritise comfort and practicality, preferring a moderate pace that allows for sightseeing and photography. Their expectations are that trails are well-maintained, have clear signage, and have convenient access to comfortable accommodation, quality food, and local amenities - all contributing to a high-value user experience and an authentic taste of rural New Zealand.

Those who reside within the local area are more likely to use the trail for general fitness, and will be less likely to engage with surrounding businesses in the same way. However, their use would also directly lead to expenditure in ancillary businesses including cafes and bike shops.

Motivations for doing a Great Ride:

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- **Experience and Exploration:** A desire to see New Zealand's stunning landscapes up close, from a unique perspective that differs from driving. They seek immersive experiences.
- **Active Holiday:** A blend of physical activity and relaxation. They enjoy being active but are not necessarily extreme athletes.
- **Social Connection:** Enjoying shared experiences with partners, friends, or family. The camaraderie of a multi-day journey is a key draw.
- **Achievable Challenge:** The Great Rides are perceived as challenging enough to feel rewarding, but generally accessible to someone with moderate fitness and some cycling experience. It's an accomplishment, but not an ordeal.
- **Escapism and de-stressing:** Getting away from daily routines, fresh air, and disconnecting from work pressures.
- **Nature Connection:** A love for the outdoors, scenic beauty, and wildlife.
- **Cultural and Historical Interest:** Many trails pass through historically significant areas (e.g., gold mining, Māori heritage), which adds another layer of interest.

Comparative trails

Five destination cycle trails in New Zealand have been selected to provide a comparative synopsis of trails considered to be similar i.e. includes travelling across farmland and have easier grades. Trail count figures have been given for each trail plus some factors which might impact level of use.

Cycle Trail	Individual trail count ⁴	Trail grade	Factors affecting number of users
Hauraki Rail Trail - 197km	82,063	1,2,3	Great Ride, relatively easy trail, close to large population centres of Auckland, Hamilton and Tauranga, coastal trail section, most popular section is the highly scenic Karangahake Gorge, well known, well promoted, flat, variety of scenery
Central Otago Rail Trail – 152km	80,380	2	Great Ride, easy trail, probably best known of NZ cycle trails, interesting heritage features along the way, ideal as a family or friend group activity, trailhead relatively close to Dunedin transport hub, unique landscape, flat, small rural communities along the way with southern hospitality

⁴ YE June 2021, sourced from www.mbie.govt.nz/dmsdocument/19854-2021-evaluation-of-nga-haerenga-great-rides-of-new-zealand-pdf. Note excludes Little River Rail Trail and Central South Trail

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Little River Rail Trail – 65km	10,000 ⁵	1	Close to large Christchurch population, not widely known outside Canterbury, not well promoted, follows the shorelines of both lakes Waihora/Ellesmere and Forsyth, mostly used by locals, flat, nuisance of lake flies, can be windy, trail surface is poor in places, perceived as boring by some, easy trail, farm animals grazing on trail
Great Taste Trail – 200km	315,478	1,2,3	Great Ride, traverses fruit and vineyard growing region with many roadside stalls, known visitor region so good existing hospitality services, coastal section of trail, variety of scenery, good weather generally
Central South Trail – 120km when completed	13,000 ⁶	1,2	Links into Alps 2 Ocean Trail, good weather generally, cycle route to Mackenzie Country and associated attractions, not well promoted

Learnings from other cycle trails⁷

Some Great Rides have been operating for 10-15 years and research by the New Zealand Cycle Trail organisation has gathered a number of valuable learnings.

- Growth on some trails is limited by accommodation offerings both in quantity and required quality
- Cycle tourists would prefer more services such as cafes and refreshment stops along/near the cycle trail
- Better promotion of safe cycling behaviour is required to reduce accidents
- Good to promote shorter/easy trails/trail sections for cycling novices and families as a 'steppingstone' to do multi-day cycling trails
- Consider marketing to the wider holiday market as an easy add-on activity rather than to focus on cycling enthusiasts
- If marketing to the wider holiday market need to match this with cycle trails that are safe and suitable for beginners
- By having trails that are fully inclusive and using universal design will benefit all noting that one in four of all New Zealanders have a disability

⁵ 2011 estimate sourced from Rail Trail Cycle Counting 2011, Via Strada Ltd. Estimate for Little River end.

⁶ Figure from trail counter for Timaru to Pleasant Point section

⁷ sourced from www.mbie.govt.nz/dmsdocument/19854-2021-evaluation-of-nga-haerenga-great-rides-of-new-zealand-pdf

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- Support the development of generational use of cycling trails similar to tramping whereby families will have a checklist of trails to complete
- Don't underestimate the maintenance that is required for cycle trails - often funded by local government. It is very difficult to institute user pays other than voluntary donations.
- On-road trail sections are undesirable from the cyclist's perspective
- Reliable transport options are critical where cyclists may only want to complete a section
- Information on all support services needs to be easily accessible and user friendly

Cycle trail distribution

Canterbury's cycle trail network is expanding from the renowned [Alps 2 Ocean Cycle Trail \(A2O\)](#), which remains the region's flagship Great Ride. This trail provides a grand journey from the base of Aoraki/Mount Cook to the Pacific coast at Oamaru. Of note a new 10km section of purpose-built cycle trail was constructed alongside Lake Pukaki to improve A2O user experience taking cyclists off the gravel road. Close to Christchurch, the [Little River Rail Trail](#) offers an accessible, shorter experience through the rural landscape to Banks Peninsula. Other noteworthy trails include the [St James Cycle Trail](#), a challenging backcountry route in North Canterbury, and various local networks around Christchurch, with those in the [Port Hills](#), [Bottle Lake Forest](#) and [Mclean's Island](#) catering more towards mountain bikers based in Christchurch.

Significant proposals in the Canterbury region are poised to diversify the regional offering including the [Hilltop to Akaroa Trail](#), which aims to extend the Te Ara Pātaka (Summit Walkway) on Banks Peninsula. Selwyn District Council proposes a new [Arthur's Pass to Ellesmere Trail](#) which promises a challenging journey from alpine environments to the Canterbury Plains. To the south, the [Central South Trail](#) (mid-way through construction) aims to link Timaru to Tekapo. This cycle trail will provide connectivity into the Mackenzie Basin and the Alps 2 Ocean Cycle Trail. On a smaller scale the 67km Waimate Trail is under construction and will provide a loop trail through native forest, stunning limestone rock formations, tussock tops, river flats and valleys.

The [South Island's Great Rides](#) are mainly clustered together. The Central Otago and Southland Regions contains the Central Otago Rail Trail, Roxburgh Gorge, Clutha Gold, Lake Dunstan, Around the Mountains and Queenstown Trails. This network creates a compelling multi-day cycling destination and draws significant visitor numbers which will soon be interlinked with the [Kawarau Gorge Trail](#). The West Coast primarily has trails focusing on immersive wilderness experiences, its network includes the Heaphy Track, Old Ghost Road, and West Coast Wilderness Trail. The Nelson, Tasman, and Marlborough regions offer a blend of rides including the Tasman's Great Taste Trail, the Heaphy Track, the Coppermine Trail, the Queen Charlotte Track and St James Cycle Trail. The Whale Trail, currently under development will provide a spectacular coastal cycle journey between Picton and Kaikoura.

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Economic, community and health benefits

It is worthwhile considering the wider benefits of establishing a destination trail and findings from the 2021 Evaluation of Ngā Haerenga Great Rides of New Zealand report concluded:

- The 2021 evaluation of Great Rides calculated that the health benefit from use of these trails (for cycling only) was \$11 million.
- Community stakeholders noted high levels of support for their local Great Ride evidenced by their “extensive use, significant financial investment, and scale of volunteer contribution.”
- The community stakeholder survey identified that 91% thought their local Great Ride had increased the profile of the area, 81% considered it made the area a more vibrant or appealing place to live and 78% thought it had been a catalyst for investment in the area.
- 32% of surveyed Great Ride participants were more determined to protect the natural environment.
- 48% visited the region because of a Great Ride.
- Average expenditure per cycle trail user was \$900 spent mostly on accommodation, hospitality, activities and admission fees (cycle trail specific).
- Of the 200 businesses nationally that responded to the Trail Stakeholder survey, just under 100 had established after the Great Ride opened. Of the already established businesses over half had reported they had subsequently expanded or added services.
- For local residents, cycle trails provide health benefits, create advocates for the area, opportunities for visitors to engage with the locals, and may result in greater willingness to help maintain trails.

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COMMERCIAL OPPORTUNITIES

A stocktake was undertaken of existing businesses in the district that could support a proposed cycle trail such as bike shops, accommodation, dining options, tour companies and add-on activities. Following this an assessment of where there is a noticeable shortfall, particularly of accommodation and dining options, has been made.

Bike shops

The uptake of multiday bike rides is linked to an increase in spending on bikes, accessories and maintenance. This would benefit the districts two local bike shops and potentially provide a space for new businesses to enter the market.

In 2021, the ratio of bike shops to population was 1:7001 in Christchurch, whereas the Ashburton District is 1:17,975. This indicates that either residents within the district shop in Christchurch, ride their bikes less, or that there is a shortage of bike shops in the Ashburton District.

[Stoked Cycles](#)

[Big Al's Methven](#)

Commercial tour operators and logistics

Experience from other cycle trails shows that there is demand for support services that include:

- Gear and vehicle transfers
- People and bike transport
- Guided trips
- Accommodation bookings
- Trip planning

With no local destination cycle trails, predictably there are no commercial bike tour operators based in the Ashburton District, however, if a new destination trail was developed this could potentially change. There are a number of Canterbury tour companies, catering for cycle tourists, who may wish to expand their operation to meet this demand, including:

[Natural High](#)

[Sidetracks Women](#)

[Tuatara Tours](#)

[Pure Trails New Zealand](#)

[Adventure South NZ](#)

[Pacific Cycle Tours](#)

[Active Adventures](#)

[Cycle Journeys](#)

[Escape by Cycle](#)

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Local activities

Whilst investigating the feasibility of the cycle trail, it's crucial to assess not just the trail's route but also the network of supporting activities and attractions for the trails users. These local activities will significantly improve the trail's overall appeal, and help draw in a wider range of visitors to boost regional tourism.

In proximity to the trail, we have identified a comprehensive list of activities. Those of the highest relevance can be found below, with a full list provided in Appendix B – Local Activities, Eateries and Accommodation:

- **Ōpuke Pools (Methven):** A significant drawcard, offering thermal pools and a day spa. This provides a high-quality leisure and recovery option for cyclists, particularly after a long day on the trail. Its presence enhances the potential for multi-day stays and higher per-visitor spend.
- **Discovery Jet (Rakaia Gorge):** This adventure tourism operator leverages the dramatic Rakaia Gorge. It offers a thrilling, distinct experience that could appeal to cyclists seeking to explore the braided rivers further.
- **Mt Hutt Ski Area (Methven):** In the later parts of the ski season it would be possible for cyclists to mix skiing with a ride of the cycle trail. Mt Hutt also caters to those wishing to site see and provides panoramic views of the Canterbury plains.
- **Methven Heliski & Scenic Flights:** For those seeking a more tailored and boutique experience, the opportunity to either heliski, or go on scenic flight would add to the trails offerings.
- **EA Networks Centre (Ashburton):** The facility offers a warm water hydrotherapy pool, spa and steam room which would cater to those seeking a day off and a chance to relax.
- **Ashburton Art Gallery and Museum:** Both the gallery and museum provide an indoor activity that appeals to a different demographic and provide cultural and historic context that will enhance the overall visitor proposition.
- **Mt Somers and Sharplin Falls Tracks:** These tracks offer both scenic walks and stunning waterfalls. The tracks also cater to nature lovers providing a different outdoor experience that will attract visitors.

The presence and geographic spread of these activities will strengthen the economic viability and appeal of a new cycle trail. Equally the variety of activities including relaxation, adventure, culture, and nature cater to a range of audiences. These activities help to provide a comprehensive tourism experience, encouraging longer stays, increased local spending, and a higher overall satisfaction for the trail riders.

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It should be noted, there are less activities in the vicinity of Staveley, Mt Somers, the Hakatere Huts and the Rakaia townships. However, the trail could provide opportunities for new boutique farm experiences or the retail of farm produce alongside the trail.

Eateries

A comprehensive list of bars, restaurants and cafés distributed across the district can be found in Appendix B – Local Activities.

In Methven, there is currently a high level of provision of eateries, with approximately 11.1 establishments per 1,000 residents. Given there are 17 restaurants and 8 cafés, it is not surprising that there are challenges in the off-season once Mt Hutt closes

Ashburton also has a number of established eateries, however they have a much lower number in comparison to Methven: 1.9 per 1000 residents. It should be noted this has not taken into account fast food restaurants or takeaway providers. Given the large number of restaurants it is expected that any increase in visitor numbers would be able to be catered for by the existing eateries.

Barrhill, Staveley, Mount Somers and Rakaia, have either low numbers of eateries or none at all. Should a trail development take place opportunities could arise for new businesses to establish, or existing businesses to expand their operations to cater to cyclists.

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Case Study: Davaar Station

Davaar Station at the base of the Takitimu Mountains in Southland, has been owned by generations of the Macdonald family who have farmed sheep and cattle here. Now a younger generation have returned to the farm to add diversity to the farm's offerings by establishing an on-farm café and woollen clothing business using wool from the Station. Being alongside the road to Te Anau and Milford Sound means they have been able to capitalise on this traffic going past their farm gate. They are also located along the renowned Te Araroa Trail where hundreds of hungry hikers pass through each year meaning their retro coffee cart is in strong demand.



Accommodation

Airbnb snapshot

AirDNA gather data from accommodation providers including Bookabach, Airbnb and other platforms. They are one of the few locations you can gain insights on short term accommodation providers.

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Table 1, AirDNA Data 19/03/2024

Field Type	Data	Interpretation
Number of active listings in the District	205	Moderate supply; however, some are seasonal, meaning true availability fluctuates.
Occupancy Rate	45%	This is relatively low indicating limited demand or an over-supply. A healthy short-term rental market typically sees 60%+ occupancy.
Average Nightly Rate	\$256	A fairly high average, which may be reflected by higher-end properties.
Median Annual Revenue	\$33,200	This is a modest income suggesting that either occupancy or length of stay is not maximised.
AirDNA Market Score	11/100	This is very low indicating poor market performance based on demand, seasonality, regulation, and growth.
Rank out of NZ's 73 Market Areas	65th	This places the Ashburton District as one of the least desirable places to run an Airbnb.

The low AirDNA Market Score (11/100) and 45% occupancy rate suggest limited demand for short-term rentals in the Ashburton District. In the context of the cycle trail, this highlights an opportunity for targeted investment in tourism infrastructure and marketing which could lift visitation and support local accommodation providers. Investment in a cycle trail would help to enhance the area's appeal and increase the number of overnight stays.

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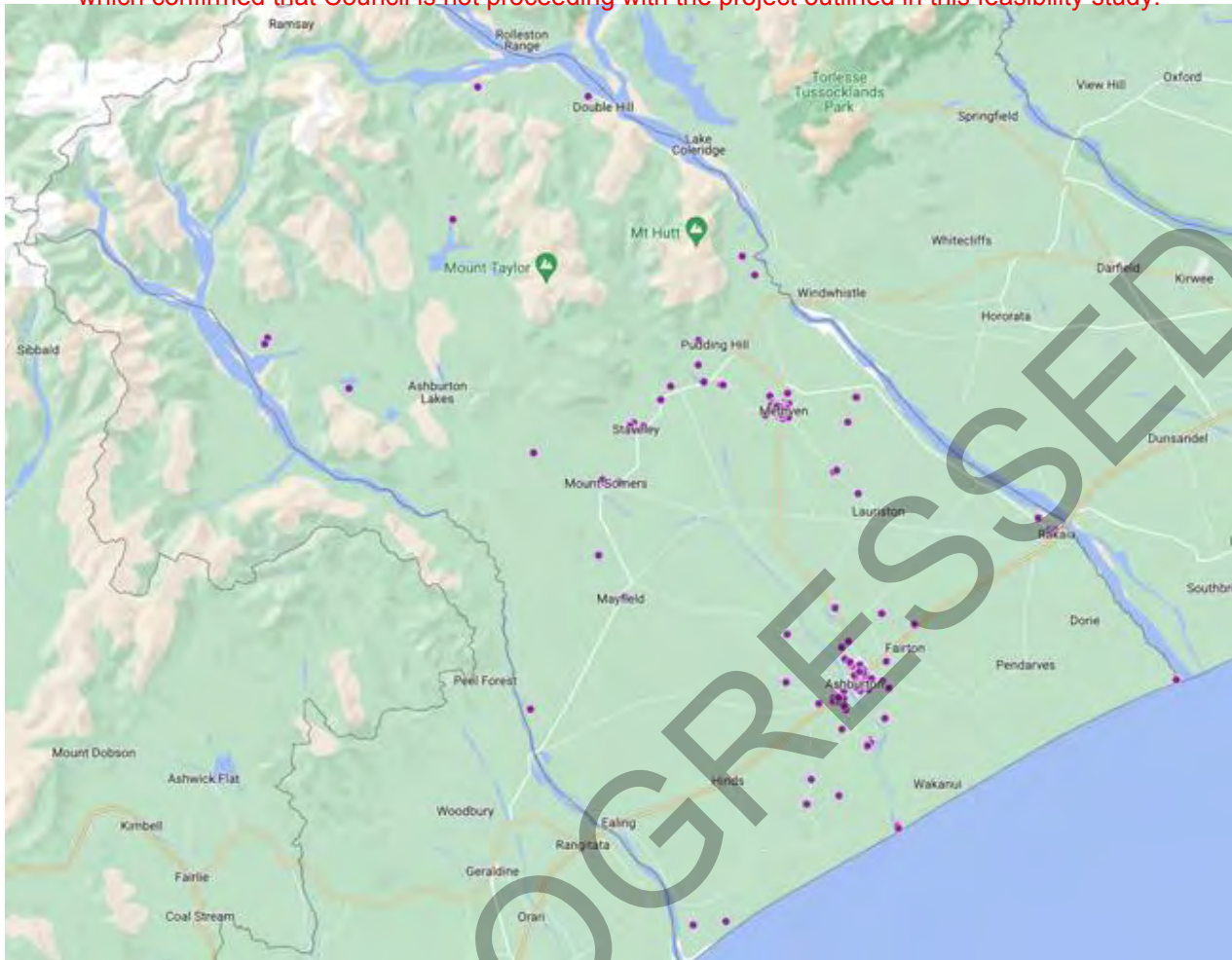


Figure 3, Airbnb Distribution in the Ashburton District

Short-term accommodation in the Ashburton District is clustered primarily around Ashburton and Methven (Figure 3), with sparse coverage in scenic western areas like Mount Somers, Staveley and the Ashburton Lakes. Listings also follow main transport routes, while the coastal areas remain under-served. The proposed cycle trail could leverage existing accommodation clusters and stimulate demand in other high-potential areas. It is likely any accommodation shortages would be first catered for by Airbnb due to the relative ease of establishment, whereas larger commercial providers would be more costly and take longer to get up and running.

Commercial accommodation providers

Methven has a well-established network of commercial accommodation providers (23) with approximately 11.1 providers per 1,000 residents and is the natural tourist hub for the district. Ashburton by comparison has a much larger population base, but has far fewer commercial accommodation (13) providers: 0.5 per 1000 residents. Given the existing provision of accommodation in Methven and Ashburton, there would be ample accommodation should a trail development take place.

It should be noted vacancy in Methven is higher outside of the ski season. Website pricing suggests there are discounts to attract visitors throughout the summer months and that a premium is paid over

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the winter ski season ([Methven Accommodation](#); [Methven Resort](#)). [The Press \(August 2024\)](#) reported that accommodation provider, SkiTimes occupancy pre-Covid was 90% full during the four months of winter and just 7% over summer, these statistics demonstrate the number of overnight visitors significantly reduce through the summer period. However, in this [article](#) The Press reported that the Ōpuke Pools, Staveley Ice Rink, Mt Hutt Bike Park and new subdivisions in Methven have started to change this trend, and that SkiTime's summer occupancy has since improved.

