



Community Voices

Report on community engagement for the Little Yarra trail proposal

January 2021



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Engagement Summary

Project Background

The Little Yarra River rises in the forested headwaters East of Powelltown. It flows through farmland and a number of small towns including Gilderoy, Three Bridges and Gladysdale before making its way to Yarra Junction and its confluence with the Yarra River.

In 2017, Melbourne Water commenced a capital waterway restoration project in Gladysdale working downstream for approximately 7km to the Barrier Creek confluence in Yarra Junction.

Based on the success of this project a Stage 2 project was developed. This project is the Stage 2 of the original project and aims to build on the existing project by continuing the works down to the Lilydale to Warburton Rail trail.

This new project will establish 2.0km of indigenous vegetation along the Little Yarra River whilst removing significant infestations of high invasive exotic vegetation. The project will contribute to the achievement of performance objective 2 of the Healthy Waterway Strategy for the Little Yarra and Hoddles Creek sub-catchment.

In addition to the ecological benefits this project will create it will also see the establishment of a walking trail along the Little Yarra River thereby improving community access and connection to waterways.

Engagement on proposed trail

In 2020, community information on the weed control and revegetation was sent to neighbouring landholders advising that we were exploring recreational opportunities as part of this project.

Following this, we engaged a landscape designer to develop preliminary concept plans for the proposed new trail network.

We began engagement on Stage 1A&B in August 2020 through various channels, the main one being our "Your Say" engagement platform.

On Your Say, local community members and businesses were encouraged to:

- View the Concept Plans
- Attend a Virtual Community session
- To fill out a survey with feedback on the proposed trail.

The engagement information was made available through various means including:

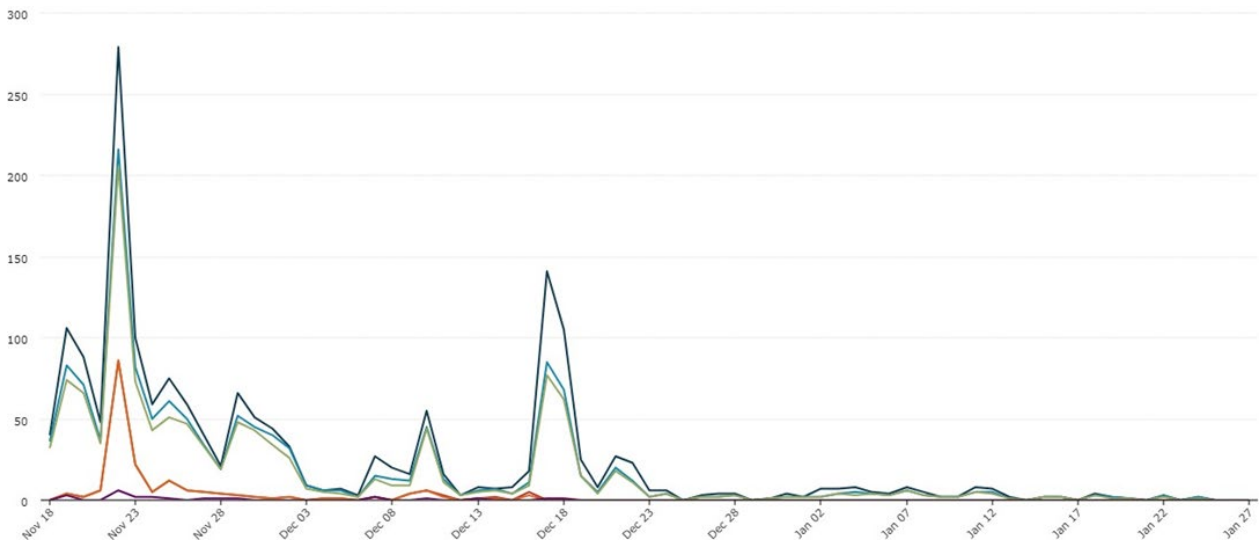
- Melbourne Water Website
- Direct mail to local residents
- Targeted social media advertising
- Sharing on other community social media platforms
- Advertising in local papers
- Signage
- Via Council and DELWP channels.

The engagement on the proposed trail was open for four weeks, closing on 18 December 2020.

The Your Say page is still active and people can still view the plans and contact the project team directly.

What we have heard so far

Performance summary



1,752 Views	1,340 Visits	1,051 Visitors	185 Contributions	179 Contributors	23 Followers
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The above graph shows the extent of engagement and interactions with the Your Say page with over a thousand unique visitors to the page.

This resulted in 185 contributions to the survey which asked various questions about the proposed trail elements and the area in general.

Most people reached the site either through social media posts or via a direct link. We used QR codes on our website, bulletins, signage and social media which might account for the high number of direct access.

Referral types



- Social Media: 448 - 41.44%
- Direct: 342 - 31.64%
- Other: 193 - 17.85%
- Search Engine: 68 - 6.29%
- Websites: 30 - 2.78%

Direct - Visitors who have arrived at a Site by entering the exact web address or URL of the page.

