



TROPICAL NORTH QUEENSLAND REGIONAL MOUNTAIN BIKE STRATEGY

2024-2034



This strategy was prepared by FNQROC in consultation with the Tropical North Queensland Regional Mountain Bike Strategy Steering Committee.

The strategy was formally adopted by the FNQROC Board on 3 October 2024.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

This plan acknowledges the traditional custodians of the Far North Queensland region and pays respects to Elders past, present and emerging, and their enduring connections to Country and culture.



Photo courtesy of Tourism Tropical North Queensland

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	6	DESTINATION MOUNTAIN BIKING	34
Priority recommendations	7	Market segments	34
Vision	8	The destination mountain bike market	42
Purpose	8	Attributes of successful mountain bike destination	46
Scope	8	The mountain bike destination	47
Strategic framework	9	Benchmarking of Tropical North	
Guiding principles	9	Queensland's destination offerings	48
Hubs and spokes regional destination model	10	The destination – transport and accessibility	50
Hubs – Local foundations and focal point	10	Events, sport and promotions	52
Spokes – Regional connections, inputs and outputs	10		
Strategic alignment	11		
STRATEGY REVIEW PROCESS	12	SUSTAINABLE TRAILS	54
Regional Mountain Bike Strategy Steering Committee	13	Sustainability Practices	54
Consultation and engagement	13	Regulatory Compliance	55
Regional mountain bike trails and users survey	14	Tenure, Access & Liability	55
Tropical North Queensland Mountain Bike Forum	16	Stakeholder Engagement	55
One on one engagement	16	Maintenance resources	56
Forums, information gathering and sharing	17	Managing trails as assets	58
Review and implementation period	17	Technical levels of service	60
Stakeholders	17	Levels of service	60
2015-2024 in review - a decade of change	18		
Tropical North Queensland Regional Mountain			
Bike Strategy 2015 impact, gaps and successes	18		
DRIVERS AND TRENDS	20	NEXT STEPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	62
Summary of key trends and drivers	20	Priority recommendations	62
Overview of trends which influence the strategy	21	Governance	62
External drivers	21	Regional investment plan	63
Regional drivers	22	Trail network maintenance	63
Trends in mountain biking disciplines	22	Destination development, events and marketing	64
		Clubs, volunteers and rider contributions to trails	65
REGIONAL PROFILE	24	Adventure and wilderness trails	66
A short history of MTB in FNQ	24	General recommendations and actions	67
Clubs and volunteers	25		
Existing mountain bike facilities			
and proposed developments	26		
Proposed new developments and			
trail network expansions	28		
Neighbouring trail offerings	28		
Regional trail networks	29		
Pump tracks and skills parks	30		
Regional pump tracks and skills parks	31		
Bikepacking and adventure routes	32		
		REFERENCES AND RESOURCES	70
		APPENDICES	72
		Regional mountain bike governance model options	72
		Discussion of governance model options	73

INTRODUCTION



Mayor Angela Toppin

FNQROC Chair

Mountain biking is one of the fastest growing outdoor recreation segments globally. AusCycling estimated the industry is worth over \$620m¹ to the national economy with no signs of plateauing any time soon. A combination of the rapid evolution of mountain bike technology; visibility of the sport through international events; social media promotion and influence; and uptake of outdoor recreation post covid; have mountain biking at the forefront of regional and local recreational infrastructure development. Mountain bike trail networks and pump tracks have been deployed nationally to stimulate local and regional economies for communities recovering from natural disasters, as well as a response to the economic and social impacts of COVID-19 pandemic.

Consequently, mountain bike clubs, state agencies, local governments and trail managers are under increasing pressure to deliver trails and mountain biking opportunities for both local and visiting riders to meet the demand. Alongside this recreational demand is the emergence of destination mountain biking as a significant and rapidly expanding tourism product which in some localities has become the economic mainstay of otherwise stagnant economies.

The potential for the Tropical North Queensland Region to lead the development of the industry and continue to build on its regional offerings was comprehensively mapped in the *Tropical North Queensland Regional Mountain Bike Strategy 2015*. The strategy accurately identified the anticipated opportunities and economic development which would emerge from the construction of formalised and locally distinct trails and networks. It also celebrated the seminal role the region, and Cairns in particular, has played in the development of the sport.

What has followed is a boom in development of concepts, plans and strategies emulating the success of destination mountain biking models based on the examples provided by places such as Derby (Tasmania), Rotorua (New Zealand), Mount Buller (Victoria) to name a few. Alongside this the trail building industry has rapidly expanded and matured into an international business model with stringent standards and practices now guiding the sustainability of the mountain biking. The historical model of mountain bike trail networks originating from illicit hand-cut trails being formalised is now more likely to be a master planned network designed from scratch to be fit for purpose.

The *Tropical North Queensland Regional Mountain Bike Strategy 2024-34* is a Board directed project of the FNQROC. This review builds on the success of what has essentially been a grass roots evolution of mountain biking in FNQ alongside significant investment in trails and facilities by MTB Clubs, State and Local Government.

While a future focus is central to the strategy, the region has more reason than ever to celebrate the influential role it has played in shaping the mountain biking industry and culture in Australia. In the face of numerous new trail developments and destination offerings nationally, the unique tropical ride identity of the region remains one of its key drawcards.

PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

1



Establish a **Regional Mountain Bike Strategy Steering Committee** to guide the implementation of the Strategy and deliver regional coordination across key projects.

2



Develop a five-year **mountain bike infrastructure plan and funding proposal** to guide the roll-out of the strategy.

3



Develop and pilot regionally scalable approaches to **whole-of-life trail network maintenance**.

4



Develop or commission a **regional destination mountain biking marketing plan** to develop and promote the regional mountain bike product.

5



Develop and pilot a voluntary **regional trail pass system**.

6



Establish a **regional adventure trail working group** to resolve, reinstate or establish single and multi-day routes.

VISION

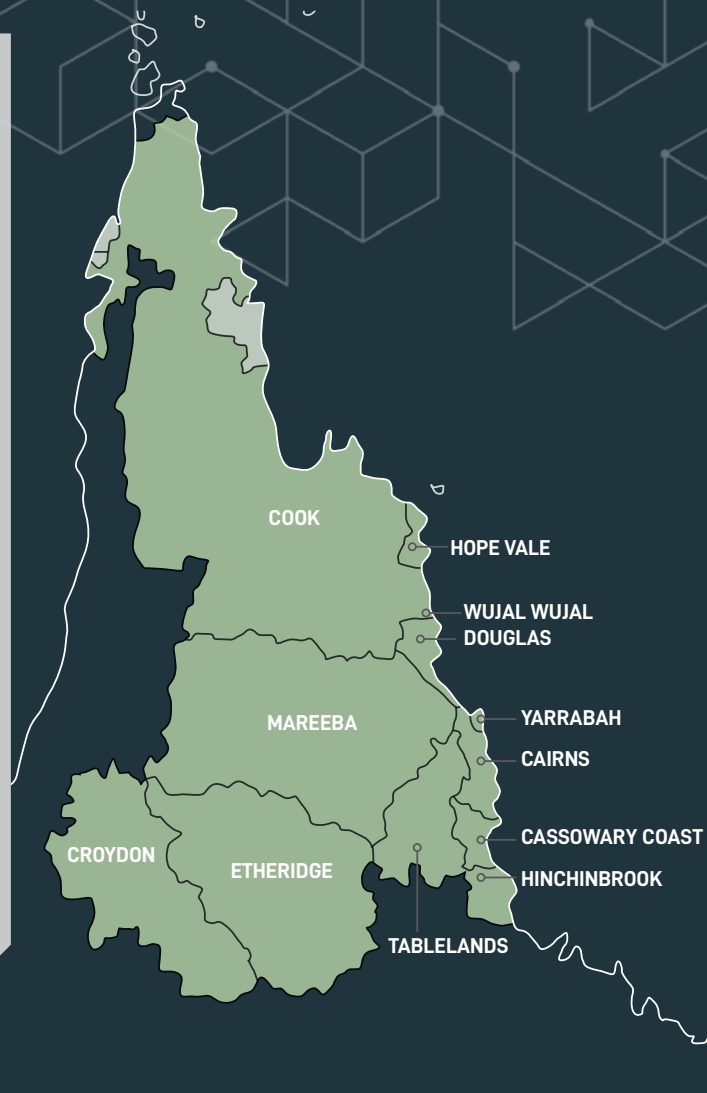
Tropical North Queensland is a sustainable world-class mountain biking destination for locals and visitors.

PURPOSE

The strategy guides the collaboration, partnerships and initiatives required to continue the development of the region as a world class mountain biking destination. It recognises the rich mountain biking history and culture of the region while providing guidance for future growth and development.

SCOPE

The geographic scope of the strategy includes the 12 local government areas of the Far North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils (FNQROC) which is comprising of Cairns, Cassowary Coast, Cooktown, Croydon, Douglas, Etheridge, Hopevale, Tablelands, Mareeba, Wujal Wujal, and Yarrabah. Consideration has also been given to how the strategy intersects with neighbouring regions, such as Townsville, where relevant.



The key mountain biking disciplines the strategy explores are:

TRAILS

Mountain bike trails and networks



SKILLS

Pump tracks and skills parks

ADVENTURE

Adventure cycling routes and bikepacking



STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

The strategy is delivered through a four-part framework



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Tropical North Queensland Regional Mountain Bike Strategy 2024-2034 strategy is built on following guiding principles.

Principle 1

First Nations at the forefront – current and future mountain bike parks and plans are built on a foundation of Traditional Owner participation, opportunity and engagement.

Principle 2

Collaboration is key – celebrating our local diversity while collaborating to deliver regional consistency, resource sharing and cooperation to gives us the opportunity to grow together.

Principle 3

A world class mountain bike destination – the region strives to be an international mountain biking destination, but not at the expense of the local experience and the character of our trails and riding culture.

Photo courtesy of Tourism Tropical North Queensland

HUBS AND SPOKES REGIONAL DESTINATION MODEL

A hubs and spokes model is central to the strategy. It identifies the individual trail networks and ride destinations as the local foundations (hubs); joined by common and shared connections (spokes) of a regionally coordinated destination. The hubs form the mainstay of the mountain bike experience for visiting and local riders; while the spokes are the connections, inputs and outputs which enable and support them.

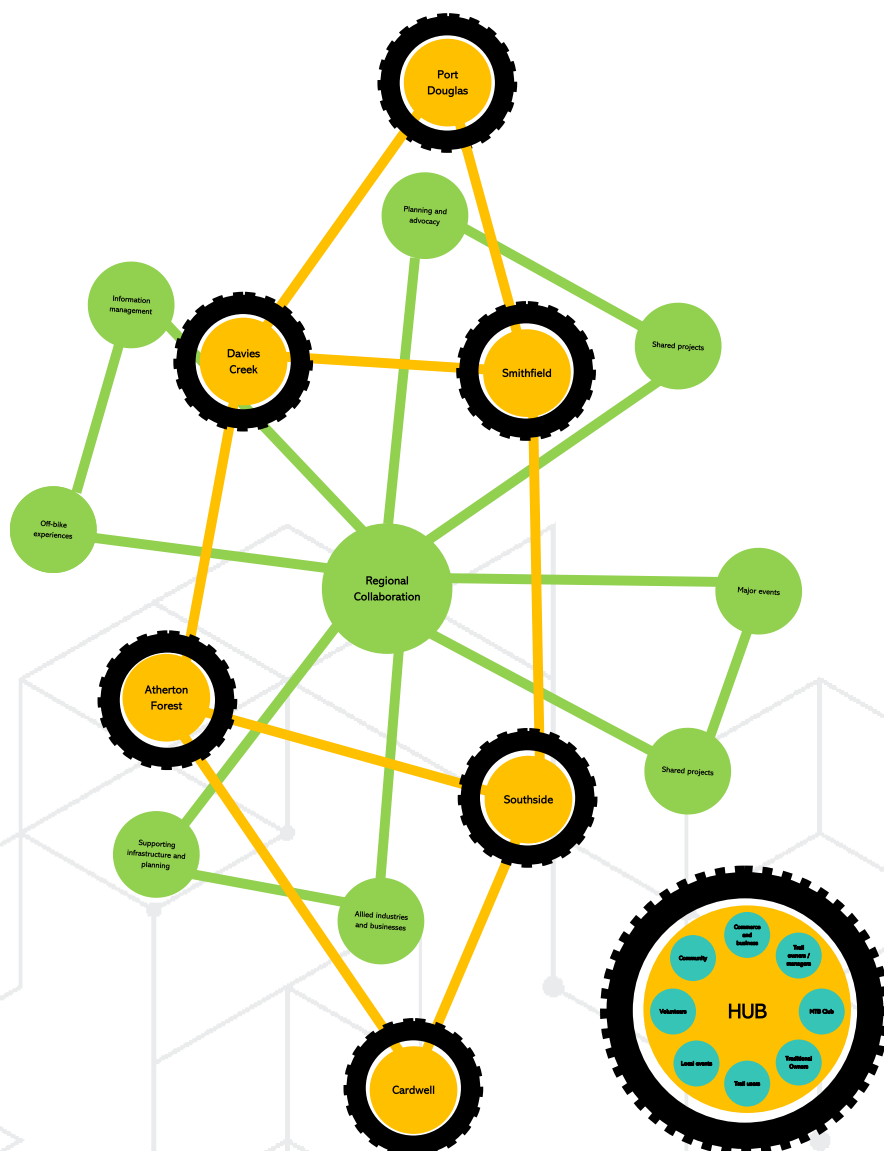
HUBS - Local foundations and focal point

Trail hubs are the foundation of the tropical north Queensland regional mountain bike destination. Each of the trail hubs in the region is unique and they are supported by their own subset of trail managers and landowners, clubs and volunteers.

The hubs operate in close collaboration with local governments, businesses, Traditional Owners and community members. Local mountain bike riders are central to each of the hubs.

SPOKES - Regional connections, inputs and outputs

The trail hubs are supported by a regionally collaborative governance model with representatives from each of the hubs working together on shared initiatives and projects within the strategy. Working together enables the benefits of economies of scale and partnership approaches to be realised while acknowledging the independence of the trail networks.





STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

The strategy aligns with delivery of strategic priorities within the following plans

National strategies and plans

- AusCycling Infrastructure Strategy 2022-2032.
- Australian Adaptive Mountain Biking Guidelines, 2018.
- Australian Mountain Bike Trail Guidelines, April 2018.

Queensland strategies and plans

- Tourism and Events Queensland's Nature-based Tourism Strategy 2021-2024 *Tourism and Events Queensland*.
- Queensland Mountain Bike Strategy, 2018.
- Ecotourism Plan for Queensland's Protected Areas 2023-2028. 2023, DES.
- Activate! Queensland 2019-2029.
- Far North Queensland, Priority Infrastructure Plan, July 2024.
- Principal Cycle Network Plan, Far North Queensland, 2016.

Regional Strategies and plans

- Tropical North Queensland Regional Mountain Bike Strategy 2015.
- Tropical Tablelands Tourism Strategic Plan, 2019-2024.
- Tropical North Queensland Destination Tourism Plan 2021.
- TNQ MTB Market Analysis Research Report. 2023, Tourism Tropical North Queensland.
- Recreational Trails Strategy, Cairns Regional Council 2023.

Local plans and strategies

The strategy is underpinned by a suite of best practice sustainable mountain bike trail network development plans for Atherton Forest, Davies Creek, Smithfield, Cardwell, and Croydon.

STRATEGY REVIEW PROCESS

Review

The review of the Tropical North Queensland Regional Mountain Bike Strategy 2015 was initiated as a Board directed project of the FNQROC. Following the original motion to initiate the review a recommendation was endorsed to:

- Establish a steering committee to guide the review.
- Undertake a desktop analysis of concepts plans, strategies, guidelines and proposals.
- Collate, review and update regional spatial data relevant to mountain biking and compile into a regional data set.
- Facilitate focus discussion/groups – facilitate a series of focus discussions to identify local riders' requirements and regional points of difference which differentiate the region from other MTB destinations.