The quality and range of commercial accommodation in Mount Somers, Staveley, and Rakaia is variable and scarce. However, the trail could provide business opportunities for these smaller townships. Until this takes place, the relative ease of travel in the district could mean the slack is picked up by providers in Methven and Ashburton.

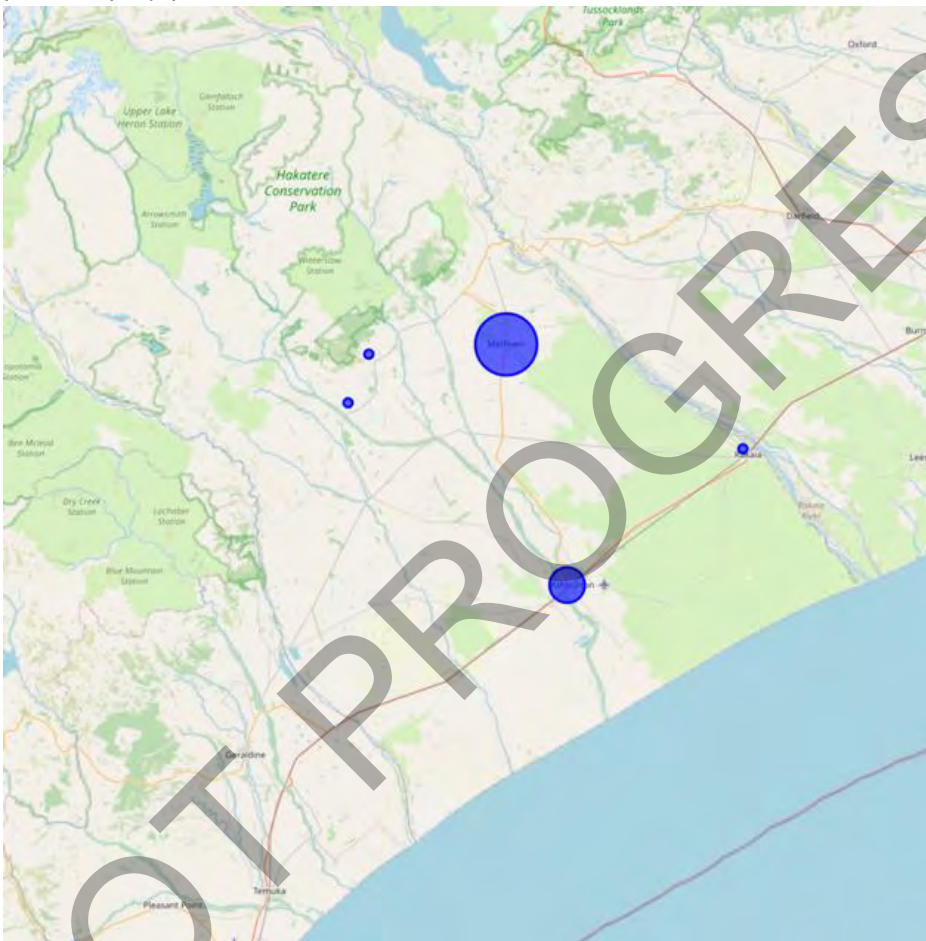


Figure 4, Commercial Accommodation Distribution by Population Centre

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Total guest nights⁸ in Ashburton District decreased by 2.8% in the year to December 2024, compared to a year earlier. This compares with an increase of 0.8% across New Zealand, showing the district has had weaker growth when compared with the wider country⁹.

Visitors stayed a total of 250,800 nights in Ashburton District during the year to December 2024, which was down from 257,900 the year before.

Case Study: Matatoki Cheese Barn

The Cheese Barn at Matatoki, along the Hauraki Rail Cycle Trail, opened in 1994 and sells a wide range of dairy products including some award winning cheeses, all produced on site. They have added homemade gelato and sorbet ice creams since which prove a big hit with the Hauraki Rail Trail cyclists during the summer. Besides the cheese shop there is a café, cheese tastings and an animal farm with alpacas, rabbits, guinea pigs, chickens, budgies, quails, canaries and goats. *Source: www.haurakirailtrail.co.nz*



Figure 5: Matatoki Cheese Barn along Hauraki Rail Trail.

⁸ Comprised of guest nights in Holiday Parks, Campgrounds, Hotels, Motels, Backpackers, Lodges and Boutique Accommodation.

⁹ Data has been retrieved from [Infometrics](https://infometrics.co.nz/)

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STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

To consider the feasibility of the Ashburton Plains Trail concept a number of individuals and groups were contacted. They fell into four categories:

- mana whenua
- trail advocates (some who were previously involved with the Braided Waters Trust)
- council managers
- other national or regional agency or company stakeholders

Mana whenua

Ngāi Tahu as an iwi has the largest land and resources interests in Te Waipounamu and have a spiritual, cultural and traditional relationship with the environment. Council have taken the lead with regard to engagement with mana whenua as they have direct relationships with the rūnanga who have takiwā across the area of interest for trail development. Three Papatipu Rūnanga have takiwā across this area:

- Ngāi Tūāhuriri, based in Kaiapoi
- Te Taumutu, based in Christchurch
- Te Rūnanga o Arowhenua, based in Temuka

There is a strong desire by mana whenua to protect the mahinga kai, taonga and wāhi tapu sites, but also the cultural landscape within their takiwā that gives a sense of identity, supports their wellbeing and mauri. Rūnanga input into decisions that may affect their resources, important sites and cultural landscape are essential.

Aoraki Environmental Consulting Ltd (AECL) acts in the interests of Arowhenua Rūnanga with regard to land use and activities. A draft proposed cycle trail route was sent to AECL with a request for any comments. A letter was received stating for Arowhenua and AECL that on review of the trail route they did not have any specific concerns, however, wished to note the "trail would pass through areas with a number of archaeological sites and the Council would need to work with Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga to ensure these sites were not disrupted or destroyed".

They also noted that the proposed trail "will be located within the vicinity of Rakaia River No. 2 nohoaka site (located north of the Rakaia township) and Rakaia Native Reserve 2058 close to the coast". For these sites AECL advised that they were managed by Te Rūnanga o Ngai Tahu on behalf of the rūnaka and they should be consulted with directly regarding these sites. Finally they requested ongoing dialogue on this project as it develops.

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Trail advocates

A meeting was held on the 27th of March, and follow-up conversations occurred with trail advocates to help guide the investigation of routes.

Advocates were identified by Simon Worthington (Ashburton District Council).

Contacts included:

1. Kirstie Gilchrist (Owner of Big Als Methven) – Information specific to foothills developments
2. Charles Ross – Information specific to Ashburton Trail Developments
3. Dean Harrison (Ashburton MTB Club) – Information specific to Ashburton trail developments
4. Kelvin Holmes (Braided Waters Trust, Ex Councillor and current Chair Methven Community Board) – Information from the original proposal
5. Neil Pluck (Braided Waters Trust) – Information specific to Rakaia trail developments

Council managers

A meeting was held on the 16th of May to update influential Council staff, and to discuss the trail feasibility study with Council managers to gain input. Attendees included:

Neil McCann, Group Manager Infrastructure & Open Spaces

Ian Hyde, Group Manager Compliance & Development

Toni Durham, Group Manager Democracy & Engagement

Ian Soper, Open Spaces Manager

Simon Worthington, Economic Development Manager

Mark Chamberlain, Roding Manager

Mark Low, Strategy and Policy Manager

Brad Thomson, Planning Manager

Support was given from all parties citing a trail development would help to increase tourist spending throughout the district. It was raised whether other trails in the foothills may be better placed for development, this was answered as being out of scope.

Mark Chamberlain, the Roding Manager, indicated support and that there were no immediate concerns over usage of district road for short sections of the trail. It was suggested *"Share The Road"*

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signs may be all that is required. Following the meeting further discussion was held with the Roding Manager over the possible shared use of the Valetta Bridge with the use of warning signage (either LED or standard), request for comment on specified roads included in the trail route, and the use of unformed legal road for the route.

Other agencies:

The following agencies or companies were contacted during the course of the project with a brief outline of their responses:

Department of Conservation (Tony Preston)

Supportive but stymied by existing restrictive policy on cycle use and trail development on public conservation land in Canterbury. Will require a review or partial review of Canterbury Conservation Management Strategy to make this activity permissible.

Environment Canterbury (ECan) (Colin Brookland)

Supportive in principle for use of Local Purpose Reserve (soil conservation and river control) and stopbank. Noted that ECan stopbanks are placed on private land. Any use of stopbanks for trails would need to ensure no modification to their structural integrity.

Manawa Energy, Highbank Power Station (Richard Spearman)

Supportive in principle for access across Manawa Energy land. This is contingent on any health and safety concerns being resolved. Noted that in process of being sold to Contact Energy.

Rangitata Diversion Race Management Ltd (RDRML) (Tony McCormick and Kees Beentjes)

Supportive in principle as already allow for Methven Walkway that uses the RDR. Inclusive access options where currently gates and stiles, will need to be worked through. Also discussed location of a North Branch Ashburton River bridge alongside the RDR on the downstream side.

Land Information New Zealand (LINZ) (Chris Rhodes)

Open to the use of LINZ land for trail. Would require an easement.

Outdoor Access NZ (Geoff Holgate)

Provided further clarification on hydro parcel land units found within riverbeds.

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DEVELOPMENT OF A DESTINATION TRAIL

Elements of a Sustainable Trail

The key elements required to ensure sustainability of a destination cycle trail is effectively portrayed in the graphic below (Figure 6).

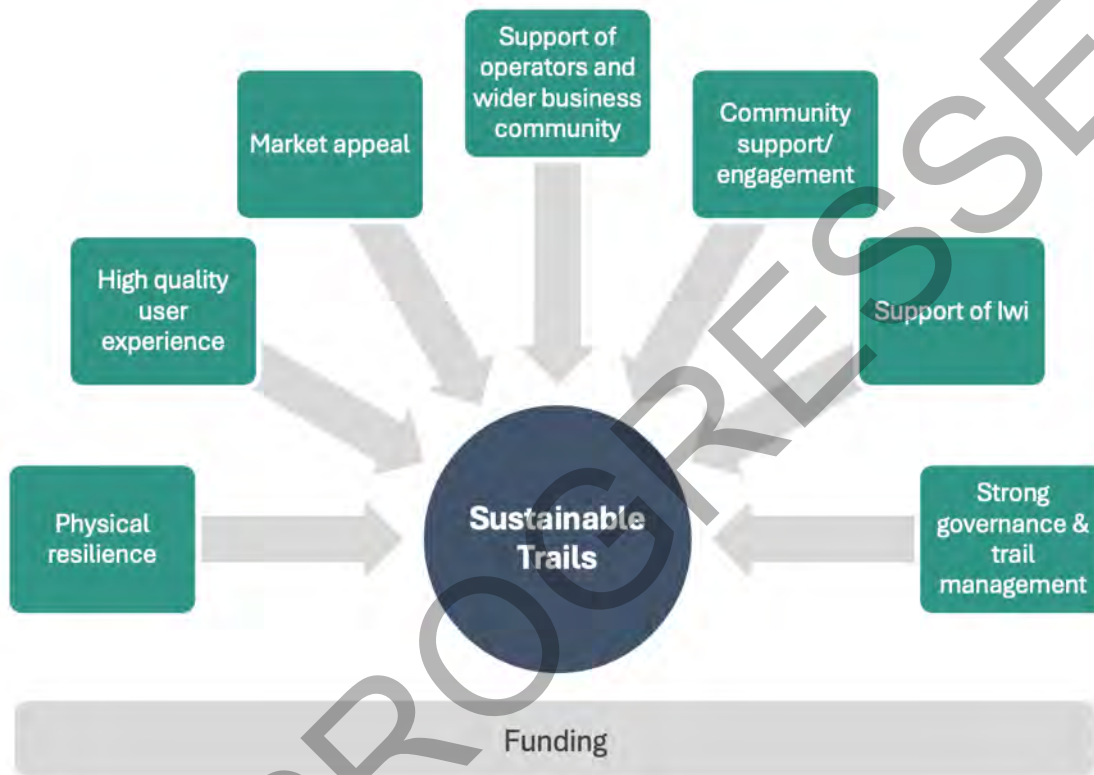


Figure 6, Sourced from Report on Great Ride Operating Models, Prepared for Ngā Haerenga NZ Cycle Trails, 2024

Governance and trail management

If a new destination trail in Ashburton District was to proceed a business model to ensure effective governance and maintenance of the trail will be critical. Destination cycle trails in New Zealand are managed under various structures including:

- central government such as the Department of Conservation – If majority of land is public conservation land
- local government – In-house, committee or contracted employee/s
- trusts
- community led charitable organisation such as an Incorporated Society
- Limited Liability Companies

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- partnership arrangement between two or more of the structures above

There are two phases in a trail's life: planning and development, and operation - different management models can be used for each phase. For instance, a trust may be established for the development of a trail and would raise funds, undertake detailed planning including finalising the route alignment, securing land access, gaining consents and managing the construction contract. Once the trail is completed then management of the trail may be taken on by the relevant council and a trail manager is employed to oversee the day to day management of the trail. However, there are also many cases where a trust continues to successfully manage a trail beyond development.

Resourcing the operation, maintenance and promotion of a destination trail needs to be considered when a trail is conceived to fully understand the lifecycle cost. Some of this work can be covered by voluntary community involvement but maintaining the trail to standard, a high quality user experience and reputation of the trail will need to be considered.

Examples of cycle trails' management structures are provided below:

Trail	Governance	Operation funding	Management Staff
Hauraki Rail Trail (Great Ride)	All - Hauraki Rail Trail Charitable Trust	MBIE, grants, donations, council funding	Chief Executive Officer
Central Otago Rail Trail (Great Ride)	Establishment – DOC Operation - Central Otago Rail Trail Trust Identified as DOC trail	DOC, MBIE, grants, donations, bequests, advertising, merchandise DOC maintain the trail	Trust Manager (50% FTE) Trust Facilitator/Social media
Little River Rail Trail	Establishment - Little River Rail Trail Trust Operation, coordination and promotion - Rod Donald Banks Peninsula Trust	DOC, ECan, Christchurch CC & Selwyn DC maintain sections of the trail Hoping to add QR code donations and merchandise	Trust Manager (10% FTE) Limited promotion
Alps 2 Ocean (Great Ride)	All - Joint Committee (includes representation of both Waitaki and Mackenzie district councils)	MBIE, donations, merchandise, Council funding (Waitaki and Mackenzie)	Trail Manager – 1 FTE Marketing – 0.25 FTE Trail maintenance contracts (paid by each council)

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project

which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.

The majority of the Great Rides are governed by charitable trusts and this seems to work well for a number of reasons¹⁰:

- staff can be more responsive
- the trail is the trust's sole priority and focus
- they are less stifled by bureaucracy and strict procedures
- they are more 'grassroots' and therefore more connected to the community
- there are a wide range of funding sources for which trusts are better placed to apply and gain
- trustees can represent the range of community stakeholders who support the trail plus additional financial, or governance expertise where required

Direct management by local government does have the advantage of tapping into the wide base of Council resources and expertise such as for destination marketing and support for events. However, competing priorities may mean that there are impacts for trail-related work and they can be slow to respond.

Trail design considerations

These considerations are essential to ensuring the trail has market appeal, delivers on a high quality user experience, has a positive effect on the natural environment and is physically resilient for the long term.

Recreational value

Cyclists look for a mix of landscapes, scenery and terrain to ensure the trail holds high appeal. Any cultural, historic and significant natural features that can be viewed along the route will enhance the visitor experience. Domestic visitors in particular are looking to undertake trails which showcase the natural environment and vistas they wouldn't see from a car, where variety is the key. Riders also report highlights where trails connect to small rural towns filled with character, that host rustic cafés and accommodation. Ideally the trail route would work well cycling (or walking) in either direction to support all trip options including an "out and back" for riders without transport support.

Environmental impact

Choosing a trail alignment which minimises environmental impact by avoiding fragile ecosystems and seeking terrain that requires minimal trail formation is essential. Trail development should work with the natural contours of the land especially where height gain or loss is required and using higher terrain with good drainage. Often trail development projects go hand in hand with either existing native habitat restoration or provide opportunities for local communities to create new natural areas

¹⁰ Report on Great Ride Operating Models, Prepared for Ngā Haerenga New Zealand Cycle Trails, 2024

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
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which also boost the appeal of the trail. During the planning phase and usually for the purposes of gaining resource consent, an Assessment of Environmental Effects would be completed to identify and mitigate any significant effects of the trail development on the environment. This would also take into consideration the positive effects for recreation, health and wellbeing the proposed trail would bring.

Resilience and climate change

A sustainable trail should be sited to avoid natural hazards to minimise trail closures and costly repairs and maintenance. For an Ashburton District Plains Trail these hazards would include: river and stream flooding, coastal erosion, and naturally unstable ground. The consequence of climate change has meant these risks have a greater probability with more intense rainfall events and coastal surges.

The increased intensity and occurrence of large rainfall events also requires future-proofing measures during construction such as installation of larger culverts and careful design of bridges allowing for flood heights and abutment protection. Any long sloped sections of trail should have gradient reversals so water scouring does not remove the trail surface.

An expected increase in temperatures will make it necessary to provide some shade for users along the trail as respite from heat and damaging UV sun exposure. There are already many existing trees and shrubs along the proposed trail alignment but this should be considered further in the detailed planning along with water bottle refill points. Any planting suggested as part of this measure should include low flammability species. Further to this the risk of wild fires is increasing and will need consideration in the detailed planning and operation including emergency management for trail users in the case of a wildfire.

Shared use

Design of this trail would predominantly target cyclists, however provision for walkers needs to be considered also as research shows that many cycle trails have as many walkers as they do cyclists. Adequate width of trail, good visibility, rest stops, wayfinding and toilets should also cater for walkers and runners.

Trail standard

Selecting the appropriate trail grade in the early development phase of a trail project is essential in ensuring the expectations of the target trail users will be met. The trail industry in New Zealand has a number of standards for trail design available including:

- mountain bike trail guidelines
- Tracks and Outdoor Visitor Structures (SNZ HB 8630: 2004)
- Department of Conservation track construction and maintenance guidelines
- Ngā Haerenga New Zealand Cycle Trail Design Guide

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The latter has been chosen as the most applicable trail design standard for this project and would be used for most purpose built recreational cycle trails in New Zealand, whether they are a Great Ride or not. The Cycle Trail Design Guide also considers best practice development of trails in road corridors or the shared use of the road carriageway where this is required.

From the NZ Cycle Trail Design Guide a Grade 2 (Easy) cycle trail has been chosen to best meet the needs and expectations of the Ashburton Plains Trail target users. A Grade 2 trail is described as being a smooth, well-formed trail with gentle climbs and is suitable for confident beginner riders. More specifically the trail should be an average width of 2m to support a social component so cyclists can ride side by side at times. The gradient should be 0 – 6% for at least 90% of the trail. The surface would be well compacted aggregate.



Figure 7, Example of an easy grade cycle trail (photo credit: Trailhub)

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TRAIL ROUTE

A combination of on ground and desktop investigations, previous work undertaken under the Braided Waters Trust (BWT) and knowledge passed on by trail advocates guided this section.

It should be noted the trail routes described below are indicative and serve the purpose of this high level study. It should be stressed also that although contact was made with central and regional government agencies (ECan, LINZ and DOC), and large infrastructure owners (RDRML and Manawa Energy), there has been no contact with other landowners over trail siting. If a trail development were to proceed considerable engagement with landowners and further detailed planning is required to finalise a trail alignment.