Social Media - Visitors who have arrived at a Site by clicking a link from a known social media site such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.

Websites - Visitors who have arrived at the Site after clicking a link located on an external website.

Search Engine - Visitors who have arrived at a Site via a search engine. Such as Google, Yahoo, etc.

Other - Visitors who have arrived at a Site by undetermined means. This may include those arriving from a direct marketing campaign.

Survey questions

1. What is your relationship to the Little Yarra River.
2. What activities do you do in the Yarra Junction area? Select your top 3 activities.
3. What is your vision for the proposed Little Yarra Trail. Share with us your aspirational experiences
4. What values in the area are you most interested in learning about? Select all that apply.
5. What facilities would you like to see along the trail? Select all that apply.
6. What information would you like to see on interpretive signage along the trail? Select all that apply.
7. What are your thoughts about the creation of the wetland area?
8. What track surface do you prefer for most of the trail?
9. How long do you like to walk and/or cycle?
10. Do you think there should be loop sections that finish where they started?
11. How can we link the trail into existing trail network and nearby facilities?
12. Is there anything else you wish to add?

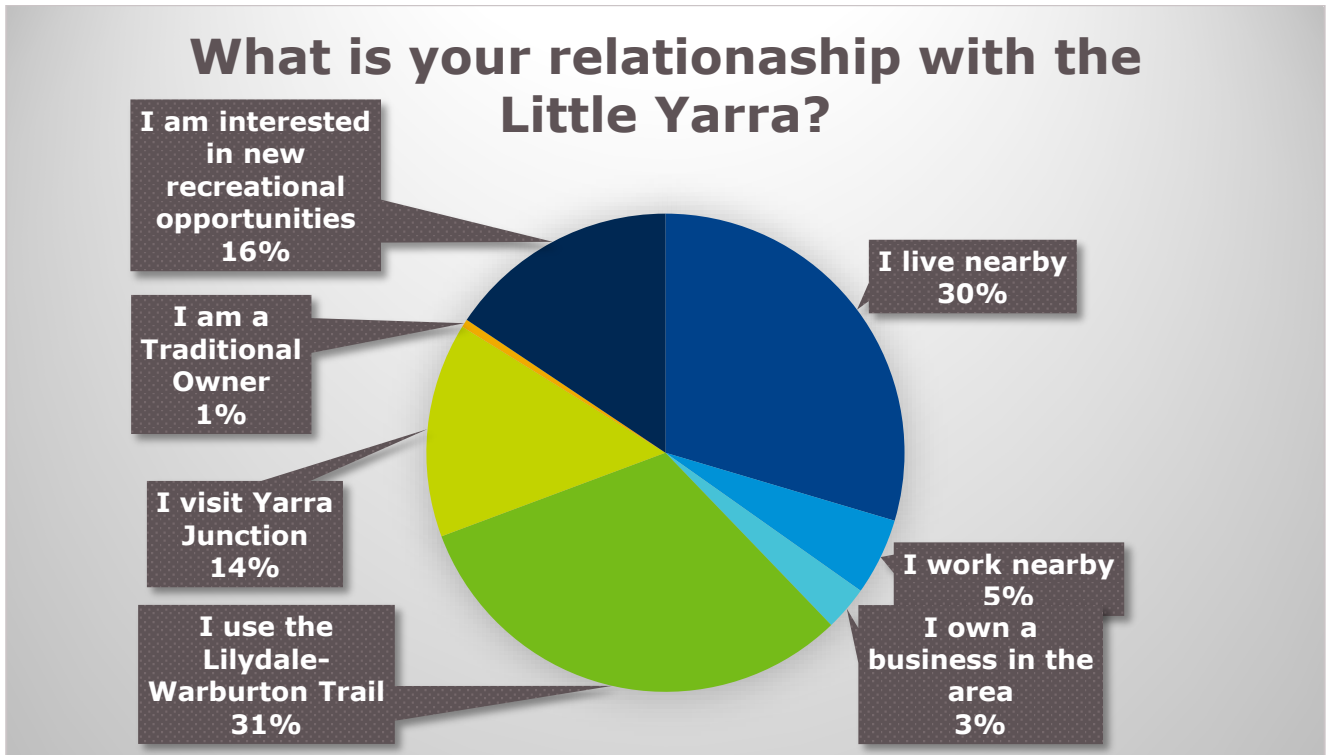
Age Group

Suburb

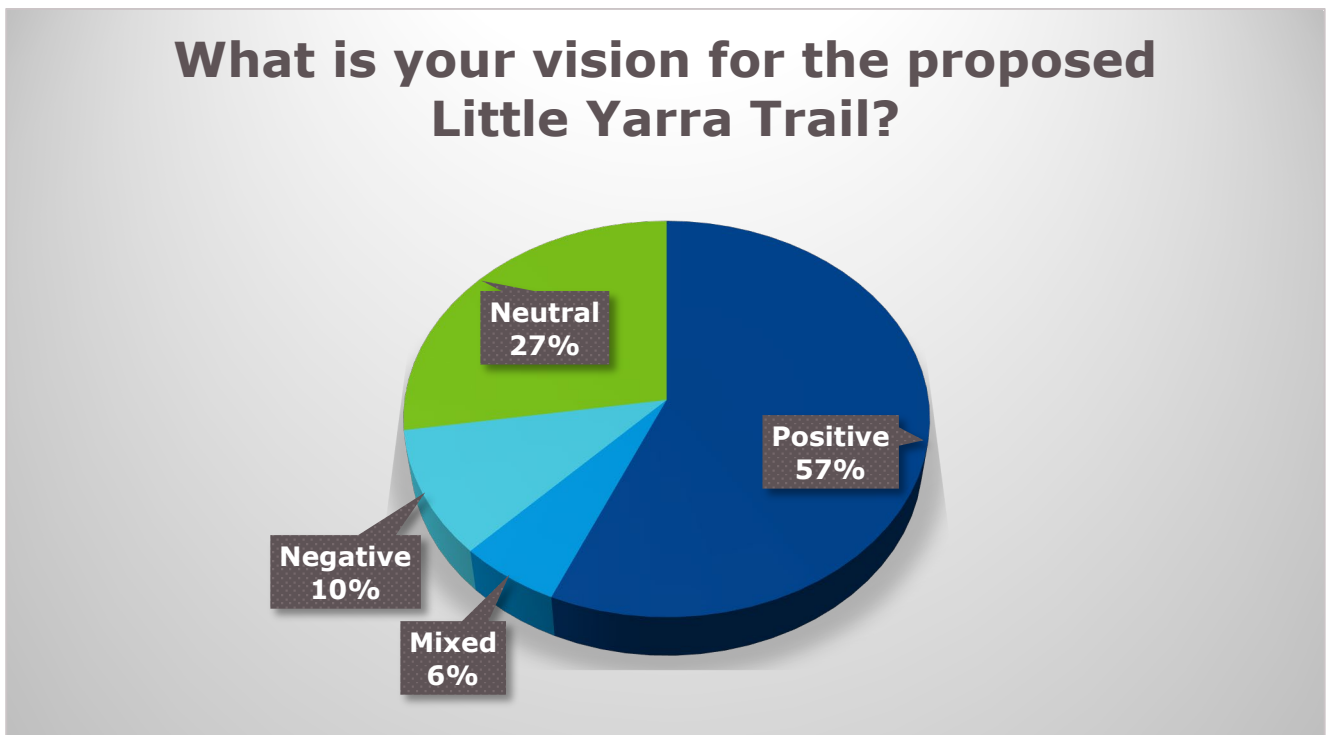
Email

I have read and understood Melbourne Water's Privacy Policy.

Survey results



The majority of respondents live locally or regularly use the existing Lilydale-Warburton Rail Trail. Those respondents from further afield indicated that they are interested in new recreational opportunities especially for horse-riding.



The majority of respondents were positive about the proposed trail. It was also clear from the data that those responding in a neutral manner were interested in the trail to be used for horse-riding.



"Multi use trail encompassing access to all members of the community."

"It looks amazing but needs to cater for equestrians."

"A walking trail that allows people to enjoy the area by walking/riding, and being in nature, so they can gain an appreciation for the river and surrounds. I would hope appropriate management allows enjoyment, while protecting the fragile river, its banks and ecology."