The review process was initiated with the inaugural meeting of the Regional Mountain Bike Strategy Steering Committee.

REGIONAL MOUNTAIN BIKE STRATEGY STEERING COMMITTEE

The Regional Mountain Bike Strategy Steering Committee was formed via invitation to key stakeholders to inform the review process and provide recommendations to the FNQROC Board on completion of the strategy. FNQROC facilitated the Steering Committee and led the strategy review process in house.

Membership and contributions to the Mountain Bike Strategy Steering Committee:

- Cairns Mountain Bike Club
- Cairns Regional Council
- Cassowary Coast Regional Council
- Croydon Shire Council
- Douglas Shire Council
- Far North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils
- Hinchinbrook Shire Council
- Mareeba Mountain Goats Inc.
- Queensland Department of Tourism and Sport
- Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service
- Rainforest and Reef Cycling Club
- Southside Mountain Bike Club
- Tablelands Cycle Sports
- Tablelands Regional Council
- Tourism Tropical North Queensland
- Wet Tropics Management Authority

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

The planned approach for consultation and engagement to compliment the input of the steering committee was to facilitate a series of focus groups. The focus areas to investigate were reviewed and refined by the steering committee. However, prior to them being initiated the opportunity to host an information stand at both the UCI Mountain Bike Masters World Championships and Crankworx Cairns 2024 events back-to-back was secured. This was alongside an invitation from Outdoors Queensland to co-host a regional mountain bike forum for industry concurrent with the events. For simplicity FNQROC determined to disband the focus group approach and instead utilise one-on-one conversations at an information booth at the two events and the regional mountain bike forum to test public and industry perceptions and expectations. A regional mountain trails and users survey was also initiated during the Masters and Crankworx events.



Regional mountain bike trails and users survey

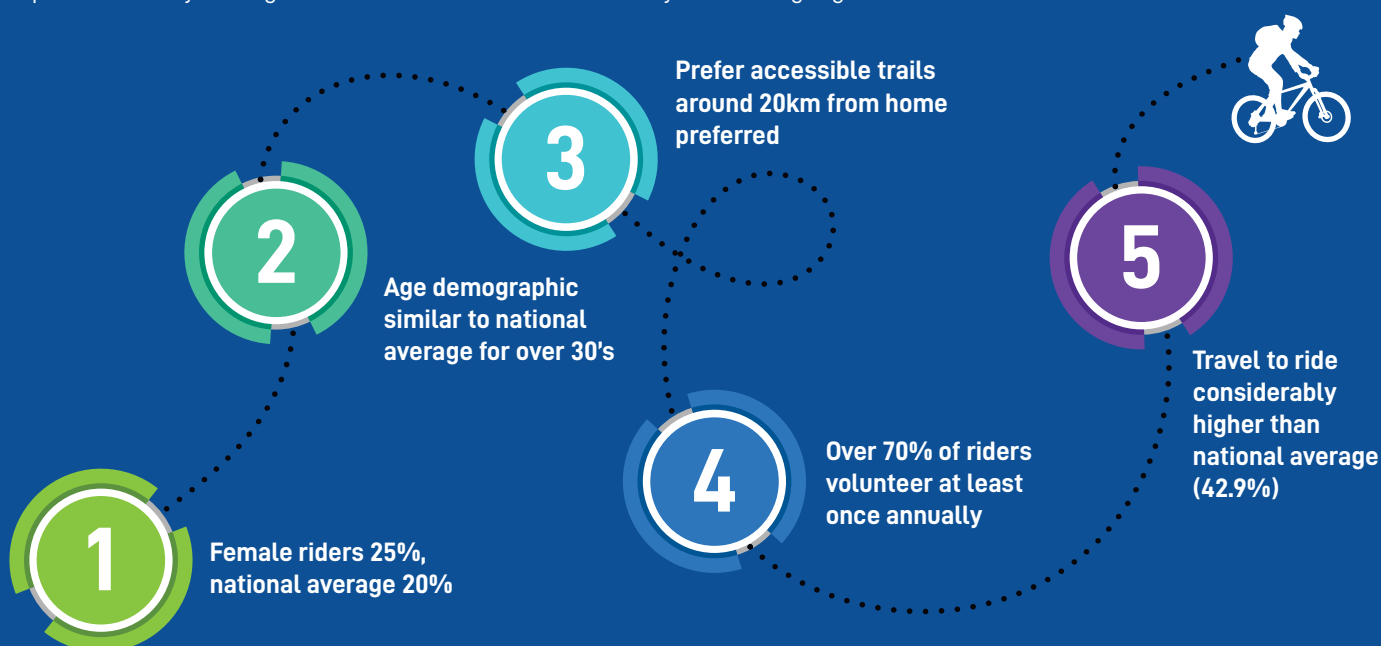
A smartphone compatible survey was developed utilising the platform Typeform® and launched to coincide with two-weeks of the UCI Masters and Crankworx events in May 2024. The survey was live for an additional two-weeks post event and promoted across MTB club social media feeds. The survey had two divergent streams for riders and non-riders.

The survey received 384 views, 264 starts and 210 submissions (79.5% completion rate) with an average time to complete of 06:40 minutes. Participation was promoted with a giveaway sticker. The survey was promoted manually at an information stand at the UCI Masters and Crankworx events with additional responses (in the majority) coming from promotion on social media feeds of local mountain bike clubs.

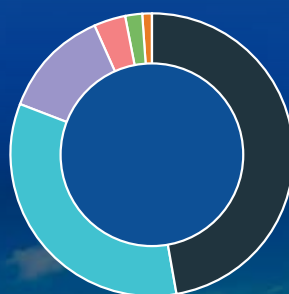
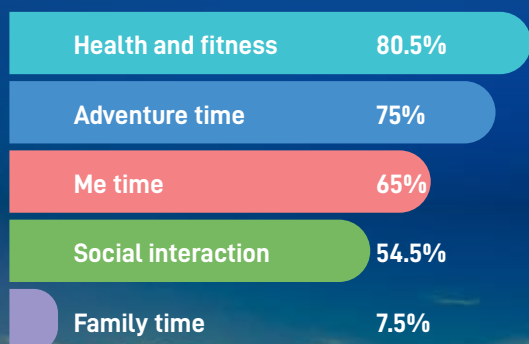
SURVEY THREADS	SURVEY RESULTS
<i>Information or feedback sought</i>	<i>What we're seeking to learn</i>
Element 1 – rider/participant profile	Rider/participant demographics
Element 2 – how you ride	Motivations, behaviour, how trails are accessed
Element 3 – trail maintenance and construction	Perspectives on volunteerism and contribution to local trails
Element 4 – The destination	Knowledge and visibility of regional options
Element 5 – personal input	Perspectives on gaps, expectations and aspirations
Element 6 – further information	Follow up



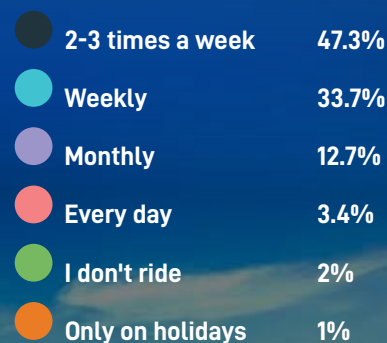
Key findings of the survey were used to inform recommendations within the strategy and are referenced throughout the report. Some key findings about who riders are and how they ride are highlighted below:



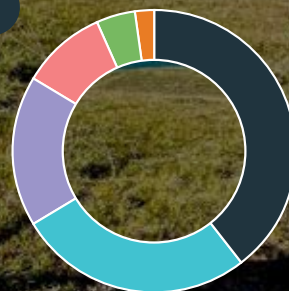
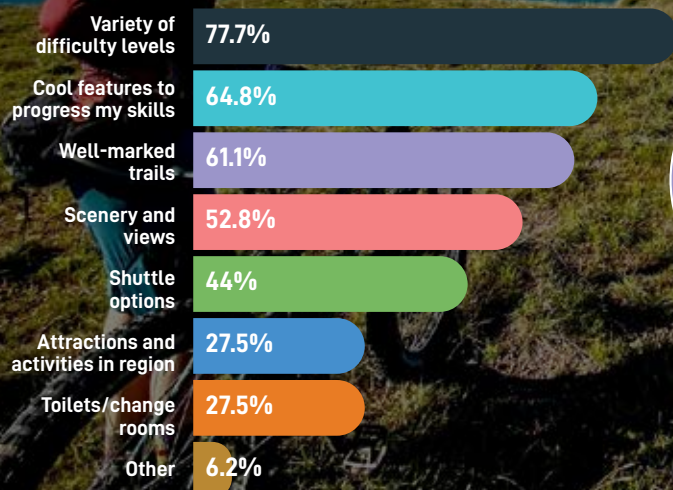
WHAT ARE THE MAIN REASONS YOU RIDE?



HOW OFTEN DO YOU RIDE?



WHAT FEATURES DO YOU LOOK FOR IN A TRAIL NETWORK?



HAVE YOU EVER DONE VOLUNTEER TRAIL WORK?



Photo courtesy of Tourism Tropical North Queensland

TROPICAL NORTH QUEENSLAND MOUNTAIN BIKE FORUM

A regional mountain bike forum was co-hosted by [Outdoors Queensland](#), [Blue Sky Trails](#) and FNQROC to coincide with Crankworx 2024 with venue kindly provided by the Cairns Institute at the JCU Innovation Hub. The forum focused on the theme of sustainability and a series of speakers and conversations explored the topics of trail building and maintenance; event staging; adaptive MTB; women in MTB; strategy and planning and First Nations leadership. Around 50 delegates from across the local industry attended. Proceedings of the forum were compiled by Outdoors Queensland and a forum survey provided an opportunity for additional feedback from delegates on take home messages and future conversations.



ONE-ON-ONE ENGAGEMENT

Face to face conversations with stakeholders, clubs, agencies, businesses and individuals took place at both the strategy inception and conclusion to gain first-hand insights into the perspectives, experiences and expectations of groups and individuals. These conversations also provided valuable historical and contextual information on the foundations of mountain biking in the region as well as past experiences with strategic planning and advocacy.



Photos courtesy of Tourism Tropical North Queensland



FORUMS, INFORMATION GATHERING AND SHARING

In addition to the Tropical North Queensland Mountain Bike Forum, FNQROC participated in the Destination MTB Forum, Maydena in November 2023 and the Sustainable Trails Conference, Otago, March 2024. Both events provided the opportunity to explore and understand approaches to sustainable trail network management and destination development as well the driving trends and challenges for the mountain biking industry. Valuable points of introduction to networks from these events have informed specialist sections of the strategy.

STAKEHOLDERS

Key stakeholders in the development and delivery of strategy include core and non-core groups and organisations. Core groups are involved in the day-to-day and operational aspects of mountain bike trails and recreation; other non-core stakeholders are involved in more strategic and region elements of mountain biking or relevant supporting industries within the region. Core groups were invited to participate in the strategy steering committee. Non-core groups were invited to comment on the strategy prior to public consultation.

Core groups

- Mountain Bike Clubs
- Department of Environment, Science and Innovation (QPWS)
- Department of Tourism and Sport
- Wet Tropics Management Authority
- Local Governments
- Tourism Tropical North Queensland
- Far North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils (FNQROC)

Non-core groups

- Mountain Bike Consultancies and Trail Builders
- Advance Cairns
- Regional Development Australia (Far North Queensland and Torres Strait)
- Mountain Bike Clubs from neighbouring jurisdictions

The strategy recommends local engagement of Traditional Owners over seeking regional representation which is often incompatible with scales of Registered Native Title Body Corporate (RNTBC) governance and representation.

REVIEW AND IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD

The Tropical North Queensland Regional Mountain Bike Strategy considers delivery over a period of 10 years from 2024 to 2034. The Regional Mountain Bike Steering Committee will guide the delivery of the strategy. The recommendation is for the Steering Committee be facilitated by FNQROC to guide the implementation of the Strategy for a period of two years prior to deciding on future governance arrangements.

2015-2024 IN REVIEW - A DECADE OF CHANGE

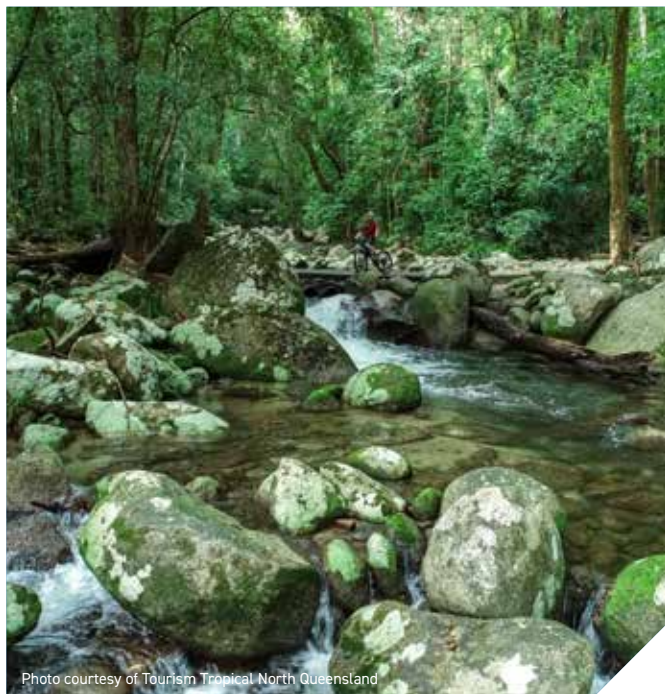


Photo courtesy of Tourism Tropical North Queensland

Tropical North Queensland Regional Mountain Bike Strategy 2015 impact, gaps and successes

The *Tropical North Queensland Regional Mountain Bike Strategy 2015* was innovative for its time. It reflected the passion of the local mountain biking and business community alongside the strength of a shared vision. The 2015 strategy made direct recommendations around the importance of regional collaboration to realise the region's full potential as a mountain biking destination. Despite the central recommendation of regional coordination not occurring; the region has continued to develop its mountain bike offerings with the primary clubs and institutions remaining in play and driving local development. A series of workshops with the *Regional Mountain Bike Strategy Steering Committee* analysed the delivery of actions and recommendations in the strategy. The review identified if the action was progressed or undelivered and provided reflection on the challenges or opportunities. Actions and recommendations considered no longer current or redundant going forward were identified.

The key findings of the review committee are summarised as wins and successes, or gaps and shortfalls.

Wins and successes

Despite no major trail expansion or new development occurring or being completed at the time the review, existing facilities have been kept relatively up to date with construction of single trails or refurbishment of current trails (Smithfield - Pipeline, Rocky Dingo, Centipede, Bowhunters; Davies Creek - Trail 6 and 3; Atherton - Ricochet (9), Ridgey Didge (6), Up and Overpass (4) and sections of the ELEV8 Race circuit; and the newly completed Port Douglas Jungle Jumps). In addition to on-ground works, Atherton Forest, Davies, and Smithfield have revised expansion concept plans and businesses cases in place or development. A significant new trail town concept for Cardwell has progressed from concept to design stage, and a concept plan and business case developed for a trail network for Croydon.

Targeted trail maintenance prior to wet season has demonstrated trails with well-maintained drainage are able to withstand severe rainfall events (e.g. Davies Creek, Trail 6 & 3; Smithfield, Rocky Dingo).

Spearheaded by the Fuller Park Pump track (Australia's first asphalt pump track²), new pump tracks have featured in the recreational infrastructure partnership between DTIS and Councils with industry standard tracks installed in almost every local government area over the past decade.

The Wangetti Trail, a 'hero' adventure trail initiative from the 2015 strategy is close to delivering stage one despite multiple setbacks and is set to open in 2024.

Several major events have reinstated the region on the world stage with Crankworx (22, 23, 24) and UCI Masters 24. Drawcard events such as the new multi-stage R2R have complimented the regional/local/schools race series (XC, DH, Enduro) calendar alongside the ELEV8 XCM at Atherton Forest.

