

Bushwalking Victoria Policy Position

Subject: **Sharing of tracks and trails** where new tracks are proposed or where it is proposed to change the use of an established track or trail.

Introduction

Bushwalking Victoria (BWV) believes that recreational walkers, like other users, have need for trails dedicated to their particular activity as many of their needs and wants are distinct from and not always compatible with those of commercial and other recreational users. However BWV also acknowledges that shared use trails have a place in the tracks network. Whether mixed use is possible or desirable for a track will depend on a range of factors that need to be considered through a proper consultative process that involves affected stakeholder groups.

When or where are shared tracks/trails appropriate?

- Where a walkers only track is not possible or where separation of incompatible users is not practical eg when there is a common destination point and separation is not feasible
- Existing roads, rail trails, and Management Vehicle Only tracks
- Where disabled access is desirable
- At pinch points such as river crossings or major road underpasses

Assessment process for new shared tracks or where changed use is proposed

- Establish why it needs to be shared
- Establish who are the likely compatible users
- Identify the shared values to confirm compatible users
- Identify potential conflict issues and whether they can be realistically managed
- Consider the safety requirements and how they will affect construction
- Consider the economic implications of trails that meet needs of all users; e.g. rail trails

Development process for new shared tracks or where changed use is proposed

- Establish a consultative group involving representatives of users
- Establish user behaviour protocols for the trail
- Detail the signage needed
- Determine education, enforcement, management requirements

When or where are shared tracks/trails inappropriate?

- When it is unsafe
- When a high quality, single use experience is desirable i.e. walking, cycling or horse riding
- Where it causes environmental damage or is aesthetically unpleasant
- When there is likely to be a high level of conflict between different user groups
- When it is a trail designed for a specific user group

Criteria for a successful shared trail/track

- Clear signage at all entry points and junctions showing it is a shared pathway and for which users it is approved [intentions books can also be a useful tool]
- Users must be compatible e.g. walkers, non competitive cyclists and horses but not motor bikes, vehicles or competition events
- Track design must not compromise the safety of any approved user group e.g. a minimum track width must be specified; sight lines must not be impeded by sharp bends or steep crests
- Surface must be suitable e.g. firm gravel surface is not compatible for cyclists and horses as the horses' hooves break the surface.

User protocols necessary for a successful shared trail/track

- Education information about the etiquette of sharing without conflict to be provided at access points and included in all published information
- Cyclists and horse riders:
 - reduce speed to a slow pace near walkers
 - ring bells or otherwise announce their presence before nearing other users
 - reduce speed further if there is no sign their warning signal has been heeded – walkers and horse riders often cannot hear cyclists approaching from behind
 - exercise additional caution where children are present (movement of children is unpredictable and can pose a serious hazard)
 - Horses must have bum bags to collect dung
- Walkers:
 - make space for other users
 - step aside for cyclists and horses
 - fold umbrellas well before nearing horses
- Where dogs are permitted:
 - all dung must be scooped up;
 - must be on short leashes when near other users
- Community events planned for trails to have a permit and be widely publicised well in advance.