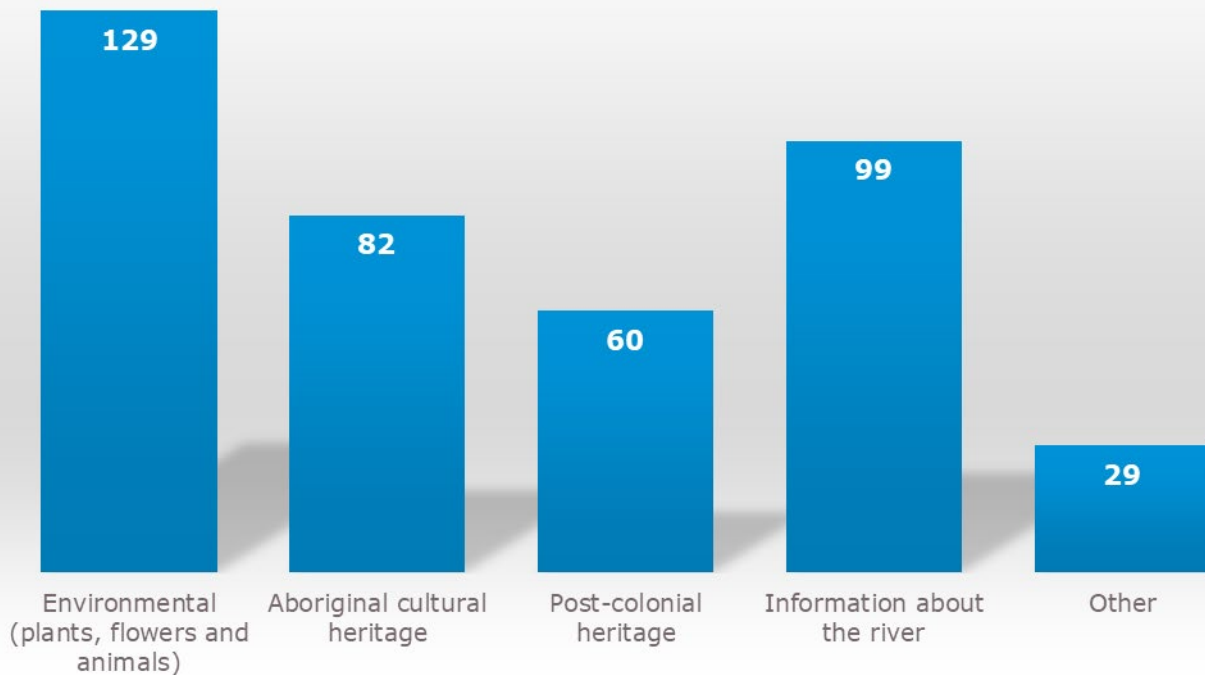


"I'm concerned that yet again horse riders will be ignored. I brought my property not far from the proposed track and am building my business here BECAUSE of the horse riding facilities close by. Now there is issue on the main trail with horse riders and having horses near a lot of bikes is downright dangerous. Especially as they won't be local and will be ignorant to how horses behave."

"My vision is something environmentally and ecologically sustainable that invites walkers to contemplate their surroundings and enjoy the tranquillity of the Little Yarra River. Perhaps there could be some picnic tables and/or bench seats to rest and relax, have a picnic, meditate, chat to friends."



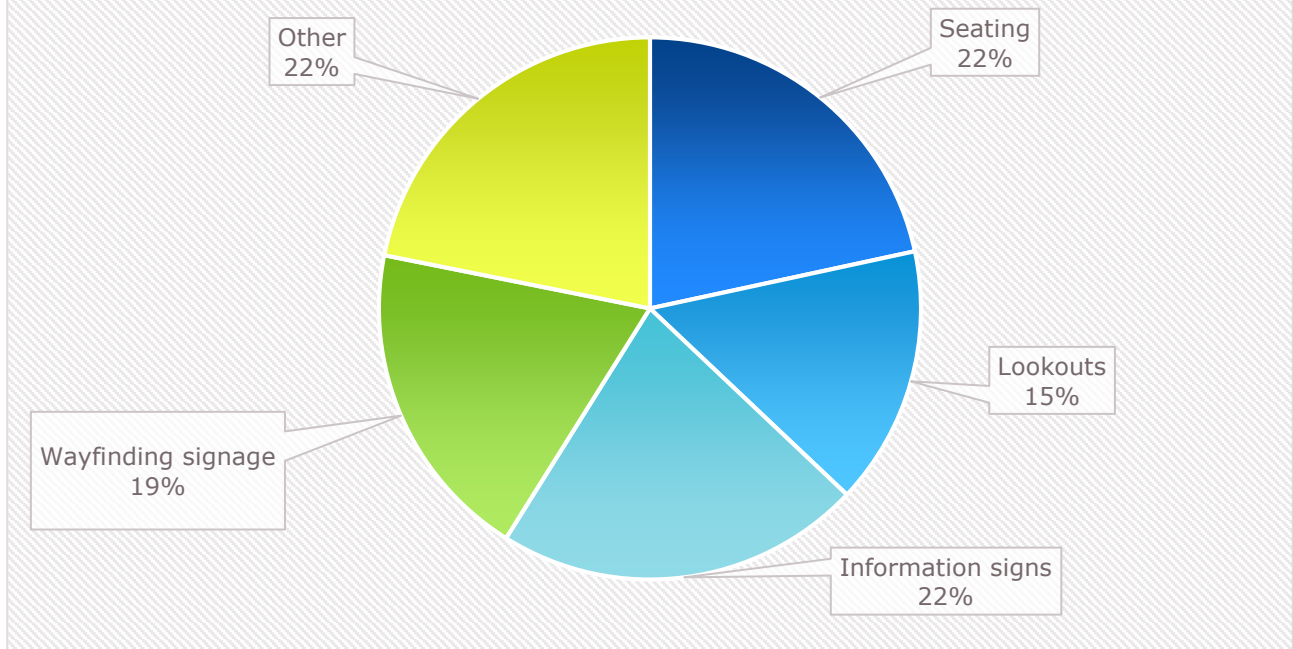
What values in the area are you most interested in learning about?