The emergence of women in mountain biking has become a tour de force in the region with an energetic uptake of mountain biking on the back of women's specific coaching clinics and social riding networks like Cairns Gravity Girls. This has been bolstered by competitive riding in every discipline and age group. Reflecting this interest, 25 % of respondents to the survey conducted during development of this strategy were women.

² [World Trail](#)

Gaps and shortfalls

The central recommendation of the 2015 Strategy was to establish a regional coordination body for Mountain Bike Clubs and Land Management Agencies to lead and guide the delivery of the strategy into the future. For want of another host, the adopted strategy of 2015 was hosted by the FNQROC, however a process to formally establish a regional coordination mechanism suited to deliver the strategy was not pursued. Consequently, the regional conversation which might have led to the establishment of a regional approach initiated during the strategy's development dissolved.

The Ride Cairns branding and marketing exercise launched on the back of the 2015 strategy made great inroads into MTB specific marketing for the region but due to lack of resources (and regional coordination to maintain momentum) was shut down. TTNQ has maintained a web presence (albeit one that has been scaled back) which captures destination offerings outside of information pages provided by MTB clubs and QPWS.

In the adventure cycling realm, the through-trails and regional ride experiences highlighted in the strategy have largely been left to evolve organically. Several commercial operators offer simple through to substantial outback supported rides. Acknowledging the efforts of individuals and small groups in this space (e.g. - Great Northern Cycle Trail, Bump Track, Musgravea Track) the lack a regionally strategic approach to defining and promoting riding options leaves the regions self-guided offerings low-key and largely invisible or out of date. Several key offerings have been impacted by severe weather events, closed for refurbishment or not maintained frequently enough to promote (e.g. - CREB Track, Cardwell Range Track, Twin Bridges).

Trail maintenance remains a perennial challenge for clubs and land managers with resource shortfalls meaning sections of trails degrade beyond manual intervention level requiring extensive machine-based refurbishment. Severe weather events have also impacted trails in recent times with landslips and high intensity flooding requiring extensive trail repairs and re-alignments. Reliance on volunteer labour force and lack of reliable/perennial funding mechanisms to maintain trails can be a significant burden on clubs and land managers.

The recommendation to pursue IMBA ride centre accreditation has not been progressed; but also has not had significant uptake in the southern hemisphere with only one accreditation in Australia and three in New Zealand. Trails in the region have been constructed to IMBA ride guidelines. AusCycling has also released the *Australian Mountain Bike Trail Guidelines*³ which are reflected in concept plans developed post 2023.

Signage of trail networks has been completed to required standards except for some sections of the Smithfield network still requiring clearer navigational signs and up to date maps. Mapping across all three major networks has been updated within Trail forks™ with local administrators now managing and cleaning data.

Pump tracks and skills parks have taken off in the region with many facilities built to service local communities. Uptake and usage vary across localities with some highly utilised and others not frequently accessed. One issue identified for pump tracks in Yarrabah and Wujal Wujal (which may also apply to other rural and remote areas) are availability of bikes for riders.

Unauthorised trails remain a point investigation requiring resolution. The pending Queensland Parks and Wildlife Statewide Cycling Policy will be an important determining factor of the approaches and options available to the region where these trails are on State land.



Photo courtesy of Tourism Tropical North Queensland

³ [Australian Mountain Bike Trail Guidelines](#), AusCycling 2023

DRIVERS AND TRENDS

Mountain biking has undergone a dramatic transformation which was accurately anticipated in the 2015 strategy. Over a decade on, and a range of highly influential drivers are changing the face of the mountain biking industry, sport and recreation. Understanding drivers and trends is critical to maintain the currency and validity of planned investments going forward. It also assists to remain regionally competitive in what is a rapidly growing market which has potential to become crowded in the future.

SUMMARY OF KEY TRENDS AND DRIVERS

There are some key trends and drivers which the strategy can respond to and influence regionally.

Women in MTB

Growing participation and leadership is transforming the face of mountain biking globally and locally. Increasing involvement of family and friends and transforming the riding community.

New technology

Evolving bike geometry and classes of MTB are changing who rides and how they ride. e.g. E-bikes, enduro, down country and adaptive bikes. As a result, trail networks need to evolve to accommodate everything from increased traffic to different riding styles and mobility needs.

Youth

Greater inclusion (and growing dominance) of youth in MTB is driving rapid change and transforming the face of the sport and styles of riding. Access to highly capable bikes, technical features, dramatically improved safety gear and professional coaching and mentoring is fostering a very different generation of riders.

First Nations

There has been a significant evolution of First Nations leadership and engagement in the mountain biking industry and trail networks from the inaugural strategy to now. Indigenous development and business opportunities are central to some of the unique mountain bike offerings for the region.

Specialist facilities

Accessible specialist facilities are rapidly transforming the way we ride and what infrastructure is required. e.g. slope style, pump track, dual slalom, jump lines. Continuing to accommodate advanced and extreme skills will grow the foundations of the riding experience in the region.

Health and wellbeing

The relationship between MTB and health has grown in scope considerably with MTB now being used in therapy as well as recreation. The universal benefits of recreation in nature were strongly reinforced during COVID 19 and demand for access to outdoor recreation has remained high.

Australian trail construction guidelines

The Australian Mountain Bike Trail Guidelines (2020) and the Australian Adaptive Mountain Biking Guidelines (2018) provide nationally relevant foundations for trail design, construction and classification. The trail guidelines also provide a hierarchy of key requirements and attributes of a local, regional and national level trails or trail networks and facilities.

OVERVIEW OF TRENDS WHICH INFLUENCE THE STRATEGY

There are some key trends and drivers which are external to region or beyond the influence of the strategy. Understanding these may assist to foresee potential pitfalls into the future and avoid over-capitalisation while working to fill the gaps which build the region's sustainability.

External drivers

Social media and performance apps

Social media platforms are a primary means to communicate, promote and connect across many aspects of people's lives. All platforms can be used constructively but there may be limitations for control of content and accessibility which could be detrimental to clubs or the region.

Globally significant events

Significant global events can dramatically influence the economic, social and political environment. The global experience of COVID 19 is a perfect case in point. The event had many significant and long-lasting negative impacts but also positively influenced participation in outdoor recreation.

National governance of cycling

The 2020 merge of MTBA and 17 other cycling organisations into a single organisation, Auscycling, was the biggest sports merger in Australia's history. As to be expected it has taken some time for the changes to settle in for a collective with such a broad scope.

Insurance premium increases

All sectors are impacted by increasing insurance costs and mountain bikers and clubs have seen increased costs (almost two-fold) based on higher premiums for cover. The rising cost of race insurance may prove to be a future barrier for participation for clubs and riders.

Regional migration and population growth

Migration in response to remote working arrangements alongside regional population growth will continue to change the demographic of local communities. Follow-on effects such as availability of accommodation and housing supply will continue to be influenced by population growth.

Bike ownership

Ownership of bicycles in general increased dramatically during COVID and while it is likely to have plateaued now, the result is an abundance of quality mountain bikes accessible to a wider range of people.

Development of other locations

There has been a global boom in destination MTB with many case studies such as Derby, Tasmania promoted as a success story to be replicated elsewhere. Based on analysis of economic or social returns mountain bike developments have also been utilised as recovery/resilience projects (e.g. recovery post bush fires).

Adventure cycling boom

Bikepacking, offroad racing and touring have all benefited from a renewed focus on adventure recreation on the back of COVID 19 and other world events. New bike and ultralight camping equipment technologies and the rapid growth in popularity of gravel bikes has had a direct flow-on effect to mountain biking.

Outdoor recreation

New participation and demand for outdoor recreation rapidly increased during COVID 19 and unstructured sport and recreation has continued to remain popular with a high demand for walking and riding trails. Demand for dual purpose or shared use trails has also increased.

Regional drivers

There are many local and regional drivers which have influenced mountain biking closer to home, most of which have either benefited or benefited from mountain biking's increasing popularity.

Planning

Development of trail network expansion or concept plans and business cases for multiple localities (Atherton Forest, Cardwell, Croydon, Davies Creek, Smithfield).

Trails and skills areas

Additions or refurbishment of trails within existing trail networks e.g. Pipeline (Smithfield), Ricochet, 12 (Atherton), Trail 6 (Mareeba).

Pump tracks and skills parks

Region-wide construction of pump track and skills parks such as Jungle Jumps Port Douglas, have increased the accessibility and participation in BMX, dirt jump and mountain bike activities outside of trail networks.

Wangetti Trail

Construction of the dual purpose Wangetti Trail has been initiated with stage one, Palm Cove to Ellis Beach, set to be completed in 2024. The Wangetti Trail is a signature trail for the region and will increase recreation opportunities and destination cycling visitation to the region.

Food and beverage diversification

The growth of local food and beverage producers across the region such as breweries, cafes, distilleries and eateries provide off bike experiences and post ride social hubs.

Other bicycle infrastructure

There has been a growth of regional bicycle commuter networks, recreational trails and links - e.g. Atherton-Mareeba Rail Trail, Cairns's cycle trails which have activated a lot more active transport options in the region.

Events and international exposure

A series of significant international events and events series have continued to promote the region on the world and national stage (CrankWorx Cairns 2022 (23, 24), Reef to Reef (R2R), 2024 UCI Masters World Mountain Bike Championships). In addition, local and regional race series have continued to promote the region for visiting and local riders (RRR, EleV8, Inter-school series, Paluma Push).

Trends in mountain biking disciplines

Mountain biking disciplines in Australia are evolving alongside increasing participation and access to quality trails.

E-bikes

E-bikes have not only increased the accessibility of mountain biking for beginner riders; they are opening new options for experienced riders as well. As a result, approaches to trail design and maintenance is responding to increased traffic and different riding pressures on trails as well developing new possibilities in technical climb trails and features.

Enduro and gravity

Gravity based riding and racing is rapidly gaining popularity as the distinction between downhill and enduro bikes becomes less pronounced as bikes become more and more capable. As a result, the demand for shuttle and uplift services to provide access for gravity riders is growing with demand often outstripping supply.

Cross-country and trail bikes

Trail oriented bikes have enjoyed rapid improvements in design and technology which have had global impacts on riding styles and bike choices. More capable cross-country bikes and lighter trail bike offerings are fuelling a demand for longer trail experiences with technical features and descents.

Bikepacking and gravel touring

Bikepacking is on the rise, offering a versatile option for riders who enjoy both on -road and off-road adventures.

Pump tracks and skill parks

Pump tracks are now widespread providing dedicated spaces for riders to hone their techniques or provide formats for competitions. Asphalt pump tracks have transformed the design, accessibility and maintenance of public bike skills areas.

Adaptive riding

The growth of adaptive mountain biking is making the sport more inclusive, allowing riders of all abilities to participate using specially designed bikes.

These trends combined mean new trail network developments are quite different from historical offerings and older trail networks are requiring differing levels of refurbishment to maintain currency.



Photo courtesy of Tourism Tropical North Queensland

REGIONAL PROFILE

A SHORT HISTORY OF MTB IN FNQ

Mountain biking in Far North Queensland has a rich history. Much of it began in the late 1980's when a pioneering crew of local thrill-seekers calling themselves 'The Mudcows' started descending the local hills and ridges on bikes. Riding with this crew, or even watching their lo-fi videos, was not for the faint-hearted. Their exploits amongst the rainforests and rocky outcrops quickly gained attention, and they established a cult following for their fearless riding style and innovative camera work. Whether intended or not they inadvertently laid the foundations for not only extreme free riding in Australia, but what is now a thriving local mountain biking scene as well. Many of those original vibes live on in the skinny, rocky and rooty single track of Smithfield and Kuranda today.

Cairns Mountain Bike Club (aka Great Northern Hill Tribe) took shape and the region gained international notoriety hosting the world championships in 1996 at Smithfield. Legacy trails from that event include the World Cup Downhill Course (Worlds) and intimidating XC features like the croc slide and Jacob's ladder which cemented the regions gnarly credentials early in the history of the sport. Alongside this, signature regional race events like the RRR (Rural, Reef, Rainforest - est. 1991, now the Triple-R) and the Crocodile Trophy (est. 1996) added to the region's development.

By the early 2000's mountain biking was catching on in the region and the first stages of construction of Atherton Forest Mountain Bike Park and Davies Creek were undertaken in 2014 adding nearly 80 kilometres of cross country and flow trails to the region's repertoire.

Since then, the region has hosted UCI World Cup in 2014 & 2016 and UCI World Mountain Bike Championships in 2017 and 2024. In recent times the area has been showcased internationally hosting Crankworx Cairns in 2022, 2023 and 2024. Atherton Forest's signature event, the Elev8 XC Marathon was first launched in 2005 as the Herberton 8 Hour before moving to the new Atherton Forest Mountain Bike Park.

Building on the region's reputation as an iconic MTB destination, the construction of the first stage of the multi-day Wangetti Trail began in 2023. The trail adds to the extensive off road cycle touring and bikepacking offerings with more to follow.

Today, Far North Queensland hosts three regionally significant trail networks catering to all skill levels with an additional proposal in the pipeline for Cardwell. From the challenging downhill tracks of Kuranda to the family-friendly trails of Davies Creek and Atherton Forest, the region offers diverse riding experiences for every level of rider.

CLUBS AND VOLUNTEERS

The region has maintained its core mountain biking/cycling clubs over the duration of the 2015 strategy through to 2024. All clubs have financial members but have more audience reach than their base membership via followers on Facebook. While there has been a shift nationally away from traditional organised sports towards informal recreation this is not necessary reflected in membership to clubs including mountain bike clubs.

Club	Trail networks	Estimated member numbers	Facebook Followers	Date of est.	Signature events	Trails and routes
Cairns Mountain Bike Club https://cairnsmtb.com/	Smithfield Mountain Bike Park	350	6,800	1980's	Enduro and DH series CrankWorx, UCI Masters R2R	
Tablelands Cycle Sports https://rideatherton.bike/	Atherton Forest Mountain Bike Park	100-150	6,200	2014	ELEV8XCM Marathon R2R	Atherton Rail Trail Merragallan Cycle Trail Tolga – Kairi Cycle Loop Malanda Cycle Loop Pinnacle Pocket Cycle Trail (Seven Sisters)
Mareeba Mountain Goats Inc. http://www.mareebamountaingoats.com/	Davies Creek Mountain Bike Park Mareeba Mountain Goats Skills and Cyclocross Park	30-50	2,200	2014	FN EPIC 6 hour	Mareeba Rail Trail Bee Miner
Cassowary Coast Multisport Club https://ccmclub.org.au/	Mission Beach Mountain Bike Park (Cardwell Mountain Bike Park – proposed)	40	2000	2013	Ona Mission Multi-sport Adventure Race	Musgravea Track Mission Beach Misty Mountains Cardwell Forest
Rainforest and Reef Cycling Club https://www.rrcclub.com.au/mtb-trails	Jungle Jumps Port Douglas	60	558	2016	R2R Triple R Gran Fondo 40	Bump Track Lemons Track (Brumby's) Twin Bridges Track Hartleys Falls Loop

Photo courtesy of Tourism Tropical North Queensland

EXISTING MOUNTAIN BIKE FACILITIES AND PROPOSED DEVELOPMENTS

The region has a great diversity of MTB experiences within 1 hour to 3 hours' drive of Cairns international airport. This section lists the primary mountain biking facilities in the TNQ Region alongside proposed developments. The trail significance hierarchy* and trail model classification# from the Australian Mountain Bike Trail Guidelines are included.

Note that this list is not representation of all mountain biking opportunities in the Region. It does not include 'unauthorised' trails, where unauthorised trails are those created by trail users without land manager approval even though some of these may be heavily utilised.

