

Tropical North Queensland Regional Mountain Bike Strategy

Draft Report Prepared for:
FNQROC

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Mareeba Mountain Goats

Cassowary Coast Multisport Club
Tablelands integrated Mountain Bike Alliance

Cairns Regional Council
Cook Shire Council
Douglas Shire Council
Mareeba Shire Council
Wujal Wujal Aboriginal Council

Cassowary Coast Regional Council
Croydon Shire Council
Hinchinbrook Shire Council
Tablelands Regional Council
Yarrabah Aboriginal Council

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This document looks at the entire Tropical North Queensland (TNQ) Region and what we need to do to further our national and international reputation as a ‘must do’ (again and again) destination.

(Need to put in Logos)

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1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this *Tropical North Queensland (TNQ) Regional Mountain Bike Strategy* is to build on the success of what has essentially been a grass roots evolution of Mountain Biking in the Region, through the identification of opportunities for Regional collaboration and formalisation of Regional goals and leadership roles. The *TNQ Regional Mountain Bike Strategy* has been developed so that the Region can continue to offer a diverse range of experiences and trail levels and maintain the Region's position as a world class MTB destination.

The *TNQ Regional Mountain Bike Strategy* is not a guide to mountain bike trails. While there will be crossover benefits for other trail activities such as hiking, trail running or multi-sport, this Strategy does not address non-MTB activities.

Mountain biking is a growing industry across the globe. Mountain biking offers more than the benefits of a healthy lifestyle - it can also be an economic driver. Benefits to the community and economy from developing a mountain bike (MTB) trail network include contributing to the health, engagement and wellbeing of locals and broadening the tourism product offered. There has been extensive research and reports written on the value of MTB to the community and economy and there are also numerous technical reports, guidelines and international standards on how to develop different MTB trails. It has been a deliberate strategy of the *TNQ Regional Mountain Bike Strategy* not to replicate this information – but rather to focus on the current trends, policy considerations, strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for MTB in the Region.

The key recommendations are categorised into:

1. Governance and Standards – priority actions for future management of mountain biking in the Region
2. Marketing and Promotion
3. The development and promotion of a Hero trail/s and supporting trails – Identification of the priority local trails for the coordinated development of the Region's trail network.

The aim of the strategy is to respond to a need for a clear, region-wide blueprint to guide agencies and public interest groups to link hubs across the FNQROC region, avoid inefficiencies, inconsistencies and unnecessary expense, thus maximising economic and social benefits to the region.

1.1 Project area

The strategy will cover the entire FNQROC Region. This incorporates the following local government areas:

- Cairns Regional Council
- Cassowary Coast Regional Council
- Cook Shire Council
- Croydon Shire Council

- Douglas Shire Council
- Hinchinbrook Shire Council
- Mareeba Shire Council
- Tablelands Regional Council
- Wujal Wujal Aboriginal Shire Council
- Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council.

An assessment of the diversity of trails in these areas is provided in **Section 3.1** and **Appendix 1** TNQ MTB Locations and Clubs.

1.2 Need for the strategy

There are many organisations working to:

- Market mountain bike tourism
- Encourage National and International Events
- Provide safe off-road tracks for use by the community
- Present our unique environment through defined and useable trails
- Encourage healthy exercise options
- Encourage community engagement through participation in local events, officiating or spectating.

To date there are discreet strategies and plans held by these groups i.e. Tourism Tropical North Queensland (TTNQ) and Tablelands Integrated Mountain Bike Alliance (TiMBa).

There are also burgeoning MTB groups and other agencies including local government needing support to develop their areas to complement the region.

This strategy will be the first of its kind for the region. It is not designed to duplicate but support discrete strategies that already exist in the region.

The Hero Projects should not exclude the ongoing investment by stakeholders such as MTB Clubs and Councils. There is a focus on the development of new projects however the overall objective is to consolidate and improve on existing trail networks and especially the linkages between them to ensure that the visitor sees the Region as an overall destination with varied riding opportunities (the whole is greater than the sum of the parts).

1.3 Project Reference Group

A reference group was established to set the terms of reference for the project, identifying key priority areas for consideration. The reference group consisted of:

- Advance Cairns
- Department of National Parks, Sport & Racing (NPSR)
- Department of Natural Resources & Mines (NRM)
- Department of Infrastructure, Local Government & Planning (DILGP)
- Douglas Shire Tourism Authority
- Each local government

- Each Mountain Bike Club
- Regional Development Australia Far North Queensland & Torres Strait Inc
- Tablelands Futures Corporation
- Tourism Tropical North Queensland (TTNQ)

The terms of reference and a review of existing plans and policies informed a subsequent engagement with MTB clubs, land managers and Councils across the region. This was conducted through face-to-face meetings and online questionnaires with each local Council, State Agencies and each MTB club.

1.4 Project Consultation

Members of the Project Reference group and key stakeholders were interviewed as part of the preparation of this *FNQ Regional Mountain Bike Strategy*. The common thread throughout the interview has been:

In order to build on the success of what has essentially been a grass roots evolution of Mountain Biking in the Region, Regional leadership is needed. With appropriate resourcing the existing Taskforce and Framework will be well placed to manage this leadership and strategy implementation role.

Multiple owners of the MTB trail network has implications for consistently applying the recommendations of the Regional Mountain Bike Strategy, as different agencies have different standards for signage, access, commerce, and liability and different resources. There is a high degree of interagency / cross ownership understanding of the issues and the benefits of a Regional Strategy, the co-operation across the region is likely to contribute to the success of the Strategy.

The recommendations from this consultation are included in **Sections 3 and 4** of this report.

1.5 Roles of Stakeholders

The *TNQ Regional Mountain Bike Strategy* is a lot more than trail development. A driver behind the development of this strategy was the recognition by Stakeholders that coordinated regional leadership is needed to continue to build on the Region’s strengths.

The main recommendation for this Strategy is to establish the Regional governance or management structure. This body will agree on priorities and assist in the co-ordinated delivery of the recommendations of the Strategy – creating consistency and efficiency in areas such as funding applications, signage, marketing and training, thus maximising economic and social benefits to the region.

It is also recognised that it is a large and diverse Region and that priorities are different from the local level to the Regional level. This strategy contains a suite of actions that supports autonomy across the Region. The structure of the Regional Co-ordinating body is also to be determined. It may be driven by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Services (QPWS), or FNQROC. However it is suggested that the body should probably evolve from the MTB clubs, similar to how other regional sports manage their activities – e.g. outrigger canoeing and Futsal.

The following stakeholders have an interest in contributing to the implementation of the Regional MTB Trail Development Strategy (note not a comprehensive list):

Stakeholder	Role in Regional MTB Strategy
Mountain Bike Australia (MTBA)	Governing body
Queensland Outdoor Recreation Federation (QORF)	Lobbying and securing investment, policy leader
Mountain Biking Clubs	Trail / Land managers, trail development, training and development of club members, run MTB events, promote trails
Cycling Australia	Event partner for all UCI events and major stakeholder with the World Cup, World Championships and future international events in the region.
Local Government	Trail / Land owners, provide assistance in trail development and funding and liability.
FNQROC	Co-ordinating body for regional matters including road network, infrastructure and planning
TTNQ	Marketing and promotion. Source funding for research
Tourism and Events QLD	Major funding partners for all international and some national events.
Advance Cairns	Lobbying and securing investment
Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing	Coordinating Sport and Recreation funding assistance
Department of Natural Resources and Mines (NRM)	Trail / Land owners, provide guidance in trail development, trail head infrastructure, and funding and liability.
Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing	Trail / Land owners, provide guidance in trail development, trail head infrastructure, and funding and liability.

2.0 Trends Influencing the TNQ Region

Since it began, mountain biking has grown enormously, simultaneously evolving into a number of different disciplines and moving from being a fringe, extreme sport to a mainstream activity.

Over the years since its inception, the sport has evolved and grown into a number of different disciplines, along with changes and advancements in bike technology. These disciplines continue to evolve, with some growing in popularity as others decline.

It is recognised that the region needs to understand trends to:

- Avoid over capitalising on investments on those areas which will not be beneficial in the future;
- Focus attention on gaps to build the Regional reputation and compete internationally as a destination of priority for all mountain biking activities.

2.1 World Class Events

The region first came to prominence as a world class MTB Destination in the mid-1990s through UCI World-Cup events, which was the first time for this standard of racing in the Southern Hemisphere. Never before had the World's best raced in such a setting of rainforest, tropical heat and dust. In an era before digital photography and when email and internet were very new forms of communication, the publicity this event generated was significant for the Region, however it was difficult to capitalize on.

20 years down the track, the UCI has returned to this Region, with a new breed of riders and spectators, and locals are enthusiastic to show off their corner of the world again. Social media has become an integral part of riding and provides a forum to build on the momentum created by national and international events.

The priority for World Class events is biased towards the northern hemisphere. Other areas of Australia and the Southern Hemisphere have aspirations to have World Class events. Cairns is a popular destination but it may not be appropriate to rely on these UCI events on a regular basis. However, the increasing popularity of MTB riding also corresponds with an increase the number and types of events available to riders, such as Enduros, Gravity Enduros, 24hr events, MTB orienteering etc.

The Region is well placed to target other significant MTB events and these events, in turn, lead to increased local events and growth of the sport in the region, and strengthen clubs in the Region. Strength in regional clubs includes membership, bike skills and also volunteers in event management and marshalling.

Recommendations

1. Continue to maintain and develop world-class trails to facilitate world-class events.
2. Build capacity within the MTB community to:
 - a. Identify skills required (undertake a gap analysis) in trail maintenance and hosting events.
 - b. Coordinate the delivery of training across the region – creating efficiencies in delivery, networking opportunities.
 - c. Building a program of accreditation to enable club members to support the Region’s local and international events.
 - d. Encourage volunteerism and membership to clubs.

2.2 Trends in Mountain Biking Disciplines

World Trail sees the mountain biking market as being composed of ‘Non-Core’ and ‘Core’ mountain bikers:

Non-core mountain bikers are people that ride mountain bikes, but do not identify themselves as being ‘mountain bikers’ and who may have little or no knowledge of the various disciplines within the sport. Non-core mountain bikers include:

- complete novices
- road bikers that occasionally ride MTB
- families seeking safe enjoyable places to ride away from cars
- school groups (often guided by tour operators)
- off-road bike tourers and more.

While they may not typify the average mountain biker, these non-core mountain bikers are important users of trails, as they represent a large potential market of future core mountain bikers. As non-core mountain bikers discover the benefits of mountain biking and become more experienced and fitter, they may potentially move into the core mountain biker group.

Core mountain bikers on the other hand, readily identify themselves as mountain bikers, and are likely to differentiate themselves according to their preferred mountain biking disciplines. Key attributes of core mountain bikers are:

- high levels of expenditure on gear and equipment
- high amount of time spent mountain bike riding
- high willingness to travel to go mountain biking
- high likelihood of participating in competitive events.

Within the group of core mountain bikers, it is possible to further differentiate riders based on their riding preferences, or preferred mountain biking disciplines.