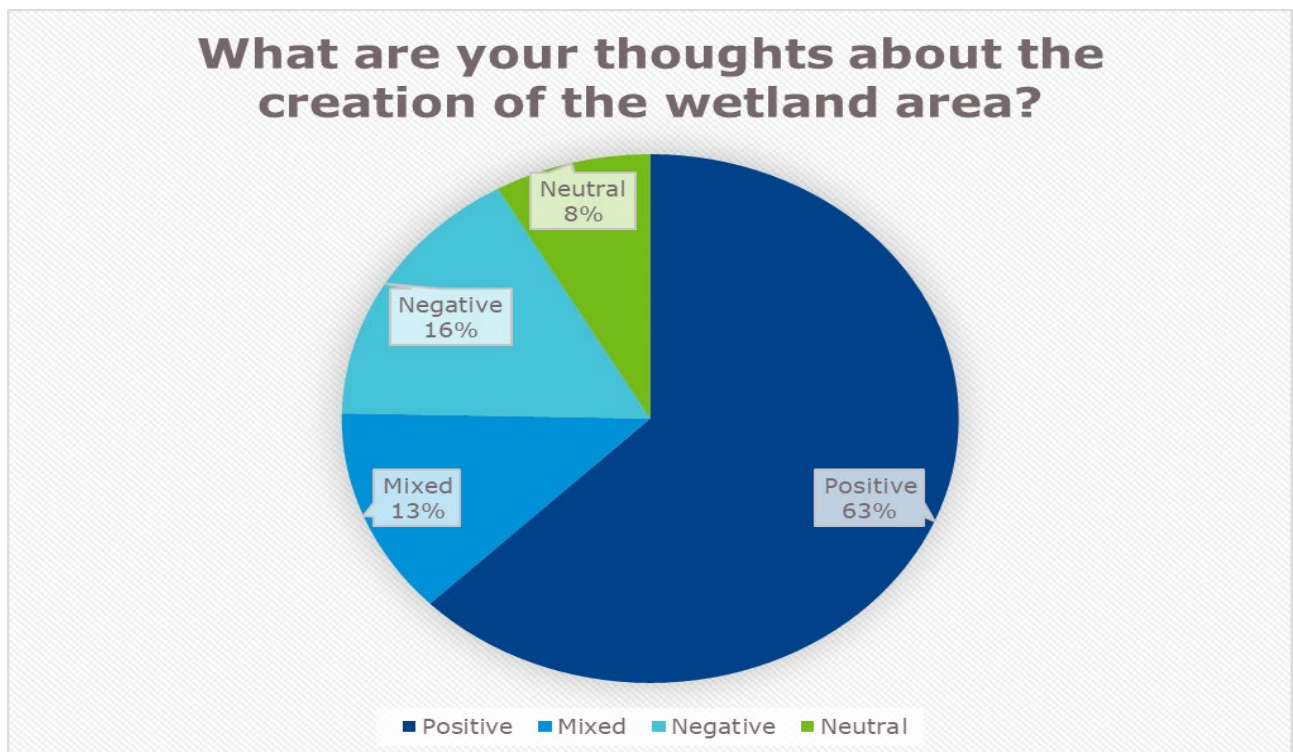
There was a fairly broad spread of interest in environmental information, information about the river and the cultural heritage of the area.

"I am interested in the history and what this area was built on i.e. logging, farming, horse events, community."

What facilities would you like to see along the trail?



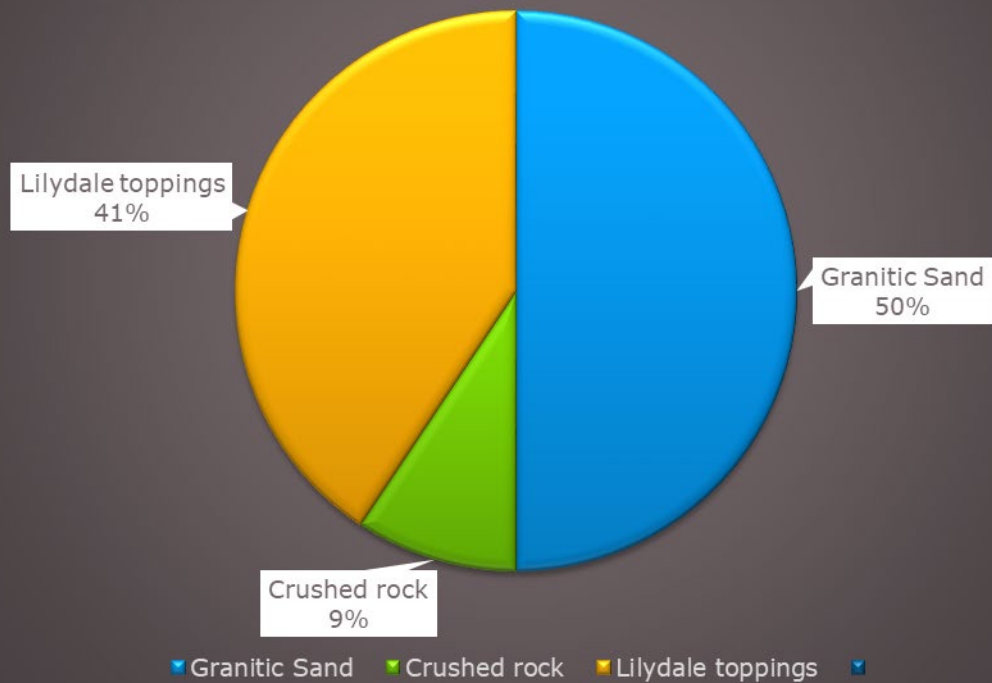
What are your thoughts about the creation of the wetland area?