Name (location)	Mountain bike offerings	Trail classification	Duration of riding	Supporting facilities	Trail model and significance
Atherton Forest Mountain Bike Park	• Cross-country and flow • Some gravity options • Pump track • Skills park • Wilderness riding • Rail trail	Easy to very difficult	4-5 hours of purpose built trails	• Trail head • Car parking • Trail signage • Nearby retail services • Club – Tableland Cycle Sports • Major event capability • Shuttle ready	Trail town* Regional significance#
Davies Creek	• Cross-country • Wilderness riding	Easy to more difficult	3 hours of purpose built trails	• Trail head • Car parking • Trail signage • Nearby retail services • Club – Mareeba Mountain Goats • Event capability	Trail network* Regional significance#
Cardwell	• Cross-country • Wilderness riding • No purpose-built trails	Easy to more difficult	2 + hours trails, fire roads and management tracks	• Car parking • Pump Track • Trail head • No signage • Annual events • Major event capability	Individual trails* Local significance#
Kuranda Downhill	• Gravity	Very difficult	Approx. 15 minutes	• Trail signage • Dedicated drop-off point • Nearby retail services • Shuttle ready	Individual trail*
Mission Beach (Musgravia Track)	• Cross-country	Easy	1 hour	• Trail head • Car parking • Trail signage	Individual trail*
Mission Beach Mountain Bike Park	• Single track • Pump track & skills park	Easy to more difficult	Duration varies depending on ride style	• Trail head • Car parking • Trail signage	Trail network* Local significance#



Name (location)	Mountain bike offerings	Trail classification	Duration of riding	Supporting facilities	Trail model and significance
Misty Mountains	• Cross-country • Wilderness riding	Difficult to more difficult	3-4 hours	• Car Parks • Trail Heads • Signage • Annual events • Major event capability	Trail network* Regional significance#
Port Douglas Jungle Jumps	• Cross country • Skills park • Dirt jumps	Easy to more difficult	1 hour	• Club - Rainforest and Reef Cycling Club • Trail signage • Car park	Trail network* Local significance#
Port Douglas Bump Track	• Cross-country descent • Wilderness riding	Easy to more difficult	1 hour	• Tour operators • Club - Rainforest and Reef Cycling Club	Individual trail* Local significance#
Smithfield	• Cross-country • Gravity • Pump track • Skills park • Jump line • Dual slalom	Easy to extremely difficult	3 hour	• Car park • Trail Head • Trail Signage • Nearby retail services • Club - Cairns Mountain Bike Club • Major event capability • Tour operators • Shuttle ready	Trail network* Regional significance#
Southside (Edmonton)	• Cross-country • Gravity • Skills park	Easy to difficult	1 hour	• Car park • Skills park • Event capability • Club - Southside Mountain Bike Club	Trail network/ individual trails* Local significance
Broadwater State Forest (Abergowrie)	• Cross-country • Gravity	Easy to difficult	1 hour	• Car park	Individual trails* Local significance#

Proposed new developments and trail network expansions

Name (location)	Mountain bike offerings	Trail classification	Duration of riding	Supporting facilities	Trail model and significance
Atherton Forest Mountain Bike Park Expansion Plan	• Cross-country and flow • Some gravity options • Pump track • Skills park • Wilderness riding • Rail trail	Easy to very difficult	Up to 45 km of new trail added to existing 57 km	• Trail head • Car parking • Trail signage • Nearby retail services • Club – Tableland Cycle Sports • Major event capability • Shuttle ready • Pump Track • Revitalized trail head in town	Trail town* National significance [#]
Cardwell (Proposed new development)	• Flow • Gravity • Cross country	Easy to more difficult	Up to 94 km of trails	• Car parking • Trail head • Signage • Pump Track • Major event capability • Nearby retail services • Shuttle ready • Swimming holes	Trail town* National significance [#]
Croydon (Proposed new development)	• Dual use • Cross-country	Easy	Up to 14 km of trails	• Car parking • Trail head • Signage	Individual trails Local significance [#]
Davies Creek Expansion Plan	• Cross-country • Wilderness riding • Gravity	Easy to more difficult	Up to 80 km of new trails added to existing 25km	• Trail head • Car parking • Trail signage • Nearby retail services • Club – Mareeba Mountain Goats • Event capability • Shuttle ready	Trail network* National significance [#]
Smithfield Expansion Plan	• Cross-country • Gravity • Pump track • Skills park • Jump line • Dual slalom	Easy to extremely difficult	Up to 52 km of new trails added to existing 30km	• Car park • Trail Head • Trail Signage • Nearby retail services • Club - Cairns Mountain Bike Club • Major event capability • Tour operators • Shuttle ready	Trail network* National significance [#]
Mount Peter (proposed new development)	• Cross-country • Gravity	Easy to more difficult	Up to 14 km of trails		Trail Network* Regional significance

Neighbouring trail offerings

Name (location)	Mountain bike offerings	Trail classification	Duration of riding	Supporting facilities	Trail model and significance
Paluma	• Cross-country • Wilderness riding	Easy to More Difficult	2-3 hrs	• Car park • Event capability	Trail network/ individual trails* Local significance [#]
Douglas	• Cross-country • Gravity • Pump track • Skills park • Jump line	Easy to Extremely Difficult	3 hours	• Car park • Trail Head • Trail Signage • Event capability • Shuttle ready • Club - Townsville Rockwheelers	Trail Network* Regional significance [#]

REGIONAL TRAIL NETWORKS



PUMP TRACKS AND SKILLS PARKS

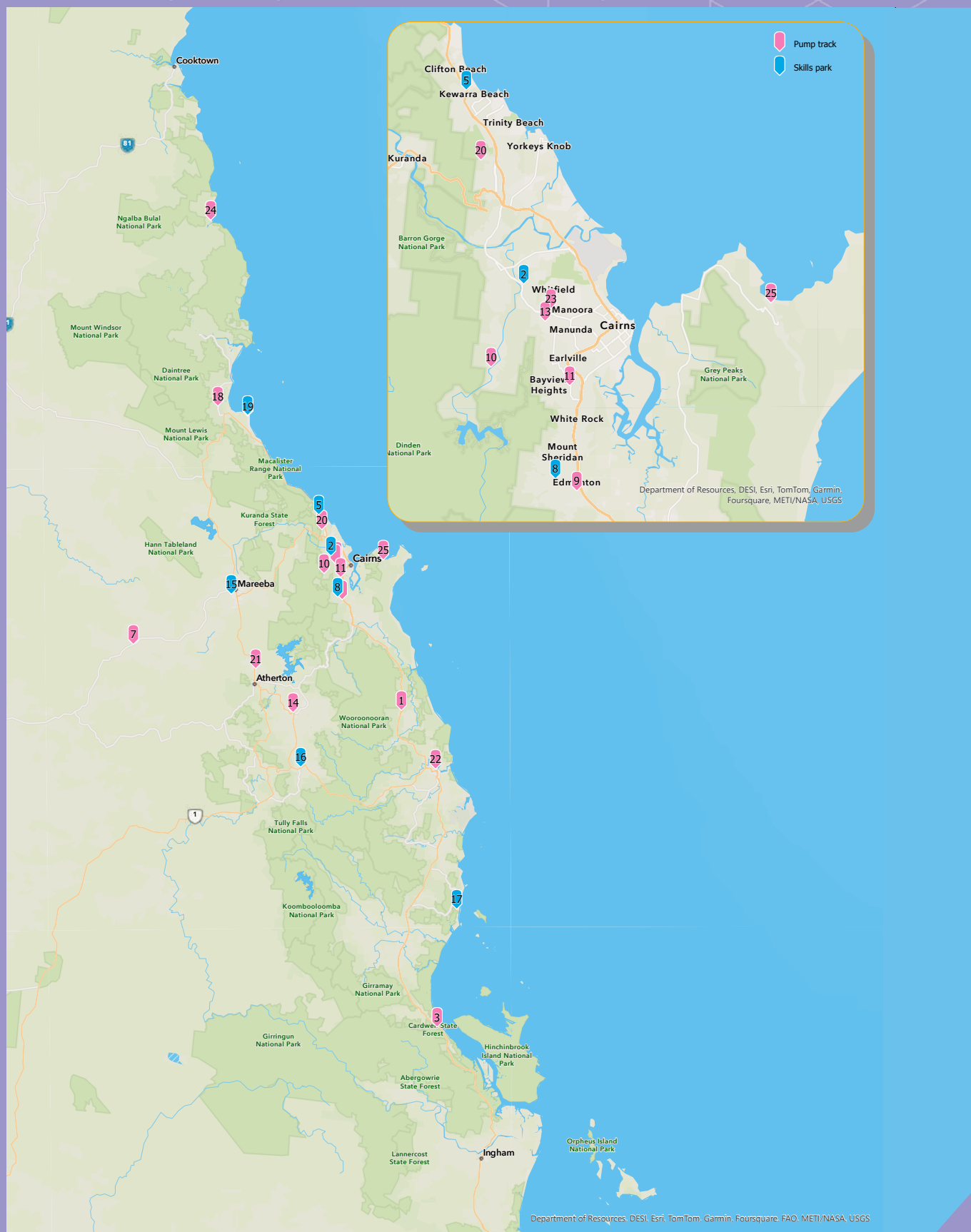
Both pump tracks and skills parks contain features to help riders build skills. They're also great fun and a perfect place for beginners to get started and are recommended elements of most mountain bike developments. Pump tracks have their roots in BMX and are compact circuits with smooth features consisting of berms, rollers, and jumps. They are designed to be ridden without pedalling. Riders gain and maintain speed by weighting and unweighting the bike in a pumping motion. They are perfect for dialling in jumps, manuals and berm technique which can be transferred directly to the trails. Most pump tracks have an asphalt surface, and many are suitable for scooters and skateboards as well. Pump track is also a competitive sport and features on the global stage in events like CrankWorx and UCI World Championships.

Skills parks contain a range of technical features and obstacles that help you prepare or practice for the trails. Features are usually graduated so you can progress from beginner to advanced level on a particular skill or manoeuvre. Obstacles like timber ramps, rock gardens, skinnies, see-saws and logs all help coach riders on the skills you need to tackle the trails.

While skills parks have been in the mix with mountain bike developments for some time, pump tracks have rapidly become essential recreational infrastructure with a track now featuring or proposed in most towns and communities. Pump tracks provide an important social setting for family riding right through to advanced riding and competition; over the past decade they have evolved from a few bumps out of sight to pride of place as important social and recreation sites. Pump tracks and skills parks may be the closest mountain bike related riding opportunity for many youth so they can be important from a social and recreational perspective.

	Name	Facility type	Surface
1	Babinda Pump Track	Pump track	Asphalt
2	Brinsmead Jumps	Skills park	Dirt
3	Cardwell Pump Track	Pump track	Asphalt
4	Clifton Beach BMX and Jumps	Skills park	Dirt
5	Croydon Pump Track (not on main map)	Pump track	Asphalt
6	Dimbulah Pump Track	Pump track	Asphalt
7	Edmonton Skills Park	Skills park	Dirt
8	Fuller Park Pump Track	Pump track	Asphalt
9	Gamburra Park Pump Track	Pump track	Asphalt
10	Jeff Pezzutti Park	Pump track	Dirt
11	Jungle Jumps Skills Park	Pump track	Dirt
12	Kanimbla Pump Track	Pump track	Asphalt
13	Malanda Pump Track	Pump track	Asphalt
14	Mareeba Mountain Goats Skills Park	Skills park	Dirt
15	Mareeba Pump Track	Pump track	Asphalt
16	Millaa Millaa Pump Track	Skills park	Dirt
17	Mission Beach Skills Park	Skills park	Dirt
18	Mossman Pump Track	Pump track	Asphalt
19	Port Douglas Pump Track	Pump track	Asphalt
20	Smithfield Pump Track and Skills Park	Pump track	Dirt
21	Tolga Pump Track	Pump track	Dirt
23	Warrina Lakes (Innisfail) Pump Track	Pump track	Asphalt
23	Whitfield Pump Track	Pump track	Asphalt
24	Wujal Wujal Pump Track	Pump track	Asphalt
25	Yarrabah Pump Track	Pump track	Asphalt

REGIONAL PUMP TRACKS AND SKILLS PARKS



BIKEPACKING AND ADVENTURE ROUTES

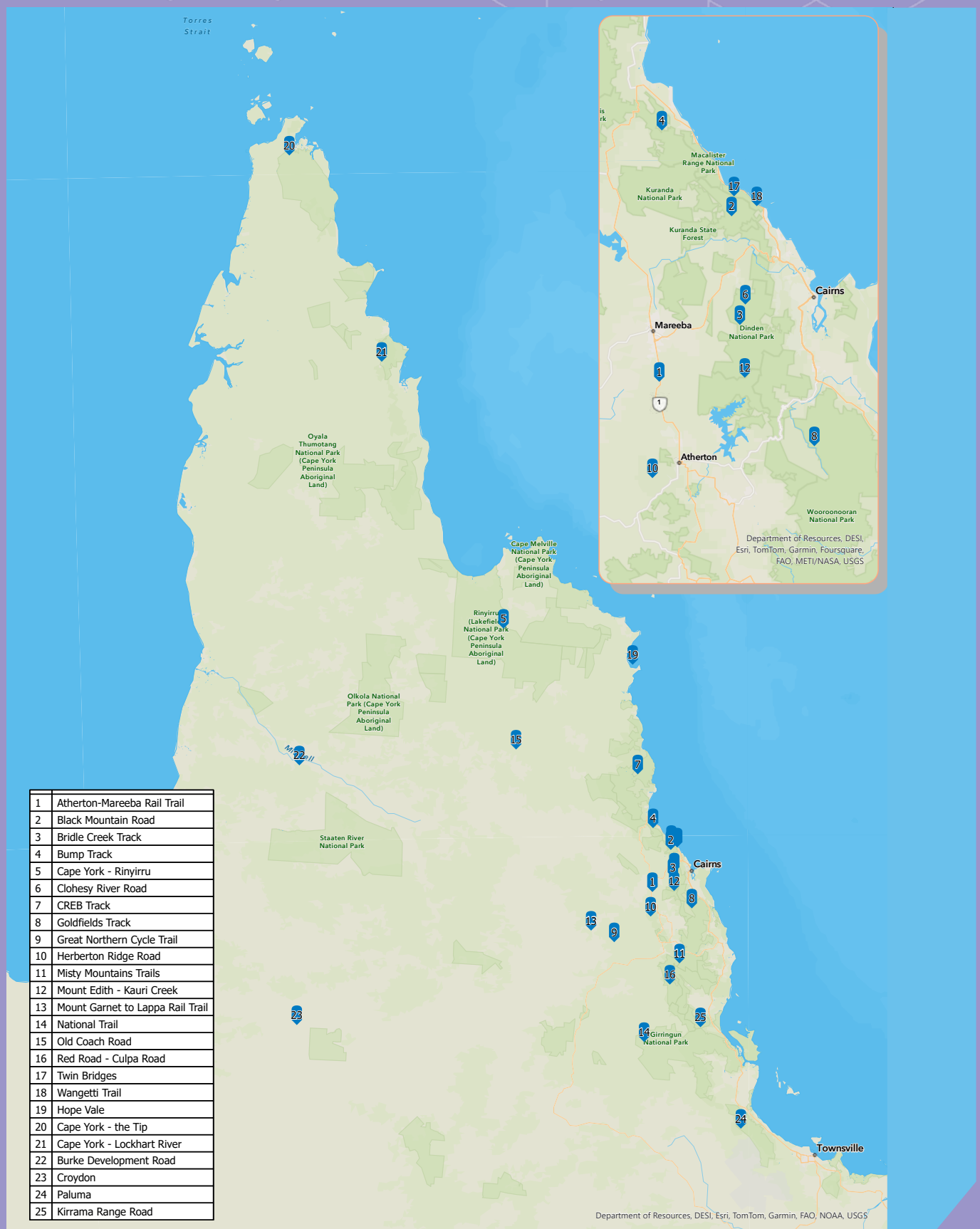
Bikepacking and adventure rides on offer in the region range from cruisy self-guided rides to multi-day epics up the Cape and beyond on supported rides with commercial operators. The region is spoilt for choice for adventurous day trips to multi-day circuits and through-routes. The Wangetti Trail will be Queensland's first purpose-built multi-use walking and mountain biking track in a National Park. It will offer multi day riding experience against a backdrop of World Heritage Reef and Rainforest. The list below is not an exhaustive list of route options but an example of some the key regional offerings.