The trail route has been broken down into six sections as follows:

1. Upper Rakaia River – Rakaia to Highbank Power Station
2. Foothills - Highbank Power Station to Mount Somers
3. Upper Ashburton River - Mount Somers to Ashburton
4. Lower Ashburton River – Ashburton to Hakatere Huts
5. Coastal - Hakatere Huts to Rakaia Huts
6. Lower Rakaia River - Rakaia Huts to Rakaia

It is noted that the trail route sections are described as if travel is in one direction but actual travel in both directions is the expected norm.

Section 1 - Upper Rakaia River (Rakaia to Highbank Power Station)

Description

The Rakaia Walkway on Railway Terrace West at the Rakaia Bike Park is where we start the proposed route, heading north towards the Rakaia Bridge. The Rakaia Walkway is currently being developed in conjunction with the Council's Parks Team. From there the route continues on the Rakaia Terrace joining the existing well-formed and surfaced trail, Rakaia River Terrace Walkway, that weaves through native plantings and past the Rakaia Transfer Station.

This walkway then continues onto the Normanby Road Plantation where its elevation provides views over the river to the north-east. This section of walkway continues until Wolseley Road. Notably the walkway has access barriers to prevent motorbikes which may cause access issues for those with accessibility needs. It is recommended that these access structures be redesigned to allow for inclusive access.

From Wolseley Road a four-wheel drive tracks begins, first running down the terrace before beginning to weave through broom, gorse and assorted riverbed scrub to McKays Road. Track surfacing consists of moderate sized alluvial gravels that would be unsuitable for trail surfacing. As McKays Road is

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approached the Rakaia Motorcycle Club track is passed. It is recommended the route be aligned away from the existing four-wheel drive tracks, and instead run along the base of the terrace to distance the trail from washout and reduce use from four-wheel drives and motorcycles. A purpose built trail that excludes motorbikes and 4WD's would also help reduce conflict or hazards created by sharing the trail with these users.

From McKays Road the route would continue up the river past the Tarbotton Land and Civil gravel quarry that operates in the riverbed. It is noted that while in operation this machinery creates a considerable amount of dust from truck passage. Access past the yard would be possible along the base of the terraces through to Somerton Road. This stretch of trail route would also pass through broom, gorse and other riverbed scrub.

A second gravel extraction site located on Somerton Road is again a potentially dusty site with regular truck passage at times. A well-formed four-wheel drive track then continues up to the Mitcham Road transmission lines. This track consists of moderate sized alluvial gravel and would require resurfacing if used for a cycle trail. However, it could be advisable to create a purpose built trail through this section to avoid conflict with other users. From the transmission lines the existing track terminates and heading upriver there is 1.0km of thick scrub and willow. Drone imagery suggests a trail through this section is feasible, however bridges or boardwalks may be required to navigate some wet sections.

Access is then gained onto the Barrhill Chertsey Irrigation (BCI) schemes road at the overflow, 5.6km south east of Barrhill and below the terrace. This road is well gravelled and would require minimal work to make usable for a cycle trail. The road continues for 7km to the BCI holding ponds and Barrhill water intake from the Rakaia river - safety considerations, such as fencing, would be required to make this area safe for cyclists.

A side trail would be required to gain access to the Barrhill settlement. This could be either constructed, noting the terraces are up to 30m high in the area, alternatively, the trail could make use of the Irwins Road cutting, or one of the two cuttings on private land either side of Barrhill.

From the holding ponds, there is 2.7km of undeveloped land under the terraces, this consists of crack willow, poplar plantings and scrub. The Lowes Cutting farm is then reached at which point the unformed legal road could be used through the farm until the cutting is reached.

Preferred route, Highbank Power Station:

From the cutting the route continues 3.8km to the back of Lowes Cutting farm, where the land is again undeveloped returning to crack willow and scrub along the base of the terrace. Through this 1.1km section the trail will likely need to cross the outlet of the Rangitata Diversion Race (RDR) twice. The route then reaches the canal at the outlet of the Highbank Power Station. There would need to be works here to separate pedestrians from the activities at the power station, to reduce disruption and ensure public safety.

The route would then need to make use of the private Happy Valley Road to reach the top of the terrace where it joins up with Rakaia River Road and heads back towards the RDR. There may also be

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opportunities to explore route options through the forestry block in this area and this would be the preferred option.

Alternate route, Lowes Cutting:

The route makes use of the formed Lowes Cutting road to go up the terrace where it joins the verge of the Rakaia-Barrhill-Methven Road. From here, the trail should be built on the northern road verge to avoid traffic until it reaches Rakaia River Road. The route would then continue up Rakaia River Road passing assorted farming operations until it reaches the RDR.

NOT PROGRESSSED

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
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Methven Branch Railway Line (not recommended):

The Methven Branch railway line between Rakaia and Methven opened in 1880 and transported passengers and freight between the two towns with peak passengers in 1920. Eventually use declined and it was closed in 1976. The line closely followed Thompson Track from Rakaia and then Line Road into Methven. Use of this old rail route for a trail is not a preferred option. This is due to the proximity to road (Figure 8), particularly Thompson Track which has heavy traffic flow at times, as well as the low appeal of a trail that follows straight road lines. As noted in the market analysis section there is a preference for trails that are fully off-road.



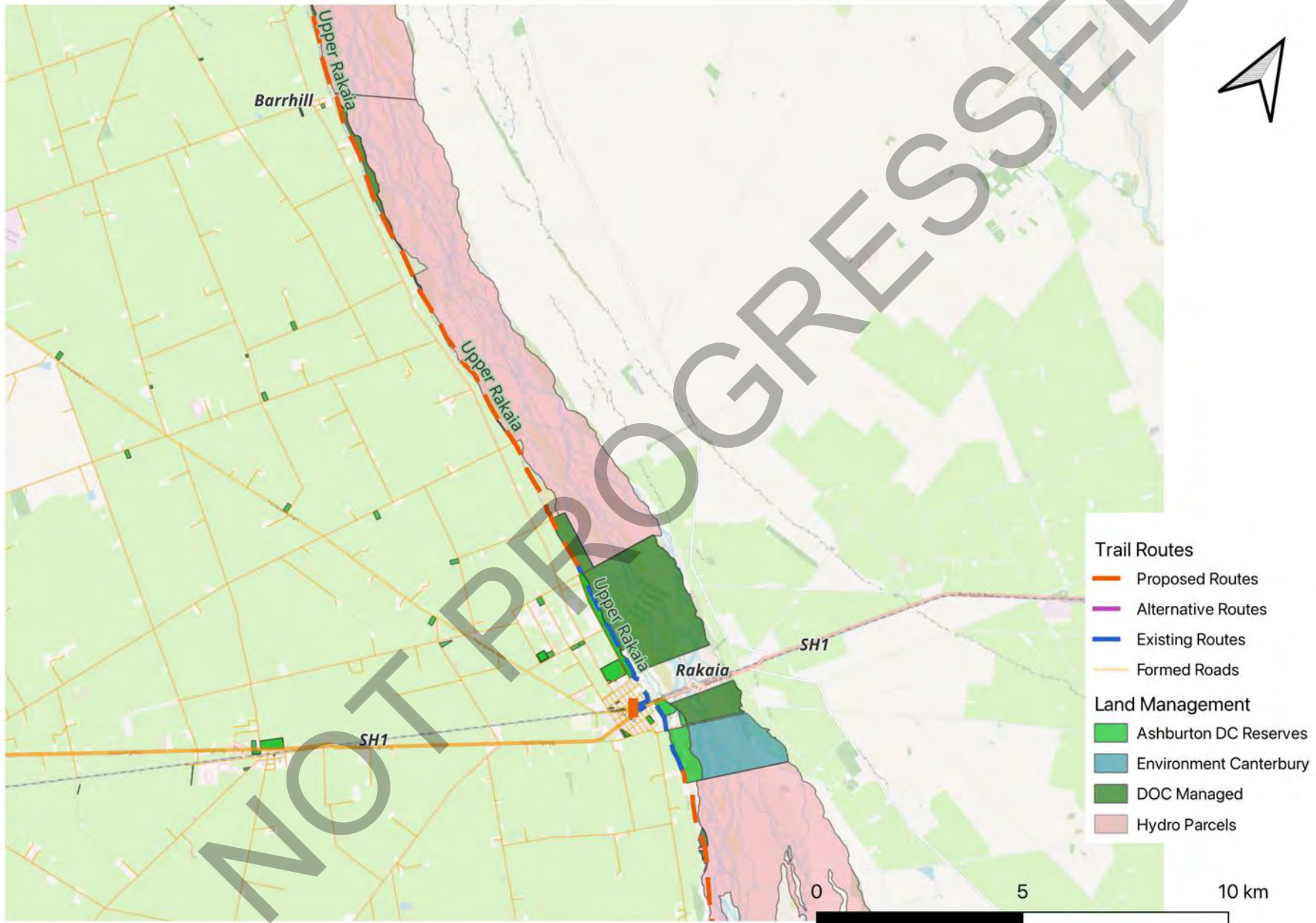
Figure 8, Remains of Methven Branch rail line beside Thompson Track Road

Section 1 – Maps and photos

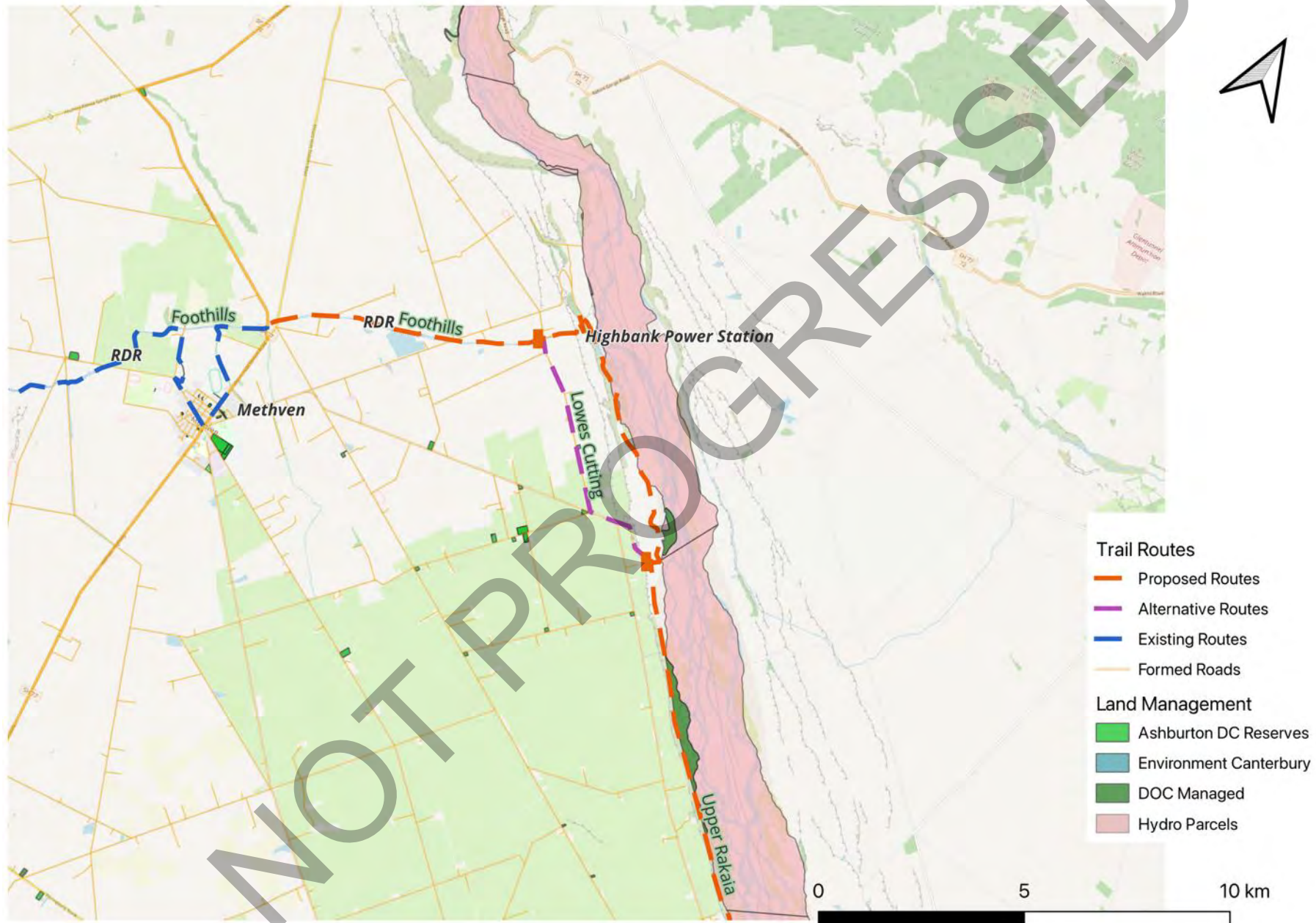
Two maps of the proposed and alternate routes for this section are shown overleaf:

Photos for this section are also provided on pages 47 -51.

Trail Route Rakaia to Barrhill Map



Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025 regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.



Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
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Figure 9, Rakaia township and trail looking north



Figure 10, Normanby plantation and trail looking north

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
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which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.



Figure 11, Rakaia riverbed between Wolseley and McKays Road

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Figure 12, Tarbotton Civil's quarry at McKays Road



Figure 13, From the Mitcham Road transmission lines looking north to the BCI overflow

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025 regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.



Figure 14, Historic Barrhill township



Figure 15, The Barrhill-Chertsey Irrigation Scheme Road looking north and a private cutting

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project

which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.



Figure 16, Lowes Cutting looking north

Challenges

- contested use of this area may impact the trail. Other users would include: anglers, duck shooters, jet boats, four-wheel drives, trail bikes and gravel extraction.
- there will be difficulty gaining access to the historic Barrhill Township up the terraces.
- the constant change of the braided river system could put the trail at risk of washout. Although Neil Pluck (Pluck's Engineering) advised the risk is low upstream of Rakaia.
- this section of trail will be highly exposed to the prevailing north-west wind given the lack of established vegetation.

Highlights

- Soddtown, part of the Rakaia Settlement, was a settlement for Irish immigrants many who were workers brought in by Premier Julius Vogel to do public works. Other similar Irish settlements were Kerrytown further south and Loburn in North Canterbury.
- fantastic views of the Canterbury Plains and the braided Rakaia River from the terraces.
- the historic Barrhill township and stunning avenues of oak, sycamore and poplar.
- Corwar Gatekeeper's Lodge (slight detour), an original estate gatekeepers house, that has been kept as a house museum with all the interior and household objects from the late 1800's on display.

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- Highbank Power Station is the terminus of the Rangitata Diversion Race and was constructed during World War 2, both were part of a huge Government Public Works Scheme of the time.
- assorted farming operations on show with a strong emphasis on cropping around Barrhill.
- stunning views of the Southern Alps and Mount Hutt on a clear day.

Trail development and infrastructure requirements

This section will require a new purpose-built trail from where it leaves the existing Rakaia River Terrace Walkway right through to where it connects with the RDR above Highbank Power Station. A purpose-built trail should be separated from existing 4WD tracks to ensure maintenance of a high quality cycling surface and reduce user conflicts. The trail would mostly stay on the lower river terrace however any opportunities to take the alignment onto the top terrace will afford better views and improve the experience. The addition of access barriers which also allow inclusive use will be required to keep four-wheel drives and motorbikes off the trail. A number of small bridges are required to cross small streams, the water race and power station overflow channels. There are at least two gravel extraction operations which will require coordinated siting of the trail at these locations plus any other safety measures needed. A side trail up to Barrhill would provide an attractive rest stop with added historical interest.

Other requirements or impact on Council services:

- wayfinding signage
- existing public toilets in Rakaia would be adequate for initial usage levels
- the Water Services Manager at Council has advised that the capacity of the wastewater and water supply systems in Rakaia is adequate for this additional demand
- the toilet at Barrhill is a good location for the trail but is unlikely to meet the quality and standard required and would need to be upgraded or replaced
- a toilet is likely required in the vicinity of the Highbank Power Station

High-level cost

\$2.6 million

Includes: trail construction (new and any upgrade of existing), bridges, toilets, signs, access barriers, consent costs and 10% contingency.

Excludes: detailed planning costs, cost of land access negotiation and formal legal access, specialist advice e.g. geotechnical assessment, cost of boundary fencing, project management or supply of interpretation/onsite displays etc.

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Section 2 - Foothills (Highbank Power Station to Mount Somers)

Description

Rakaia River to Methven

From the Rakaia River Road the proposed route follows the banks of the RDR on the north-west side crossing Barkers Road, Darts Road, and Mount Hutt Station Road. The route then continues over the top of the siphon east of Waimarama Road where it also crosses to the south-west bank of the RDR continuing to the Methven Walkway. All of these sections of the route are currently in grass and would require development and trail surfacing.

From the Methven Walkway the trail follows the Enchanted Forest track to the Opuke Pools. The trail then makes use of the newly formed track along the verges of Mount Hutt Station Road entering into the centre of Methven.

Methven to Staveley

From the Methven town centre, the route continues out on Forest Drive and links into the Methven Walkway at the intersection with Mount Harding Road. The route then follows the walkway through native plantings back out to the RDR. It should be noted that in high rainfall sections of the trail here become flooded. The route then follows the RDR's unsurfaced south-east bank where it crosses Pudding Hill Road and Ledgerwoods Road. At Dip Road the route crosses to the north-west side of the RDR, crosses the Ashburton River Road, and reaches the siphon under the Ashburton River North Branch.

The route then crosses the largest bridge required for the project, estimated at a span of 140m to cross the North Branch of the Ashburton River. Placement of the bridge would likely be downstream of the siphon.

From the western side of the Ashburton Rivers North Branch the route remains on the south-eastern bank of the RDR to Forks Road. The route continues to the Alford Forest Cemetery Rd where it crosses back to the north-western bank of the RDR, from here the route is surfaced until it reaches the siphon under Taylors Stream. The Taylors Stream bridge will need to span approximately 45m and should be placed downstream of the siphon.

From the western side of Taylors Stream the route will resume on the south-eastern bank of the RDR and continue to the Ashburton-Staveley and Springburn-Bushside roads which it will cross. The route will then reach the Arundel-Rakaia-Gorge Road where it will cross to the north-western bank and continue until it intersects with Rutherford Road. The route will utilise Rutherford Road heading north alongside Bowyers Stream until Staveley township is reached.

Preferred route, Lime Kiln, Ammunition Bunkers and Upper South Branch

From Staveley the route will continue across the one-way Boyds Road bridge. At the one-way bridge the route continues to the top of Boyds Rd, the top half of the road climbs moderately and has gravel

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surfacing. From the end of the road the high point of the route would be reached at 480m, from here views would extend out across the Canterbury Plains. Once above the kiln the track will zig-zag down to the Langdon Lime Kiln and Reid Stream, this would be an obvious spot to stop and take in the areas history with both lime and coal extraction.

A small bridge would be required to cross Reid Stream from where the route would traverse approximately 1.5km under the base of Stevenson Hill and a canopy of stunning beech forest. The route then reaches Stevenson Stream which will require a small bridge. From here the trail would either continue onto private land or follow *Alternate route 1* outlined below.

From Stevenson Stream the route will continue along the base of the Cox Hills making use of existing Four-Wheel drive tracks through the native beech forest and scrub. The trail will then leave the bush, following an existing formed track along the bush edge south-west which requires multiple crossings of Cave Stream tributaries. The trail then makes a sharp turn east (just before the lime quarry) and crosses Cave Stream 200m north-east of the historic ammunition bunkers.