In 2015, the competitive disciplines that appear to be showing the most growth in popularity are:

- **Gravity enduro** – This type of riding is characterised by long, drawn out, moderately steep (5-15% grades on average) descents, with some short uphill along the way. Due to the nature of it, this type of riding can appeal to both experienced riders and inexperienced riders. The ideal type of bike for this type of riding is a dual suspension mountain bike with 100-150mm of suspension travel front and rear. Most of the large bike companies are offering bikes to suit this purpose – the modern day, go anywhere, do anything, all-purpose mountain bike. These bikes are generally being marketed under the monikers of ‘trail’ and ‘enduro’ and are amongst the most popular types of mountain bikes being sold today. Typical prices for such bikes range from \$3,000 up to \$12,000. This type of riding has a competitive aspect (gravity enduro racing), but many enthusiasts have little aspiration to race;
- **Marathon cross-country** – This discipline has been growing in popularity for some time, with many successful races in Australia including 8, 12 and 24 hour and 100km formats. These events have a festival atmosphere to them, often requiring participants to camp overnight. Some of Australia’s largest and most long running mountain biking events fall into this category. These events draw large numbers of participants (many compete in teams rather than as individuals) and often attract large numbers of supporters and spectators and can be very profitable.

The evolution of the various mountain biking disciplines goes hand in hand with the evolution of mountain bikes and the evolution of mountain biking trails. These three processes are inter-dependent, each influencing, and influenced by, each other – along with the changing nature of social media, including go-pros and drones. So, with constantly improving technology, mountain bikes are getting lighter, while still retaining characteristics that were only available on heavy downhill bikes five years ago, influencing the rise of gravity enduro. Conversely, trail builders are building trails to cater to both cross-country riders and gravity enduro riders simultaneously, contributing to the growth in sales of those types of bikes.

A trail term garnering a lot of usage currently is ‘**flow trail**’. A flow trail is typically a descending trail, with moderate gradients (5-15%), bermed corners, rollers and other features, such that it requires minimal braking and pedalling...it simply ‘flows’ through the landscape, and gives riders a feeling of effortless fluidity. Flow trails best fit under the gravity enduro discipline of riding, but, of course have cross-over elements with cross-country and downhill.

- **Gravity enduro and ‘flow trails’** Gravity enduro and ‘flow trails’ will remain key attractions in mountain biking, because they are more accessible and more enjoyable than other disciplines – they don’t have the extreme risks associated with downhill or the extreme fitness and exertion of cross-country. They tap into the very heart of what makes mountain biking fun.

Furthermore, destinations are embracing this type of riding because it provides an opportunity to provide a crucial commercial service in shuttling riders to the top of the trail – most gravity enduro type riding is point-to-point, from high altitude to low altitude,

requiring a vehicle pick up/drop off – these trails provide opportunities to film rides with go-pro or drones; which in turn provides free promotion of the trail.

- **Cross-country**, while not the latest trend in mountain biking, still remains the discipline with which the majority of mountain bikers identify. This is also the discipline in which most people enter the sport of mountain biking – most novices will start out riding a conventional cross-country mountain bike over fairly flat and gentle terrain. As they gain experience and skill, they are likely to discover the various different disciplines and lean towards one or the other.

Finally, there is a growing demand for **pump track and dirt jump riding**. This is often accommodated by building small pump tracks, dirt jumps or skills trails at the trailheads of traditional cross-country trail networks. These tracks are often used by cross-country riders as they warm-up or cool-down or wait for friends to arrive. However, given that dirt jump and pump track type facilities are strongly used by young riders, the best location for such facilities is in urban areas with good access, public transport and high visibility. These facilities can be thought of as ‘urban bike parks’ and are the bicycle equivalent of skate parks.

Trails that are rated as ‘Easy’ and ‘More Difficult’ generally attract the most usage from riders – core and non-core. However trails rated as ‘Very Difficult’ and ‘Extremely Difficult’ contribute to the Region’s status and profile. These trails help to attract major events, give ‘street cred’ and provide promotional imagery. **Section 3.5** contains more discussion on trail signage and the IMBA trail difficulty rating system.

Findings

Non-core mountain bikers (novices, road bike riders, school groups and tour groups etc.) represent a large potential market of future core mountain bikers, as they discover the benefits of mountain biking and become more experienced and fitter, they may potentially move into the core mountain biker group.

Core mountain bikers differentiate themselves according to their preferred mountain biking disciplines and this group are likely to:

- spend on gear and equipment
- spend time spent mountain bike riding
- travel to go mountain biking and compete.

Gravity enduro and ‘flow trails’ tap into the heart of what makes mountain biking fun and will remain key attractions in mountain biking. The trails are accessible, enjoyable and don’t have the extreme risks associated with downhill or require the fitness and exertion of cross-country.

Cross-country still remains the discipline with which the majority of mountain bikers identify. This is also the discipline in which most people enter the sport.

Pump track and dirt jump riding are often found at the trailheads of traditional cross-country trail networks and used by riders to warm-up, cool-down or wait for friends to arrive. However, given that dirt jump and pump track type facilities are strongly used by young riders, the best location for such facilities is in urban areas with good access, public

transport and high visibility. These facilities can be thought of as 'urban bike parks' and are the bicycle equivalent of skate parks.

Recommendations

1. Pump track and dirt jump riding facilities:
 - a. audit and upgrade current facilities and standards before establishing new facilities.
 - b. prioritise in urban areas with good access and high visibility. These facilities can be thought of as 'urban bike parks'.
2. Maintain and enhance the existing trails rated as Very Difficult and Extremely Difficult that contribute to the Region's status and profile and that attract major events.

3.0 Securing our global position

In order to build on the success of what has essentially been a grass roots evolution of Mountain Biking in the TNQ Region, Regional leadership is needed. With appropriate resourcing the existing Taskforce and Framework will be well placed to manage this leadership and strategy implementation role.

2.1 Existing Mountain Biking Facilities

The region has a remarkable diversity of MTB experiences within 1 hour to 3 hours drive of Cairns. This section lists the main formal mountain biking facilities in the TNQ Region. Note that this list may not be a complete and true representation of all mountain biking opportunities in the Region. Especially, it should be noted that it does not include 'informal' trails, where informal trails are those created by trail users without land manager approval.

This again reinforces the need for this Strategy to provide clear, region-wide priorities for the development of a coordinated network of trails and experiences across the Region including mapping the trails.

The International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) has two programs that are similar to a 'quality control certification system' for mountain biking trails. These are the IMBA Epics and IMBA Ride Centres.

IMBA Epics are those rides that "*celebrate true backcountry riding experiences that are technically and physically challenging, more than 80 percent singletrack and at least 20 miles (32km) in length*". Currently there is only one single trail in Australia that has been given IMBA Epic status, which is the 'Australian Alps Epic' located near Mt Buller in Victoria. For more information, refer to www.imba.com/model-trails/epics.

The IMBA Ride Centre program is a tiered recognition system for mountain biking destinations. It has wide range of criteria against which destinations are evaluated, resulting in a score and classification as either gold, silver or bronze. Criteria include trail experience, services, community involvement, tourism and marketing and other considerations. Currently the only IMBA Ride Centre in Australia is Mt. Buller, classified as a Bronze level Ride Centre. For more information, refer to www.imba.com/ride-centers/evaluation-overview.

Both of these programs could offer excellent marketing opportunities for mountain biking trails in the Cairns region. The current different trail networks (Atherton, Smithfield, Davies Creek etc.) would need to be carefully assessed against the criteria for these two programs to determine whether there is a realistic chance of success of obtaining either recognition.

A preliminary assessment of the Atherton trail network suggests that it could be classified as a Silver level ride centre. With an additional downhill track, the Gold standard could be achieved, making this the only gold level ride centre in Australia.

It is also recognised that not every trail needs IMBA accreditation. The outdoor experience, regardless of grade, length, signage, services, tenure etc., is also important, and it is not practical or feasible to assume that all trails will achieve IMBA accreditation.



Figure 1. Regional MTB Centres – Extract from Ride Cairns Map

Additional detail on each of the local clubs and MTB locations is contained in **Appendix 3**.

Table 1. Existing MTB Facilities in TNQ

Name / Location	Styles of MTB Catered For	Difficulty Levels	Duration of Riding	Support Facilities / Culture
Atherton Forest Mountain Bike Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mostly cross-country Some gravity¹ options Pump track Skills track Wilderness riding² Rail trail 	Easy to Very Difficult	4-5 hours of purpose built trails	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trailhead Car parking Trail signage Toilets, Water, Showers Bike wash Nearby retail services Club – Tableland Cycle Sports Tour operators Major event capability
Cairns bike parks (approx. 15-18 existing low level facilities)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pump track riding Dirt jumping 	Easy to More Difficult	Not applicable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generally low level of facilities – some defined parking, some fencing and minimal signage. No club support. Culture varies from site to site;

Name / Location	Styles of MTB Catered For	Difficulty Levels	Duration of Riding	Support Facilities / Culture
around Cairns)				some are well used and loved.
Davies Creek	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-country 	Easy to More Difficult	2 hours of purpose built trails	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trailhead • Car parking • Trail signage • Local club – Mareeba Mountain Goats • Tour operators
Cardwell	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-country • Wilderness riding² • No purpose built trails? 	Easy to More Difficult	Up to 40km of trails?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Car parking • Trail head • No signage • annual events • major event capability
Kuranda Downhill Track	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gravity¹ 	Very Difficult	Approx. 15 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trail signage • Dedicated drop-off point • Nearby retail services • Tour operators
Mission Beach (Musgravia Track)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-country 	Easy	1 hour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trailhead • Car parking • Trail signage
Mission Beach MTB Park Sth Mission Beach Road	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single track & pump track & skills park 		Duration varies depending on ride style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Car Parking • Trail Head • annual events • Club - Cassowary Coast Multisport Club
Misty Mountains ³ (Gorrell Track and Elizabeth Grant Falls) Cardwell Range, Maple Ck Road, K-Tree Road, Bora Ground Road, Maalan Road)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-country • Wilderness riding² 	Difficult to More Difficult	3-4 hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Car Parks • Trail Heads • Signage • Annual events • Major event capability • www.npsr.qld.gov.au/parks/misty-mountains/about.html
Port Douglas (Bump Track)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-country descent • Wilderness riding 	Easy to More Difficult	1 hours riding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None • New Club • Tour operators
Smithfield	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-country • Gravity • Pump track riding 	Easy to Extremely Difficult	3 hours of purpose built trails	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Car park • Trailhead • Trail signage • Nearby retail services • Strong club – Cairns MTB Club • Major event capability • Tour operators

Notes:

1. Gravity is used as a collective term for all descending mountain bike disciplines. These include disciplines such as downhill, freeride and gravity enduro that focus on speed, technical difficulty and descending;
2. The term 'wilderness riding' is used to describe long distance, backcountry riding on existing tracks and roads. Defining characteristics of this type of riding are the usage of existing infrastructure (whether old

logging tracks, bridle trails, four-wheel drive routes or other), an ethos of adventure and self-sustainability and a sense of remoteness.