Photo courtesy of Tourism Tropical North Queensland

Name	Route type	Use type
Atherton- Mareeba Rail Trail	Out and back	Bikes/Walkers
Black Mountain Road (multiple tracks and trails)	Through route and connector	Bikes/ Vehicles/4WD
Bridle Creek Track	Through route	Bikes/Walkers
Bump Track	Through route	Bikes/Walkers
Cape York (extensive tracks and trails)	Through routes and loops	Bikes/ Vehicles/4WD
Clohesy River Road	Through routes and loops	Bikes/ Vehicles/4WD
CREB Track	Through route	Bikes/4WD
Goldfields Trail	Out and back	Bikes/Walkers
Great Northern Cycle Trail	Multi-day route	Bikes/ Vehicles/4WD
Herberton Ridge Road	Through route/loop	Bikes/Vehicles
Kirrama Range Road	Through route	Bikes/Vehicles
Misty Mountains (multiple tracks and trails)	Through route and connectors	Bikes/Walkers/ Vehicles/4WD
Mount Edith – Kauri Creek	Loop	Bikes/Vehicles
Mount Garnet to Lappa Rail Trail	Through route	Bikes/ Vehicles/4WD
National Trail (Sections 1 & 2 Cooktown to Colinsville)	Through route	Bikes/Walkers/ Horses/Vehicles
Old Coach Road	Through route	Bikes/4WD
Red Road/Culpa Road	Through route	Bikes/4WD
Twin Bridges	Through route	Bikes/Walkers

LOCATION OF REGIONAL BIKEPACKING ROUTES AND JOURNEYS



DESTINATION MOUNTAIN BIKING

MARKET SEGMENTS

Target audiences for the strategy are aligned to the mountain biking user types identified in the national trail guidelines⁴. In simple terms, leisure and independent riders represent local (non-core users of trail networks) and enthusiast, sport and gravity users are core users of trail networks and most likely to contribute to clubs and development of destinations. In terms of marketing and promotion enthusiast, sport and gravity users are also the most influential cohort and those which will have the most significant economic contribution to the local market.

Type	Description	Classification sought	Potential Market
Leisure	Includes general cyclists of all ages and abilities and is potentially the largest market. Typically, they ride infrequently, often have limited skills and require very accessible trails. They are not members of clubs and they are more likely to use highly accessible routes close to home or make the journey to trail facilities with amenities and services such as bike hire, cafés and toilets.	This group will generally seek white (easiest) and green (easy) classification trails. As they progress, will start to ride blue (moderate) classification trails.	Significant
Enthusiast	Enthusiasts are purely recreational mountain bikers with moderate skills and variable fitness, and ride weekly. They are typically aged 29-49 and form the majority of mountain bike riders. They typically don't compete in events and they possess limited outdoors experience. They prefer trails with good trail signage and seek technical but not too challenging trails. Enthusiast mountain bikers are the most likely to take short breaks to different areas.	Mostly green (easy) and blue (moderate) classification trails. As they progress will start to ride black (difficult) classification trails and has the potential to move into another user type (sport and/ or gravity).	Significant
Sport	Competitive mountain bikers, who ride regular routes multiple times a week and are members of mountain bike clubs, they are a small but influential market. They are willing to seek less accessible trails, have a high fitness level and are technically proficient but may have limited outdoor skills. They ride a very wide variety of trails.	Green – Double Black (easy to extreme).	Small but influential
Independent	Skilled outdoor enthusiasts who ride once a week and are technically proficient with good level of fitness. Generally, they are a small market. Often involved in other outdoor activities, they are capable of planning their own rides and ride a very wide variety of trail classifications. The adventurous aspect is more important than the technical challenge and they seek more remote trails.	White to Black and Adventure Trails	Small
Gravity	Highly skilled technical riders who seek very challenging trails, typically ride at least once a week and are often members of clubs. They represent a small market that requires purpose-built trails, which are repeatedly used in a concentrated manner. Gravity riders seek specific trails with the highest classifications.	Blue – Double Black (moderate to extreme)	Small but growing rapidly

⁴ [Australian Mountain Bike Trail Guidelines](#), AusCycling 2020

For more advanced riders, trail networks are interpreted and promoted on the reputation of their features as well as individual trails. Sport, gravity, enthusiast and women riders (whether local or visitors) are more likely to promote the region (passively or actively) through social media and sports apps. Even where no formal competition exists, performance apps such as STRAVA™, social media reels and sports camera footage from devices such as GoPro™ promote locally relevant skills, progression and competition between riders.

In addition to the enthusiast, sport and gravity riders identified above, the cohort of women riders in and outside of the region presents a unique opportunity for the destination to specialise. While not structured to provide an accurate gender cross-section of riders, 25% of respondents to the regional strategy survey were women, which is higher than the average identified for participation in mountain biking nationally. In the survey women participated in riding across all levels of riding but are highlighted individually below as a specific consideration in the market.

Rider cohort	Types of trails sought	Potential market	Market	Regional opportunities
Leisure	Green to blue	Significant	Local and non-core visitors	Expansion of green and blue trail offerings, coaching, tuition and skills areas.
Independent	Any, including adventure routes	Small (but growing)	Local and non-core visitors	Bikepacking routes, days rides, cultural experiences.
Women	Any	Medium (but growing rapidly)	Local and visiting core mountain bikers	As for leisure riders but with women's specific trail, service and skills offerings. Skills progression and opportunities to socialise and participate. Membership to groups.
Enthusiast	Green and blue (with some black features)	Significant	Local and visiting core mountain bikers	Trails offering skills progression, coaching and consistent maintenance standards. Membership to groups.
Sport	Green through to double black	Small (but influential)	Local and visiting core mountain bikers	Technical skills coaching, events, racing and competition via performance apps and social media. Membership to groups.
Gravity	Blue to double black	Small (but rapidly growing)	Local and visiting core mountain bikers	Promotion of must do trails and technical features. Membership to groups. Technical skills coaching, events, racing and competition via performance apps and social media.



Photo courtesy of Tourism Tropical North Queensland

Women in MTB

Women are one of the fastest growing market segments in mountain biking with increasing participation in recreational and competitive cycling globally. Alongside the evolution of much improved and capable mountain bikes, the enablers for this have been the growth and diversification in women's specific equipment, events, coaching clinics and visibility on social media. Inspired by early pioneers and role models of women in BMX and mountain biking and connected by strong social networks women have been getting more women on bikes. A natural consequence of this is also increased opportunities for youth, children and other family or friends in general to participate. In mountain biking the impact of the 'you have to see it to be it' philosophy is now playing out in extreme sports with women competing in Red Bull Hardline and Crankworx Slopestyle for the first time in 2024. This cultural shift is reinforced by signature international events such as Tour de Frances Femmes and Paris Roubaix Femmes becoming mainstream as cycling transforms itself in much the same way surfing did when women like Layne Beachley levelled out the playing field at the start of this century.

Despite this, participation rates in most national and international studies currently rest at around 15-20 % as the entrenched norm of mountain biking as a male dominated culture and sport is slowly being transformed. Barriers to participation extends to most areas of the industry including technical and leadership roles but is most evident at the trails and competitions where the numbers are sometimes quite clear to see.

Regional surveys undertaken by Gravity Girls Cairns highlighted some of the barriers to women participating in mountain biking and gravity racing, they included:

- Women learn differently, they don't enjoy the pressure of the standard gravity race or forced learning environments.
- The transition between the skills required to ride beginner/intermediate and advanced trails is often too big a leap and so becomes a barrier to progression.
- There are limited opportunities to learn and practice the fundamental technical skills like riding steep drops, rock gardens, jumps and cornering without riding black and double black trails themselves. Access, remoteness, safety considerations and lack of riding buddies can all factor into a reluctance to learn on the trails themselves.
- Women are often primary caregivers, and so prioritise their family's needs over their own interest/passion to ride or compete.
- Women are more likely to have to navigate competing costs, especially cost-of-living pressures so riding and racing might be sacrificed for their family's benefit.



The tropical north region is well placed to continue to build a flourishing local mountain bike scene for women and girls which is part of a much bigger global movement. Strategies and programs which enable the local scene to develop further can also be a significant drawcard for intrastate and international visitors and should be central pillar of the region's development as a mountain biking destination going forward.

CASE STUDY : GRAVITY GIRLS CAIRNS

Moira Love started what became Gravity Girls South Australia as a way for women to connect around all things mountain biking and encourage other riders into the racing scene. Since that Facebook group began in 2014 it has gathered over 600 local members and spawned the development of sister groups across the country.

Gravity Girls Cairns started out in symmetry with the gravity girl's movement of South Australia and subsequently Western Australia. The Cairns girls originated organically through a simple conversation in about 2017 about the same two to three girls battling it out on the podium each race. They suggested that more girls would want to be able to race - however the type of racing on offer for them was a big step up, intimidating, and just too serious.

So, they decided to create a women's only event so that there could be more accessible race terrain for girls to ride with company. The race lead up included some social rides and preparation for riding technical features with free clinics to try and get the girls confident on trail features they normally wouldn't try. The format was set for a fun non-competitive racing environment so more girls could participate or be involved. After a short hiatus after COVID 19 a fresh push on the Gravity Girls initiative was launched in the region in 2023 and participation in the local scene grew from those 12 participants or so in the early days to a current membership of over 220 and growing. Today women and girls regularly gather under the Gravity Girls Cairns banner to ride socially and share skills on introductory rides through to gravity shuttles and everything in between.



Adaptive MTB

On the back of exceptional new technologies and increasing awareness and inclusivity adaptive mountain biking is growing worldwide. Adaptive mountain bikes enable individuals with physical and neurological disabilities to participate in the sport. Adaptive bikes are generally propelled by electric assist or hand-pedalled mechanisms which allows them to cater to a wide range of user needs, making mountain bike trails accessible to a diverse range of people who were previously excluded.

The global market for adaptive bikes is expanding due to the development of adaptive-specific trails worldwide with many new developments now including adaptive ready offerings. Trails, designed with specific slope, camber, and width requirements, ensure that riders can enjoy challenging yet accessible routes. At the same time not-for-profit organisations like Break the Boundary in Western Australia, have emerged as specialists in promoting and facilitating adaptive mountain biking. The group offers clinics, coaching programs, and one-on-one sessions to help people of all abilities try or join in.

Although as an industry adaptive mountain biking is still in its infancy, the advent of the NDIS has facilitated a much wider access and appreciation of the new generation of bikes on the market. The costs for individuals can be prohibitive with bikes costing anywhere up to \$35,000 so cooperative and try before you buy models have significant merit.

The adaptive mountain biking market in Australia is likely to continue to specialise and grow along with its riders. With increasing support from organisations, government bodies, and clubs, more individuals are discovering the joys of mountain biking. With an international airport on the doorstep of the nearest trail network and hundreds of kilometres of off-road ride offerings the region is well-placed to become an international destination for adaptive riders if the appropriate equipment providers and support services are put in place.

Youth

Mountain biking is a family activity for many and in the Tropical North is not unusual to see well-kitted families heading out to ride technical trail offerings just as often as you might see families riding less advanced green trails. Many youth riders also have access to BMX clubs and the coaching services, race training and skills progression they offer translates directly to modern mountain biking. Pump tracks are a regular outing for kids of all ages on balance bikes and scooters.

Youth participation in mountain biking is booming with social, recreational and competitive riding all on offer in the region. Youth specific race series, access to shuttle services, and coaching programs alongside jump lines, pump tracks and skills parks mean that younger riders these days have access to opportunities to progress every aspect of their riding. Youth in the region also have access to world class events to either spectate, meet their heroes or participate. Many core rider families travel and compete across the region and the state or travel to other mountain biking destinations in tropical north's off season. Youth riders and their families form a mainstay of clubs and an important word of mouth and socially connected network which promotes the region (and it's riding prowess) beyond its boundaries.

There is a divide in terms of access to bikes for many in remote and rural communities, particularly in indigenous communities like Yarrabah and Wujal Wujal which both have quality pump tracks but limited to access to suitable bikes and safety gear. With quality asphalt pump tracks now accessible in most regional towns addressing the accessibility and equity issues through targeted programs should be a regional priority.

In conversations with younger riders at the strategy stall at Crankworx there were multiple suggestions for access to more technical and extreme riding opportunities. These included technical jump lines, foam pits for aerial skills practice and trials arenas or parks alongside transport options for younger riders to ride at locations across the region (without having to rely on their families).

Adventure cycling and bike packing

Bikepacking is essentially off-road cycling combined with hiking/camping, usually with supplies stripped back to the essentials. Most consider it an offshoot of bicycle touring which has traditionally been more focused on formed and sealed roads, but the lines are often blurred. Often touted as a new approach to travel, off-road cycling (aka bikepacking) is as old as bicycles with early adventure cyclists undertaking incredible continental crossings of Australia early last century. Modern bike packers ditch racks and panniers in favour of frame mounted bags while fatter tyres and more mountain bike-like getups are used to tackle single track and off-road routes.

Entry in and out from the Cairns airport offers self-guided riders a whole world of riding across the region. With more and more riders heading into the wilds to explore the routes on offer there is an opportunity for the region to elevate its profile in this rapidly growing international market.

Bike packers are often self-supporting and not as likely to spend locally at the same levels as mountain bikers more generally. The segment does however have a significant presence on social media and international forums and can be highly influential in promoting the region and its mountain biking culture through these channels. At this point in time there are several barriers to development of the market in the region to be addressed. These are included in the recommendations.



Photo courtesy of Tourism Tropical North Queensland

Local riders

The tropical north region has a long history of mountain biking, and its roots go back to the very beginning of the sport in Australia. As a result, local riders' identify strongly with certain trails and trail networks having ridden them or been involved in their construction or maintenance over many years. Clubs, volunteers and local riders have been tireless advocates for the construction of the trails they ride and the events and competitions that they host. The local mountain biking community is very well connected via social networks and share information on trail conditions, adventure routes and mountain biking opportunities across the region. Many riders will utilise neighbouring trail offerings during wet weather or to ride newly renovated or constructed trails. While there is a strong appreciation for the opportunities of expanding trail networks and growing visitation, there is also a range of reservations to planned changes in local offerings.

Looking at the regional market offerings through the lens of the local mountain bike community, it is important to consider a trail networks' appeal to visitors, but also the value to local riders and trail builders who have worked together to define the regional riding experience. Distinctive local terrain, technical trail features and climate all influence local riding styles and the unique offerings. Many local riders surveyed during the Crankworx and UCI Masters events readily identified a favourite trail or network and most appreciated the unique environmental settings of the region's trails.

In regions with a long history like the tropical north, local mountain bikers define the ride culture and are likely to contribute the most in terms of volunteer hours and resources back to trails and events.

Specialist market segments summary

The following table summarises some of the key market segments and the opportunities to establish or continue to build on a regional point-of-difference in the destination mountain bike market. These specialist market segments are in addition to the location destination reef and rainforest offerings already established in the TNQ tourism market.