From the ammunition bunkers, discussions with Mt Somers Station could steer the trail in one of three directions:

1. Extending south-east down Peaches Road and onto Hoods Road into town
2. Extending down the cutting 1km north-west of the Buxton Kilns, before connecting onto the Ashburton Gorge Road and back into Mount Somers.
3. Using the road reserve to extend north-west up Peaches Road before descending Burnett Road crossing the Ashburton Gorge Road to drop down to the north bank of the Ashburton River and following this back into Mount Somers.

Alternate route 1, Rutherford's Road ULR to Stevenson Stream Siphon

Should access not be attained across private land to the ammunition bunkers and Upper South Branch the trail will make use of the RDR. After crossing Stevenson Stream the track would use the Unformed Legal Road (ULR) that links back to Rutherfords Road, a short road section would then extend to the Stevenson Stream Siphon. From there, the trail would follow the description of *Alternate route 2* below.

Alternate route 2, Bowyers Stream, RDR and Arundel Rakaia Gorge Road

From Staveley the route will continue across the one-way Boyds Road bridge. Should permissions be unable to be negotiated to the kiln or across DOC land the trail would either be built alongside Bowyers Stream, or make use of Rutherfords Road, a quiet gravel road, to head south to the RDR. From the RDR, the trail will continue to the Stevenson Stream siphon where a 25m bridge will be built to reach to the eastern bank of the RDR.

The route will then continue on the eastern bank of the RDR until it reaches the Arundel Rakaia Gorge Road, this section will pass forestry and land grazed by sheep and beef. This section of road has a

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relatively high traffic flow so it is recommended a trail is built on the north-western verge of the road until it reaches the Mount Somers township.

Alford Forest-Bushside-Springburn-Staveley (not recommended):

The Braided Waters Trust favoured a trail turning off the RDR at the North-Branch and heading inland following the Alford Forest Cemetery Road to the Inland Scenic Route. From there this road would be followed to after Alford Forest where rural roads would be used to take a meandering route across to Mount Somers village. This route avoids the need for an expensive bridge across the North-Branch and traverses through more small settlements which would add interest to a trail of this nature.

However, we have discounted this route for two reasons:

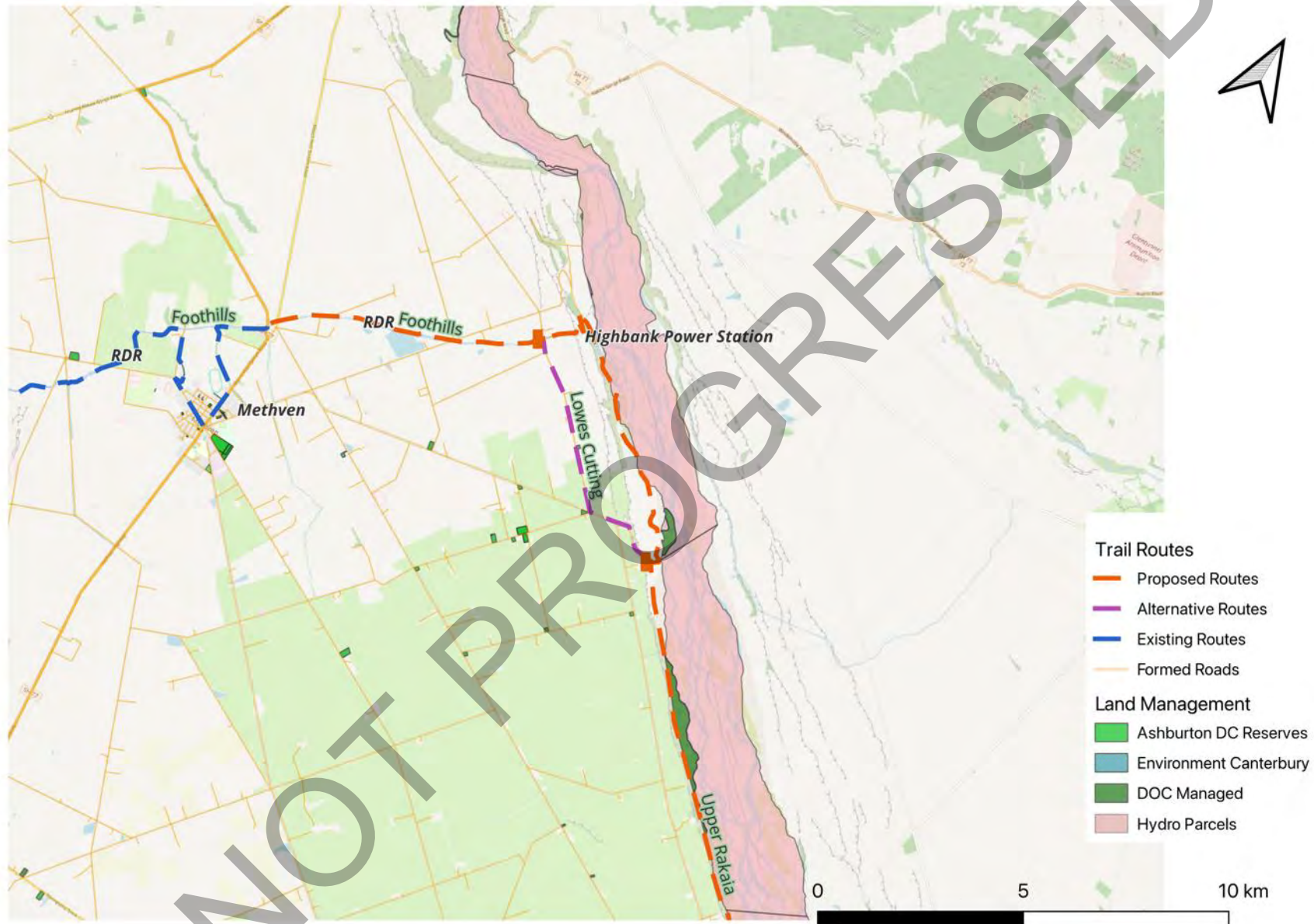
1. The market's preference is to have the trail off-road rather than on-road, and the lack of public conservation land (PCL) and unformed legal road (ULR) along the base of Mt Alford force the trail onto the roads to Staveley which hold little appeal to cyclists.
2. There are safety concerns around this route using the Pudding Hill Stream and Ashburton North Branch one-way bridges. However, we note the roading team has these bridges in the renewals budget and pedestrian facilities could be included with their replacement. Should bridge renewals be delayed, the cost to add clip-on structures to these two bridges, if structurally feasible, would be high. The Taylors Stream (two-way) bridge on this route would also be a choke point.

Section 2 - Maps and photos

Two maps of the proposed and alternate routes for this section are shown overleaf:

Photos for this section are also provided on pages 58 to 65.

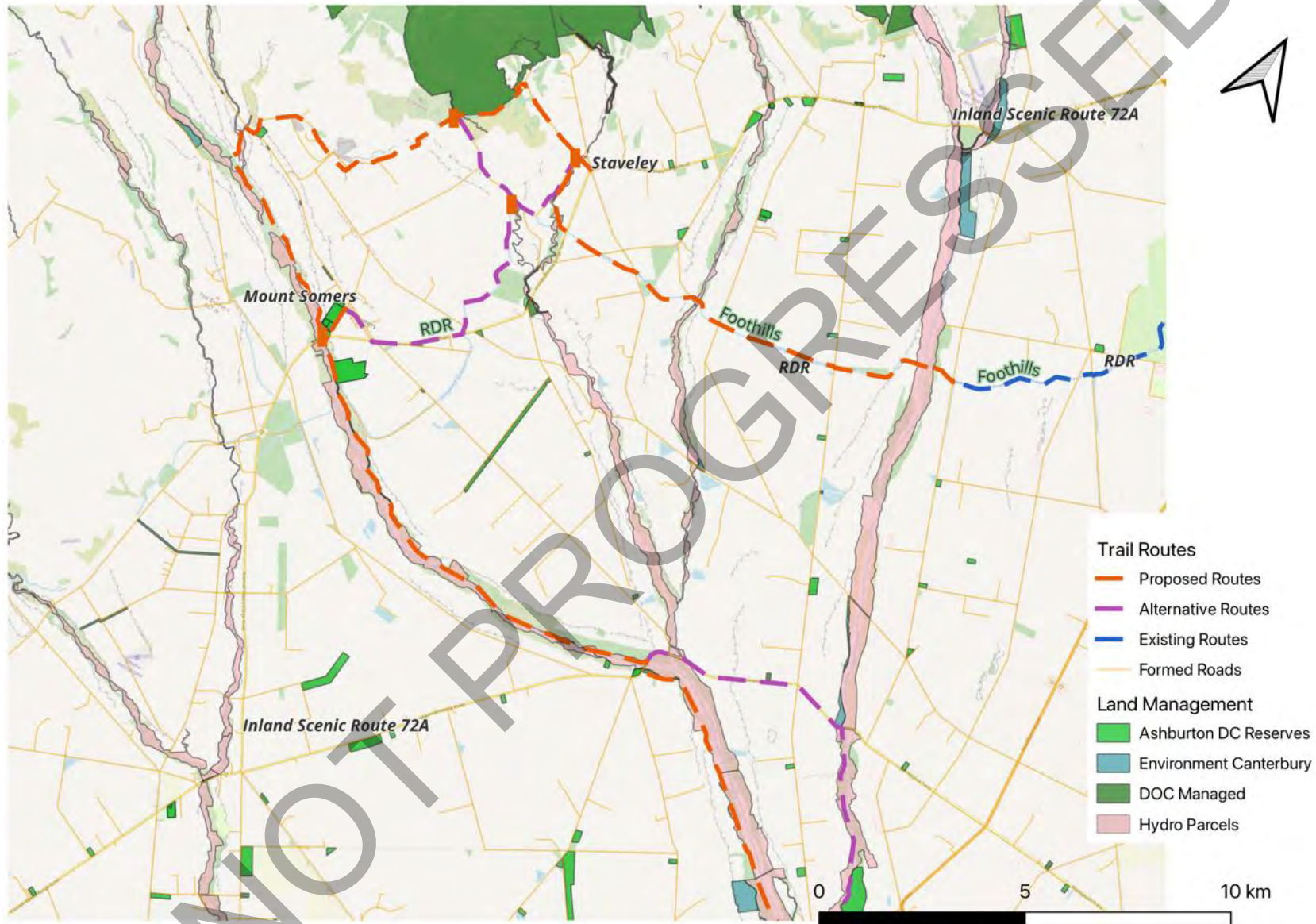
Trail Route Highbank Power Station to Methven





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Trail Route Methven to Mount Somers



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Figure 17, RDR and Barkers Road looking west



Figure 18, RDR and Mount Hutt Station Road looking south-west

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Figure 19, Mount Harding Road looking towards to Methven showing Methven Walkway



Figure 20, Ashburton North Branch siphon

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Figure 21, The banks of the RDR west of the North Branch



Figure 22, The banks of the RDR west of the North Branch

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Figure 23, Taylors Stream siphon



Figure 24, Taylors Stream siphon looking downstream

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Figure 25, Staveley township looking up Boyds Road



Figure 26, the route down to the Stevenson Hill lime kiln, looking at Boyds Road

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Figure 27, Stevenson Hill looking over the lime kiln



Figure 28, Stevenson Hill

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Figure 29, Unformed legal road above Rutherfords Road



Figure 30, Stevenson Stream siphon on Rutherfords Road

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Figure 31, Arundel-Rakaia-Gorge Road looking up the RDR

Challenges

- constructing a 140m bridge across the North Branch of the Ashburton will be costly and may be challenging especially given the strong north-westerlies that hit the plains.
- the development of a cycle trail across PCL inland from Staveley is currently not permissible under the existing Canterbury Waitaha Conservation Management Strategy. However, this area, including a stop at the Christchurch Lime Company kiln, will add greatly to the attractiveness of the trail.
- some extended gravel and sealed road sections that could pose a hazard and detract from the value of the ride (on all routes). Options do however exist to avoid most of these sections.
- it may be a challenge obtaining access to run the trail across Mount Somers Station and other private land in the area.
- a trail past the Peaches Road quarry may cause concern for the quarry operators with regular heavy vehicle traffic.

Highlights

- creating commercial opportunities for Methven and the surrounding area – where hospitality generally struggles during the off-season (outside winter).
- good level of refreshment stops, shopping opportunities and availability of accommodation for trail users in Methven, Staveley and Mount Somers.
- creating off-road cycle linkages between the Methven, Staveley and Mount Somers townships.

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- spectacular views of Mt Hutt, Mt Somers and the surrounding mountain ranges.
- option to view the historic Mt Hutt Road Board Office and the Pipe Shed in Methven - both are registered historic sites with Heritage NZ/Pouhere Taonga.
- opportunity to visit other historic sites across the foothills including the Staveley Lime Kilns and Mount Somers Ammunition Bunkers.
- exposure to a range of agricultural operations including forestry, sheep, beef, dairy, and cropping.
- the ability to travel along the Rangitata Diversion Race (RDR), which irrigates a large portion of the Canterbury Plains - built as part of a government Public Works Scheme in the 1930's and 1940's.
- trail users could make a side trip to the historic Limestone Cottage at the junction of Limestone and Woolshed creeks.

Trail development and infrastructure requirements

From the Highbank Power Station a purpose built trail is required to zig zag up to the tail end of the Rangitata Diversion Race (RDR), a height gain of 120m. This is required to keep the trail within Grade 2 standard. Once on the RDR a compacted, gravel trail surface would need to be added to the existing accessway, similar to what has been done for the Methven Walkway, to create a Grade 2 trail.

Currently there are barriers such as fences and gates that prevent vehicle access onto the RDR at all road intersections. Further discussion is required with RDRML to allow for access barriers that do not inhibit inclusive use for walkers, cyclists and adaptive bikes but meet RDRML's requirements also.

A number of significant bridges is required to establish this section of trail, the largest of these being a 140m long bridge across the Ashburton North Branch. On leaving the RDR below Staveley the trail would utilise Rutherfords Road into Staveley and Boyds Road to the base of the foothills. A side trip to the lime kilns would be available on the existing DOC tracks. A new purpose-built trail is required from the Boyds Road end to traverse the lower slopes of Stevenson Hill and Cox Hills with bridges across several streams until a farm track is joined near the historic ammunition bunkers. Dependent on access arrangements existing gravel roads could be used to lead down to the South Branch where purpose-built trail is required along the north bank to reach Mount Somers township.

Other requirements or impact on Council services:

- wayfinding signage
- there are currently no public toilets at Staveley, and they would be required in this location if the trail was developed.
- Methven and Mount Somers has adequate public toilets for this additional use.
- Council has advised that the capacity of the wastewater and water supply systems in Methven, Staveley and Mount Somers is adequate for this additional demand. Note that the latter two towns are on septic tank systems. Methven can already cope with high winter demand from ski visitors so has surplus capacity during the summer months.

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project

which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.

High-level cost

\$3.4 million

Includes: trail construction (new and any upgrade of existing), bridges, toilets, signs, access barriers, consent costs and 10% contingency.

Excludes: detailed planning costs, cost of land access negotiation and formal legal access, cost of boundary fencing, specialist advice e.g. geotechnical assessment, project management or supply of interpretation/onsite displays etc.

NOT PROGRESSSED

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project

which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.

Section 3 - Upper Ashburton River (Mount Somers to Ashburton)

Description

Mount Somers to Valetta Bridge

From Mount Somers the route extends up to Hoods Rd and makes use of the domain from the Mt Somers Hall with the route extending into the plantation alongside the cemetery. The route follows the ULR to the Arundel-Rakaia Gorge Road, where it crosses and drops onto the Ashburton South Branches riverbank. From the river bank the route meanders through crack willow scrub and poplar trees for 1.6km to the RDR siphon and South Branch water intake.

Safety considerations, such as safety fencing, may be required around the siphon and water intake and settling pond. From there the route would continue down onto the river bank for 1.5km until it reaches the RDR overflow. A bridge is recommended here which would need to be approximately 15m long.

The route then continues down the riverbank through willows and assorted scrub. Sections of riverbank in this area have gravel groynes for flood protection which may cause issues with trail construction. Four kilometres downstream of the overflow a gravel extraction site is reached which has an accessway through Rangimarie Station to Tramway Rd. The route then continues a further 5.2km alongside a forestry block and farmland until the Valetta Bridge or The Forks is reached.

Preferred route, South Branch

The route then uses the bridge to cross to the south bank and utilises ULR and DOC estate to access the riverbank planted in crack willow and poplar trees. The route continues downstream on the riverbank 14km to Sheates Road. A trail could be located on Local Purpose Reserve (ECan) or Hydro parcel (riverbed managed in some cases by LINZ) although there are some sections where private land will need to be traversed including near Ahuru, and at Westerfield Farm – although an alternative route exists with a ULR in the vicinity. Several small water races and streams in this section will also require crossing.

A local trail enthusiast is in the process of extending the South Bank River Trail to Sheates Road (Lagmhor) from Tinwald. The trail could use this section which is currently just downstream of Jacksons Road and this would require minimal investment for completion. The surfacing on this stretch of trail consists of river gravels and sections of silt and clay, the trail has been built to a Grade 2 standard. From Tinwald, access is possible through the Lions River Trail to Lake Hood, or across the Ashburton Bridge to the Ashburton township.

Alternate route, North Branch

From the Valetta Bridge the route continues north-east across Bowyers Stream making use of the existing road bridge which has a rather wide shoulder. A 5.5km trail would then be built alongside

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
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which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.

Thompsons Track to keep cyclists off the road. The route will be on the north-western side and will extend to the Ashburton River North Branch.

At the Ashburton North Branch the route will extend 19km along the top of the stop bank (ECan managed) along the west bank, extending until it reaches the Ashburton-Staveley Road bridge. There are gaps in the stop bank which would require more extensive trail development and consideration to avoid affecting managed overland flood flows. This section of the ECan stop bank crosses more than 20 different private land parcels, so there is a high level of landowner negotiation required to allow for this alternate trail. Vegetation in the area consists of crack willow, poplar and assorted scrub.

From the Ashburton-Staveley Road bridge the route would briefly join the Methven Highway. From here the route continues down Racecourse Road until it reaches Farm Road on the edge of Ashburton - a trail may be required to be constructed on the verge of Racecourse Road due to traffic speed. Following Farm Road the route would then continue onto Melrose Road (both using the urban road carriageway with 50km/hr traffic speeds) and link in with the existing river trail to the Ashburton Bridge. This section of existing trail is Grade 3 in sections so may require upgrading given the proposed trail's target audience, alternatively the walkway in the area could be re-purposed as a multi-use trail. This would require consultation with the local mountain biking community if this alternate route was chosen.