3. Includes old Forestry trail used for MTB not specifically dedicated MTB trail.

There are also many, many mountain biking trails in the region that have not been formalised, and are therefore not included in the table above. These informal trails are often found close to built up, urban areas, especially where areas of natural bushland back onto developed areas and there is good vertical elevation. Cairns especially has an abundance of such areas and many informal trails. In fact, there are probably 6-12 informal downhill trails in the Cairns Region that are heavily used by local riders and offer world-class downhill mountain biking experiences, albeit for advanced riders.

Findings

The International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) has two programs that are similar to a 'quality control certification system' for mountain biking trails. These are the IMBA Epics and IMBA Ride Centres.

IMBA Epics are those rides that *"celebrate true backcountry riding experiences that are technically and physically challenging, more than 80 percent singletrack and at least 20 miles (32km) in length"*. Currently there is only one single trail in Australia that has been given IMBA Epic status, which is the 'Australian Alps Epic' located near Mt Buller in Victoria. For more information, refer to www.imba.com/model-trails/epics.

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Recommendation

1. Investigate IMBA accreditation requirements and audit the existing trails to understand what is required for accreditation, the likelihood of trails achieving accreditation and the benefits and time and cost.
2. Support the development of an additional descending trail at Atherton, to the length and standards needed to achieve Gold ride centre status.

3.2 Events and Volunteer Management

The region is recognised nationally and internationally as offering world class MTB venues, terrain, and events. It is a reflection of the strength of the MTB community.

The Crocodile Trophy is the biggest mountain bike stage race in the world for individual participants. The Crocodile Trophy is a staged event commencing in Cairns and taking in the regional areas, with stopovers in the Tablelands, the Cooktown region and Daintree / Port Douglas.

Smithfield is a host venue for the UCI Mountain Biking World Cup (2014 and 2016) and the UCI Mountain Biking World Championships (2017), and National Enduro Event (2015). The park has 60km of trails including technical climbs and descents for advanced riders.

Currently, TTNQ, Tourism Queensland, Cycling Australia, James Cook University and Cairns Regional Council are currently working on leveraging events – with international focus on the upcoming 2016 round of the UCI Mountain Biking World Cup and the 2017 UCI Mountain Biking World Championships, there are opportunities for:

- Promotion of the region and the variety of rides
- Partnering with other clubs, to allow visiting riders to train on different tracks as the Smithfield trail network is closed to non-competitors around the high profile events. There is also an opportunity to promote other trails to local riders during this time.
- Educating Council, Local Business and State Government about the catalytic effect of MTB Tourism for the economy and community health and how they can leverage off the international success of MTB.

Building capacity for volunteering in the MTB sector has been identified as a key contributor to the success of future major events. Volunteers are critical to the management of any major event, particularly for specialist positions such as judging, scoring and officiating. MTBA currently accredits volunteers for these roles however most of this accreditation takes place outside of the region. Supporting the development of local MTB clubs and competitions, as well as assisting MTBA to deliver accreditation in the region will directly influence the capacity of Far North Queensland to host further major MTB events. It is acknowledged that Cairns MTB club has run skills instructors courses and runs skills courses for women and junior riders.

MTBA research has shown that, of the people that ride mountain bikes, approximately 80% do not belong to a club. Local experience indicates that in any MTB club, only 10% of the members are actively involved in keeping the club running, providing opportunities to others, undertaking trail care etc. Many of the actions identified in this Strategy rely on volunteers for delivery (grant writing, running races, trail maintenance, social media). The success of the Strategy will be strengthened by ensuring there are enough people to do the work, and also to enable succession over time.

Recommendations

1. Develop a Social Media and Technology Plan that strategically considers the trends and change in use of social media, apps, go-pros and drones, and provides recommendations for:
 - a. the appropriate, contemporary social media technology to be adopted for the region e.g. use of agreed #hashtags, and the pros and cons of Apps versus Ad-on Technology, and
 - b. consistent information and consistent format of information to be found on regional MTB club websites such as the use of locally relevant icons for trail status - open, closed, under maintenance.
 - c. The development of a central, reliable location to source up to date information on events; trail status; clubs; training and development opportunities etc.
2. Document existing trails with a consistent format for maps, directions, trail descriptions etc.
3. Build capacity within the MTB community to:
 - a. Identify skills required (undertake a gap analysis) in trail maintenance and organising events.
 - b. Coordinate the delivery of training across the region – creating efficiencies in delivery, networking opportunities.
 - c. Building a program of accreditation to enable club members to support the Region’s local and international events.
 - d. Encourage volunteerism and membership to clubs. Note: Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing have a series of online volunteer resources for clubs.
4. Provide clear, region-wide priorities for the development of a coordinated network of trails and experiences across the region to avoid inefficiencies, inconsistencies and unnecessary expense, and maximising economic and social benefits to the region. The top priorities are identified in section 5 of the report and the subsequent actions are to:
 - a. Map the existing trails consistently across the region
 - b. Confirm any gaps in trail infrastructure
 - c. Confirm the priority trails and likely issues such as tenure and funding.
 - d. Confirm priority trail infrastructure.
5. Build on the success of the UCI Mountain Biking events. There are opportunities for:
 - a. Promotion of the region and the variety of rides.
 - b. Partnering with other clubs, to allow visiting riders to train on different tracks as the Smithfield Track is closed around the World Event. There is also an opportunity to promote other trails to local riders during this time.
 - c. Educating Council, Local Business and State Government about the catalytic effect of MTB Tourism for the economy and community health and how they can leverage off the international success of MTB.
 - d. Ride Cairns branding and promotion in the lead up to world championships.

3.3 Websites, Maps and Apps

3.3.1 Websites

Information on the internet remains the most popular method of researching rides – where to ride, trail descriptions and videos provide more information to refine ride choices.

The information available online about rides in the Region remains sparse and quickly outdated. Information on the Smithfield Trails is a benchmark for the Region. Information on Kuranda, Davies Creek and Atherton trails is readily available however there is a shortage of information on formal and informal rides in Port Douglas, Daintree, Cook, Cassowary and Hinchinbrook.

There is a lot of information that is ‘known’ to those within the MTB community, however it is incredibly difficult to access for those who are not local MTB riders. Ideally there would be a central and reliable location for trail information, however this is recognised as likely to be just as easily managed at the local club level, and may simply benefit from an agreed set of criteria for what information should be made available e.g.

- status of trails
- upcoming events
- local trail maps, descriptions etc.
- code of conduct
- links to other local MTB clubs etc.

Consistency of mapping and trail descriptions is an obvious shortfall in the Region’s brand at this time. The on-line information and trail head maps do not show many of the trails e.g. Red Ringer, Vines and Nationals at Smithfield are not signed.

There is an opportunity to strengthen real time (online) communication e.g. via Trail Alerts - like Park Alerts. Within such a vast region, while one place may have trail closures due to rain, there is likely to be another trail open within an hours drive. Note: the Ride Cairns app can do this and NPSR are a partner in this technology.

3.3.2 Maps

Maps are an essential tool when actually on a ride. Well-designed maps with trail names and ratings need to be readily available and are invaluable for enhancing the experience. Successful international destinations such as Whistler, Canada have waterproof maps available for purchase and free paper maps are available throughout the trails in special waterproof containers or from pop-up Information Centres.

Maps may provide suggestions for which trails to ride for different skill levels, possibly even allowing for skill progression over time. Printed maps can be picked up as a souvenir e.g. trail scarf / hanky or paper maps. These maps can make a small profit that goes back into clubs or trail development.

3.3.3 Apps

The evolution of cycling apps such as “Strava” (2009) and “Map My Ride” (2007) has changed the way people ride. These GPS cycling apps log ride information including speed, time, elevation, distance and the route travelled. Riders can then view their statistics and compete against themselves for improved times, and also against all others who have ridden the course – at any time. The leaders in the Apps market such as Strava and more recently Pink Bike (Trail Fork) are well advanced and funded in developing technology. It is possible to buy rider data from Strava to establish where people are riding; where they come from etc., however this only captures data from those riders that upload ride data to Strava.

This virtual competition can turn every ride into a time trial—sometimes at the loss of cycling etiquette, however on the whole, these apps are recognised as creating a rigorously measured, database-matched, global community with the sudden ability to turn the most banal ride into a race. These apps are contributing to the motivation of cyclists – new and old to get out and explore their local area, and also helps riders find good rides while visiting new places.

These apps and others such as “My Virtual Mission” also allow riders to set an ultimate goal and then work towards it – such as number of kilometres in a month.

Additionally, there is a growing use of *Maintenance Apps* such as “Fill that Hole” that are used to communicate hazards, locations of potholes etc.; and *Information Apps* such as “St John Ambulance First Aid for Cyclists” that addresses first aid treatment for a range of common cycling-related injuries.

The Region already has a strong Social Media / Apps base. The RideCairns branding was established in 2014 with funding from State and Local Government. The Ride Cairns App provides data on who is using trails (measures trail usage and determines postcodes, countries of origin etc.) – as long as they are using the App. There is a recognised opportunity to use the App or similar Apps to collect data relating to where people come from; age; gender; other trails ridden; etc. This data will assist in marketing and product development. However technology is only just advancing now to a point where this data can be collected and privacy considerations are also acknowledged.

The RideCairns App has the potential to provide up to date trail conditions as anyone who is on the App can message an administrator while they are riding if they come across a tree down on a trail for example. Riders using the App can see other friends on the course which helps with the social nature of riding and the safety aspect.

At the same time the introduction of wearable technology - the ‘Fit-bit’ and ‘Apple Watch’ is already moving people away from smart phones and the associated use of Apps. The connectivity to Apps will remain important, however compatibility with GPS is now the most important consideration for MTB riders – location, distance and elevation are factors that drive people’s choice of trail.

Findings

The promotion of specific local #hashtags such as #RideCairns is an easy, low cost way to promote the Region.

Technology is changing quickly and developing social media Ad-ons that can connect into existing widely used Apps such as Strava and Map My Ride.

Wearable technology e.g. 'Fit-bit' and 'Apple Watch', is already moving people away from smart phones. Connectivity to Apps will remain important, however compatibility with GPS is now the most important consideration for MTB riders, who are often outside of 'mobile range' – location, distance and elevation drive people's choice of trail.

Many regional trails are out of mobile range maps need to be provided for off line and through GPS software –location, distance and elevation drive choice of trails.

This technology quickly changes the nature of social media feeds. Trails and parks with opportunities to film the feats of individuals will become increasingly popular.

The information available online about rides in the Region remains sparse and quickly outdated. Information on the Smithfield Trails is a benchmark for the Region. There is a lot of information that is 'known' to those within the MTB community, however it is incredibly difficult to access for those who are not local MTB riders.

Consistency of mapping and trail descriptions is an obvious shortfall in the Region's brand at this time.

The introduction of wearable technology is already moving people away from smart phones and the associated use of Apps. Compatibility with GPS is now the most important consideration for MTB riders, who are often outside of 'mobile range' and want to measure – location, distance and elevation drive people's choice of trail.

The region should have internationally accredited trails and the first step is to understand what is required for accreditation, the likelihood of trails achieving accreditation and the benefits and time and cost.

There is an opportunity to strengthen real time (online) communication e.g. via Trail Alerts - like Park Alerts. With such a vast region while one place may have trail closures there is likely to be another trail open within a hours drive. Note: the Ride Cairns app can do this and NPSR are a partner in this technology.