Segment	Regional specialisations	Segment enablers	Regional enablers
Women	- Women's coaching, ride camps, and events - Women designed and maintained trails and features - Industry leadership and development	- Women's specific promotion and marketing - Social networks - Off bike packages - Group offerings - Supporting products; childcare etc.	- International Airport - Airport connections - Bike hire and regional outfitters - Shuttles - Intraregional bike friendly transport - Social media and information apps - Après bike experiences - Venues and gathering places - Local food and drink offerings - Cultural and First Nations experiences and packages
Youth (and families)	Coaching, ride camps and academies, and events	- Technical skills features - Bike libraries and mentoring (rural and remote)	
NZ and Southern States winter riders	- Coaching and progression packages - Events and race offerings - Unique ride experiences	- Bike hire and regional outfitters - Technical guides, trail intel and promotion	
Enthusiasts			
Adaptive MTB	- Supporting specialist health services - Adventure rides and destinations (Wangetti, Black Mountain) - Technical and tropical terrain coaching and guiding	- Adaptive bike hire and fit services - International Airport - Group offerings - Specialist accommodation - Other accessible adventure offerings	
Specialists (gravity and sport)	- Pro and technical events offerings - Technical, tropical terrain, enduro and downhill coaching, mentoring and guiding	Specialist bike hire, pro tune mechanics and technical support	
Bike packers	- Adventure rides and destinations - Adventure races	- Official routes and guides - Bike hire and regional outfitters	





Photo courtesy of Tourism Tropical North Queensland

THE DESTINATION MOUNTAIN BIKE MARKET

Many visiting riders will either have family or associates joining them who do not ride; or look to store the bike for a rest day or two and take in the sights or other local tourism offerings while they're in the area. With so many existing tourism products on the market there is easily accessible experiences for riders or their associates to incorporate into a mountain biking trip.

The Economic impact of the Cairns MTB Sector⁵ Report outlines potential growth of the MTB sector of 5.3% between 2023-2027. This growth is contingent on the influence of hosting significant events such as Crankworx and the construction (and maintenance) of additional high quality trail offerings. Mountain bike riding is estimated to currently contribute \$35.4 million to the Cairns economy. The future contribution could be in the order of \$140 million if trail infrastructure was increased (encouraging longer visitor stays).

There is an estimated 423,200⁶ mountain bike riders in Australia with a market split of 80% male and 20% female

riders with a strong trend of the female segment increasing. Participation is generally centred on 35-44-year-olds followed by 45-54-year-olds. The regional MTB strategy survey indicated the similar trends but with stronger representation of female riders (25.5 %) and over 80% of riders over age of 34 (35/44 - 31.2%, 45/54 - 29.8 %, 55/64 - 19.5%).

According to AECs report, Smithfield currently hosts local rides in the order of 17,900 and visitor rides of 9,700 equally around 26,800 rides per year with an additional 1,000 or so rides associated with events.

Tourism Tropical North Queensland's market analysis report⁷ recommends the region could build the MTB market to 2% of total tourist expenditure which would equate to \$95 million by 2030. The central pillars to this are the construction of new trails; new ride product development and owning winter riding opportunities for southern Australians and New Zealanders while bolstering our credentials through major events like Crankworx.

CONSTRUCT AND MAINTAIN HIGH QUALITY TRAIL OFFERINGS

1

2

DEVELOP NEW AND UNIQUE RIDE PRODUCTS

SECURE THE WINTER MTB MARKET

3

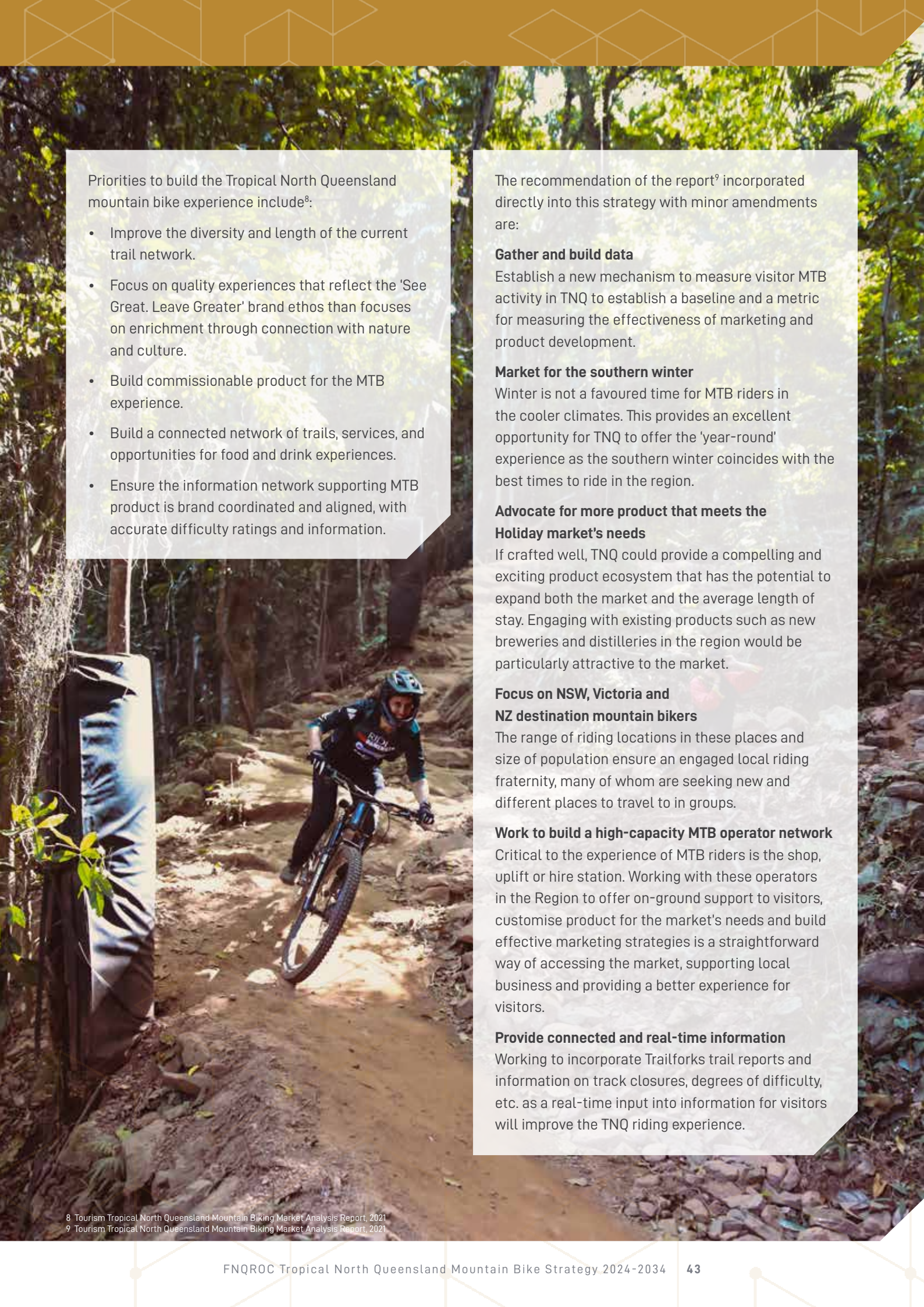
4

PROMOTE OUR CREDENTIALS ON THE WORLD STAGE

⁵ Economic impact of the Cairns MTB Sector, Cairns MTB Club, 2023

⁶ Nationwide AusPlay Survey 2022

⁷ Tourism Tropical North Queensland Mountain Biking Market Analysis Report, 2021

A full-page background image showing a mountain biker in a blue and black jersey and helmet riding a trail through a lush green forest. The trail is dirt and rocky, with sunlight filtering through the trees. The biker is in the center-left of the frame, leaning forward. The image is framed by a dark orange border at the top and bottom, and a dark orange geometric pattern on the right side.

Priorities to build the Tropical North Queensland mountain bike experience include⁸:

- Improve the diversity and length of the current trail network.
- Focus on quality experiences that reflect the 'See Great. Leave Greater' brand ethos than focuses on enrichment through connection with nature and culture.
- Build commissionable product for the MTB experience.
- Build a connected network of trails, services, and opportunities for food and drink experiences.
- Ensure the information network supporting MTB product is brand coordinated and aligned, with accurate difficulty ratings and information.

The recommendation of the report⁹ incorporated directly into this strategy with minor amendments are:

Gather and build data

Establish a new mechanism to measure visitor MTB activity in TNQ to establish a baseline and a metric for measuring the effectiveness of marketing and product development.

Market for the southern winter

Winter is not a favoured time for MTB riders in the cooler climates. This provides an excellent opportunity for TNQ to offer the 'year-round' experience as the southern winter coincides with the best times to ride in the region.

Advocate for more product that meets the Holiday market's needs

If crafted well, TNQ could provide a compelling and exciting product ecosystem that has the potential to expand both the market and the average length of stay. Engaging with existing products such as new breweries and distilleries in the region would be particularly attractive to the market.

Focus on NSW, Victoria and NZ destination mountain bikers

The range of riding locations in these places and size of population ensure an engaged local riding fraternity, many of whom are seeking new and different places to travel to in groups.

Work to build a high-capacity MTB operator network

Critical to the experience of MTB riders is the shop, uplift or hire station. Working with these operators in the Region to offer on-ground support to visitors, customise product for the market's needs and build effective marketing strategies is a straightforward way of accessing the market, supporting local business and providing a better experience for visitors.

Provide connected and real-time information

Working to incorporate Trailforks trail reports and information on track closures, degrees of difficulty, etc. as a real-time input into information for visitors will improve the TNQ riding experience.

⁸ Tourism Tropical North Queensland Mountain Biking Market Analysis Report, 2021
⁹ Tourism Tropical North Queensland Mountain Biking Market Analysis Report, 2021

The destination - regional variety offers skills progression

The tropical north is somewhat unique in that it offers opportunities for riders to progress as they develop their skills across a range of mountain biking disciplines within a single region. The points of difference between each of the trail networks on offer provide opportunity to support different rider needs and skill levels; host a variety of different event styles; and accommodate seasonal variation. For visiting riders, the region offers the opportunity to self-guide or pair up with local coaches and clinics to progress their riding on almost any terrain.

Network description	Trail offerings – basic	Trail offerings – advanced	Rating	Elevation	Km Trail
Atherton Forest Nestled up close to the town of the same name, Atherton Forest is the region's most extensive trail network at 57 km with a concept plan mapping out another 45 km. Atherton serves up everything from epic switching climbs to flowy descents and long meanders in the forest for beginners. The network is machine cut so expect room to move and fun, flowy benched trails. Over 320m of elevation fuel the descents.	Atherton serves up great entry level riding with accessible green loops nestled in the floor of an open valley. The upper trail and outer network offer extensive blue trails with long switching climbs and fast flowy descents back down to the valley floor. Green berms offer beginner (and advanced) riders with some great sections of pump and flow.	The network offers mildly technical climbs and fast flowing descents on firm, rocky trails right through to sections of berms, jumps, step downs and drops (all with B-line options). A-line jumps, sneaky lines and the occasional double offer fun challenges for more advanced riders. Otherwise just soak up the long descents.	Green and Blue (Black A line diversions)	758m - 1,077m (350m v)	57 km
Davies Creek - (DAVIES) Davies is the regions premier cross-country destination with a mix of gentle climbs and fast descents through open woodland. The trails serve up around 25 km of beginner and intermediate trails with a concept plan in place for an additional 80 km within a total descent of around 375m.	Davies is a cross country and trail destination at heart with a range of trail formats from fire roads to twisty, cattle-pad single track that snakes through the trees. Recent additions like trail 6 offer super fun and fast beginner friendly flow and progressive jumps.	The upper blue sections offer a bit more speed in steeper but open berms before dropping back down to the green trails Laying on the speed in the looser granite gravel sections can test your skills and there's bunch of natural and built features for those wishing to get the wheels off the ground or hone their technical climbing skills. Recommended for night rides to beat the summer heat and meet the wildlife.	Green and Blue (Black A line diversions)	423m - 578m (155m v)	25 km
Southside (Edmonton) Short, sweet and local. The southside trails provide locals with access to single track, downhill adrenalin and a skills park all within their reach.	Introductory and advanced skills can be practiced in the well-equipped skills park before turning your skills to the fun and quick green loops of Manihot.	Green ant (old boot) offers a fun up and back with a speedy blue descent.	Green, Blue and Black	22m - 368m (346m v)	10 km

Network description	Trail offerings – basic	Trail offerings – advanced	Rating	Elevation	Km Trail
Smithfield (SMITTY) Iconic on the world mountain biking stage, Smithfield offers a spectacular network of trails in the rainforest. It is probably best known for its rooty, rocky, technical downhill runs in the rainforest that have hosted world championship events since the beginning of the sport. It's a compact network at ~30 km but has a concept plan which proposes another 52 km in its 435m elevation.	Often more known for its technical trails, there's lots on offer for beginners too, with green loops serving up easy to navigate trails with introductory berms and descents to learn on. Machine cut blue trails offer a natural progression to managing speed and flow through berm and roller descents. Riders of 'Pipeline' are rewarded after a long climb up switchbacks with a fun and fast descent. A green (ish) jump line at bowhunters provides a great intro to tabletops.	Smithfield shines in the technical realm and offers lots of challenging descents and climbs. The network artfully blends hand-cut old school trails with machine polished jump lines and features. Stand outs are its root-riddled and rocky downhill and enduro lines that make the most of the vertical elevation on hand. Blue and black jump lines on bowhunters offer plenty of air for advanced riders. The penultimate challenge is to race the World Cup Downhill course which serves up almost everything Smithfield has to offer in one gnarly 1.8km run.	Green, Blue, Black, Double Black	30m - 462m (435m v)	29 km
Cardwell (in development) A sweet new pump track marks the proposed trail head for 90km of trail earmarked for the spectacular coastal town of Cardwell. Framed as a premier flow destination in the making, in the words of the Girramay traditional owners we invite you to "Ride where our ancestors once walked" Cardwell (proposed)	The Cardwell proposal really offers it all with an uplift focused gravity park running back down to town from three separate drop in zones.	Features such as air flow trails and long, long descents with incredible views to Hinchinbrook Island and the Coral Sea will have riders frothing for more	Green and Blue		~90km
Croydon (in development) Simple, beginners dual use trails which will connect the historical town of Croydon to Lake Belmore via some incredible rocky hills and stunning vistas .	A first-class pump track at the trail head in town offers riders to hone their skills in between rides. A gentle meandering climb from town out to the Lake and back. A great way to take in the outback sunset. A quality pump track on town means you'll need to bring along the dirt jumper as well.		Green dual use		~14 km

A full-page background image showing a mountain biker in a blue and yellow jersey, black helmet, and knee pads, riding a black mountain bike on a rocky, dirt trail. The trail is surrounded by dense green forest with tall trees and palm fronds visible in the background. The lighting is bright, suggesting daytime.

ATTRIBUTES OF SUCCESSFUL MOUNTAIN BIKE DESTINATION

The mountain biker

Visitors to a mountain biker destination come from a relatively diverse background but share some common traits which characterise the market. Based on the findings from a range of survey sources¹⁰ the following assumptions can be made about a typical destination mountain biker:

- Spends around \$2,500¹¹ per trip.
- Is aged between 35 and 55.
- Is comprised of approximately 80% males and 20% females (although the female cohort is increasing).
- Has average to above average disposable income and plans to travel to ride each year.
- Is likely to travel with their own bike (or hire a high-quality offering at the destination).
- Spends between \$2,000 and \$6,000 annually on mountain biking.
- Usually travels to ride with 2-5 friends (or family who also ride).
- Will travel interstate, inter-region or internationally to mountain bike.
- Augments riding time with luxury downtime through local tourism experiences, food, beverages and culture.
- Seeks to develop or progress their skills on fun and fast trails and adventure rides.
- Prefers and will pay for shuttles and uplifts if they are available.
- Is likely to record their ride on a sports app and post their ride holiday on social media.

Photo courtesy of Tourism Tropical North Queensland

¹⁰ World Trail MTB Riders Survey 2013, Queensland Mountain Bike Strategy Users Survey, 2017, Tropical North Queensland Regional Strategy Survey, 2024, AusPlay survey (2022).

¹¹ (\$2,8485.75) - Mountain Biking in Australia: An Economic and Participation Analysis, GHD, (2021)

The mountain bike destination

A variety of attributes contribute to the success of a mountain biking destination (adapted from World Trails, Six Elements ride destination model and Mackay Region Mountain Bike Strategy, 2019). Each of these elements work together to complete the experience of visiting riders. Many of these are equally important to the local mountain biking community as well.