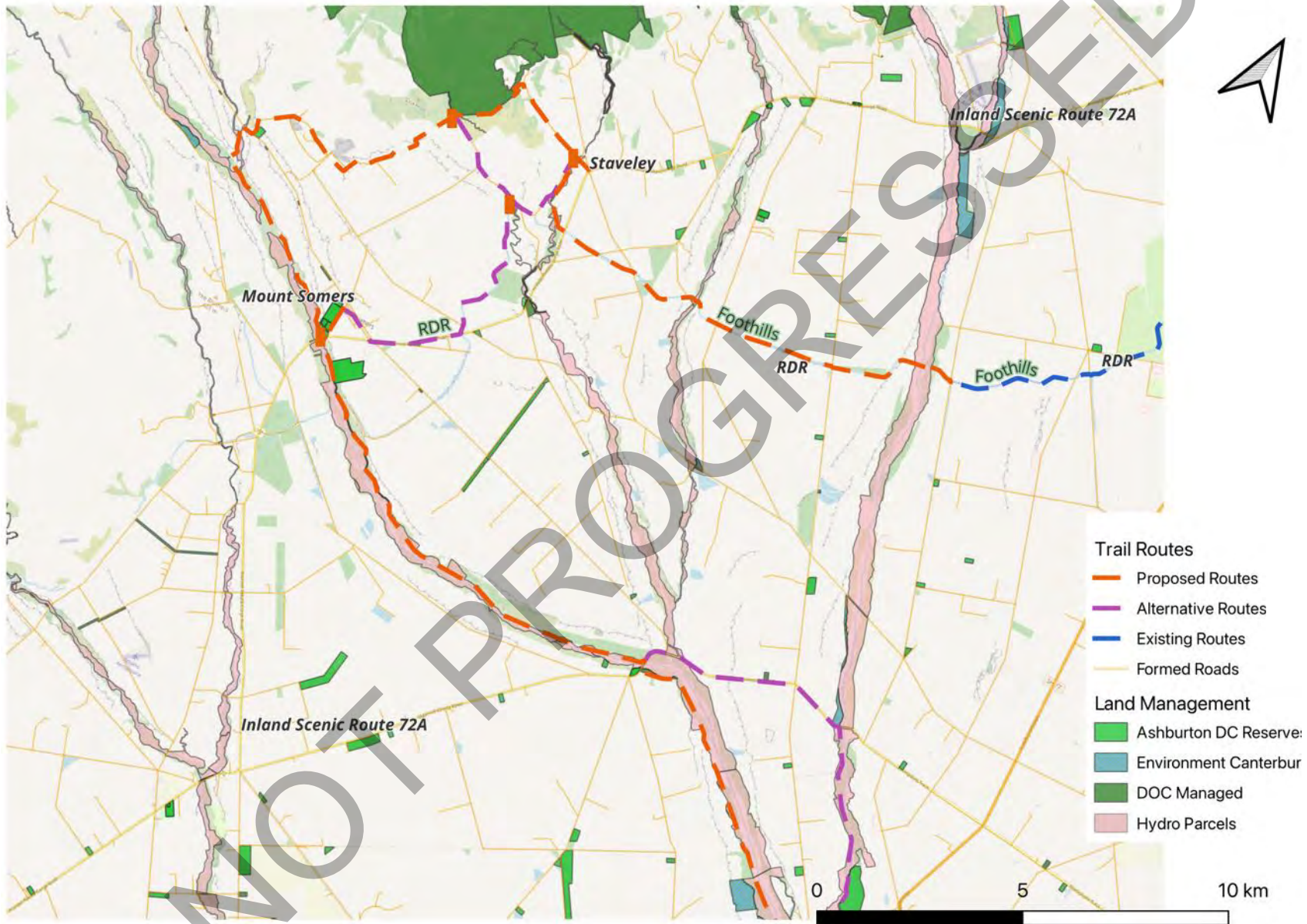
Section 3 - Maps and photos

Two maps of the proposed and alternate routes for this section are shown overleaf:

Photos for this section are also provided on pages 72 to 77.

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025 regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.

Trail Route Mount Somers to 'The Forks'

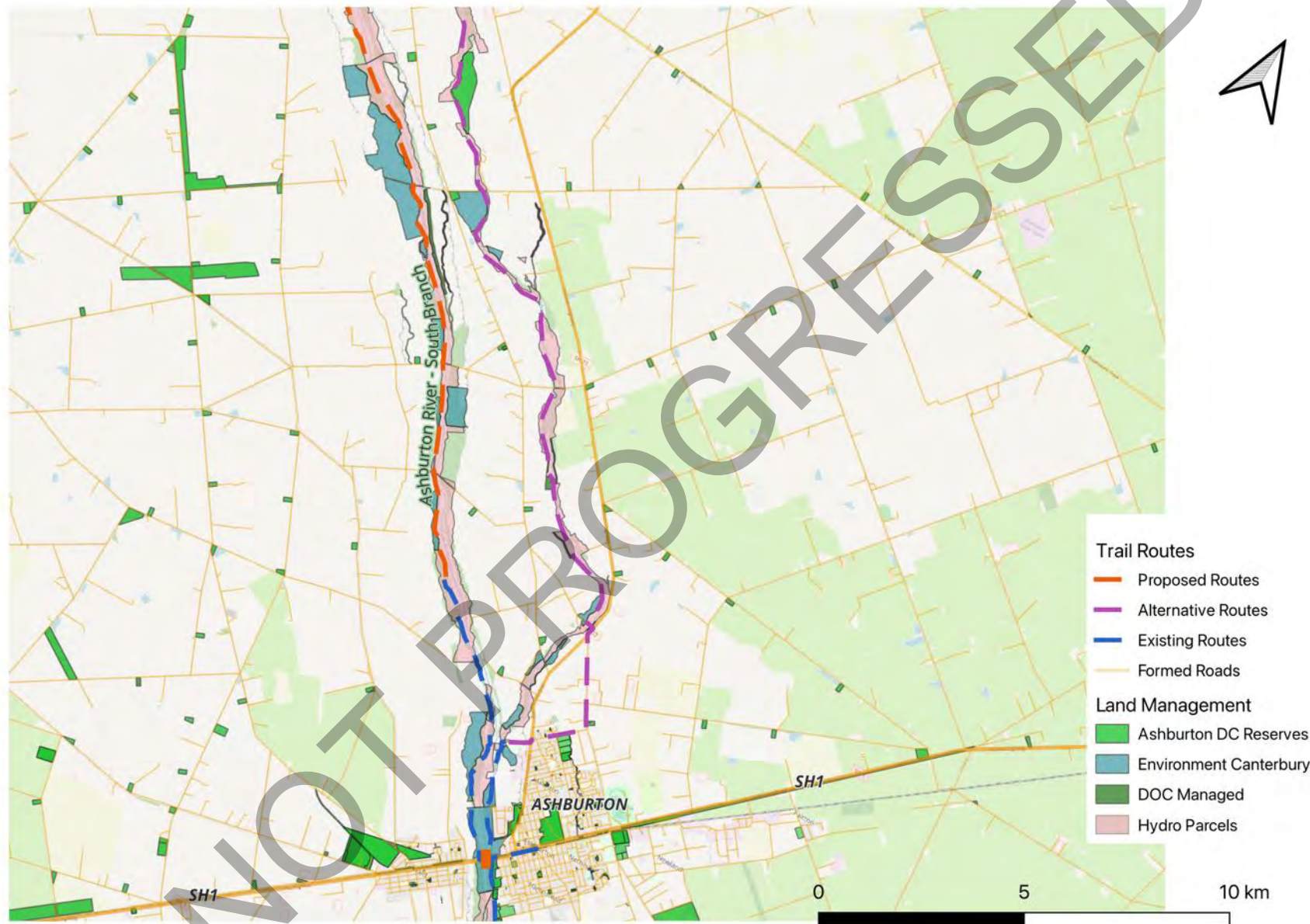




Trail Route 'The Forks' to Ashburton

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025 regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.

ASHBURTON DISTRICT PLAINS TRAIL FEASIBILITY STUDY



Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project
which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.



Figure 32, Ashburton South Branch bridge, Arundel-Rakaia Gorge Road



Figure 33, Ashburton South Branch bridge, Arundel Rakaia Gorge Road looking downstream

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project
which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.



Figure 34, Ashburton South Branch water intake for the RDR



Figure 35, Ashburton South Branch siphon and settling pond on the RDR

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project
which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.



Figure 36, Mayfield-Valetta Road



Figure 37, Mayfield-Valetta Road and Tram Road, looking up Bowyers Stream

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project
which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.



Figure 38, Valetta Bridge, Ashburton South Branch



Figure 39, "The Forks" and Valetta Bridge looking down the ULR

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project
which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.

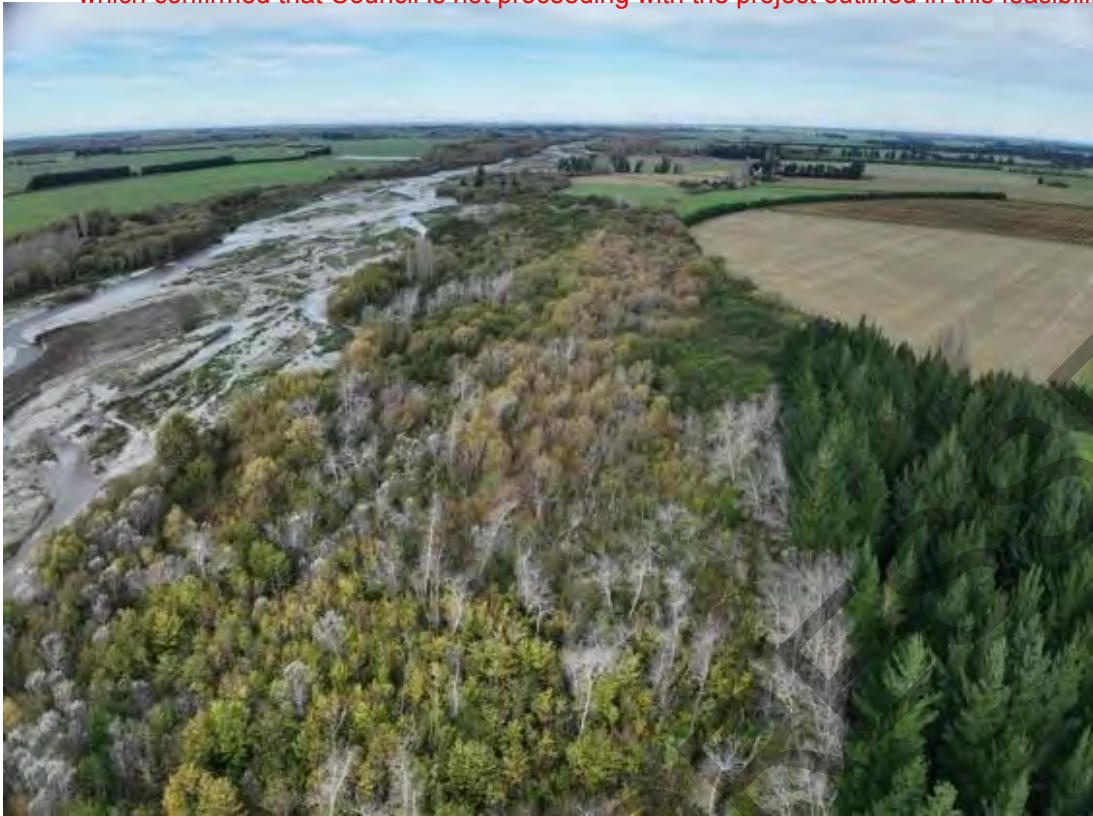


Figure 40, Looking down the Ashburton South Branch from "The Forks"



Figure 41, Looking up the South Branch from Sheates Road

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project
which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.



Figure 42, Looking up the existing South Bank trail from Timaru Track Road



Figure 43, the South Bank Trail at Timaru Track

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project

which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.

Challenges

- private land access particularly on the Ashburton North Branch may make trail development on this alternate route difficult.
- measures to safeguard walkers and cyclists will be required if they were to share the Valetta Bridge with existing traffic.
- high traffic volumes and road crossings in the vicinity of “The Forks” may pose a hazard to cyclists.

Highlights

- the opportunity for individuals to view the RDR’s siphon and intake off the Ashburton South Branch.
- spectacular views of Mt Hutt, Mt Somers and the surrounding Southern Alps.
- a new township cycle linkage, connecting Mount Somers to Ashburton.
- exposure to a range of agricultural operations including forestry, sheep, beef, dairy, and cropping.
- creating commercial opportunities for Mount Somers and the surrounding areas which currently attract lower tourist numbers.
- there are nearby historic sites related to early farming estates particularly at Lagmhor and Westerfield including the Westerfield Estate sod buildings, Laffey’s Cottage and Lagmhor Estate. Note these are located on private land.

Trail development and infrastructure requirements

A new purpose-built trail is required from Mount Somers following the Ashburton South Branch to where the route would meet the existing South Bank Trail out of Ashburton. This is the preferred route. A 15m long bridge is required at the RDR overflow near Mount Somers. The proposed trail crosses from the north bank to the south bank using the Valetta road bridge in The Forks area. The addition of walkers and cyclists onto this bridge may necessitate safety measures such as warning lights for motorists when pedestrians and cyclists are on the bridge. This would require further investigation and discussion with the Council Roding team as to an acceptable solution for shared use, particularly for pedestrians. At least five small bridges (or large culverts may suffice) are required to cross minor waterways on this section primarily downstream of the Valetta Bridge.

Other requirements or impact on Council services include:

- the installation of wayfinding signage
- a toilet and picnic area near the Valetta Bridge would be required once a trail was established

High-level cost

\$2.6 million

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project

which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.

Includes: trail construction (new and any upgrade of existing), bridges, toilets, signs, access barriers, consent costs and 10% contingency.

Excludes: detailed planning costs, cost of land access negotiation and formal legal access, cost of boundary fencing, specialist advice e.g. geotechnical assessment, project management or supply of interpretation/onsite displays etc.

NOT PROGRESSSED

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project

which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.

Section 4 - Lower Ashburton River (Ashburton to Hakatere Huts)

Description

From Ashburton to Hakatere Huts the route can utilise existing trails. At Ashburton the existing Ashburton River Trail extends from the bridge downstream, more advanced trails in this area (Grade 3) continue through to Trevor's Road (refer Figure 46). These may require modification or an alternate trail could be developed to accommodate the target market. Squeeze barriers and concrete blocks in this area make it difficult for users with access needs.

From Trevors Road the route follows a wide and well surfaced Grade 2 trail which remains at this standard to the Hakatere River mouth. Trevors Road has a motorcross and four-wheel drive track, however a few issues are experienced with these coming onto the existing trail given its popularity. From Milton and Cochranes roads existing trail use decreases steadily due to the proximity to Ashburton. Vegetation in the area consists of crack willow, poplar and scrub.

Just south of Cochranes Road and the overhead transmission lines, individuals often cross the Ashburton River in low flows to link in with the Lake Hood Trail. Downstream of here, a 2021 flood washed away sections of the trail with some of this washout easily visible from River Road and requiring trail restoration. From here the trail continues past Wakanui School Road and along the base of the river terraces to the Hakatere Huts. As the huts are approached native plantings are passed through and the trail terminates where it re-connects with River Road.

The total distance of this trail segment is 17.9 kilometres, extending from the Ashburton Bridge to the Hakatere Huts.

Section 4 - Maps and photos

A map of the proposed route for this section is shown overleaf:

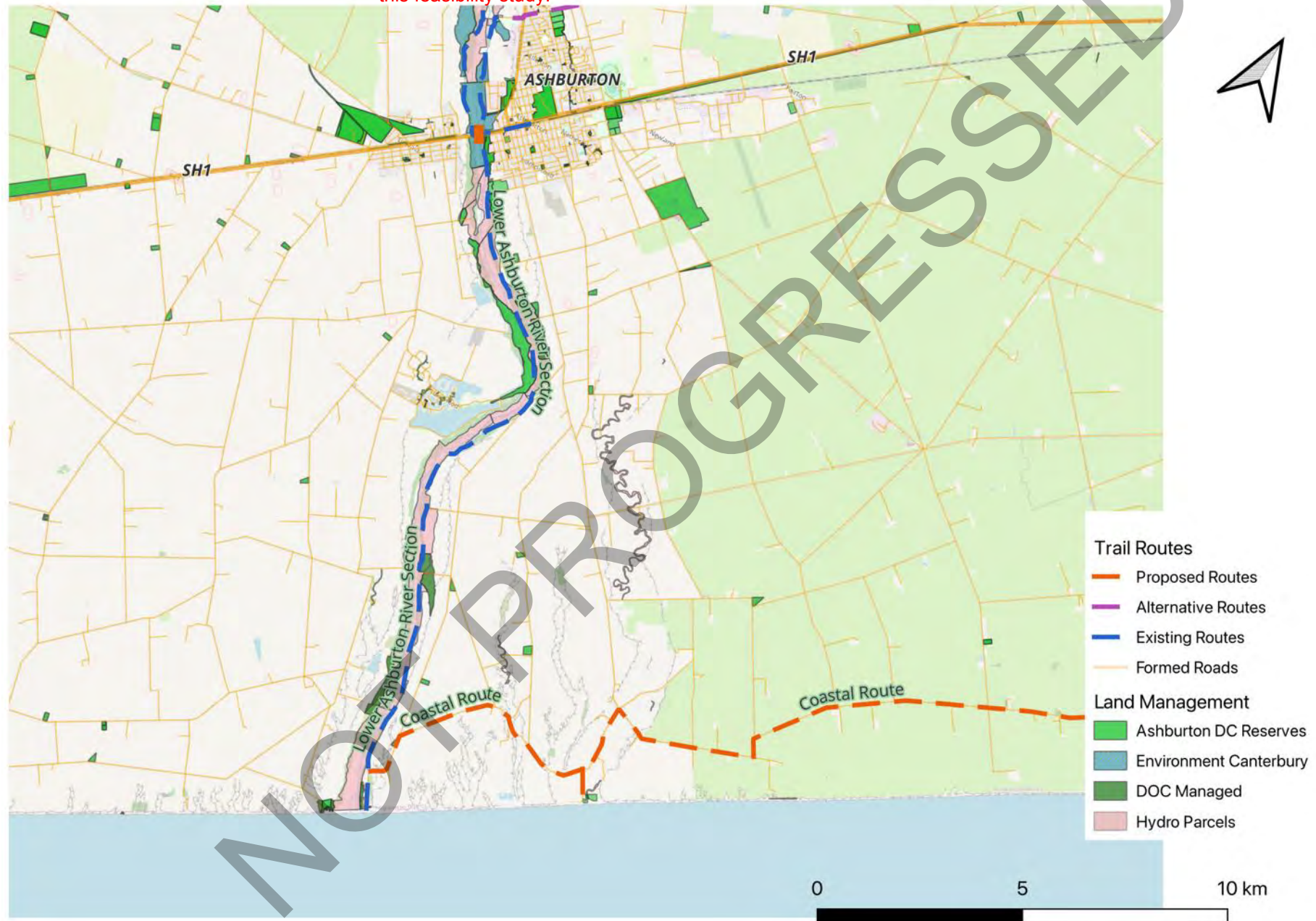
Photos for this section are also provided on pages 82 to 90.



Trail Route Ashburton to Hakatere Huts

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025 regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.

ASHBURTON DISTRICT PLAINS TRAIL FEASIBILITY STUDY



Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project
which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.



Figure 44, Clip on footpath for pedestrians on the Ashburton bridge

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025 regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.



Figure 45, Trail signage for the Ashburton MTB Trails



Figure 46, Squeeze barriers limiting access at the bridge

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025 regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.



Figure 47, Ashburton MTB track near the dog park



Figure 48, Squeeze barriers limiting access at William Street

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project
which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.



Figure 49, The trail at William Street



Figure 50, Squeeze barriers at Trevors Road

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project
which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.



Figure 51, The Ashburton River at Trevors Road



Figure 52, Squeeze barriers at Milton Road south

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project
which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.



Figure 53, Squeeze barriers at Cochranes Road



Figure 54, Squeeze barriers at Cochranes Road

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project
which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.



Figure 55, The trail at Wakanui School Road



Figure 56, The trail termination on River Road

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project
which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.



Figure 57, The Ashburton River from the trail



Figure 58, The Ashburton River mouth looking south-west

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project
which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.



Figure 59, The Ashburton River mouth looking south-west

Challenges

- evidence of vandalism and undesirable use lower down on the trail.
- contested use of this area may impact the trail. Other users would include anglers, duck shooters, four-wheel drivers and trail bikes.
- Tree windfall from high winds often blocks sections of trail here which requires constant upkeep.
- the constant change of the braided river system could put the trail at risk of ongoing washout. Although willows and stop banks protect the trail in some areas.
- significant coastal erosion diminishes opportunities to view the coastline in the area.

Highlights

- opportunities to explore the district's coastline.
- fantastic views of the Ashburton River from the riverside terraces and stop banks.
- a variety of birdlife can be viewed on the riverbeds throughout the area.

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project

which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.