Recommendations

1. Commission research into the value of MTB to the TNQ economy, including:
 - quantify the cost-benefit of the investment in bicycle infrastructure. There may be significant bang for buck in terms of \$/metre of trail and maintenance.
 - refine ways to gather data on numbers of users, hours on trails, gear used.
 - demographics of trail users – age, gender, locals / visitors, nationality, time in region, trails visited etc.
 - types of social media used, digital equipment used, apps used.
 - Future MTB trends.
2. Continue to develop and support and market the Ride Cairns App which measures trail usage and determines postcodes, countries of origin etc.

3. Develop a Social Media and Technology Plan that strategically considers the trends and change in use of social media, apps, go-pros and drones, and provides recommendations for:
 - a. the appropriate, contemporary social media technology to be adopted for the region e.g. use of agreed #hashtags, and the pros and cons of Apps versus Ad-on Technology.
 - b. consistent information and consistent format of information to be found on Ride Cairns and Regional MTB club websites such as the use of locally relevant icons for trail status - open, closed, under maintenance.
 - c. The development of a central, reliable location to source up to date information on events; trail status; clubs; training and development opportunities etc.
 - d. Include user guidelines designed for Clubs and businesses to maximise use of apps and social media sharing.
4. Document existing trails with a consistent format for – maps, directions, trail descriptions etc.
5. Investigate IMBA accreditation requirements and audit the existing trails to understand what is required for accreditation, the likelihood of trails achieving accreditation and the benefits and time and cost.
6. Investigate the adoption of the IMBA trail building principles to establish a consistent product across the region that:
 - Provides opportunities for use by less experienced riders
 - Creates safe and convenient drop off and pick up areas and trail head amenities.
 - IMBA accredited trails –more research needs to be done on the value of accreditation vs costs and will it bring more events /visitors to the region.
7. Implement a Regional Trail Alert system that is live and accessible from a range of social media sources. Strengthen real time (online) communication (e.g. via Trail Alerts - like Park Alerts):

Note: the Ride Cairns app can do this and NPSR are a partner in this technology.

3.4 Social Media, Go-pro & Drones

The MTB sector has been identified as an early-adopter culture relying on mobile and online data to upload footage and download information and reviews. This indicates a need to engage specifically with effective online marketing techniques, and provides a number of strategic opportunities to engage with viral marketing and social networking.

Go-pro digital cameras emerged in 2006 along with the first smart phones in 2007 and the emergence of affordable drone cameras (2014) has enabled riders to not only document their rides, but also to push for greater feats. This technology has quickly changed the nature of social media feeds which now include ‘epic downhill runs and flow rides’ and an array of

incredible 'stunt and trick rides'. Trails and parks with opportunities to film the feats of individuals will become increasingly popular.

Significantly Go-pro and Drones are also linked to GPS. Photos and videos are now easily uploaded to websites, Facebook (2004), Twitter (2006) and Instagram (2010). The rise of social media also enables individuals to post updates about their rides and allows Clubs and agencies to communicate with riders.

When used well social media including #hashtags can:

- drive social traffic, allowing riders and interested parties to talk about their favourite ride or event (*pre or post event).
- create an engaging virtual screen experience through use of photos and videos of rides (usually downhill).
- provide real time information on maintenance or safety issues for riders, clubs and agencies.
- reward people for loyalty and earn loyalty - through Twitter or Facebook users can initiate a live chat. Invitations for fans to special events, warm-ups etc.
- enhanced fan access to athletes before, during and after events. Improved connectivity between locals and visitors; riders and fans; or between competitors and clubs.
- connectivity results in loyalty which results in free promotion of events and trails, and potentially results in more competitors, more event ticket sales and more merchandise (marketing and branding) sales.

3.5 Signage & Trail Difficulty Rating

Signage is a critical aspect of trail development in terms of both wayfinding and communicating trail information. A comprehensive signage strategy needs to be developed in line with current tourism signage strategies. This may be supplemented by an online engagement strategies such the Ride Cairns App which can be further promoted through signage at Trail Heads to encourage people to download the App. The App may also include emergency access points for injuries etc. A mobile phone application can be downloaded to give real time information about tracks in the local area, possible closures or new trails opening. In particular, the following aspects of signage for mountain bike trails are crucial to a safe and enjoyable visitor experience:

3.5.1 Wayfinding & Trail signage

Road signage is key to the success of MTB trails as part of the regional tourism product, as many potential mountain bike visitors will access the mountain bike trails using vehicles.

Signage at trailheads must provide information such as trail length, trail difficulty, trail gradients, maps, safety information, code of conduct and any 'ride at your own risk' information for insurance purposes. Out on the trail network, waymarker signage is critical to ensure trail users can easily and safely navigate throughout the trail network. Interpretive information about any aspects of interest, such as indigenous and European heritage, flora and fauna of note or geological formations, can also help to improve the trail experience and educate trail users about local issues.






3.5.2 Consistency across region

A network of world class MTB trails requires a thorough and consistently uniform suite of signage across all land tenures. At the moment, there is different signage on National Parks managed land, Department of Natural Resources land and Council land. While there is no international standard for mountain bike trail signage, the use of the IMBA Trail Difficulty Rating System (**Table 3.5.3**) is recommended for rating trail difficulty, which is then communicated to users via signage using symbols similar to the ski signage (i.e. green circle, blue square, black diamond etc.). Signage should be uniformly branded regardless of tenure across for the TNQ Region to maximise the user experience.

3.5.3 Naming trails

Names give the trail an identity and are invaluable in marketing the trail network. Names should be fun and reflect local stories or culture or personalities. Recently, many trail networks have developed symbols (also called pictograms) that are used in conjunction with the name on the trail signage. These symbols should be simple designs, with highly contrasting colours, easy to read from a distance while moving at speed. The symbol should obviously complement the name. These symbols also help in marketing and promoting the trail network, especially where a given trail may become a favourite of the local mountain bike community.

Table 2. IMBA Trail Difficulty Rating System

	Easiest (white circle)	Easy (green circle)	More Difficult (blue square)	Very Difficult (black diamond)	Extremely Difficult (double black diamond)
Symbol					
Trail Width	183cm or more	91cm or more	61cm or more	30cm or more	15cm or more
Tread Surface	Hardened or surfaced	Firm and stable	Mostly stable with some variability	Widely variable	Widely variable and unpredictable
Average Trail Gradient	5% or less	5% or less	10% or less	15% or less	20% or more
Maximum Trail Gradient	Max 10%	Max 15%	Max 15% or greater	Max 15% or greater	Max 15% or greater
Natural Obstacles and Technical Trail Features (TTF)	None	Unavoidable obstacles 5cm tall or less. Avoidable obstacles may be present. Unavoidable bridges 91cm or wider.	Unavoidable obstacles 20cm tall or less. Avoidable obstacles may be present. Unavoidable bridges 61cm or wider. TTF's 61cm high or less, width of deck is greater than half the height.	Unavoidable obstacles 38cm tall or less. Avoidable obstacles may be present. May include loose rocks Unavoidable bridges 61cm or wider. TTF's 122cm high or less, width of deck is less than half the height. Short sections may exceed criteria.	Unavoidable obstacles 38cm tall or greater. Avoidable obstacles may be present. May include loose rocks Unavoidable bridges 61cm or narrower. TTF's 122cm high or greater, width of deck is unpredictable. Many sections may exceed criteria.

Findings

Trail signage plays a critical role in risk management and visitor experience. Trail signage has two main components:

1. Trailhead signage, which is generally large format, with maps, detailed descriptions of the trails, safety information, code of conduct etc.;
2. Directional signage, which is generally fairly minimal, often consisting of simple bollards with arrows and trail names to indicate trail directions.

Unfortunately, trail signage is often poorly executed by land managers, resulting in unnecessary risk exposure and poor experiences for trail users. After all, the best trails in the world are no good if people can't find them. Uniform signage across the TNQ Region will enhance the user experience.

The implementation of a consistent signage standard across all the trails in the TNQ region (regardless of tenure) could have a big impact on reducing risk issues and improving visitor experiences. This could include the use of a region wide logo, consistency in the frequency and placement of signs and the type and number of symbols used.

Recommendations

1. Investigate the adoption of the IMBA Trail difficulty Rating System is recommended for rating trail difficulty.
2. Ensure signage is uniformly branded regardless of tenure across for the TNQ Region to maximise the user experience. This includes the road network.
3. Name trails to give the trail an identity and build marketability into the trail network. Names should be fun and reflect local stories or culture or personalities.

3.6 Commerce and trails / Bike friendly, Cyclists welcome

With increasing numbers of mountain bike tourists come increased commercial opportunities. These opportunities are most often in traditional hospitality businesses – accommodation, food and beverage – as tourists, regardless of their visitation purpose, ultimately need food and beds.

The opportunities to develop services allied to MTB is largely driven by entrepreneurial individuals and not necessarily the role of the strategy. However stakeholders and agencies should be aware of the importance of this value-add, to the overall MTB strategy and the objective should be to find ways to support these businesses.

Particular commercial opportunities that have proved successful elsewhere include:

- Bike shops – especially near trailheads. They may not sell a large number of bikes, but accessories, consumables, repairs etc. are critical for visiting mountain bikers
- Shuttle services – in areas with good vertical elevation and gravity trails, riders will happily pay for comfortable and reliable transport back to the top of the hill
- Coffee – bike riders of all disciplines love a good coffee shop. The closer to the trailhead, the better
- Bike hire – most core mountain bikers are inclined to bring their own bikes, but there is still a good market segment of non-core riders looking to hire good quality mountain bikes. This may be particularly true in TNQ, where there is a strong backpacker tourism scene
- Guided tours and mountain bike tuition – Again, this opportunity doesn't have huge appeal for core mountain bikers, but it can be an excellent way for non-core mountain bikers to try the sport. Also a great way for large group activities, including school groups
- Accommodation – mountain bikers cover a wide spectrum of incomes, and have wide ranging expectations for accommodation. Anyone that can cater towards cycling somehow in their accommodation offering will have a competitive advantage. This can be as simple as providing secure bike lock up facilities
- There appears to be a growing overlap with boutique food and wine tourism segments. Breweries and wineries are popular with mountain bikers.

Local Government & Chamber of Commerce leadership is required to grow local support and understanding of the flow on benefits of MTB for small business and communities.

MTB riders travel across the region for different trail experiences. These riders look for Bike Friendly accommodation, cafes / coffee shops, places for bike service and repair. The Cyclist Welcome initiative of TiMBa & DSDIP is a good example of a program to educate small business owners and the community on welcoming cyclists and how to be bike-friendly.

Being bike friendly also provides an economic development opportunity near MTB facilities and requires Council to be flexible with planning requirements to allow 'pop-up' businesses near MTB trails to provide a service to riders. <http://tablelandstrails.com/contact/cycle-welcome/>

Findings

With increasing numbers of mountain bike tourists come increased commercial opportunities. These opportunities are most often in traditional hospitality businesses – accommodation and refreshments. The opportunities to develop services allied to MTB is largely driven by entrepreneurial individuals and not necessarily the role of the strategy. However stakeholders and agencies should be aware of the importance of this value-add, to the overall MTB strategy and the objective should be to find ways to support these businesses.