Quality Trails and natural Features

The trail is the product, the quality of individual trails, trail features, navigation and landscape features are integral to the rider experience. Spectacular local surroundings, scenery, vistas and natural surroundings add to the experience of the trail.

Extent

The length and layout of the trail network determine the length of time and stay required to experience a ride location. The assumption used in the Australian Mountain Bike Trails Guideline recommends 30 + kilometres of trail for a regionally significant and 80+ for a nationally significant trail network with multiple loops of trail on offer.

Variety

Mountain bikers seek variety and the opportunity to develop and progress their skills on features which either match or challenge their skill level. To appeal to a wider audience a trail network needs to offer difficulty levels which best match the rider demographic. This translates to offering a higher percentage of beginner to intermediate trails, with a smaller but select offering of technical or difficult trails or features.

Connectivity and location

The Australian Mountain Bike Trails Guideline recommends a nationally significant trail network be within 180 km of an airport or transport hub and between 45 and 90 km of another regionally or nationally significant trail network.

Tourism and marketing

There are two quite separate avenues for the marketing and visibility of trail networks. Dedicated destination riders are most likely to receive information on places to ride via word of mouth from their peers or from industry and location specific social media and press. New to the sport or curious riders are likely to participate in riding as smaller component of a broader holiday visit.

Supporting services and infrastructure

Planning ride holidays and travelling with bikes and related equipment can be complicated and not having appropriate services in place can be a deterrent to potential visitors. Services and infrastructure for visiting riders begins at the airport or transport hub and continues to the trails and accommodation services.

Event Overlays and Competitions

In addition to direct marketing approaches, the profile of a destination and even an individual trail or trail feature can be promoted to a broader audience via events and competitions. Coverage during international and pro-series events or opportunities to participate in mass-participation like marathon XC events increase exposure and appeal.

Pubs, accommodation and availability of non-mountain bike product

Much like the supporting infrastructure and services, access to off the bike experiences and products is important for destination visitors. Locally distinct food, beverage, cultural and accommodation experiences and packages offer a value-add to visiting riders. Additional and non-bike tourism and visitor offerings are equally as important and provide visitors important down-time from riding.

Maintenance and ongoing investment in trails

Trail maintenance is crucial to maintain the quality, safety and ride appeal of a trail network. Keeping the offerings of a network on par with the contemporary needs of riders through systematic upgrades and refurbishment is important to maintain the appeal of the ride product.

Community and local ride culture*

An active local ride culture adds to the appeal of a destination for visiting riders and locals alike. Mountain biking is a relatively new sport for much of the community and comes with its own subcultures and disciplines.

Specialisation^{12*}

Celebrating the local history and specialisations adds to the appeal of a destination. Hero trails and other must-ride offerings alongside unique technical trail features all add to the appeal of a destination. Getting a local to guide a ride or a demonstrate a technical line can unlock a trail for a visiting rider.

¹² *Attributes in addition to Mackay Region Mountain Bike Strategy, 2019

Benchmarking of Tropical North Queensland's destination offerings

The benchmarking and target setting consider the regions' destination mountain bike offerings and how the 2024-34 strategy seeks to deliver them. It considers the existing mountain bike trail networks of Atherton Forest, Davies Creek and Smithfield, and the proposed trail networks for Cardwell and Mount Peter.

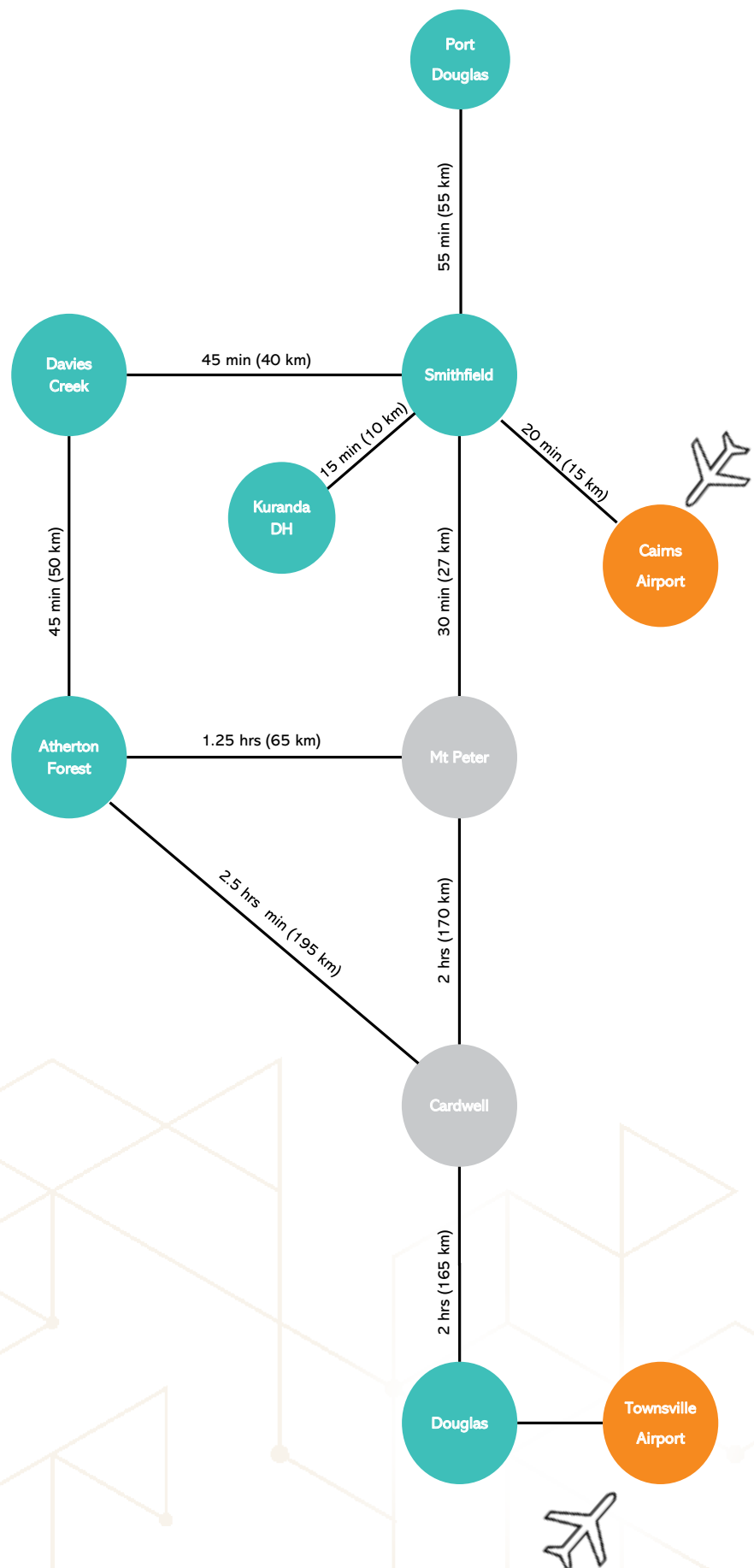
Key attributes	Current	2034 Strategy targets and recommendations	Key investments and strategies
Quality trails and natural features	- Trails are of high quality with recent upgrades undertaken for individual trails. - The three existing trail networks offer unique and exceptional scenery, vistas and natural surrounds.	- Undertake scheduled refurbishment of aged trails across existing networks. - Develop regionally consistent signage and trail naming for marketing.	- Regional Mountain Bike Infrastructure Plan. - Whole-of-life trail network maintenance model.
Extent	Current extent of trail networks at Atherton Forest, Davies Creek and Smithfield meets local or regional significance standards.	- Deliver three trail expansion and one trail development project to nationally significant trail standards. - Expand Atherton Forest from 57 to ~102 km. - Expand Davies Creek from 25 to ~105 km. - Expand Smithfield from 30 to ~82 km. - Deliver new Cardwell trail network ~94 km.	- Regional Mountain Bike Infrastructure Plan. - ATHERTON FOREST MOUNTAIN BIKE PARK - STAGE 2, CONCEPT PLAN. - CARDWELL TROPICAL MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAIL PROJECT, FEASIBILITY REPORT. - CROYDON MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAILS MASTER PLAN. - DAVIES CREEK MOUNTAIN BIKE PARK EXPANSION CONCEPT REPORT. - SMITHFIELD MOUNTAIN BIKE PARK EXPANSION CONCEPT REPORT.
Variety	The region has exceptional variety across its three current trail networks due to the different terrain between each location.	Deliver additional beginner / intermediate and advanced trail offerings with shuttle accessibility at Atherton Forest, Smithfield and Davies Creek.	Regional Mountain Bike Infrastructure Plan.
	- The proposed expansion plans for trail networks address gaps in beginner/intermediate/advanced and shuttle ready options. - The proposed Cardwell development offers a gravity uplift specific offering which provides additional diversity.	- Deliver shuttle compatible trails, supporting infrastructure and services across all networks. - Deliver regional adventure routes and rides to link Cairns Airport – Smithfield – Davies Creek – Atherton Forest – Cardwell.	- Regional adventure trail working group. - ATHERTON FOREST MOUNTAIN BIKE PARK - STAGE 2, CONCEPT PLAN. - CARDWELL TROPICAL MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAIL PROJECT, FEASIBILITY REPORT. - CROYDON MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAILS MASTER PLAN. - DAVIES CREEK MOUNTAIN BIKE PARK EXPANSION CONCEPT REPORT. - SMITHFIELD MOUNTAIN BIKE PARK EXPANSION CONCEPT REPORT.
Connectivity and location	- Each TNQ mountain bike trail networks is within 50-170 km of Cairns International Airport. - Smithfield is within 15 km of Cairns International Airport. - TNQ's current major trail networks are within ~50km of each other.	- Leverage the accessibility between trail networks by supporting development of cross-regional transport options. - Establish MTB support infrastructure and information at key contact areas for visitors including Cairns Airport. - Deliver the Mount Peter trail network to service the southern Cairns region.	- Regional destination mountain biking marketing plan. - Regional mountain bike infrastructure plan.
	Southern Cairns residents have limited access to extensive trail network riding opportunities.		

Key attributes	Current	2034 Strategy targets and recommendations	Key investments and strategies
Tourism and marketing	- Tourism Tropical North Queensland Mountain Biking Market Analysis Report provides direct recommendations to develop the destination MTB market. - Currently there is limited coordinated market development beyond events-based promotions. - Ride information and trip planning materials (formerly posted on Ride Cairns) not readily accessible).	- Implement regional brand coordination guided by an agreed marketing plan. - Deliver rider and trail information through regional trail pass system and social media platforms.	- Regional destination mountain biking marketing plan. - Regional trail pass.
Supporting services and infrastructure	- International events CrankWorx and UCI Masters World Mountain Bike Championships secured into the near future. - Local and regional level events provide access for local mountain bikers to compete in a variety of disciplines and levels.	- Continue to develop specialist coaching, mentoring and training opportunities for local riders to compete in visiting events. - Secure future major events rounds and series for the region as a specialist tropical competition venue. - Upgrade or construct trails and supporting infrastructure to support future major events.	Regional destination mountain biking marketing plan.
Availability of non-mountain bike product	The Tropical North Queensland Region has exceptional off-bike tourism and visitor offerings and established adventure and ecotourism markets which align to the destination mountain biking segment.	- Develop incentives for local and visiting mountain bikers through regional trail pass system. - Incorporate existing package options into mountain bike destination marketing.	- Regional destination mountain biking marketing plan. - Regional trail pass.
Maintenance and ongoing investment in trails	- The region has specialist tropical trail and network design expertise. - Current revenue from trail use is not translated into resources for trail maintenance. - Coverage and frequency of preventative and proactive trail maintenance could be improved across all networks.	- Implement a whole of life trail maintenance model. - Develop trail usage data and information collection system to manage trail network and report return on investment. - Investigate options for collaborative approaches to trail maintenance.	- Regional mountain bike infrastructure plan. - Whole-of-life trail network maintenance model. - Regional trail pass.
Local ride culture	- The region has exceptional mountain bike credentials and history. - Clubs have strong levels of followers on social media. - Numbers of club membership is constrained by local population size. - Seasonal availability of trails could be improved with trail upgrades and re-routing. - Higher technical levels of coaching (e.g. PMBiA Air and Tech) are currently not locally available.	- Support Clubs to expand membership through value-adds and opportunities delivered through a regional trail pass system. - Deliver specialist coaching, mentoring and training opportunities, facilities and services for local mountain biking community. - Support the further development of programs and participation for women and youth in the local mountain bike culture.	- Regional destination mountain biking marketing plan. - Regional trail pass.
Specialisation	- The region offers specialisation in technical and adventure riding options. - Progression across all mountain biking disciplines is available. - Specialist coaching services are available in the region. - There is limited access to progressive learning environments.	- Support clubs and businesses to further develop specialist skills and events. - Support initiatives to support accessibility. - Incorporate skills progression design into new trails and retrofits of existing trails during major refurbishments.	- Regional destination mountain biking marketing plan. - Regional trail pass.

The destination – transport and accessibility

One of the keys to unlocking Tropical North Queensland as a mountain bike destination is the development of regional mountain bike transport options in tandem with shuttle and uplift services.

The services are essential to provide access to the gravity offerings in the region and to transport riders between trail networks. With these services in place, destination packages can be established to provide visiting riders with a selection of ride itineraries to match their needs and time available. Established transport options will also provide essential logistical support to assist local youth access regional facilities and support the staging of cross-regional events.





The establishment of a transport system for mountain bikers between regional trail networks will also allow the region to augment its extensive bikepacking and adventure cycling options. The transport needs for mountain bike park users and adventure cyclists are essentially the same. Return and drop off services for bike packers would enable riders to access the entire region through the Cairns International Airport.

Events, sport and promotions

While the traditional competitive mountain bike offering has been cross-country racing since its inclusion in the Olympic Games in 1996, gravity and extreme events are now close on its heels in popularity and participation. Alongside recreational mountain biking, events and competitions form an important part of the riding community and industry. Events provide opportunities for promotion, sponsorship and participation at all levels of the sport. Clubs and volunteers are the mainstay of local and regional events and provide opportunities for both local and visiting riders to compete.

Sponsorship and support of Local and State Government and collaboration with peak tourism and cycling industry bodies and businesses is pivotal in providing the platform for many of the high profile and signature events like CrankWorx. Iconic events provide demonstrated economic benefits and an opportunity to promote mountain biking to riders and wider community. In a report commissioned by Cairns Mountain Bike Club it is estimated that the inaugural CrankWorx event in 2022 generated revenue of between \$4-5 million¹³.

The economic return for major events is coupled with exceptional promotion of the region as a mountain biking destination with an estimated 38 million viewers¹⁴ of the CrankWork event on the world stage. This exposure translates into aspirations for mountain bikers from outside the region to plan a future visit, as well promoting the sport in the regional and national market.

After hosting the World Championships in 1996 the region has hosted UCI World Cup in 2014 & 2016 and UCI World Mountain Bike Championships in 2017 and 2024. In recent times the area has been showcased internationally hosting Crankworx Cairns in 2022, 2023 and 2024.

National and regional race series and events such as the Red Bull Defiance, Triple R and ELEV8XCM all draw visiting and local riders to participate. They also contribute to the regional appeal as a mountain bike destination and return economic and social benefits to local communities and the region.



¹³ Economic Impact of the Cairns MTB Sector, Cairns MTB Club, 2023

¹⁴ Tourism Tropical North Queensland Mountain Biking Market Analysis Report, 2021



SUSTAINABLE TRAILS

SUSTAINABILITY PRACTICES

Sustainability is now front and centre of a global trail building industry. Trail maintenance is essential to protect the initial investment, but also to ensure the ongoing safety of users and compliance with construction standards. Once trails are open to the public, it is crucial to keep them in a condition relevant to their difficulty rating.

