

NZTA suggests cycle rides

By Heather Carston

THE ability to connect to existing and prospective cycling networks is something Otorohanga should get to grips with and take advantage of.

That's the message from the New Zealand Transport Association (NZTA)'s Jonathan Kennett to the Otorohanga District Council.

At Tuesday's meeting, Mr Kennett presented a number of reasons as to why the council should apply to the NZTA to fund three cycle routes as part of the country's Heartland Rides.

The suggested cycle routes are Otorohanga to Kawhia Harbour via Waitomo Caves; Kawhia Harbour to Raglan and Otorohanga to the Timber Trail via Waitomo Caves.

INCREASING

He said touring by bike — and different kinds of bikes at that — was a rapidly increasing pastime by New Zealanders, who make up the bulk of those who travel this way, through to those from Australia, the United States, Canada and the UK. Most of those were aged in their 40s, 50s and 60s.

"New Zealand currently has 22 Great Rides, but we are looking at investment into moving people away from urban areas into much safer and more beautiful back-country roads, which is where our Heartland cycle routes are coming in," he said.

"Our most popular is the Forgotten Highway between Taumarunui and New Plymouth, followed by the South Island's Rainbow Rd and Dansey's Pass, which has gravel roads very similar to Otorohanga."

He said the new 71km Heartland cycleway which opened up earlier this year from Mangakino to Pureroa Forest was proving very popular. Not only because the ride passes the plinth marking 'centre of the North Island', but for the sheer beauty of the region.

Mr Kennett said bikepackers are the target market as they have minimal gear and food and are looking for what they need from the closest towns, and tend to prefer to be in more remote areas, which have a lot less traffic on the cycle routes.

STRONG INTEREST

Councillors Ken Phillips and Robyn Klos expressed a strong interest in exploration of Otorohanga's eastern boundary, which encompassed part of the Waikato River Trail Rides.

There were also other areas they questioned as to being possibilities, rather than looking at tracks which had parts of them in other council areas.

However, Mr Kennett said the roads had to fit specific and known criteria and were graded this way, although he agreed they needed further investigation.

Both he and ODC land management officer Trish Ambury explained the beauty of the scheme relied on councils working together to develop the networks which would provide a better destination package for travellers, rather than focusing on routes within the council catchment area alone.

The only cost to the council would be the signage which NZTA would provide, but the council would need to install. All other marketing would be done through the Heartland Rides-NZ Cycle Trail website and annual publication, unless the council chose to

do its own in addition.

ECONOMIC BENEFIT

Deputy mayor Deborah Pilkington asked if this could benefit remote areas into opening up farms, halls or other places for Air BnB or accommodation. Mr Kennett agreed it would provide some economic benefit for remote regions.

"The whole plan could be very beneficial to Otorohanga in that people come down from Auckland by train, get off at Otorohanga with their bikes — and they have some great cycleway choices to make."

Mrs Klos said she had read a blog recently by a well-known American global traveller who said of all the countries he had visited, the sight of the sunrise over the Lake Arapuni made him understand what silence was — something he would never forget.

"They could also end up in Pureora or Ngaroma, the site of some of region's earliest Maori history — which is all documented — and early European settlement."

He says economic benefits may include 500 - 1000 riders around year four, at \$156 a day for three days.

"This could see between \$78,000 to \$468,000 a year on visitor spend alone," said Mr Kennett.

Councillors also wanted to have alternative routes suggested, such as Hauturu Rd and Honikiwi Rd.

Mr Kennett said they were good alternatives which needed further investigation at a later date.

The council agreed to make an application to the NZTA to have the cycle routes through the district.

Carbon footprint offset

WAITOMO cave tour operator Glowing Adventures has achieved Climate Positive Business Operations certification for the 2018 calendar year with ekos. To achieve the certification, Glowing Adventures measured and offset all 120% of the CO2 emissions from its day to day operations during 2018, including electricity, waste, freight, and company vehicles. Owners Michelle and Stefan Boddie (pictured) worked with carbon measurement and offsetting social enterprise ekos to calculate and offset the carbon footprint of their business operations. Once the CO2 output was quantified, the next step was to choose a native reforestation or protection project and purchase carbon credits to offset the emissions from their business operations. "It was a great exercise which really opened our eyes to how we can run our business in the most sustainable way possible," says Mr Boddie. The certification was received on Wednesday. PHOTO SUPPLIED



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