Recommendations

Continue to support and advocate bike friendly communities:

- a. Work with Local Government & Chamber of Commerce and tourism organisations to understand the economic and health benefits of MTB for small business and communities.
- b. Support the autonomy of local MTB Clubs for development and maintenance of their local trails.
- c. Clubs work collaboratively with TTNQ as the lead agent in the branding and promotion of trails including through the Ride Cairns Brand.

3.7 Tenure, Access & Liability

The existing and likely future MTB trail network across the TNQ Region is held in a mix of tenures including National Parks, State forests, Forest Reserves, Crown Land (Unallocated State Land), local government owned parks, roads, leasehold and freehold.

Land managers of parts of the MTB trail network include NPRSR, NRM, Council (roads, parks), Clubs (trails), Electricity companies, Sunwater, Queensland Rail, private landowners (including cane headlands on farms) and James Cook University. It is of significant note that the world class Smithfield Park Development Plan does not include the trailhead. Parking and facilities at the head of trail are with JCU. A priority should be to secure a land use agreement with JCU to ensure the complete MTB Facility at Smithfield is secured for future users.

Having multiple owners of the MTB trail network has implications for consistently applying the recommendations of the Regional Mountain Bike Strategy, as different agencies have different standards for signage, access, commerce, and liability and different resources. There is a high degree of interagency / cross ownership understanding of the issues and the benefits of a Regional Strategy. Co-operation across the region is likely to contribute to the success of the Strategy.

NPRSR & NRM have made good headway in relation to public liability while each local government has, or is working towards a public liability strategy. MTB is a family friendly healthy activity. MTB trail users do sustain injuries however the proportion of injuries to users is quite low. There are benefits to having a Regionally agreed and understood approach to liability and this may be through:

- For Local Government, the Local Government Association of Queensland would be the appropriate organisation to undertake this work, as it is a state wide matter
- For local clubs Mountain Bike Australia (MTBA) membership includes tailored 24/7 personal accident & public liability insurance.
- Consistent message about liability and where to get insurance, similar to National Parks camping.

Finally, the role of Wet Tropics Management Authority (WTMA) is noted. The WTMA is responsible for planning and regulating the management of activities in the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area (WTWHA). The 'Wet Tropics' is not a form of land tenure, but a conservation status. The WTMA is not a land owner, however it is an agency that provides advice on management of the World Heritage area.

Findings

Multiple owners of the MTB trail network has implications for consistently applying the recommendations of the Regional Mountain Bike Strategy, as different agencies have different standards for signage, access, commerce, and liability and different resources. There is a high degree of interagency / cross ownership understanding of the issues and the benefits of a Regional Strategy, the co-operation across the region is likely to contribute to the success of the Strategy.

MTB is a family friendly healthy activity. MTB trail users do sustain injuries however the proportion of injuries to users is quite low. There are benefits to having a Regionally agreed and understood approach to liability

Recommendations

1. Secure a land use agreement with JCU to ensure that access to the complete MTB Facility at Smithfield is secured for future users as the Smithfield Park Development Plan does not include the *head of Trail*. Parking and facilities at the head of trail are not secured in any agreement with JCU.
2. Develop a Regionally agreed and understood approach to liability for infrastructure and riders through:
 - For Local Government, the Local Government Association of Queensland would be the appropriate organisation to undertake this work, as it is a state wide matter
 - For local clubs Mountain Bike Australia (MTBA) membership (riders).
 - Consistent message about liability and where to get insurance, similar to National Parks camping.

4.0 Regional Diversity – Regional Strength

The region has excellent tourism infrastructure, access and capacity all year round and is primed to attract serious new levels of visitation. A strong reputation for world class trails, an established suite of events, a keen and enthusiastic grass roots network and a tourism industry seeking to diversify are the key drivers for the development of MTB tourism in Tropical North Queensland. TTNQ

Mountain biking is increasing in popularity around the world. The sport is growing and it seems that every town has some trails that can be used for riding. It is very important to have a point of difference. For the Tropical North Queensland Region the strength is the quality of the diversity within the Region i.e.:

- the scenery and a tropical environment
- variety and distance of trails (short and long) and altitude
- ease of access to trails
- a variety of local, national and international competitions
- an enthusiastic, competent and professional grass roots MTB network
- towns with excellent tourism accommodation and infrastructure
- the existing and potential of the trails located within or near the main towns including Cardwell, Cairns, Atherton, Port Douglas and Mission Beach in the region linked to each other with extended trails between them to maximise the recreation and tourism opportunities for both locals and visitors and share the economic benefits across the region.

This Strategy emphasises the opportunities to establish regional priorities to strengthen the overall riding experience and prioritise development of a coordinated network of trails and experience across the region.

While riders will remember the technical challenges, the scenery can be an important part of the experience – the photo opportunity with a waterfall, a view, large tree, cassowary etc. that puts the trail on the map (or social media). The majority of trails in the region are in State Forest, National Park or World Heritage Areas, and the trails are an opportunity to showcase not only the environmental values of the area, but to demonstrate best practice trail development and management in a high rainfall tropical environment. The trails are also a testament to the partnerships between government agencies and local MTB clubs which are run by volunteers.

Clubs are essential to the success of MTB in the Region. Clubs run a range of events, establish and maintain trails, provide volunteers for local, interclub and international events. Clubs are the interface of the users with Council and State agencies.

It is also acknowledged that Townsville has a strong MTB community and it is just 2 hours drive from Cardwell, Mission Beach and access to the Misty Mountain Trails. The strength of MTB in TNQ, is boosted by the proximity of Townsville and there is value of intra-state market for the TNQ region.

4.1 Measuring use & Value to economy

Measuring who uses the trails and for what activities is key to the ongoing management and sustainability of the trail network.

Funding for further development and allocation of resources from organisations such as TTNQ, Parks and Wildlife and Health promotion agencies depends on understanding how many people access the trails and for what purpose. A number of suggestions have been made for consideration:

- Counters on tracks (a reliable and proven means of data collection).
- A compulsory online registration powered by a larger, more established application such as Map my run or Strava.
- Tracking device that links to mobile phones as used in shopping complexes to map patterns of movement.
- Compulsory registration at trail heads using log books.

It is recognised that compulsory registration is expensive and tough to police and difficult when utilising different trails / park areas. This reinforces the opportunities to use technology to record data about track users.

The use of technology to collect demographic data assists in better understanding the nature of the users. At the same time the technology allows users engage with social media, also presenting better viral marketing opportunities. TTNQ has expressed an interest in working to develop this further, subject to funding.

The value of MTB to the economy has been identified as a significant piece of work that should be commissioned. Understanding who the users are and where they come from will assist in this regard. There is also the need to have the cost-benefit identified for the region. It is understood, (but not quantified) that investment in bicycle infrastructure has a significant bang for buck e.g. in terms of \$/metre of trail and maintenance.

In understanding the value of MTB to the economy there is also a need to explore options for a 'user pays' system to assist the clubs and land managers who contribute resources and time to the management of the trails. Central to this is the tension between MTB tour operators who use the resource and the clubs or land managers who maintain the tracks. This system may be linked with the use measurement system.

4.2 Trail management & Safety

The Region should have IMBA accredited trails and the first step is to understand what is required for accreditation, the likelihood of trails achieving accreditation and the benefits and time and cost.

Maintenance of trails is a key consideration for the protection of the initial investment, but also for the ongoing safety of the trail users. Once trails are opened up for the public usage, there is a crucial responsibility to ensure that the trail is maintained in a standard similar to when it was first completed. If it is not, there is a risk that the trail may no longer meet its

signposted and publicised trail difficulty rating. For example, the IMBA Trail Difficulty Rating System stipulates that an Easy trail can have unavoidable obstacles up to 50mm high. If a tree falls across the trail that is higher than 50mm, in effect, this means the trail no longer meets its advertised 'Easy' rating. For this reason, prompt identification of issues, followed by prompt rectification, is critical for the ongoing management of trails.

Mountain bike trails can be designed to accommodate other users, however they are most successful when designed solely for MTB use.

Generally speaking, most singletrack mountain bike trails are designed for single direction travel only. This is a key risk management technique to minimise the likelihood of head-on collisions between mountain bikers. It also creates a better user experience too; as trails feel less crowded when all riders travel in the same direction.

Trails should be open year round. During the wet season some trails are likely to be water affected in some way, and may need to be closed to protect the trail. The Ride Cairns App can be used by trail managers to inform riders of hazards and changes to conditions. TTNQ and Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing research has identified that it is a sport that people will do while it is wet.

There is an opportunity to strengthen the communicated (online) in real-time (e.g. via Trail Alerts - like Park Alerts). With such a vast region, while one place may have trail closures due to wet weather, there is likely to be another trail open within an hours drive.

4.3 Marketing

We have an amazing variety of trails and we are uniquely positioned as the only developed tropical mountain bike destination in the world. TTNQ

4.3.1 Market segments

As discussed in **Section 2.2** there are distinct market segments in MTB in terms of levels of expertise, downhill or cross country and types of riders, such as families on holiday who are interested in going for a ride, road bike riders who crossover to MTB or locals who ride weekly or people who travel specifically to ride iconic or challenging tracks.

Non-core mountain bikers are important users of trails, as they represent a large potential market of future core mountain bikers. As non-core mountain bikers discover the benefits of mountain biking and become more experienced and fitter, they may potentially move into the core mountain biker group.

Core mountain bikers, readily identify themselves as mountain bikers, and are likely to differentiate themselves according to their preferred mountain biking disciplines. Key attributes of core mountain bikers are:

- high levels of expenditure on gear and equipment
- high amount of time spent mountain bike riding

- high willingness to travel to go mountain biking
- high likelihood of participating in competitive events.

Event tourism is another segment within. Conducting research to better understand the markets within and travelling to Cairns and matching these with MTB trail product already existing in the region is the first step to developing the MTB Strategy. Shortfalls and mismatches in these will identify opportunities to further develop products or markets.

4.3.2 Ride Cairns



The Region already has a strong Social Media / Apps base. The RideCairns branding was established in 2014 with funding from State and Local Government. The brand was part of the initiative to capitalise on the momentum in the region surrounding the UCI Mountain Biking World Cup in 2014 / 2016 and the [Mountain Bike Australia - MTBA](#) Australian National Enduro Championships October 2015.

RideCairns includes the:

- RideCairns website <http://www.ridecairns.com>
- RideCairns Facebook page;
- RideCairns Instagram page #ridecairns
- RideCairns Live mobile app

RideCairns has the support of the local MTB Clubs and National Parks as an effective means of distributing information on trail closures, maintenance etc. The RideCairns brand is part of the Region's coordinated strategy for Regional MTB. The regional branding and marketing will benefit from the deliberate focus on driving social traffic through these forums.

It is acknowledged that the Regional MTB Clubs have links with the Ride Cairns Brand. The content of these pages plays a significant role in the dissemination of information about the Region to locals and visitors.