Trail development and infrastructure requirements

The existing Ashburton River Trail is available for this section of the route from Ashburton to the Hakatere Huts. If it were to be included as part of a destination Ashburton Plains Trail concept it would need to be upgraded in places, including a review and possible replacement of access barriers.

Other requirements or impact on Council services:

- wayfinding signage updated
- existing toilet facilities are in place in Ashburton and at the Hakatere Huts.

High-level cost

\$50,000 – \$100,000

Includes: trail construction (upgrade of existing), signs and access barriers only.

Excludes: detailed planning costs, cost of land access negotiation and formal legal access, cost of boundary fencing, project management or supply of interpretation/onsite displays etc.

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project

which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.

Section 5 - Coastal (Hakatere Huts to Rakaia Huts)

Description

A trail that followed the coastal fringe, often a coastal cliff, was originally considered for this section however it was concluded that ongoing coastal erosion and existing eroded gulleys would make this route difficult to construct and maintain. Taking a trail inland to avoid this erosion and for longevity would be disruptive to farming operations and diminish the coastal experience. The best solution is to use the existing gravel rural roads (the route as described below) to create a loop for the hardy cyclists, however it is not recommended to include as part of the Ashburton Plains Trail concept.

From the Hakatere Huts the trail will extend back up River Road for 2.15km and connects onto Fitzgerald Road for 2.9km, depending on traffic flows it may be better to build a trail on the roadside verges. From there, the trail extends down Seaside Road for 2.6 km and does a short trip to Wakanui Beach where a toilet is in place and stunning sea views can be experienced.

From the beach the trail heads back inland down Wakanui Beach Road for 2.6km before heading down Corbetts Road south for 3.7km. The trail then shifts onto gravel after turning inland onto Wrights Road, this extends for 0.5km before the trail joins Buckleys Road for 12km.

As the trail reaches Chertsey Kyle Rd, there would be the opportunity to head to Pendarves Beach 2.1km back to the Coast, where there is significant erosion. The trail then continues for 3.5km down Lambies Road. From here the trail extends 1km back towards the coast down Kyle Road, and 9.8km towards the Rakaia River down Corbetts Rd North. Beach access is also possible 0.9km down Mainwarings Road which accesses the Dorie Beach, this beach is easily accessible and has low coastal cliffs. As the trail reaches Acton Road the road surface changes back to chip seal.

From the end of Corbetts Rd North the trail turns back to the coast down Kingsburys Road for the final 1.3km to the Rakaia Huts. This stretch of road is planted in a variety of native species including mountain flax, broadleaf and pittosporum which back onto forestry. From the huts, beach access can be gained in several different locations.

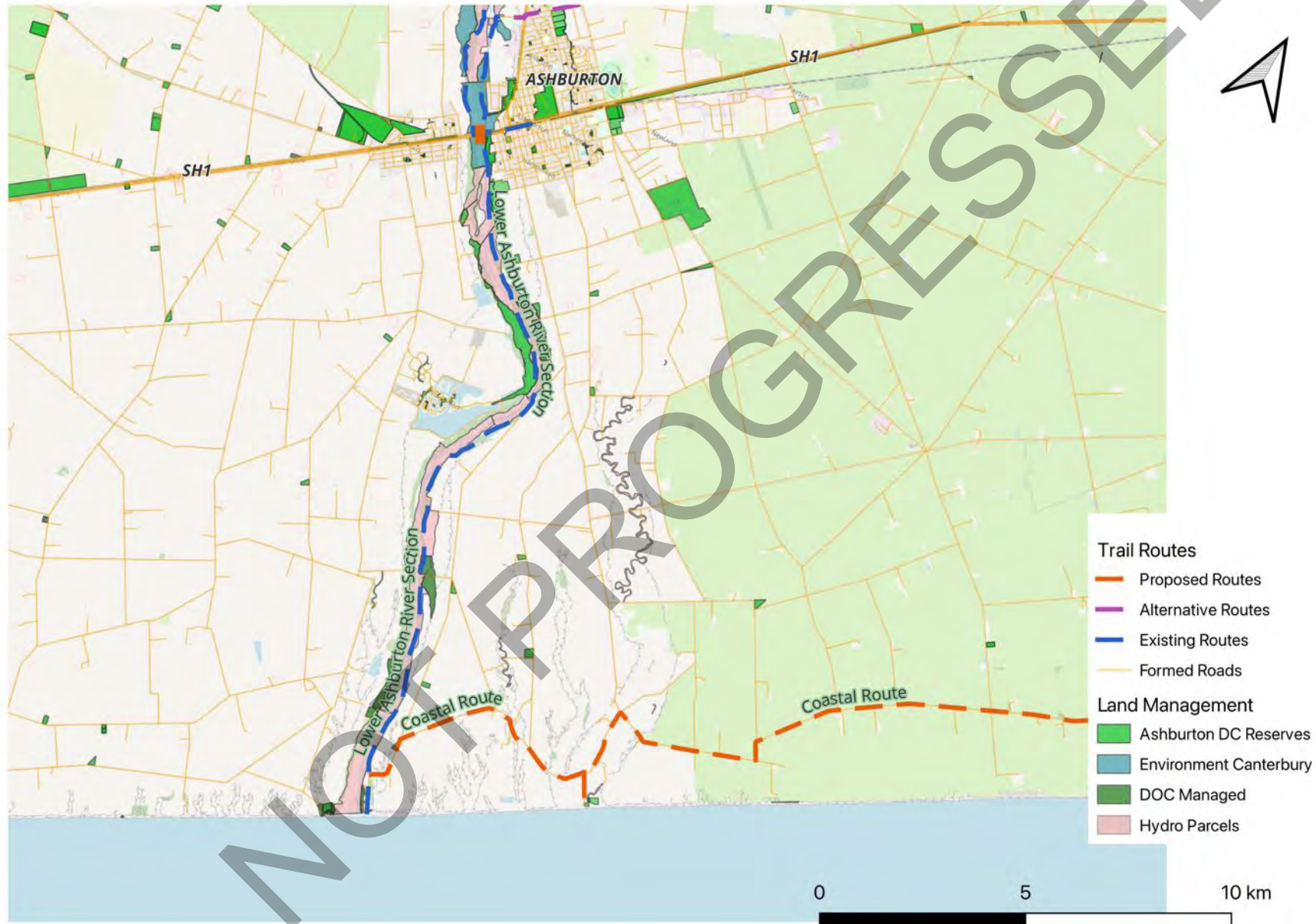
Section 5 - Maps and photos

Two maps of the proposed routes for this section are shown overleaf:

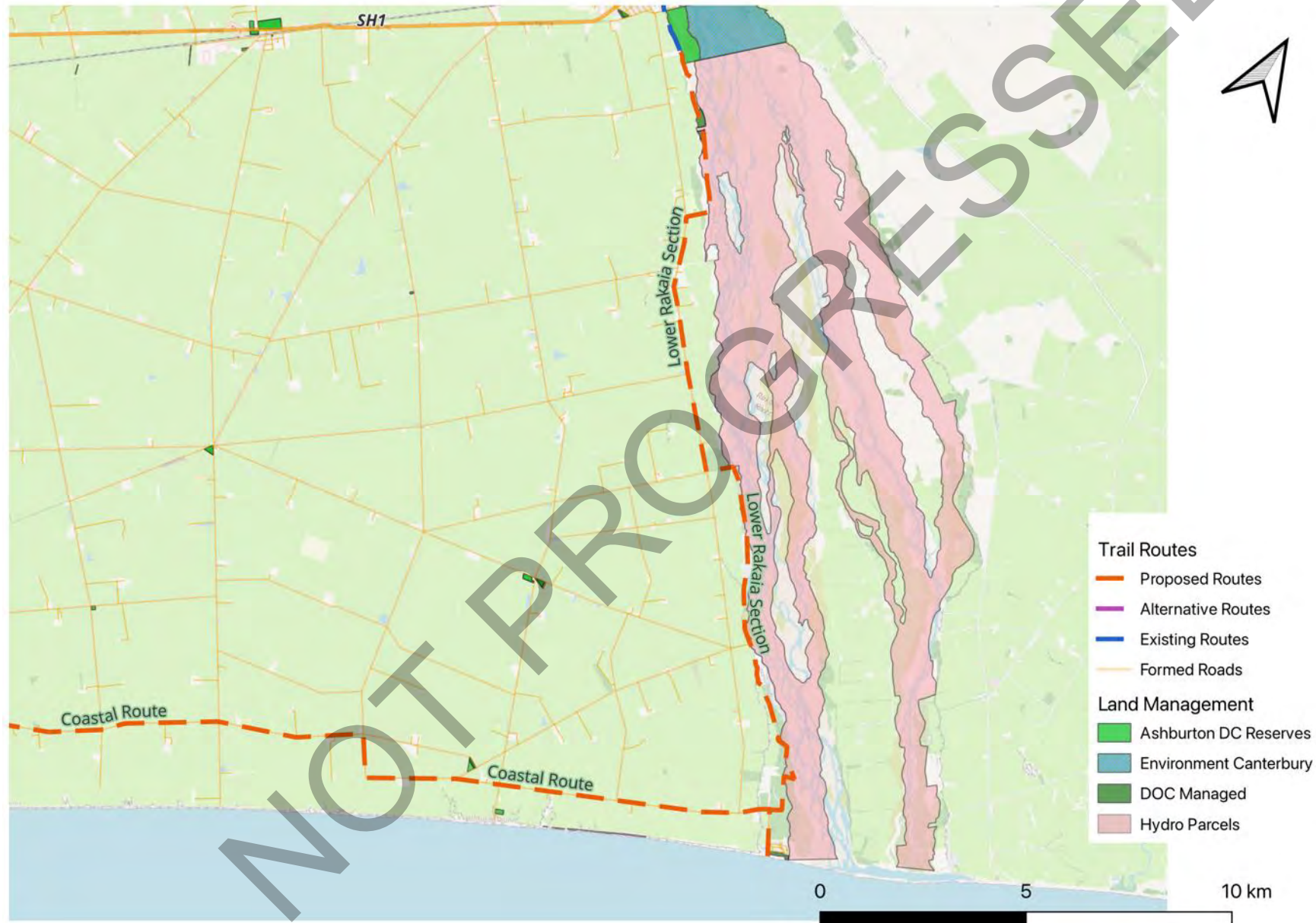
Photos for this section are also provided on pages 95 to 98.

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025 regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.

Trail Route – Coastal Route West



Trail Route – Coastal Route East



Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project
which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.



Figure 60, Wakanui Beach looking south-west towards the Ashburton River Mouth

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project
which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.



Figure 61, Wakanui Beach, south-western end



Figure 62, Pendarves Beach looking north-east showing the erosion

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project
which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.

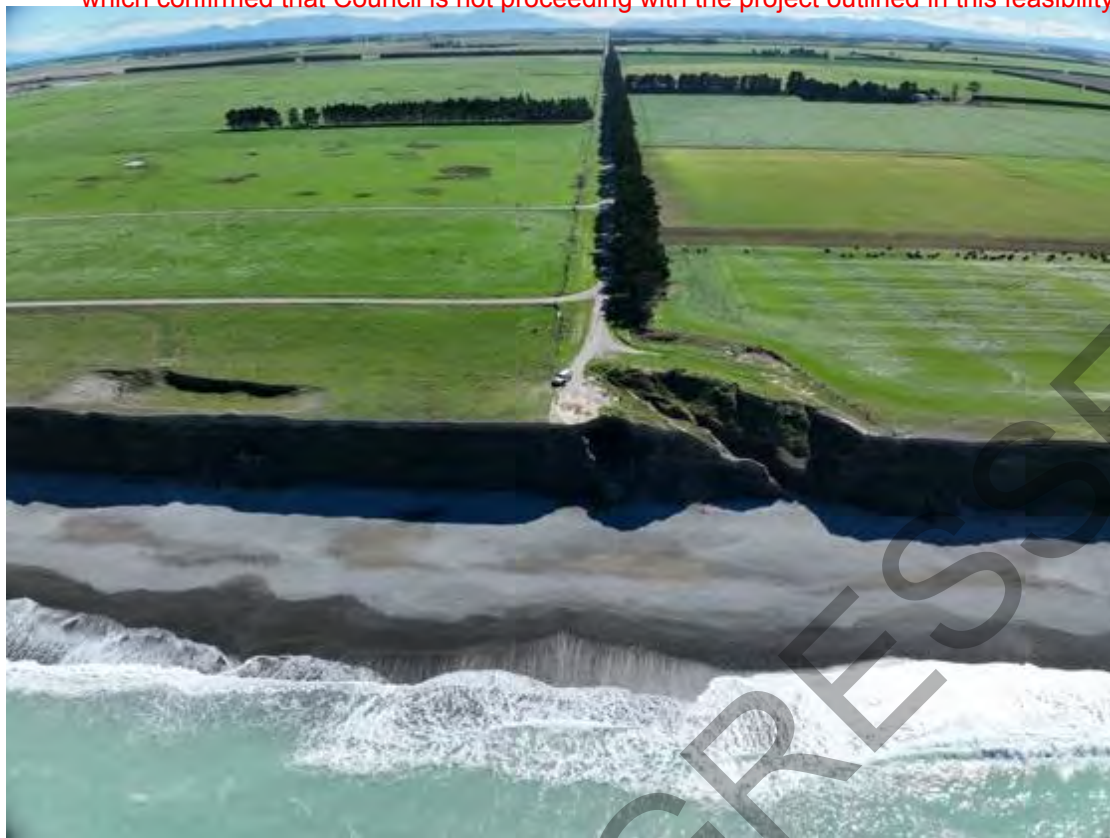


Figure 63, Pendarves beach and ute for reference of cliff scale



Figure 64, Dorie Beach looking east

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project
which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.



Figure 65, Dorie Beach, cars for reference of cliff scale



Figure 66, Rakaia Southern Huts, River Mouth and Banks Peninsula

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project

which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.

Challenges

- slumps and significant coastal erosion, particularly around the Hakatere Huts makes it unsustainable for a trail to follow the coastline.
- long stretches of gravel road would significantly diminish the recreational value of this section of trail and the user experience would be poor.
- strong coastal and north-west winds would make this section of trail unpopular, particularly due to the lack of shelter.
- significant coastal erosion diminishes opportunities to view the coastline throughout much of this trail segment without a 1-2km out and back detour.

Highlights

- opportunities to explore the district's coastline.
- linkage from the Hakatere Huts to the Southern Rakaia Huts
- a variety of bird and sea life can be experienced on the beaches, water and dunes in the coastal area where there is access. Seals were observed during route investigations.
- whakanui was historically a significant kaika along the ara tawhito (traditional travel route) that follows the Canterbury coastline. Numerous taoka and other archaeological remains were recovered from the site and are now on display in the Ashburton Museum.
- existing toilet facilities are in place at the Hakatere Huts and Whakanui Beach.

Trail development and infrastructure requirements

The available rural roads as described would provide an acceptable route for hardy cyclists wishing to create a full circuit if a Rakaia-Methven-Mount Somers-Ashburton trail was to be developed.

Other requirements or impact on Council services:

- wayfinding signage

High-level cost

\$5,000 for wayfinding only. Note this is contingent on this section being part of a wider Ashburton Plains Trail and creating a loop.

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project

which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.

Section 6 - Lower Rakaia River (Rakaia Huts to Rakaia)

Description

From the southern Rakaia Huts the proposed route will head back inland 1.3km down Kingsburys Road until the four-wheel drive track to the river is reached. From here the route will head back towards the Rakaia River for 300m and join the Dorie community trail. The Dorie community trail consists of a combination of dirt and gravel surfacing and continues for 4.3km up to Dobsons Ferry Road. This section of trail is under a closed canopy of crack willow and poplar and has boggy sections closer to the Rakaia River mouth.

From here the route would extend a further 4.9km along the riverbank to Griggs Road through the poplar and crack willow, sections of four-wheel drive track may be usable here. The final 600m of the route would require an easement before joining an ULR back to Acton Road. From early investigations, stop banks are not present on this section of river and the margin between farmland and the river becomes tighter closer to Griggs Road.

From Griggs Road, the route will extend up Acton Road 6.3km to the Rakaia Golf Club. Due to how busy this section of road is, it would be recommended a trail be built on the roads verge.

From the golf club an ULR would be used to head 650m towards the Rakaia River. A short 12m long bridge would be needed in this section, and from here the route would continue 4.1km up the river until the Acton Farmers Irrigation race is reached. This section of the proposed trail will pass through willows, poplar and scrub. Some sections of the river come close to the farmland and it would be advisable to seek easements to avoid trail washouts.

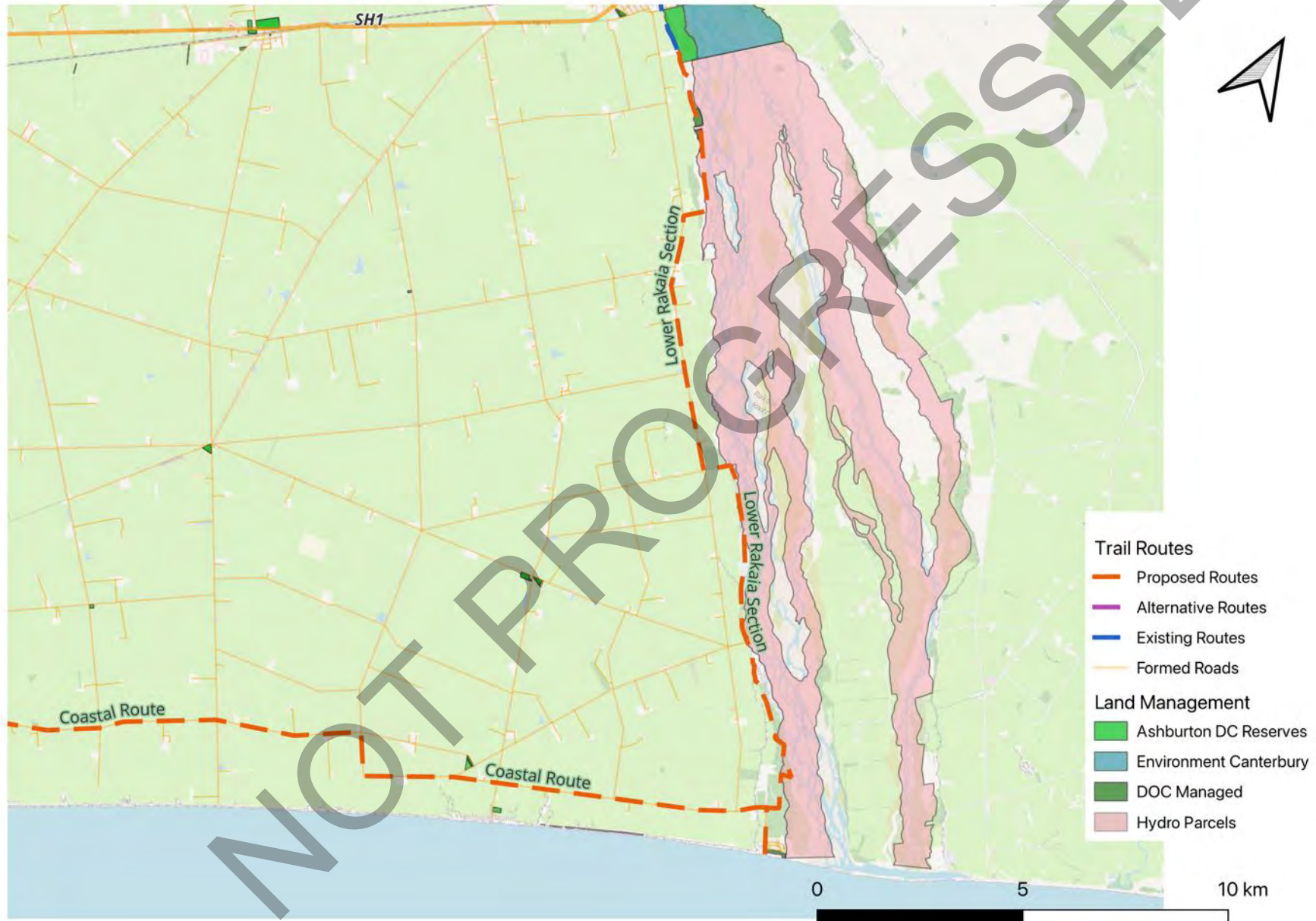
Another small 10m long bridge would be required to cross the Acton Irrigation Schemes overflow. From here a four-wheel drive track can be joined for the final 2km to the Rakaia Bridge. This section of the proposed trail will pass through crack willow and will continue alongside the Acton Irrigation Scheme.