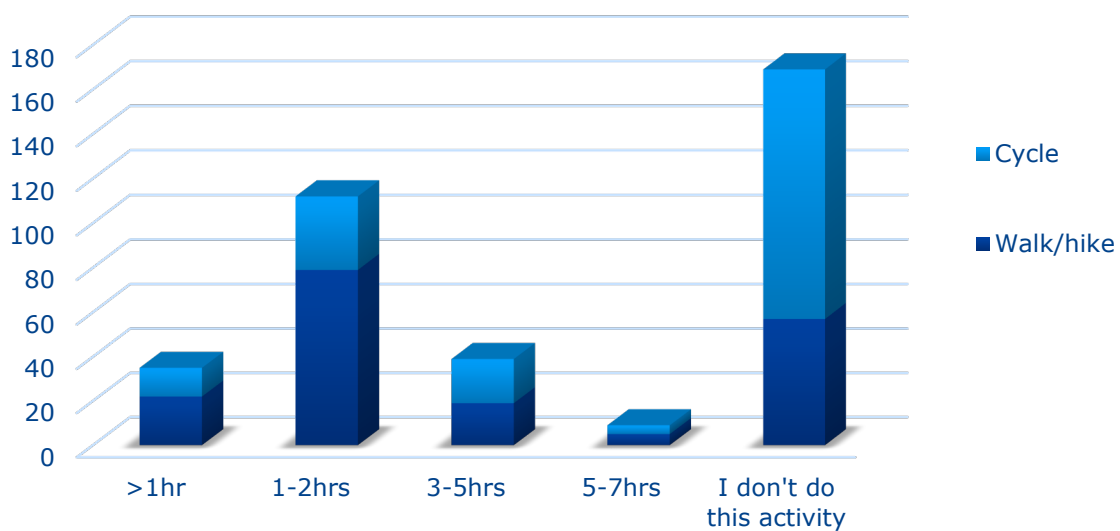
Generally a positive response to the question of the creation of a new wetland although there were some respondents who were concerned about the impact of flooding on the wetland and an increase in snakes and weeds. (See next section for more details).

"A wetland will require strict weed control of blackberries etc. and areas with bird blinds. Such areas also need no human traffic for breeding of water birds so any walkways need careful location. E.g. internal foot traffic only platforms where no bike or horse riding is possible."

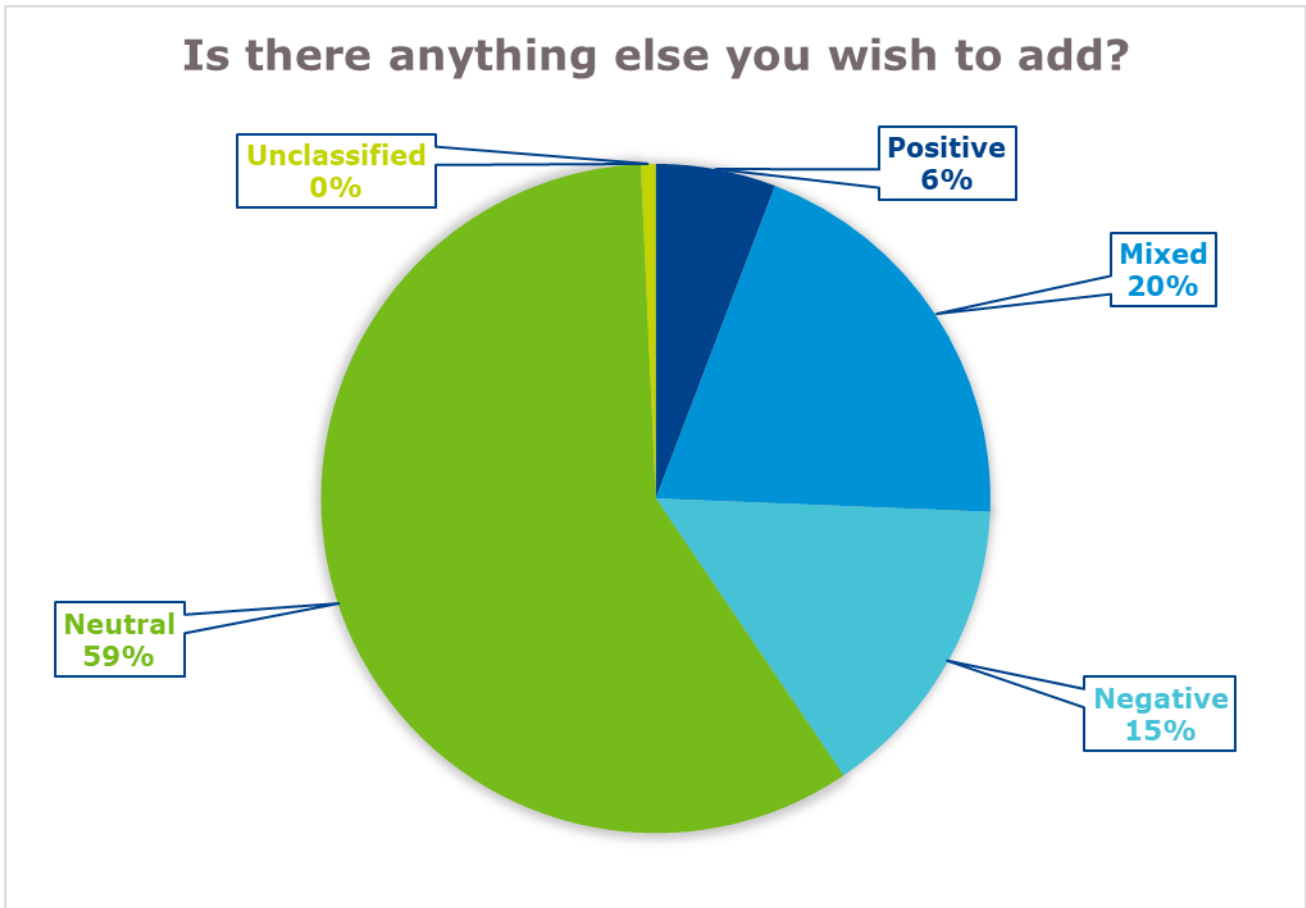
What track surface do you prefer for most of the trail?