Recommendations

- 1 Continue to utilise and improve the online Regional brand and marketing for the region. Through the Regional Task Force ensure that information is up to date and evolves with available technology.
- 2 Local MTB Clubs maintain autonomy for development and promotion of their local trails and TTNQ is a lead agent in the Region for marketing of trails including through the Ride Cairns Brand.
- 3 Document existing trails with a consistent format for – maps, directions, trail descriptions etc.
- 4 Continue to build relationships with local media, national and international publications. Get stories out regularly – local articles as well as the online magazines,

you-tube etc. Look for good news stories and promote.

- 5 Conduct research to better understand the markets within and travelling to the Region including Event tourism and identify what trails they use and what product they would like to use (preferences and satisfaction).
- 6 Use of Ride Cairns as part of the communication tool for the Regional Coordinating body.
- 7 Build on the good working relationship that TTNQ has developed with all major MTB publications and websites.
 - a. TTNQ and MTB Clubs to work together to provide destination information and content for TTNQ to distribute through national and international digital media.
 - b. TTNQ to develop media content guidelines – In the way of copy and images - i.e. what makes a good content.

5.0 Recommendations – The Vision for the Future

The vision for the future of mountain biking in Far North Queensland presents a number of ideas and concepts, some new and some old. These ideas have been categorized into three groups:

1. Governance and Standards
2. Marketing and promotion
3. Hero trails
4. Supporting trails

It is acknowledged that the ideas and concepts presented in this document have a ‘Cairns-centric’ flavour. While this strategy does consider the entire TNQ region in this assessment, it is also realistic about what should be the early priorities and what will be successful (where success is generally characterized as the ability to attract trail users, and in some cases, encourage spending) and is feasible and therefore likely to be funded.

In this regard, the following points are significant:

1. Autonomy across the region is supported. It is acknowledged that priorities change depending on what level you are working within. e.g. Local MTB Club or Regional Strategy – therefore a suite of actions and recommendations is appropriate. The development of a Hero Trail should not be at the detriment of ongoing development of the broader trail network across the Region.
2. There are two main drivers that can be used to obtain funding for the development of mountain bike trails:
 - The need to meet local recreational demand, and improve outcomes for health and fitness, youth participation and outdoor recreation;
 - The need to attract tourism visitation and associated economic stimuli.

Typically, it is the latter of these two drivers that has been most successful at attracting significant funding for trail development in Australia. With this in mind, the majority of the projects proposed herein are those that we believe are feasible as tourism projects. As such, most lie within 1-3 hours drive of Cairns, which is the main service centre for tourism in TNQ.

The overall Recommendation of this Strategy is to:

Establish a Regional Co-ordinating body for MTB clubs and Land Management Agencies. There may be a lead agency or there may be an overarching management group which will follow through with this Strategy’s recommendations.

5.1 Governance and Standards

These recommendations are non-trail based and are important to the overall notion of developing clear, region-wide priorities for the development of a coordinated network of trails and experience across the region. The recommendations in this section are likely to be most relevant to Government and the Regional Co-ordinating body as well as individual MTB Clubs.

Objective	Section of this Report	Recommendation – Governance and Standards
Regional Coordination	Section 5 Supported by entire TNQ MTB Strategy	Establish a Regional Co-ordinating body for MTB user groups and Land Management Agencies. There may be a lead agency or there may be an overarching management group which will follow through with this Strategy's recommendations.
Build on success	Section 2.1	Continue to maintain and develop world-class trails to facilitate world-class events.
	Section 2.1 Section 3.2	Build capacity within the MTB community to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Identify skills required (undertake a gap analysis) in trail maintenance and organising events. b. Coordinate the delivery of training across the region – creating efficiencies in delivery, networking opportunities. c. Building a program of accreditation to enable club members to support the Region's local and international events. d. Encourage volunteerism and membership to clubs. Note: Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing have a series of online volunteer resources for clubs.
	Section 2.2 Section 2.4 Section 3.2	Document existing trails with a consistent format for – maps, directions, trail descriptions etc.
	Section 2.5	Pump track and dirt jump riding facilities: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. audit and upgrade current facilities and standards before establishing new facilities. b. prioritise in urban areas with good access and high visibility. These facilities can be thought of as 'urban bike parks'.
	Section 2.5	Maintain and enhance the existing trails rated as Very Difficult and Extremely Difficult that contribute to the Region's status and profile and that attract major events.
Consistency and accreditation	Section 3.1	Investigate IMBA accreditation requirements and audit the existing trails to understand what is required for accreditation, the likelihood of trails achieving accreditation and the benefits and time and cost.
	Section 3.1	Support the development of an additional descending trail at Atherton, to the length and standards needed to achieve Gold ride centre status.

Objective	Section of this Report	Recommendation – Governance and Standards
	Section 3.3	<p>Investigate the adoption of the IMBA trail building principles to establish a consistent product across the region that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Provides opportunities for use by less experienced riders b. Creates safe and convenient drop off and pick up areas and trail head amenities. c. IMBA accredited trails –more research needs to be done on the value of accreditation vs costs and will it bring more events /visitors to the region.
	Section 3.2	<p>Provide clear, region-wide priorities for the development of a coordinated network of trails and experiences across the region to avoid inefficiencies, inconsistencies and unnecessary expense, and maximising economic and social benefits to the region. The top priorities are identified in this report and the subsequent actions are to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Map the existing trails consistently across the region b. Confirm any gaps in trail infrastructure c. Confirm the priority trails and likely issues such as tenure and funding. d. Confirm priority trail infrastructure.
	Section 3.2	<p>Build on the success of the UCI Mountain Biking events. There are opportunities for:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Promotion of the region and the variety of rides. b. Partnering with other clubs, to allow visiting riders to train on different tracks as the Smithfield Track is closed around the World Event. There is also an opportunity to promote other trails to local riders during this time. c. Educating Council, Local Business and State Government about the catalytic effect of MTB Tourism for the economy and community health and how they can leverage off the international success of MTB. d. Ride Cairns branding and promotion in the lead up to world championships.
	Section 3.5	<p>Investigate the adoption of the IMBA Trail difficulty Rating System is recommended for rating trail difficulty.</p>
Tenure	Section 3.7	<p>Secure a land use agreement with JCU to ensure that access to the complete MTB Facility at Smithfield is secured for future users as the Smithfield Park Development Plan does not include the <i>head of Trail</i>. Parking and facilities at the head of trail are not secured in any agreement with JCU.</p>
	Section 3.7	<p>Work with Sunwater to develop a Regionally agreed and understood approach to secure reliable access for riders.</p>
Approach to Liability	Section 3.7	<p>Develop a Regionally agreed and understood approach to liability for infrastructure and riders:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. For Local Government, the Local Government Association of Queensland would be the appropriate organisation to undertake this work, as it is a state wide matter b. For local clubs Mountain Bike Australia (MTBA) membership (riders). c. A consistent message about liability and where to get insurance, similar to National Parks camping.

Objective	Section of this Report	Recommendation – Governance and Standards
Communication	Section 4.3	Use of Ride Cairns as part of the communication tool for the Regional Coordinating body.
	Section 3.3	<p>Develop a Social Media and Technology Plan that strategically considers the trends and change in use of social media, apps, go-pros and drones, and provides recommendations for:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> the appropriate, contemporary social media technology to be adopted for the region e.g. use of agreed #hashtags, and the pros and cons of Apps versus Ad-on Technology. consistent information and consistent format of information to be found on Ride Cairns and Regional MTB club websites such as the use of locally relevant icons for trail status - open, closed, under maintenance. Include user guidelines designed for Clubs and businesses to maximise use of apps and social media sharing.

5.2 Marketing and Promotion

These recommendations are non-trail based and are important to the overall notion of developing and promoting TNQ for mountain bike tourism. The recommendations in this section are likely to be most relevant to TTNQ, individual MTB Clubs and the Regional Coordinating body.

Objective	Section of this Report	Recommendations – Marketing and Promotion
Social Media and Technology	Section 3.2	<p>Develop a Social Media and Technology Plan that strategically considers the trends and change in use of social media, apps, go-pros and drones, and provides recommendations for:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> the appropriate, contemporary social media technology to be adopted for the region e.g. use of agreed #hashtags, and the pros and cons of Apps versus Ad-on Technology, and consistent information and consistent format of information to be found on regional MTB club websites such as the use of locally relevant icons for trail status - open, closed, under maintenance. The development of a central, reliable location to source up to date information on events; trail status; clubs; training and development opportunities etc. Include user guidelines designed for Clubs and businesses to maximise use of apps and social media sharing.
Research the market and trends	Section 3.3 Section 4.3	<p>Commission research into the value of MTB to the TNQ economy, including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> quantify the cost-benefit of the investment in bicycle infrastructure, there may be significant bang for buck in terms of \$/metre of trail and maintenance refine ways to gather data on numbers of users, hours on trails, gear used

Objective	Section of this Report	Recommendations – Marketing and Promotion
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> c. demographics of trail users – age, gender, locals / visitors, nationality, time in region, trails visited etc. d. types of social media used, digital equipment used, apps used e. Future MTB trends. f. Conduct research to better understand the markets within and travelling to the Region including Event tourism and identify what trails they use and what product they would like to use (preferences and satisfaction).
	Section 4.3	<p>Build on the good working relationship that TTNQ has developed with all major MTB publications and websites.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. TTNQ and MTB Clubs to work together to provide destination information and content for TTNQ to distribute through national and international digital media. b. TTNQ to develop media content guidelines – In the way of copy and images - i.e. what makes a good content. c. Continue to build relationships with local media, national and international publications. Get stories out regularly – local articles as well as the online magazines, you-tube etc. Look for good news stories and promote.
Safety	Section 3.3	<p>Implement a Regional Trail Alert system that is live and accessible from a range of social media sources. Strengthen real time (online) communication (e.g. via Trail Alerts - like Park Alerts):</p> <p>Note: the Ride Cairns app can do this and NPSR are a partner in this technology.</p>
Signage	Section 3.5	<p>Ensure signage is uniformly branded regardless of tenure across for the TNQ Region to maximise the user experience. This includes the road network.</p>
	Section 3.5	<p>Name trails to give the trail an identity and build marketability into the trail network. Names should be fun and reflect local stories or culture or personalities.</p>
Support and Advocate	Section 3.6	<p>Continue to support and advocate bike friendly communities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Work with Local Government & Chamber of Commerce and tourism organisations to understand the economic and health benefits of MTB for small business and communities. b. Support the autonomy of local MTB Clubs for development and maintenance of their local trails. c. Clubs work collaboratively with TTNQ as the lead agent in the branding and promotion of trails including through the Ride Cairns Brand.

5.3 Hero trails

Hero trails are those trails that have the potential to attract a significant level of new mountain bike tourism. In order to achieve this, hero trails need to offer outstanding

mountain bike experiences, outstanding scenic beauty and outstanding ‘off-bike’ support services.

A key finding of the consultation undertaken for this *TNQ Regional Mountain Bike Strategy* was the need to develop a Hero MTB Track Experience. It was envisaged that this would be located between Cairns and Port Douglas, and reasonably accessible to most levels of MTB rider, with opportunities for further challenge for the more advanced rider. Critical to the success of the trail would be a key identifiable and tropically unique ‘money shot’ image location that capture vistas of natural features such as coastlines, rocky outcrops, the coral sea, double island or palm trees.