Section 6 - Maps and photos

A map of the proposed route for this section is shown overleaf:

Photos for this section are also provided on pages 102 to 107.

Trail Route Rakaia Huts to Rakaia



Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project
which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.



Figure 67, Rakaia Southern Huts looking up the Rakaia River



Figure 68, Dorie community trail

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025 regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.



Figure 69, Dorie stopbanks near the trail



Figure 70, Dorie trail



Figure 71, Crack willows planted for flood protection



Figure 72, Dorie community trail

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project
which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.



Figure 73, ULR at the Rakaia Golf Club



Figure 74, Rakaia River, looking downstream from the Acton Irrigation Schemes overflow

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project
which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.



Figure 75, Acton Irrigation scheme overflow



Figure 76, Acton Irrigation Scheme and four-wheel drive track below Rakaia bridge

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project
which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.



Figure 77, Acton Irrigation Scheme and four-wheel drive track

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project
which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.



Figure 78, Acton Irrigation Scheme below Rakaia Bridge



Figure 79, Rakaia River looking upstream, at the bridge and the four-wheel drive track

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project

which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.

Challenges

- long stretches of road would significantly diminish the value of this section of trail, particularly as users bike into the prevailing north-west wind on the false flat up to Rakaia.
- the constant change of the braided river system could put the trail at risk of ongoing washout, the stretch of river below Rakaia is more dynamic. Although willows, poplar and stop banks would provide protection in some areas.
- tree windfall from high winds often block sections of trail here which requires constant upkeep. Sections of windfall were observed on the Dorie track during route investigations.
- working around the Acton Irrigation Scheme may be challenging, and safety precautions may need to be implemented.

Highlights

- there is extensive birdlife throughout the river area and the trail would help highlight existing values and provide opportunities for trapping and regeneration projects.
- there are opportunities for individuals to explore the braided river and its banks.
- exposure to various agricultural operations including forestry, sheep, beef and dairy.
- spectacular views of Mt Hutt, Mt Somers and the surrounding mountain ranges.
- community connections linking the Rakaia and Dorie communities.
- existing toilet facilities are in place in Rakaia.

Trail development and infrastructure requirements

The existing Dorie Community trail would require upgrading to improve the surface and harden up any muddy or soft spots. A purpose-built track is required to be constructed for the next riverbank section up to Griggs Road from where the trail route would follow Acton Road likely requiring the trail to be built on the roadside verge for safe travel. At the Rakaia Golf Course a new trail including a 12m long bridge is required to leave the road and follow the riverbank until the Acton Farmers Irrigation race is reached, with another 10m long bridge required to cross the overflow stream. From this point a 4WD track can be followed, however this would require improvement to the surfacing.

Other requirements or impact on Council services:

- wayfinding signage
- a toilet facility would be required for the Rakaia Huts

High-level cost

\$1.6 million

Includes: trail construction (new and any upgrade of existing), bridges, toilets, signs, access barriers, consent costs and 10% contingency.

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project

which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.

Excludes: detailed planning cost, cost of land access negotiation and formal legal access, cost of boundary fencing, project management, specialist advice e.g. geotechnical assessment or supply of interpretation/onsite displays etc.

NOT PROGRESSSED

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project

which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.

Land use and tenure for preferred trail route

Where possible public land has been used for creating a proposed trail alignment, however, as the Ashburton Plains is highly productive and intensively farmed land with limited public landownership, this could only be achieved for a portion of the route. The riverbanks of the Rakaia and Ashburton rivers were logical and appealing terrain for a trail yet are, perhaps surprisingly, a patchwork of private and public ownership.

The recommended trail route and alternative options cross multiple parcels of land under various tenure and management including the following:

- Council managed road reserve (formed and unformed legal road, ULR)
- public conservation land (PCL) (Department of Conservation)
- the Rangitata Diversion Race
- ECan stopbank alongside various riverbeds
- Local Purpose Reserve (for soil conservation and river control)
- Hydro parcels
- with the remainder private land under freehold

An overview of the management purpose and implications for trail use have been described below for all of these except private land under freehold.

Council managed road reserve

Ashburton District Council are responsible for managing the formed legal road network throughout the district, excluding the highways which are managed by the NZ Transport Agency. Any sections of cycle trail that intend to use formed public roads will require approval from the Council roading network manager. Market preferences have indicated that cycle trail users prefer to be fully off-road. Despite this being an objective it is not always possible and this proposal includes some sections within the road corridor. Where required the trail route would either share the carriageway for roads with low traffic volumes, or where the road has higher traffic, be a separated trail within the road reserve corridor. Safety is the prime consideration, but also user experience needs to be considered. For a high traffic sealed road the separate trail may also need to be sealed to ensure cyclists remain off the carriageway.

The Council also has authority over Unformed Legal Roads (ULR) which have the same public access rights as formed roads. ULR are recorded on survey plans but are not formed or even obvious on the ground and were often established when land was first surveyed during early European settlement. In many cases these ULRs have been treated as "private" land by the neighbouring landowner when they have not been utilised for public access. Ownership of ULRs sits with either a territorial authority or

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the Crown¹¹. There is a 15km length of ULR along the southern bank of the Rakaia River from Irwins Road to where it joins with the Rakaia Barrhill Methven Road at Peterhead. The trail alignment would utilise this strip if it is practical on the ground and Council is in agreement fully recognising the public access purpose of this land. It is noted that there may be easements, leases or licences over certain ULR parcels in existence that need to be considered.

Public Conservation Land

The preferred route crosses a small proportion of public conservation land classified as either conservation park, stewardship area or marginal strip – all managed by the Department of Conservation (DOC) under the Conservation Act 1987. Most of this public conservation land needed for the trail is within the Rakaia River corridor.

Permission is required from DOC for establishing trail on public conservation land. Within the Conservation General Policy, a bicycle is considered a type of vehicle and the policy states that their use needs to be compatible with the statutory purpose for which the place is held. Furthermore the Policy states that conservation management strategies must include where specified types of vehicles are allowed on public conservation land and any associated conditions.

The Canterbury (Waitaha) Conservation Management Strategy (CMS) 2016 is restrictive on the development of cycle trails on public conservation land. The areas of public conservation land required for the proposed trail fall within the Southern Conservation Parks (Hakatere Conservation Park to the west of Staveley) and the Braided Rivers Place (both marginal strip and stewardship land on the Ashburton and Rakaia rivers). The policy for each of these places does not identify existing or proposed mountain bike or cycle trails within these public conservation lands that would allow for this proposed trail. Therefore development of the cycle trail could not proceed on these land parcels until there was a change to these policies or the proposed trail was included in the strategy. The Canterbury CMS is not likely to be subject to a review for at least another 1.5 years. The alternatives are to seek a partial review alongside other parties who have trail proposals also stymied by the policy, or to avoid use of public conservation land for siting this trail. The latter is possible but will require additional negotiation with private landowners.

Where any new trail development is considered any adverse effects (including cumulative effects) of mountain bike use on natural, historic or cultural values and other recreational users is to be avoided, remedied or mitigated.

Rangitata Diversion Race

The Rangitata Diversion Race began as a 1930's depression era government employment scheme to provide irrigation to the plains and this substantial engineering feat was finally completed in 1945.

¹¹ Herenga ā Nuku, Outdoor Access Commission. <https://www.herengaanuku.govt.nz/types-of-access/what-forms-of-legal-public-access-are-available-in-new-zealand>

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The water race itself is typically 3.6m deep and the surface is 7.6m wide at full flow¹². There are vehicle access tracks along both sides of the race for most of its length.

The land the Rangitata Diversion Race (RDR) occupies is predominantly freehold title owned by Rangitata Diversion Race Management Ltd (RDRML) and where the scheme traverses private land there are easements. There are three sections of private land and one section of Council managed land where RDRML holds easements between the Rakaia River and the South Branch Ashburton River.

Currently the Methven Walkway runs along the RDR between Methven and the North Branch of the Ashburton River.

ECan stopbank

The sole purpose of stopbanks is to stop flooding of property surrounding waterways or to mitigate the effects of such flooding. They are carefully engineered to ensure they can withstand large flood events and protecting assets of neighbouring properties is dependent on their effectiveness when required. There are many cases throughout New Zealand where trails have been developed along the top of stopbanks and they can allow excellent views for users due to their height above surrounding land. However, the stopbanks structural integrity is paramount to any secondary use.

In Ashburton District ECan owns the stopbank infrastructure, however they do not own the underlying land. Use of the stopbank bordering the south bank of the Ashburton North Branch has been considered as an alternate trail route on the section between Mount Somers and Ashburton.

Local Purpose Reserve (for soil conservation and river control)

These are a type of protected area that were established under the Reserves Act 1977 and have the primary aim of protecting soil resources and managing flood risks. There are a number of these in the Ashburton River which are managed by Environment Canterbury. Use of these reserves for the development of a trail should be permissible given there is no interference to the purpose for which they are held.

Hydro parcels

Much of both the Rakaia and Ashburton riverbeds and riverbank is held as hydro parcels - land with no specific title having arisen where boundaries of the adjoining lands were determined to be the river/waterway. Most of this land is assumed to be in Crown ownership under the responsibility of Land Information New Zealand (LINZ), however this is not always the case. Where the land adjoining the hydro parcel is Crown/publicly owned, then usually LINZ will manage this hydro parcel. If it is private ownership to the boundary and this looks like a hand drawn line - then there is most likely a presumptive right of ownership of the riverbed to the centreline by the neighbouring private

¹² <https://www.rdrml.co.nz/our-environment/>

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landowner. The hydro parcel land ownership situation is clearly not straightforward and ownership would require clarification where these parcels would be utilised for trail development.

Securing access for a trail

Due to the large investment in a destination trail, potential commercial dependencies and the reputational risk from any closures, secure tenure is required for these trails. That means that where the trail will cross private land a secure legal means of access for the trail corridor is needed that will be enduring as opposed to an informal agreement. The most common form utilised for trails is an easement, there are other options however these are less effective. For example, the Department of Conservation have their own mechanisms for managing other agencies or community group's trails on public conservation land – either via a concession or a management agreement. These ensure any natural, historic or cultural values are safeguarded and the activities of other legitimate recreational users are allowed for.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

The Ashburton District Council wish to support economic growth in the district and have raised the prospect of a new destination cycle trail on the plains as a boost to the tourism offerings and as a seasonal offset for Mt Hutt snowsports. Elsewhere in New Zealand, cycle trails have proven they can attract domestic and international visitors, boost local tourist activity, and create income and business development opportunities, as well as jobs for locals. During the Covid pandemic, when the borders closed, the continued domestic use of the cycle trails was a lifeline to many businesses. Local trails are an important recreational asset for residents. There are also social and cultural benefits for communities, with trails bringing people together, promoting wellbeing and healthy lifestyles, boosting community pride, showcasing the unique character of the district, as well as providing opportunities for volunteering.

Despite the brief suggesting a large loop trail linking the foothills to sea (and the communities of Rakaia, Methven, Mount Somers, and Ashburton along the way) **it is recommended that a proposed trail would instead be a U shaped trail with trailheads at Rakaia and Ashburton and excluding a coastal section.**

The development of a trail along the coastal fringe from Hakatere Huts to the Rakaia River mouth has not been included as it would be difficult to establish and maintain a trail in this area due to increasing coastal erosion. Additionally, compliance with the NZ Coastal Policy Statement (DOC 2010) requires the trail to be designed for the 'cumulative effects of sea level rise, storm surge, and wave height under storm conditions'. Shifting the trail further back from the coastal edge would diminish the user experience and involve traversing across intensively farmed private farmland. The only practical alternative route is using the existing low-use rural roads inland but parallel to the coastline however this holds low appeal.

The option is available for cyclists to use the Ashburton River Trail, and existing rural roads linking Hakatere Huts to Rakaia to create a loop, however this would not be part of the main destination trail concept. A trail from Rakaia to the southern Rakaia Huts would be appealing as a connection to the coast, however is a lower priority, has a higher risk prospect for flooding and therefore is not considered as part of the Ashburton Plains Trail concept recommended within this report.

A viable Grade 2 trail (easy, gentle gradients and smooth surface) is achievable from Rakaia to Ashburton via Methven, Staveley and Mount Somers. The route would work as follows and has been split into the following three sections (Sections 1 -3, as per the

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Trail route section of this report):

- **Upper Rakaia.** The Rakaia to Highbank Power Station route would follow the Rakaia River south bank with a rest stop provided for at Barrhill and ending at the Highbank Power Station.
- **Foothills.** The Highbank Power Station to Mount Somers route would follow the Rangitata Diversion Race through to below Staveley requiring large bridges at the North Branch Ashburton River and at Taylor Stream. From where it leaves the RDR the route would use a low use rural road and will take cyclists through Staveley where refreshments are available, heading west towards the historic lime kilns through native forest and eventually linking up to the South Branch Ashburton River (north bank) and down river to Mount Somers.
- **Upper Ashburton.** The Mount Somers to Ashburton route would continue following the north bank of the river down to Valetta where the road bridge would be crossed. At this point the trail would use the south bank of the Ashburton River continuing down river until the existing South Bank Trail is met and followed to eventually end up at the highway bridge which allows for pedestrian/cyclist crossing. Note the proposed second road bridge across the Ashburton River presents another option for the last stretch into town.

Costings

Capital cost

The total capital cost of this project is estimated to be \$8.6 million. Costs include: trail construction (new and any upgrade of existing infrastructure), bridges, toilets, signs, access barriers, consent costs and 10% contingency.

An overview of the indicative capital cost for each section of the trail are shown in the table below. For detailed costings refer to [Appendix D - Costing Detail](#). Exclusions are shown under each section in the

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Trail route section of the report.

Table 2, Cost of trail construction

Trail section	Cost
Upper Rakaia: Rakaia to Highbank Power Station	\$2.6 million
Foothills: Highbank Power Station to Mount Somers	\$3.4 million
Upper Ashburton: Mount Somers to Ashburton	\$2.6 million

Operational cost

If constructed it is estimated that maintenance may cost an estimated \$50,000 per year for each trail section. There are other ongoing costs also such as: an engineer's inspection of structures, contingency funds for natural hazard damage, depreciation of assets, trail manager cost and ten yearly trail resurfacing cost. Note the July 2025 storm and flooding event in the Tasman District has caused damage to the Great Taste Trail with an estimate of \$2 million to repair. Industry best practice recommends that high quality cycle trails should be resurfaced every 10 years to maintain the standard and uphold the quality experience. Table 3 outlines the annual operational costs across ten years.

Table 3, Cost of trail operation across ten years

Ongoing cost items	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10
Trail Manager	100	102	104	106	108	110	113	115	127	120
Maintenance	150	153	156	159	162	166	169	172	176	179
Structure inspection			10			10			11	
Contingency fund	10	10	10	11	11	11	11	11	12	12
Resurface trail										200
Depreciation- Structures, toilets	43	43	43	43	43	43	43	43	43	43
Depreciation – signs and access structures	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Annual cost	308	313	328	324	329	345	341	346	374	359

1. Figures in \$000

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2. Inflation of 2% on all except depreciation
3. Structural inspection by engineer every three years

Trail design considerations

As discussed in the Trail design considerations section a key factor for a proposed trail's success is the recreational value or appeal factor. This is usually a combination of scenic values, natural features, historic points of interest, opportunities for interaction with local communities (such as sampling the local produce), and within the users comfort level. For the latter it is clear that the trail can be built to the target market's preference being an easy, well-formed trail suited to a wide age range and from beginner ability and beyond. There will be opportunities for interaction with local communities along the way although it is likely this will also organically develop and grow as the trail gets established.

Scenic qualities and natural features are present but perhaps not to the level that many cycle trail tourists have come to expect from other outstanding trails such as the Alps 2 Ocean and the West Coast Wilderness Trail. An Ashburton Plains Trail would need to capitalise on some of the following:

- the unique braided rivers and associated native birdlife
- the stunning backdrop of the Canterbury Foothills and the Southern Alps
- attractive travel along the often tree-lined RDR
- a beech forest section below Stevenson Hill
- crossing of multiple streams and rivers enroute

For many, traversing farmland and viewing the diversity of agriculture within the district will also be a strong area of interest.

A trail project often goes hand in hand with ecological restoration projects and there will be multiple opportunities for this alongside the proposed trail. In particular creating patches of native vegetation along the proposed trail on the banks of the Rakaia and Ashburton rivers would not only enhance the riding experience and the local natural values, but may give a glimpse into what a truly natural braided river ecosystem would look like.

There is a wealth of historic features and sites along the proposed trail that if interpreted well will add interest and enhance the cyclists journey. Some of these include:

- Barrhill Village with historic buildings and impressive tree lined avenues was established in the 1870's. Modelled on an English village, Barrhill housed the families of Corwar Estate workers and also a baker, blacksmith, bricklayer, post office keeper, hotelier and gardener. Onsite displays outline the rich history of the village.
- Corwar Gatekeeper's Lodge is a Category A listed building under the District Plan. This small building, built in the 1870's was part of the Corwar Estate and is now kept as a museum with the interior and household items from the late 1800's.

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- Highbank Power Station and the Rangitata Diversion Race are important landmarks on the Plains. Both were constructed as part of a government Public Works Scheme under Premier Julius Vogel.
- Staveley lime kilns on DOC land.
- Mount Somers Stone – A cathedral in Melbourne is built using this local stone.
- the Limestone Cottage on Woolshed Creek is an old stone workers' cottage.

A more comprehensive list of historic sites along the preferred trail route is included in Appendix C - List of Historic Items and Sites Adjacent to Preferred Trail Route.

Itineraries

Development of the recommended Ashburton Plains Trail from Rakaia to Methven to Mount Somers to Ashburton with travel in both directions would allow for the provision of a number of possible itineraries.

Table 4, Potential itineraries

Duration	Where	Commercial Opportunities
Multi-day trip	Rakaia to Methven to Ashburton	<p>Staying in Methven and Mount Somers accommodation and dining out along the way.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shuttle bus between Rakaia and Ashburton • Guided or supported tours • Bike hire and gear transfer • Bike shop maintenance • A rest day at the Ōpuke Pools • Cafés and restaurants
Day trips	<p>Rakaia to Methven</p> <p>Methven to Mount Somers</p> <p>Loop trip from Mount Somers to Staveley*</p> <p>Ashburton to Mount Somers</p>	<p>Would require a there and back trip, support vehicle, vehicle transfer or an opportunity for a local bike shuttle operation to service this need.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accommodation • Cafés and restaurants • Bike hire and bike shops

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Duration	Where	Commercial Opportunities
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A soak at Ōpuke Pools post ride
Shorter trips	Rakaia to Barrhill return Methven to Staveley return	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bike hire and bike shops Cafés and restaurants
Weekend - Active adventurer	Combination of cycling daytrip or shorter day with other activities	<p>Other commercial activities, i.e. jet-boating, skiing and Ōpuke Pools/</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accommodation Cafés and restaurants Bike hire and bike shops
Weekend – Cycling enthusiast	Combination of cycle trail day or part day trip and a visit to the Mt Hutt Bike Park with 40km plus trail network.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accommodation Cafés and restaurants Bike hire and bike shops A soak at Ōpuke Pools post ride
Bikepacking	Could use any of these trails as part of a larger bikepacking journey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accommodation Cafés and restaurants Bike hire and bike shops A soak at Ōpuke Pools post ride

*This would require surface improvement of the RDR between Staveley and Mount Somers but would make a very pleasant loop trail out from Mount Somers or Staveley.