How long do you like to walk and/or cycle?



Again, the majority of respondents indicated that they do not walk or cycle but were horse-riders and would like to undertake horse-riding on the proposed trail.



Nearly 60% of respondents provide neutral responses to this question largely due to the fact that they were concerned that horse-riding was not specifically considered in the survey.

It should be noted that horse-riding was not specifically included as the proposed trail is within the Yellingbo Conservation Area (YCA). The area is subject to certain conditions for activity and will ultimately be managed by Parks Victoria and whether it can be used for horse-riding will be determined by the Final 10 Year Masterplan for the YCA.

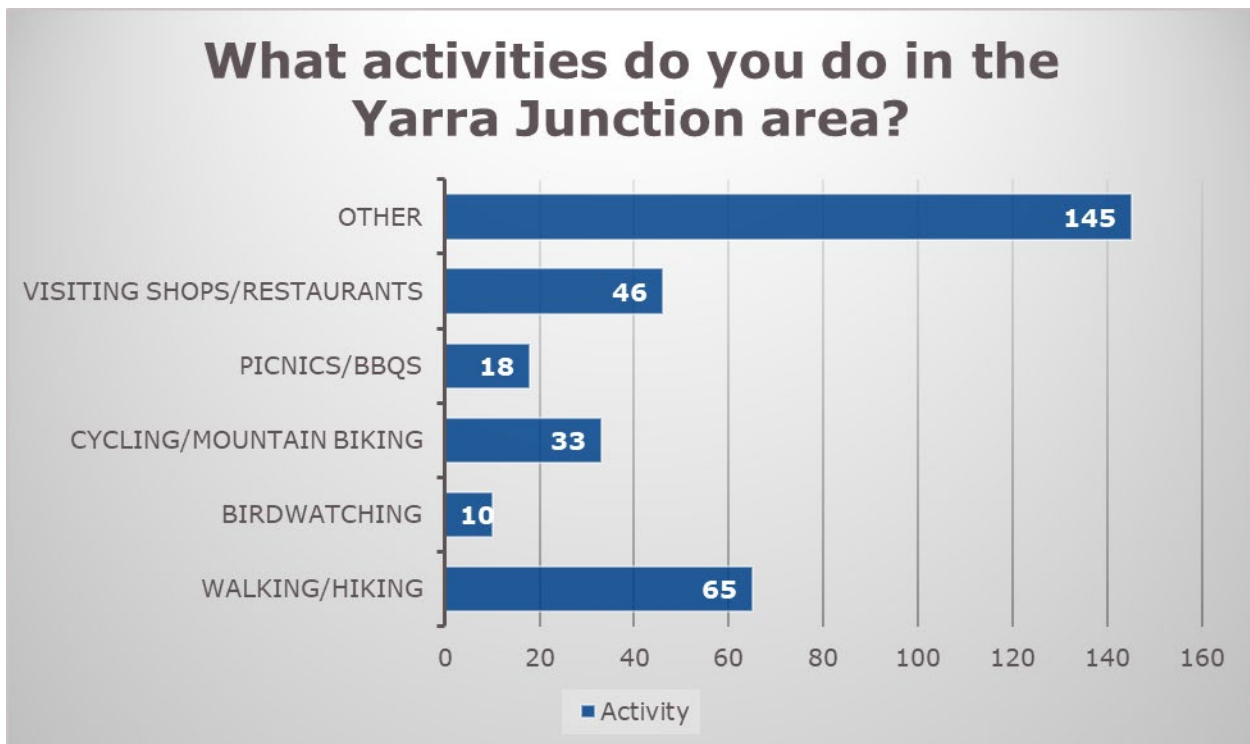
Themes

During the consultation phases we heard a range of feedback across several key themes. This section outlines what we heard under each key theme and provides further explanation and examples of the feedback received.