Trail	Details – Hero Trails
Wangetti Trail	<p>The Wangetti Trail is a proposed new shared-use trail, running parallel to the coast, all the way from Palm Cove to Port Douglas. Key aspects are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A shared-use trail for walkers and mountain bikers; • Mostly purpose-built singletrack; • Dual directional; • Approximately 60km long; • 1 – 3 days duration (one way); • Spectacular views of the coast and the Great Barrier Reef; • Showcasing a diverse range of terrain and vegetation; • Ranges in elevation from 0m to 300m; • Hop on / hop off; • Optional trail experiences (side routes to key features); • Range of accommodation options; • Interpretive opportunities. <p>See Appendix 2 ‘<i>Wangetti Trail Proposal</i>’ for more information.</p>
Kuranda Downhill	<p>The Kuranda Downhill played an important role in the growth of mountain biking in Australia and helped to develop some of the country’s finest ever competitive racers. It remains popular today and offers an opportunity for serious, world-class descending within minutes from residential areas and with top-to-bottom sealed road access.</p> <p>There is an opportunity to improve the track, through better drainage, implementation of IMBA trail building principles, the inclusion of A and B lines (also creating an opportunity for usage by less experienced riders) and creating safer and more convenient drop off and pick up areas.</p>
Smithfield Mountain Bike Park	<p>Despite its eminent place in Australian mountain biking, Smithfield Mountain Bike Park has many limitations – there is actually not much purpose built mountain bike trail, especially for beginners, and it occupies a very compact space.</p> <p>There is an opportunity to expand the trail network, creating linkages to nearby towns and roads. A brief report was prepared by World Trail in 2014, exploring opportunities for expansion of the core network and potential linkages to Black Mountain Rd, Kuranda, the Tablelands and beyond. This opportunity would help to build on Smithfield’s current reputation, capitalize on the coming World Cup round in 2016 and the World Championships in 2017, and generally push Smithfield further onto the world stage for mountain bike tourism (see Appendix 3 for links to ‘<i>Smithfield Mountain Bike Trail Expansions and Supplementary Links Report</i>’ and ‘<i>Addendum – Additional Details Regarding Supplementary Links</i>’).</p>
Atherton	Continue to expand, refine and improve the trail network to continue to attract new visitation and

Trail	Details – Hero Trails
Forest Mountain Bike Park	<p>maximize the return on investment.</p> <p>Consider adding signposted wilderness trails from Atherton to Herberton, Chillagoe and beyond. See also the recommendation ‘Tablelands Linkages – Hubs and Links’.</p> <p>Look at better promotion and events to better capitalize on the investments already made.</p> <p>Initiate discussions with Department of Defence regarding the future of the firing range at Atherton, with the aim of securing it for future mountain biking expansions/opportunities.</p>
Tablelands Linkages – Hubs and Links	<p>With some excellent mountain bike facilities (Atherton Forest Mountain Bike Park, Davies Creek) already in operation, there is an opportunity to create formalized linkages between them, to promote longer stays and spread the benefits of cycle tourism more broadly across the Tablelands. In particular, the goal would be to link the trail networks of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Misty Mountain Trails which links Ravenshoe, Milla Milla, Mena Creek, Palmerston Highway, Tully Gorge • Atherton, Davies Creek and Smithfield to nearby towns and eventually to each other e.g. Gordonvale, Innisfail and Port Douglas could also be considered. <p>Such linkages could include some purpose-built new trail, but would more likely be comprised of existing roads, four-wheel drive tracks, management vehicle trails and rail trails, requiring only signposting and promotion. The rail trail from Atherton to Mareeba will help achieve this goal, but could be expanded further from Atherton to Herberton.</p> <p>This concept has long been promoted by the local cycling club (Tableland Cycle Sports) and the Tablelands Futures Corporation and is often referred to as the ‘Hubs and Links Model’, where the townships (and local trail networks) are the hubs, and the routes between them, the links (see ‘Appendix 3 TFC TIMBA Business Development Pack’ and ‘<i>Bike Trails on the Atherton Tableland</i>’ for more information).</p>
Develop a number of wilderness / adventure / mountain bike touring rides including overnight experiences	<p>There appears to be growing demand for authentic, wilderness, backcountry, overnight adventure rides, that encourage self-sufficiency and are generally tackled by social groups. These rides can be supported by tour operators or undertaken independently.</p> <p>Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Atherton to Gordonvale or Babinda, via Lake Tinaroo, Lake Eacham, Gadgarra, Goldsborough Gold Fields; • Daintree to Cooktown, via Lion’s Den, Roaring Meg Falls, CREB Track etc. • Misty Mountain Trails. • Goldfield Trail – 16km return following an historic path through the rainforest of Wooroonooran National Park, should go through to Babinda • The elevation and vehicle access to areas behind Cardwell offer good opportunities for Gravity Enuro trails, with good access to Townsville MTB Clubs as well as the TNQ Region. <p>This concept certainly has some cross-over with the recommendation above, but has more emphasis on wilderness, remoteness and adventure, whereas the Tablelands Linkages are generally located in more accessible locations and would be designed to maximize usage of established accommodation in the local towns.</p>
Develop a best practice, world class	<p>Cairns currently has approximately 15-18 urban bike park facilities scattered around the municipality. Most are small and in fairly poor condition, requiring ongoing annual maintenance.</p>

Trail	Details – Hero Trails
urban bike park in Cairns	<p>There is an opportunity to replace some of these bike parks with a best practice example urban bike park in a highly visible and easily accessible locations. This type of facility would mirror the success of the huge skate park on the Cairns Esplanade, which is a magnet for tourists and locals. Such a facility should cater for a range of abilities, from beginner to advanced, should feature a range of different track styles, including pump tracks, jump tracks and skills trails and should be appealing for non-riders and spectators.</p> <p>There are opportunities for similar urban bike parks on the Tablelands – Yungaburra / Lake Eacham Trail and at Mission Beach and Port Douglas.</p>
Develop mountain bike trails at Copperlode Dam / Lake Morris	<p>Copperlode Dam or Lake Morris is the principal water supply for Cairns and is located just west of the city. It is surrounded by national park and possesses areas of outstanding natural beauty. In 2014, a report was commissioned to look at recreational opportunities around the lake. One of the ideas presented and thought to be feasible was the development of mountain bike trails at the lake, including the potential for a cross-country trail all the way around the lake.</p> <p>See '<i>Lake Morris Recreation Management Plan</i>' in Appendix 3 for more information.</p>
Formalize existing popular downhill trails near Cairns	<p>As stated previously, Cairns has many world-class descents, featuring serious elevation. While not all are suitable for formalization due to safety or environmental reasons, some should be considered for formalization.</p> <p>An example of this is the popular mountain biking route from Speewah to Caravonica via Glacier Rock and McDonalds Track. Many local mountain biking enthusiasts are currently using this trail, often making a two-day trip of it and camping overnight half way down.</p>
Yarrabah trail development	<p>Yarrabah is an Aboriginal community approximately 50km to the southeast of Cairns. Located on the coast, but with tall mountains (up to 700m above sea level) and intact native forests. It has been proposed recently as a new location for the development of mountain bike trails.</p> <p>The trail network would be designed to maximize the benefits for the local indigenous community and would include a strong emphasis on cultural tourism and interpretation. Trail lengths, styles and difficulty ratings would be designed to suit the terrain available.</p> <p>With the expansion of Cairns towards the south, and recent discussions about possible expansions across Trinity Inlet, trail development in Yarrabah could also help to provide recreational opportunities for residents in the south of Cairns.</p>

5.4 Supporting Trails

A principle recommendation of this strategy is to provide clear, Region-wide priorities for the development of a coordinated network of trails and experiences across the Region to avoid inefficiencies, inconsistencies and unnecessary expense, and maximising economic and social benefits to the Region. The top priorities are:

- a. map the existing trails consistently across the Region
- b. confirm any gaps in trail infrastructure
- c. confirm the Priority trails and likely issues such as tenure and funding.
- d. confirm priority trail infrastructure.

The supporting trails are important to the overall mountain bike product offering in the region, but are not considered hero trails. These trails are important at a local community level, offering facilities for local residents to exercise and recreate. The priority trails are identified as:

Trail	Recommendations – Supporting Trails
New purpose built trail network on south side of Cairns	<p>Cairns is expanding rapidly southwards. Suburbs such as Edmonton and Gordonvale are undergoing huge residential expansions currently.</p> <p>There is an opportunity to consider the development of a new trail network to service this growing population base and encourage healthy lifestyles. There are already a range of informal trails in the area which could be considered for formalization, plus there is also an opportunity to discuss the integration of recreational trails into the fabric of large scale residential developments currently underway.</p>
Mission Beach	<p>Continue to expand and refine existing trail network in and around Mission Beach. Look at formalizing some of the informal trails currently being used.</p>
Cardwell	<p>Continue to expand and refine existing trails in and around Cardwell. Look at formalizing some of the informal trails currently being used. In particular, there could be an opportunity to consider developing gravity enduro trails to attract usage from Townsville based mountain bikers.</p>
Port Douglas	<p>Continue to expand and refine existing trails in and around Port Douglas. Look at formalizing some of the informal trails currently being used.</p>
Expansion of urban cycleways	<p>Cairns already has a good network of urban cycling paths, but these could certainly be further expanded. While these are not considered mountain biking trails per se, they do help to provide off-road cycling access for locals and visitors to mountain bike trails and other attractions.</p> <p>A new cycleway has been proposed to link Cairns to Palm Cove. If constructed, this cycleway would provide off-road cycling access from Cairns to the start of the proposed Wangetti Trail (see Priority 1 in ‘Hero Trails’) at Palm Cove.</p> <p>Also, with the modernization of sugar cane farming, many cane tram lines are being retired from usage. These could potentially be repurposed as walking and cycling paths, providing better off road cycling connectivity.</p>
Island Rides	<p>Tourism goes hand in hand with the Great Barrier Reef and the Reef is a major drawcard for visitors to Cairns and the surrounding region.</p> <p>Subject to further investigation, it may be possible to capitalize on the reef by the development of 1-2 iconic mountain bike trails on some of the offshore islands. Only some islands would be suitable – those with enough size and elevation to make for a reasonable experience. Examples include Fitzroy Island, Dunk Island and Hinchinbrook Island which have existing tourism infrastructure (including accommodation and ferry services), are reasonably large and have good elevation. This opportunity would be a value-add for local tourism businesses and may encourage increased overnight stays.</p>

Trail	Recommendations – Supporting Trails
Davies Creek to Cairns	Davies Creek between Kuranda and Mareeba is becoming a popular trail network. The concept of a trail linking Davies Creek with Cairns has been suggested and would certainly be worth further investigation. It is likely that there are already existing informal trails in the local area that could suffice for this purpose. This recommendation has some cross-over with the recommendation 'Formalize existing popular downhill trails near Cairns' in 'Hero Trails', and could be investigated together.
Mareeba to Rocky Creek Rail Trail clean-up	Mareeba to Rocky Creek Rail Trail clean-up – In particular the section has two blocked bridges forcing riders to ride through bush onto the highway. The bridges could be made safe with minor work.
Kuranda to Mareeba to the Rail Trail	Kuranda to Mareeba to the Rail Trail.
Cooktown to Laura Rail-trail	The railway is closed and the lines removed. It is possible to follow the Laura Heritage Trail from the centre of town. The trail provides a good feel for the gold rush years. Relics from the era still remain. Distances – to be confirmed – 100km approx. (Cooktown and the Palmer Road, 48 km)

Appendices

Appendix 1. TNQ MTB Locations and Clubs

1 Cairns MTB Club

Cairns is most well known in the mountain biking scene for the Smithfield trail network which offers international standard cross-country and downhill trails, that are also popular with locals. In fact, Smithfield has a variety of trails suitable for all skill levels. The Smithfield trails are regularly maintained by the local club (Cairns Mountain Bike Club) and has a dedicated carpark and trailhead with directional signage installed on the trails.