Trail connectivity and bike hub towns

There is potential for this Ashburton Plains Trail to link in with other attractive destinations or proposed trails in the region which are mostly in the foothills area, they are:

- A cycling link to Rakaia Gorge – Lake Coleridge – Lake Lyndon and possibly the Selwyn District's proposed Alpine to Sea Trail.
- A cycling link on a trail towards Geraldine and on to Fairlie which would then connect with the Central South Trail through to Tekapo.

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Investigation into the proposed sub-trails as promoted by the Mid-Canterbury Tourism Advisory Group is required, as it is likely 2-3 of these trails would have merit alongside a cycle trail between Methven and Mount Somers. This would really create some momentum towards making Methven and Mount Somers bike hubs with an exciting array of bike trails to suit all experience levels - so if a family group or friends group with mixed abilities stayed in these towns there would be something for everyone. From a brief overview of the maps of the proposed sub-trails - the Long Loop Ashburton Track, the Lake Emma route and the Arrowsmith to Mt Potts route as a selection - would provide sufficient challenge and adventure amongst spectacular scenery.

Further complementary cycling activities within the District include the existing:

- Mt Hutt Bike Park near Methven
- Ashburton MTB Loop
- Ashburton Skills Park
- Lake Hood Trail

Governance and Management

Ashburton District Council does not currently manage any recreational trails preferring to provide support to community groups to undertake long term "ownership" and maintenance. With regard to the proposed trail, there is work being done from within the community to progress sections of this trail to satisfy local recreational demand and for economic benefit to the local town. Council support is needed to ensure the best connected route is chosen and built to a standard which delivers on market expectations to ensure economic return.

The formation of a trust is recommended as the best option for this project. This should consist of representatives from Council, iwi, landowners, commercial operators, trail champions and District promotion agencies. The addition of one or two people with a financial or business management background would improve the skillset of a trust. A trust would also be a better vehicle for raising sufficient funds and tapping into grant and trust funding unavailable to local government. The trail supporters group in Methven, wishing to develop a trail through to Staveley, are currently looking at creating a trust as the most effective model to move this project forward.

The creation of a Trail Manager role, possibly in association with the Council, would oversee the development phase, then once completed would manage the operation, maintenance, finance reporting and marketing of the trail. Key tasks would include:

- | | |
|--|---|
| • Procuring and managing maintenance contractors | • trail status communication |
| • promotion and marketing – experience management | • lobbying and applying for funding |
| • commercial and landowner relationship management | • website maintenance and social media management |
| | • financial oversight and reporting |

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- health and safety management
- board reporting
- contributions to destination planning

Project plan

A project plan should be prepared that would outline the trail development process noting the project scope and deliverables with milestones, however, some key decisions are required before this can be completed effectively.

Instead this study recommends the following staging and next steps for the project.

Staging

Development of the full trail concept (Rakaia - Methven – Mount Somers – Ashburton) should be done in stages and it is logical to use the three trail sections recommended in this report. Priority for the development of each stage has been proposed below. This considers the recreational values (as described above), community benefit and likely popularity:

1. Foothills - Highbank Power Station to Mount Somers
2. Upper Ashburton - Mount Somers to Ashburton
3. Upper Rakaia - Rakaia to Highbank Power Station

Each of the trail sections can be seen as stand-alone daytrips for cyclists - our research has shown that daytrips or shorter trips make up the greatest proportion of cycle trail use. Besides allowing for manageable construction projects, staging would also give an opportunity to build the first section and gauge its success through monitoring - levels of use, user satisfaction, any increased spend at existing businesses, or support from locals - before moving onto the next stage.

Next steps

1. Council to consider and decide whether to support an Ashburton Plains Trail in principle.
2. If supported, it would be added as a project (for detailed design) to the next Long Term Plan to gauge whether the wider community is supportive.
3. If there is clear community support Council to facilitate the establishment of a Trails Trust or support an existing Trust.
4. The Trails Trust with the support of the Council will seek funding for an experienced Trail Manager who will undertake detailed planning, pursuing landowner support, finetuning the trail route, obtaining legal access, applying for funds, preparing and managing the trail construction contract.

This [video](#) (embedded in the news article) which shows the construction of the Waimate Trail - may help to give a better understanding of what is involved in developing a destination trail.

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Feasibility study limitations

It should be noted this feasibility study has several limitations:

- Approximately 80% of the proposed trail was visited or viewed in person as part of this feasibility study. This included the use of a drone and a four-wheel drive to cover most of the proposed route. Further inspections were not possible due to private land access, the range of the drone or poor weather the week of the inspections.
- Where access was not able to be gained, high quality aerial imagery and 3D mapping was used to view the trail route digitally. This can often not accurately reflect what is seen on the ground so comes with some limitations.
- This feasibility study has been produced using only publicly available information and information which has been shared by members of the community and Council.
- Cost estimates were based on other completed trail construction projects in Canterbury including the Alps 2 Ocean - East Pukaki new trail section (off-road), Central South Trail, and the Waimate Trail.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A - Scope of Works

The scope of works is identified within the plans and documents included with this Request for Quotation.

Deliverables of the Scoping Exercise

- Understanding the market
 - o Who are the users?
 - o How would they engage in the trail?
 - o What can be learned from other trails?
- Investigate route options
 - o Rakaia – Methven
 - o Methven – Mount Somers
 - o Mount Somers – Ashburton
 - o Ashburton – Rakaia
- Seek high level support from landowners on the route
 - o Commitment was secured from landowners by the Braided Waters Trust for access for the Trail.
 - o Unfortunately, the addresses were not recorded, and a manual concordance will now need to be undertaken to determine which parcels of land had permission.
 - o The permissions will need to be refreshed as landholdings will have changed and there is a significant delay since landowners were last spoken to about this project.
- Understand the high-level investment required to build the route
 - o Price for track
 - o Signage
 - o Gates and fencing
 - o Bridges
- Identify commercial opportunities on the route
 - o Hospitality
 - o Accommodation
 - o Transport
 - o Services and Maintenance

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- o Others
- Identify connections between this route and others planned in the district
 - o The high-country cycle trails currently being considered by the Mid Canterbury Tourism Advisory Group
 - o A potential Lake Hood loop from Ashburton
 - o Connections to the Methven Bike Park
 - o The Ashburton skills trail
- Identify existing tracks that can be utilised by this project, specifically the tracks around Rakaia, the Ashburton river trail and the RDR track.
- Develop a high-level project plan with a staged approach to developing the route.
- Produce a report that answers the above questions and make recommendations to Council about the next steps.

NOT PROGRESSSED

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Appendix B – Local Activities, Eateries and Accommodation

Local Activities

[Ōpuke Pools](#)

[Discovery Jet \(Rakaia Gorge\)](#)

[Methven Heliski](#)

[Heli Rural Methven](#)

[Lake Heron Air](#)

[Stevely Ice Rink](#)

[Mt Hutt Ski Area](#)

[Lord of the Rings Tours](#)

[Adventure Balloons NZ Ltd](#)

[Ballooning Canterbury](#)

[Erewhon Station](#)

[Backcountry New Zealand Hunting & Fishing Guides](#)

[Newzengland Clay Shooting & Archery](#)

[Dirt Bandits](#)

[Trott's Gardens](#)

[Ashburton Museum](#)

[Ashburton Art Gallery](#)

[Aviation Museum](#)

[EA Networks Centre](#)

[Tinwald Golf Club](#)

[Rakaia Golf Club](#)

[Ashburton Golf Club](#)

[Methven Golf Club](#)

[Mt Somers & Sharplin Falls Walkway](#)

[Mt Barrosa Track](#)

[Mt Sunday Track](#)

[Te Awa Awa Walk](#)

List of Eateries

Methven Restaurants and Bars (15)

The Dubliner

Blue Pub

Brown Pub

Frydays

The Green Parrot Bar & Grill

Nawab Eatery

Ōpuke Tranquility Bar and Eatery

Patron Brewery @Methven Resort

Ski Time

Stronechrubie

Thai Chilli

Dom's Methven

Aqua Japanese

Shackleton's @Brinkley

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Craft @Arabica

Methven Cafés (8)

The Alpine Grind

Something Delicious

Molecule

45 Café

Topp Country Café

Primo E Secundo Café

Station Coffee

Ōpuke Café

Rural Restaurants and Bars (4)

The Mount Bar & Café (Mt Somers)

Panthers Rock (Mayfield)

South Rakaia Hotel

Railway Tavern Rakaia

Rural Cafés (4)

Staveley Store

Harvey's Bakehouse (Rakaia)

Mt Somers General Store

Mayfield Café

Ashburton Restaurants and Bars (24)

Cleavers Corner Gastro Pub

Formosa Modern Asian Cuisine

Noble 600

The Fine Lion

Smoke Ashburton

Miyabi Japanese

The Phat Duck Brew Bar & Kitchen

Alluvial Restaurant

Kebizza Kebabs & Pizza

Tinwald Tavern Bar

Ton's Thai

Taj Spice Indian Restaurant

Indian Minar

The Rabbit - All-Day Menu & Cocktail Lounge

The Ottoman Ashburton

Krung Thap Thai Street Food Ashburton

Koji Japanese Restaurant

The Lake House

Highway One Restaurant

The Devon Tavern

Alford Forest Road Thai

Sal's Authentic NY Pizza

Ashburton Club & MSA

Ashburton RSA

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Ashburton Cafés (17)

Lushingtons Café	Joe's Garage Ashburton
Sim's Bakery	Nigendys
Somerset Grocer	Robert Harris Ashburton
Triangle Espresso	Millhouse Kitchen
Cafe Time	Harvey's Bakehouse
Violet.	Columbus Coffee
One ninety nine	Black & White Coffee Cartel
Taste Cafe	Mr Man's Bakery and Cafe
Kelly's Cafe & Bar	

List of Accommodation Providers

Ashburton (13)

Taylor's Motel	Hotel Ashburton
ASURE Adcroft Motel	The Suites Ashburton
Bella Vista Motel Ashburton	Ashburton Holiday Park & Lodge
Commodore Motor Lodge	Tinwald Motels
The Suites Ashburton	Academy Lodge Motel
ASURE Adcroft Motel	Regency Motel
Coronation Park Motels	

Methven (23)

Pinedale Backpacker Lodge & Apartment	Southern Cross Lodge
Northfield Luxury Accommodation	Methven Resort
Snow Denn Lodge	Brinkley Resort
Methven Lodge & BnB	Greenhouse Ski Lodge

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025
regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project

which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.

Mt Hutt Motels

Big Tree Lodge

Methven Motels & Apartments

Methven Camping Ground

Ski Time Lodge

Barkers Lodge

The Blue Pub

Whitestone Cottages

The Brown Pub

Four Seasons Motel

Abisko Lodge

Alpenhorn Chalet

Cedar Chalets and Barkers Lodge

Powder House Country Lodge

Quickenberry Lodge

Rakaia (3)

South Rakaia Hotel

Rakaia River Holiday Park

Railway Tavern Rakaia

Mt Somers (3)

Mt Somers Holiday Park

Mount Somers Tavern

Stronechrubie Accommodation

Other Foothills Accommodation (3)

Pudding Hill Lodge

Rotherwood of Staveley

Red Cottages Staveley

Appendix C - List of Historic Items and Sites Adjacent to Preferred Trail Route

Connor Lysaght, Archivist Ashburton Museum, and Michael Hanrahan, local historian, generously provided a wealth of information on historic sites, buildings, items and activities along the preferred trail corridor. If any of these can be made part of the trail visitor experience, noting that a number are on private land, it would greatly enhance the appeal of the trail.

Historic features along the trail route to be considered are:

- Sodtown, part of Rakaia Settlement, was a settlement for Irish immigrants many were workers brought in by Premier Julius Vogel to do public works. Other similar Irish settlements were Kerrytown further south and Loburn in North Canterbury.
- The historic Barrhill township and stunning avenues of oak, sycamore and poplar.
- Corwar Gatekeeper's Lodge, an original estate gatekeepers house, that has been kept as a museum with all the interior and household objects from the late 1800's on display.
- Highbank Power Station is the terminus of the Rangitata Diversion Race and was constructed during World War 2, both were part of a huge Government Public Works Scheme of the time.
- Rangitata Diversion Race (RDR), built as part of a government Public Works Scheme in the 1930's and 1940's, which irrigates a large portion of the Canterbury plains.
- Pipe Shed in Methven, a remnant of the RDR construction period.
- Mt Hutt Road Board Office, still in original condition.
- Staveley Museum includes information on area's unique geology
- Staveley lime kilns
- Ammunition bunkers at Cave Stream associated with the Godley Head gun on Lyttleton Harbour
- Limestone Cottage on Woolshed Creek housed stone workers employed at the quarry.
- Mount Somers Quarry – stone from here has been utilised throughout the country and in Australia including a cathedral in Melbourne.
- Buxton Kiln on Ashburton Gorge Road, a more modern version of the Staveley kilns
- History of Mount Somers Tramway that connected Tinwald, Springburn and Blackburn Mine.
- Westerfield Estate sod buildings
- Lagmhor Estate, one of the original large estates of Mid Canterbury. Reputed to have kept 140 horses in its heyday.
- Laffey Cob Cottage, built by the NZ Roads Board in the late 1890's, although is in poor condition. Located at the corner of Sheates and Fechny roads.
- Multiple historic sites within Ashburton.

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025 regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.



Appendix D - Costing Detail

Refer to Ashburton District Council resolution dated 17 September 2025 regarding the Ashburton District Plains Trail project which confirmed that Council is not proceeding with the project outlined in this feasibility study.

Track section	Description	Work required	Distance/width (metres)	Rate (per metre)	Est. cost \$ (000)	Comments
Upper Rakaia: Rakaia to Power Station						
Rakaia Terrace Walkway	Established existing trail	May require some widening and further surfacing	3,300	20	66	
end Walkway to Highbank PS	Stable river terrace with mostly exotic trees/vegetation	New trail: Clear alignment, form subbase, surfacing	27,700	70	1,939	
Bridges	Near Highbank Power Station	New steel beam bridges @15m x 2	30	2,500	75	
Bridges		New small timber bridges @5m x 4	20	2,000	40	
Bridge		New small timber bridge @ 10m	10	2,000	20	
Wayfinding signage	Nominal amount				5	
Toilets	For Barrhill and Highbank				150	
Consents	For toilets, land use, activity in riverbed, bridges - nominal amount				25	
Access barriers	Nominal amount				20	
					2,340	
					234	add 10% contingency
					2,574	million
					2.6	rounded
Foothills section: Power Station to Mt Somers						
Barkers Rd	Substantial climb through pine plantation to end of RDR	New trail will require zig zagging route			50	
RDR	Rangitata Diversion Race from Rakaia River Rd to Methven Walkway	Spray grass, add geotextile & surface gravel, compact	8,140	30	244	
Methven Walkway	Established existing trail					
RDR	Methven Walkway to Nth Branch Ashburton River	Spray grass, add geotextile & surface gravel, compact	7,220	30	217	
Bridge/Ford	Nth Branch Ashburton River	New suspension bridge	140	7,000	980	
RDR	Rangitata Diversion Race: Nth Branch to Taylor's Stm	Spray grass, add geotextile & surface gravel, compact	6,000	30	180	
Bridge	Taylor's Stream	New swingbridge	52	6,000	312	
RDR	Taylor Stream to Bowyers Stm	Spray grass, add geotextile & surface gravel, compact	4,000	30	120	
Bridge	Bowyers Stm	New bridge	20	6,000	120	
RDR	Rangitata Diversion Race: Bowyers Stm to Rutherford Rd	Spray grass, add geotextile & surface gravel, compact	700	30	21	
Rutherford Rd (gravel)	RDR to Boyds Rd	Use road as low traffic flow	1,800			
Boyds Rd	Staveley to end of formed road	Use road as low traffic flow	2,500			
Bush/scrub section	end Boyds Rd to ammunition bunkers rd	New trail: Clear alignment, form subbase, surfacing	4,600	60	276	
Bridges x 6	Reid, Stevenson and Caves stms	New timber bridges 10-15m length x 6	75	2,000	150	
Farm track & quarry road	past bunkers, quarry down river tce to Ashburton Gorge Rd	Road and available track	2,800			
Ashburton Gorge Rd	to ULR	New separate roadside track	2,000	30	60	
Hakatere Sth Branch	ULR and riverbank to Mt Somers	New trail: Clear alignment, form subbase, surfacing	2,700	50	135	
Wayfinding signage	Nominal amount	has numerous road intersections			10	
Toilet	New public toilet for Staveley				150	
Consents	For toilets, land use, activity in riverbed, bridges - nominal amount				25	
Access barriers	Nominal amount	To meet requirements of RDR			30	
					3,080	may require separate trail past quarry for safety, dust
					308	add 10% contingency
					3,388	million
					3.4	rounded
Upper Ashburton: Mount Somers to Ashburton						
Nth bank Sth Branch Ashburton R	Mt Somers to Valetta bridge	New trail: Clear alignment, form subbase, surfacing	12,000	70	840	
Valetta bridge	shared with vehicle traffic?	Add LED cycle use sign warning using pressure pad			10	

Track section	Description	Work required	Distance/width (metres)	Rate (per metre)	Est. cost \$ (000)	Comments
Bridge	crossing RDR near Mt Somers	New steel beam bridge	15	2,500	38	
Sth bank Sth branch	Valetta bridge to existing sth bank trail	New trail: Clear alignment, form subbase, surfacing	18,700	70	1309	
Sth Bank Trail	existing trail to Ashburton bridge				50	nominal cost for any surface improvements or widening
Bridges x 6	small stms into Sth branch	New timber bridges 5m length x 6	30	2,000	60	
Wayfinding signage	Nominal cost				5	
Toilet	new toilet required midway - near Valetta Bridge				50	
Consents	For toilets, land use, activity in riverbed, bridges - nominal amount				25	
Access barriers	Nominal amount				20	
					2,406.5	
					241	add 10% contingency
					2,647	
					2.6	rounded
Lower Ashburton River: Ashburton to Hakatere Huts						
Ashburton River Trail	use existing trail	Requires some upgrading to meet Grade 2 standard			50 -100	
		Includes new access barriers & signage				
Coastal : Hakatere Huts to Rakaia River mouth						
	use existing roads	Wayfinding signage only			5	
Lower Rakaia River: Rakaia River mouth to Rakaia						
Dorie community track	informal community track	Improvement required	4,300	30	129	
end of Dorie track to Griggs Rd	riverbank covered in dense exotic vegetation	New trail: Clear alignment, form subbase, surfacing	4,900	100	490	rate reflects lots of tree removal and build up of base
Acton Rd to golf course	Follows Acton Rd	New trail on road verge	6,300	30	189	
Golf course to Acton Irrigation	riverbank covered in dense exotic vegetation	New trail: Clear alignment, form subbase, surfacing	4,750	100	475	rate reflects lots of tree removal and build up of base
Bridge	for crossing stream near golf course	New timber bridge 12m length	12	2,000	24	
Bridge	for crossing irrigation scheme overflow	New timber bridge 10m length	10	2,000	20	
Acton Irrigation to Rakaia	Existing 4WD road	No work required	2,000			
Wayfinding signage	Nominal cost				5	
Toilet	new toilet required Rakaia Huts				50	
Consents	For toilet, land use, activity in riverbed, bridges - nominal amount				25	
Access barriers	Nominal amount				20	
					1,427	
					142.7	add 10% contingency
					1,570	
					1.6	rounded