The themes we have identified are:

- Horse riding
- Privacy for adjacent landholders
- Flooding – flood plain
- Snakes and increase in weeds
- Ongoing maintenance

Horse-riding



When asked about activities undertaken in the area, the majority of people indicated that they carried out other activities in the area.

Based on the data, the number of responses under "Other" were related to horse-riding, with over 75% of respondents stating that they rode horses in the area.

This data indicates that there is a strong desire for the trail to be a shared asset for horse-riding, cycling and walking.



"Please consider all users of the trails in all areas. Horse riding is a very popular pastime and riders wish to continue to participate. Cycling and walking/hiking should not be exclusive to these trails. Horses have co-existed on rail trails and many many other trails along with cycling and foot traffic, and should not be excluded in further trail developments."

This also included the need for the provision of services to make this possible ie. Parking for floats and areas for tacking.

Privacy for adjacent landholders

A number of responses included reference to ensuring that adjacent landholders have privacy. Responses of this nature were made from locals living in Yarra Junction or Wesburn, and may be from those directly impacted by the trail on their boundaries.

"Look after abutting property owners that will be most impacted, the least you could is provide fencing and screening with plants. Do not create wetlands."

"How will this impact land owners along the track? I wouldn't want people walking my boundaries so I would hope good fencing it out in place to protect residents property."

Flooding – flood plain

Several responses and particularly from local residents adjacent to the proposed rail have indicated that the land is subject to inundation and that it is a flood plain.

This was especially noted in response to the question about the creation of a new wetland area.



"This area floods all the time. How is the wash out of the paths going to be prevented?"

"We already have plenty of wetland habitat due to regular flooding in this proposed area."

"What you do in one area with excavations will have a flow on effect to all the surrounding landowners with drainage and flooding flows. The Little Yarra Circuit already has its own natural wetlands during the winter months and even flash flooding during the summer months due to seasonal storm events."



"Melbourne Water should treat adjoining land holders with the upmost respect, they should not be out of pocket in any way when re-fencing their property. You are working on a floodplain, you need to ensure floodwaters are not redirected onto private property. The trail must be available to all members of our community. If the upmost care is taken with these concerns a great community asset can be generated whilst minimising the impact on affected landholders."

"A great idea. This area often floods in very rainy years so it's another way of using this small area in a positive way. As long as it's well serviced and genuinely cared for e.g. frequent rubbish removal, filtering of the wetlands to enable healthy waterways etc."



This has been taken into account in the Concept Design and further work will be done in the preparation of the Functional Design to ensure that the trail causes no increase in flooding or poses no serious safety risks in terms of usage.

Snakes and increase in weeds

In response to the question about the creation of a new wetland along the trail, a number of responses indicated that there was a potential issue with snakes and an increase in weeds if left unmaintained.

"This needs very careful consideration as many of these turn into overgrown weeded areas full of snakes making them an eyesore and unusable."

"The front of that paddock belongs to myself and I have found it to be the home of quiet a few snakes."

"Will be good for the Tiger snakes, frogs and the bird habitat that is all in abundance already along this waterway."

Ongoing maintenance

While the majority of people were positive about the trail, there were also some negative reactions due to the perceived lack of ongoing maintenance to the trail.



"Security fencing at least 2.5 metres high all along the new section of the trail for the safety and security of landowners. A detailed parking plan that does not destroy the fronts of landowners homes and security of landowners along the trail. A detailed plan of proper maintenance if river reserve with effective fire management clearing of land. A detailed plan of platypus habitat and the re-introduction of platypus. A plan for the allowing of young people to fish and do yabbinging."

"The required maintenance that the full proposal encompasses is significant. Not only will more rubbish and other items left by users end up in the river, but unless the grass is kept short all summer, it will pose a fire risk to the adjoining properties and also a snake risk to young children that may wonder too far off the track and into the bushland. Our medical facilities in the immediate area are not equipped to be able to cope with such an incident."



Melbourne Water will work together with DELWP and Parks Victoria to ensure that this is managed through the project.

Timeframes and next steps

The views expressed so far, and outlined in this report, will be used to develop the Functional Design which will also consider the issues raised in the community feedback in the five theme areas.

Our intention in preparing this Engagement Report is to clearly outline our process, what we have heard and the next steps for engagement.

We have aimed to respond to the questions and the feedback we have received to date.

We will continue to review any questions or feedback received through engagement channels such as the Your Say portal available at <https://yoursay.melbournewater.com.au/little-yarra-trail>