Apart from Smithfield, Cairns offers a range of other mountain biking experiences that would suit all levels of riders including families and complement a stay in or around the town. The challenge is to identify the key rides to promote and invest in the infrastructure.

Competitive mountain biking in Cairns is generally focussed on the trails at Smithfield. The most recent high profile event at Smithfield was a round of the UCI Mountain Biking World Cup in 2014 (including downhill, cross-country and other disciplines), with another round to be held there in 2016. There is a national Enduro event being held at Smithfield in 2015. The UCI Mountain Biking World Championships will be held there in 2017. On a smaller scale, there are numerous club and regional level competitions held at Smithfield throughout the year.

2 Douglas Integrated Riders & Trail-builders (DIRT)

The Douglas area offers the opportunity to ride a hero trail such as the Bump Track and then take time to explore the trails the locals ride. There are many tracks offering variety in length, skill challenges and scenery including:

- Historical trails including indigenous walking trails and pioneering logging trails, through national parks
- Cane fields and trails through private property
- Beach tracks and camping reserves
- Skills track
- CREB Track / Bicentennial Trail

Local trails have minimal trailheads if any. A good trail head with a map and advice about length, degree of difficulty and elevation and the need for self-sufficiency on the trail is required.

The area offers a variety of half-day rides that suit all levels of riders and complement a stay in or around Port Douglas. The variety of trails is a strength for this area however the challenge is to identify the key rides to promote and invest in the infrastructure, including bridges and culverts. An official off road trail from Port Douglas to Mossman Gorge is a potential trail that can be achieved through existing cane headlands and trails.

The Douglas region includes Bloomfield Falls, Cape Tribulation and the upper Daintree – all destinations that can be driven to or ridden to from Port Douglas, and destinations that have accommodation available for riders.

RRR The iconic Triple RRR (Rural, Rainforest & Reef) cross country has been running since 1991 and is the longest running ‘point to point’ cross-country MTB race in Australia. The race has been run as a club event, Queensland Cross Country Championships and a round of the Australian National Series. The event is currently run by UWM and attracts over 700 local, national and international entrants having the choice of racing the 35 km Classic RRR and a 70km Endurance RRR.

3 Mareeba Mountain Goats Inc

Mareeba Mountain Goats established the 25km trail Davies Creek trail network in conjunction with Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service. The club runs social rides, junior and senior events.

The development of skills parks and club members is a priority for the club – including the training of members to run events and building a program of accreditation to enable club members to support the region’s local and international events.

Davies Creek trails are close to Mareeba, but are reasonably central to Atherton, Port Douglas, and Cairns and the area is often dry, when other parts of the region are wet. When the Smithfield trails are closed for major events, these trails are a good training venue and alternative ride for locals.

The important connecting trails between Cairns and Speewah via the Copperlode Dam trails and also other trails including Mt Lewis, are opportunities for the Region.

4 Tableland Cycle Sports Inc & Atherton Forest Mountain Bike Park

Tableland Cycle Sports Inc was formed in 2005 and has significantly contributed to the development of the Atherton Forest Mountain Bike Park, the jewel in the crown of mountain biking on the Atherton Tablelands, offering the largest and most comprehensive mountain biking trail network in the Council area. The Atherton Forest Mountain Bike Park has a 55km network bike trails catering for riders of all ability levels, from novice mountain bikers to the most experienced riders. The trail network allows for recreational riding while also complying with national and international guidelines for competitive course design. It has a dedicated carpark and trailhead just off the main street in Atherton, with a pump track and skills trail. All trails are well signposted and maintained, with the easier trails generally located on the lower slopes of the park. With an open road running through the park, it also offers vehicle-assisted shuttle access to gravity trails.

A new Rail Trail is being implemented across the Tablelands, with the first stage from Atherton to Tolga complete. The extension of the trail:

- a. North to Mareeba should be a priority, and requires cooperation of the Tablelands Regional Council and the Mareeba Shire Council and State Government.
- b. South to Herberton is recognised by riders as an opportunity to create a linkage to Herberton that provides riders with a dedicated off-road path, that doesn’t require high levels of fitness or technical ability. Rail trails generally cater to ‘non-core mountain

bikers' rather than 'core mountain bikers' (see discussion previously about maintain biker market segments), however, they can be important for maintain bikers if they provide off-road access routes to mountain bike singletracks.

5 Cassowary Coast

The Cassowary Coast Multisport Club (<http://ccmclub.org.au>) was founded in 2013 and is the point of contact for the Mission Beach, Cardwell, Tully and Misty Mountains areas.

The club now runs a number of regional events including the annual OnaMission Multisport Adventure Race with 'active' locals of all ages and abilities, including full families.

The MTB Park at South Mission Beach was established by the Club which is continually working on establishing more off-road trails for mountain bikers and connecting with existing regional mountain bike initiatives.

The World Heritage tropical rainforest in the Cassowary Coast region presents world-class trails, rivers, waterfalls and experiences. CCMC is actively playing a part in establishing a network of both active locals and local mountain bike trails in our region and plans to develop further infrastructure.

The area offers a variety of mountain bike trails with the added bonus of swimming holes and waterfalls. From easy beach rides the whole family can enjoy steep hill climbs for the more experienced, there is a trail for all skill levels. Popular Rides include:

- Cardwell scenic drive - This scenic 26km drive from Cardwell is a favourite with local mountain bike riders who can select from mostly gravelled roads and 4WD trails catering for any ability from 10km to 50km in distance and visit some great swimming holes on the way. The surface goes from smooth to rough gravelled forestry road and the maze of 4WD tracks includes multiple elevations. There is a carpark at the five ways on Forestry Drive.
- Musgravea Trail – 12km return, follows an old forestry road. This mainly flat trail is suitable for all weather access and requires a medium level of fitness.
- Mission Beach – 21km return. The whole family can enjoy this ride along the wide open space of beautiful Mission Beach. The ride has views to Dunk Island. At low tide the ride is on hard packed sand with two small creek crossings.
- Misty Mountains – K-Tree, Maple Creek and Sutties Gap Roads (For more information on the Misty Mountains trail network, visit: <http://www.nprsr.qld.gov.au/parks/misty-mountains/about.html>)

6 Hinchinbrook

Hinchinbrook does not have a formal MTB club or formal network of trails, however the shire is surrounded by National Parks and the historical logging trails provide links north as far as Herberton / Ravenshoe, and south into the established networks of the Townsville area. There are opportunities to establish scenic rides to Wallaman Falls and Jourama Falls from Ingham.

7 Cook

MTB is a recognised part of the Cook Shire economic and tourism strategy. There are 3 forms of extreme MTB experiences in the Cape / Cooktown:

1. The Bicentennial Trail starts in Cooktown with Section 1 Cooktown to Gunnawarra being partially suited to cycling.

Section 1 Cooktown to Gunnawarra (Guidebook extract for Cyclists)

Cooktown to Ayton. Follow the road from Ayton to Mossman via Cape Tribulation. Leave Mossman along the Captain Cook Highway, turning right onto the Mossman-Mt Molloy Road (Rex Range Highway) and use this route up the range picking up the Trail again at the top of the range. Follow the National Trail into Mt Molloy. The next part of the National Trail is quite unsuitable for bike riding, so follow the road from Mt Molloy to Mareeba then west to Mutchilba. Follow the Trail now to Innot Hot Springs then follow the Kennedy Highway west to Mt Garnet and turn south on the Gunnawarra Road regaining the Trail just north of Gunnawarra.

2. The Crocodile Trophy has had stages show casing MTB in the Cape, and finishing in Cooktown – racing up ‘grassy hill’.

The concern for Cook Shire is that there are currently no official mountain bike trails. There are informal singletracks that are not reliably maintained and the off-road experiences within the Shire are four-wheel drive tracks.

8 Yarrabah

Currently not a formal MTB destination, there is a good network of trails and local knowledge. There is potential to develop MTB tourism combined with indigenous tourism at a unique location that could be accessed by road or potentially by boat.

Appendix 2. Wangetti Trail Proposal

Appendix 3. Referenced sites, document and strategies

Cairns City Council (2002) Cairns Regional Mountain Biking – Interim Management Strategy

Cairns Regional Council (2015) *Lake Morris Recreation Management Plan*’ **HYPERLINK TO BE PROVIDED**

IMBA (2004) *Trail Solutions: IMBA's Guide to Building Sweet Singletrack*

IMBA (2007) *Managing Mountain Biking: IMBA's Guide to Providing Great Riding*

IMBA Rules of the Trail – www.imba.com/about/rules-trail

IMBA Ride Centre program – www.imba.com/ride-centers/evaluation-overview

QPWS Group activity permits – operational policy

QPWS Public liability insurance, indemnity, release and discharge requirements –operational policy

QPWS Commercial activities – General requirements - operational policy

QPWS Commercial activities in QPWS-managed areas – information sheet, checklist and procedural guide

NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service September 2011 Sustainable Mountain Biking Strategy

QLD Department Transport and Main Roads Queensland Cycle Strategy 2011–2021
<http://www.tmr.qld.gov.au/Travel-and-transport/Cycling/Strategy.aspx>

QLD Outdoor Recreation Federation (QORF) December 2014 Developing Mountain Biking in Queensland: Regional Solutions; Section 3.7 3.7 TNQ Regional Trail Centre

Qld Parks and Wildlife Service Mountain biking in QPWS managed areas

Qld Department of Communities, Sport and Recreation Services November 2011 Queensland Adventure Activity Standards: Mountain biking

Ride Cairns www.ridecairns.com

Tablelands integrated Mountain Bike Alliance (TiMBa) (August 2012) Creating a world class mountain bike destination www.tablelandtrails.com

TiMBa; TRC; Tablelands Futures Corporation Mountain Biking Atherton Tablelands
<http://www.athertontablelands.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/AT-MTB-flyer-d31.pdf>

TiMBa 'Business Development Pack' <http://cainstrails.com/wp-content/uploads/TiMBa-Business-Development-Pack-August-2012.pdf>

TiMBa Bike Trails on the Atherton Tableland **HYPERLINK TO BE PROVIDED**

'Smithfield Mountain Bike Trail Expansions and Supplementary Links Report' and 'Addendum – Additional Details Regarding Supplementary Links'

World Trail (June 2011) *Atherton Mountain Bike Trails Concept Plan*

World Trail (April 2014) *Revised Concept Plan for Atherton Mountain Bike Plan (draft)*
<http://tablelandcyclesports.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/AFMBP-Concept-Plan-Revision-2014-Draft.pdf>

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