The incorporation of mountain bike developments into regional resilience and diversification projects has also led to a much more detailed consideration of the social, environmental and cultural drivers which underpin the mountain biking industry. Additional drivers and influences which need to be considered in addition to trail management and maintenance requirements include cultural stewardship, climate change and the environment.

Cultural stewardship through appropriate engagement, consultation, facilitation and empowerment of First Nations needs and perspectives to be comprehensively considered in new works and systematically retrofitted into existing works (based on the feedback of Traditional Owners or Native Title Holders).

Climate change and extreme weather events is beginning to influence trail design and maintenance. In the tropics construction may need to be augmented by a higher standard of armouring and drainage for trails to endure extreme rain events, as well as remain rideable or return to rideable as soon as possible after rain events.

Environmental stewardship of trail networks is essential for the network to be sustainable and resilient. Considerations including biosecurity, pathogen and weed hygiene as well as water quality, biodiversity and appropriate fire regimes should be comprehensively included in new designs works or systematically retrofitted into older infrastructure. It is an expectation that environmental stewardship and responsibility is visible and integrated across all relevant aspects of the operation (including events).

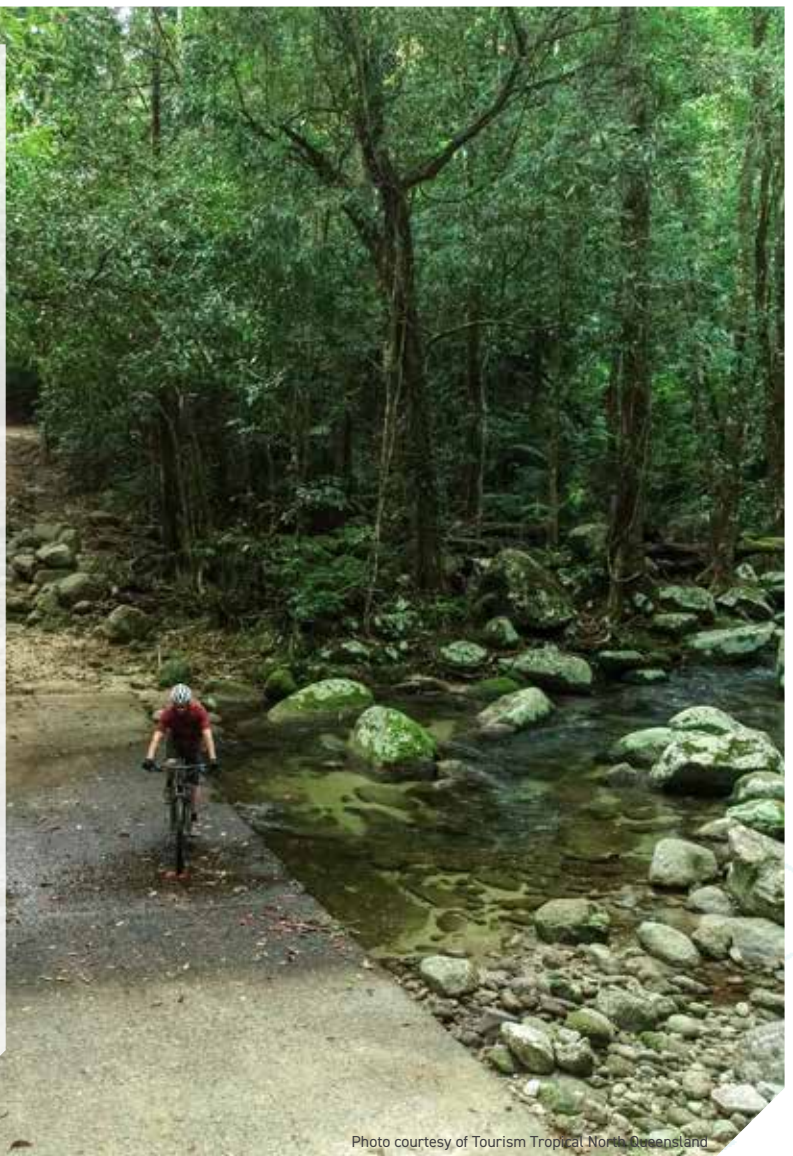


Photo courtesy of Tourism Tropical North Queensland

Tenure, Access & Liability

Mountain bike developments rarely sit within the remit of a single landowner, so tenure management is a central consideration. Where regulatory requirements or permits are in place (e.g. – Section 34 for National Park or Collaborative Deed for State Forest) this can be relatively straightforward. Where other tenure such as freehold or leasehold are included in the developments footprint other levels of agreement are required. There is not always a template approach to these management or land use agreements, so they require negotiation on a case-by-case basis. Tenure also has a direct bearing on the regulatory and compliance settings for trail construction which can take place. Dirt jumps or other advanced features may not be able to be constructed on some tenures due to risk management and liability requirements.

National Parks and State Forests. These areas are managed by government agencies and have regulations to protect natural resources. Mountain biking developments are required to align with conservation goals and require detailed environmental impact assessments. Where a tenure transition takes place within a protected area the pre-existing use of the area will be taken into consideration¹⁵.

Local Government Land. Managed by local councils, these lands may have more flexible regulations but still require adherence to cultural, local planning and environmental guidelines.

Private Property. Development on private land requires agreements with landowners, ensuring that trails do not interfere with other land uses. Legal agreements should outline responsibilities for maintenance and liability.

Stakeholder Engagement

Traditional Owners. Upfront and ongoing engagement with the relevant First Nations representative body or the holder of Native Title is essential for the appropriate management of trail networks. There may also be significant opportunities for First Nations leadership, business development or partnership opportunities within the mountain biking industry.

The strategy recommends local engagement of Traditional Owners over seeking regional representation which is often incompatible with scales of RNTBC's.

Community involvement. Engaging local communities, including mountain biking clubs and residents, helps build support and ensures the trails meet user needs. Multi-use options are often explored for mountain bike networks to add value or to manage potential use conflicts or safety concerns.

Government agencies. Collaboration with agencies and land managers ensures that developments align with broader land management objectives. This is essential in situations in contexts where liability rests with State agencies as land managers. Outside of private developments, mountain bike projects are delivered in alignment with State or Federal government sport, recreation and regional investment priorities and policies

Local Government. Local government usually has a role or some level of participation or influence on mountain bike developments. At the simplest level this may include providing enabling infrastructure such as access roads, car parking or other services. At the other end of the spectrum Local Government may be responsible for the management of trails and resource the workforce on-ground. Local Government also plays a lead role in supporting regional economic development and tourism which is directly relevant to destination mountain biking products.

Regulatory Compliance

Environmental Regulations. Compliance with state and federal environmental laws and local planning provisions is essential. This includes protecting endangered species, managing erosion, and maintaining water quality.

Cultural Heritage. Consultation at all stages of development is necessary to ensure appropriate consideration and protection of indigenous cultural sites. Consultation with Traditional Owners is crucial to ensure trail alignments and future management activities do not impact culturally significant areas.

¹⁵ Operational Policy, [Mountain biking in QPWS managed areas](#), 2014

Maintenance resources

Annual trail maintenance costs vary across terrain, usage patterns and seasonal events but with appropriate levels of monitoring and auditing can be relatively predictable over time. Ongoing maintenance costs are lower than initial construction costs but are more difficult to secure from external sources¹⁶. A major reconditioning, re-alignment or repair of trails may be required every 5-8 years. These repairs generally require contractors and machinery so the cost may be like initial construction costs in some situations. Major refurbishments may not require the same outlay for detailed design and approvals if the works happen with the defined trail alignment and are within construction guidelines.

Public mountain bike parks are public good projects from the outset. Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service recognises mountain biking as a recreation activity consistent with the management principles for protected and forests and provides policy¹⁷ to guide mountain bike trail construction and use. They are typically managed through an agreement between the state or local land manager and the local mountain bike club. The role and contribution of local government is unique to every one of these arrangements. Public mountain bike parks are not pay-at-the-gate facilities. The economic revenue they generate is diffused into the surrounding local and regional businesses as well as to commercial operators who pay a permit fee to access them. A conundrum that managers of public mountain bike parks need to navigate is that most of the economic benefit they generate is not returned to support the operational and capital needs of the park.

The base operational resource from State agencies which usually host trails on their tenure is not always enough to manage a network. The shortfall can be addressed through internally allocated resources, but these resources must also address many other land management requirements so are competitive and in no way guaranteed. Revenue from permits issued for commercial operators are directed to consolidated revenue, not to the trail network. So, despite the significant revenues (~\$2,500 per visiting rider on holiday or \$25 per ride)¹⁸ generated by local and visiting mountain bikers, very little of these returns are directed to the trails they came to ride.

The trail management workforce resources on hand generally include volunteer labour and contractor services. These can also be augmented by trail maintenance teams, which in turn might be leveraged from traineeships and employment programs. The level of specialisation in the maintenance task is an important consideration when deciding which resource is most effective to use. The realistic monetary value of maintenance costs typically quoted ranges from between \$500 to \$1,500 per kilometre of trail annually. These costs can be much more if trails are not maintained frequently or may be higher for beginner level trails where strong compliance with safety standards are required to keep the trail surface and features true to its rating. Leveraging a local volunteer base for both routine maintenance and special projects at dig days and working bees can be highly effective and has other value-adds but will be unlikely to be the single solution. Additional resources for maintenance need to come from other sources outlined below.

Base resources	Base revenue	Periodic revenue	Corporate revenue	User contributions	External grants
Land Manager Operational Works Budget	Club membership	Event entry fees Fundraisers, raffles, auctions etc.	Sponsorship and donations License fees Merchandise Leases	Trail fees and donations Parking fees Entry fees	Competitive Grants Development Grants Disaster Recovery Grants
Volunteers					

Currently a disconnect occurs in the operational phase of trail networks between the maintenance required to operate the trails and the revenue they generate. There are several options used to address this operational shortfall. Derby and Finch Hatton are public trail destinations that are managed by local government operated trail maintenance teams. User pays privately operated parks like Maydena and Boomerang Farm fund their operation out of entry and uplift services. Another strategy to address this is a voluntary user contribution model which generates revenue from rider donations or membership base and supporting businesses to fund trial maintenance.

¹⁶ Australian Mountain Bike Trail Guidelines, AusCycling 2020

¹⁷ Operational Policy, Mountain biking in QPWS managed areas, 2014

¹⁸ Mountain Biking in Australia: An Economic and Participation Analysis, GHD, (2021)

CASE STUDY : TABLELANDS TRAIL BUILDERS PROGRAM

A new youth traineeship program, funded by the Skilling Queenslanders for Work initiative, aims to maintain the Atherton Forest Mountain Bike Park. Spearheaded by the Vocational Partnerships Group (VPG) in collaboration with Tablelands Regional Council and Tablelands Cycle Sports, the Tablelands Trail Builders program offers paid traineeships to disadvantaged job seekers aged 17-24. Participants will receive training in trail care, emphasizing practical skills like landscaping, weed management, and pest control. The initiative also includes an accredited course leading to a Certificate in Conservation and Ecosystem Management.

To ensure long-term success, weekly career and employability skills training will prepare participants for sustainable employment opportunities. VPG's Chief Executive Officer, Maryanne Tranter, highlighted the program's community and environmental impact. David Prete, founding president of Tableland Cycle Sports, expressed enthusiasm for involving local youth in maintaining the trails and nurturing a skilled workforce dedicated to the park's upkeep.

This initiative not only benefits the park but also empowers young individuals, fosters community support, and sets a precedent for similar projects. With a dedicated local Project Supervisor and VPG's expertise, the program aims to transform lives and create lasting positive effects in the local area.



Managing trails as assets

Public mountain bike trails are constructed assets and need to be managed in a life of asset approach like any other infrastructure. Maintaining mountain bike trails to their rated category is crucial for ensuring safety, sustainability, and user enjoyment. Trail condition is also a key determinant of rider experience and is directly linked to the marketability and user satisfaction of a destination. In the regional strategy survey when asked what respondents would like to see more of, the highest-ranking response (58.7%) was trail maintenance. Maintaining trails to their rated category is essential for managing liability and minimising litigation risk, particularly for green and blue rated trails.

Trail design.

Sustainable trail design minimises environmental impact and maintenance costs. Techniques include proper drainage, erosion control, and using natural materials. The costs associated with trail maintenance vary depending on several factors including:

- Trail design and construction standards.
- Trail surface.
- Soil type and geology.
- Usage levels.
- Environmental conditions.
- Trail features.
- Trail grade.

Ongoing maintenance.

Establishing a maintenance plan is vital for long-term sustainability. This includes regular inspections, vegetation management, and surface repairs. Typical maintenance activities required to manage and maintain trails include:

- Routine inspections and audits.
- Vegetation management.
- Erosion control.
- Drainage management.
- Surface repairs.
- Signage and amenities.
- Seasonal closures and disaster preparedness.
- Biosecurity risk management.
- Waste management and sustainable procurement

Management planning and policy.

Supporting processes, tools and policies streamline management of trail assets and include:

- Compliance and maintenance reporting.
- Asset management planning.
- Volunteer and contractor work effort recording and reporting.
- Maintenance request management systems.
- Disaster management plan.

Monitoring, data collection and information management.

The data and information collated from trail usage tools and audit systems provides an important window into both the management of asset and the return on investment. Information management and evaluation tools might include:

- Trail counters or use tracking devices and other hardware.
- Data storage and software solutions.
- Reporting, modelling and evaluation tools and processes.





TECHNICAL LEVELS OF SERVICE

Levels of service

A technical level of service (LoS) is used in asset management to define specific, measurable criteria that assess the ability of assets to meet community needs. In management of public assets, these parameters can include measures such as reliability, quality, safety or environmental impact, and compliance with legislation. There are two key benefits to a levels of service delivery approach. First and foremost, required standards can be maintained and assets can be operated more consistently to deliver reliable services; secondly, they can be used to set targets for improvement in management systems and identify where assets do not meet a required standard.

Not all assets are equal or their purposes the same, so a LoS system accommodates separate classes of asset requiring different minimum levels of service or management action. Service levels can be mandatory, context specific or desirable.

This example below shows how an LoS system could be applied to the management of a trail network in combination with a trail standards guideline. The existing asset classes of local, regional and national are drawn from [Australian Mountain Bike Trail Guidelines](#). Several off-the-shelf products are available to assist trail managers undertake trail auditing, monitor trail usage and report on management and maintenance plans. Given most of the functions or requirements for sustainable trail management are universal there is opportunity to consider regionally consistent approaches and packages to support land managers and clubs.

Trail management requirements and minimum standards Y (yes), N (no), O (optional)	Local	Regional	National
Routine inspections and trail audits	Y	Y	Y
Vegetation management	Y	Y	Y
Erosion control	Y	Y	Y
Drainage management	Y	Y	Y
Surface repairs	Y	Y	Y
Signage and amenities audit	N	O	Y
Seasonal or weather-based closure plan	O	Y	Y
Biosecurity risk management	O	Y	Y
Compliance and maintenance reporting	O	Y	Y
Asset management planning	O	O	Y
Volunteer and contractor work effort recording and reporting	O	Y	Y
Maintenance request management system	N	O	Y
Disaster management plan	O	Y	Y



Service provision and trail offerings Y (yes), N (no), O (optional)	Local	Regional	National
Trail Hub or Trail Centre	N	N	Y
Accommodation	N	N	Y
Bike hire	N	N	Y
Local food or eateries	N	O	Y
Event hosting capabilities	N	O	Y
Trail head	Y	Y	Y
Trail markers	Y	Y	Y
Change rooms	O	O	Y
Toilets	Y	Y	Y
Potable water	O	O	Y
Bike wash/biosecurity hygiene station	O	O	Y
Car park	Y	Y	Y
Length of trail	20km	20- 80 km	80+ km
Number of loops	2+	2+	4+
Proportion of single track	>80%	>50%	>50%
Minimum area of site	>250 ha	>500ha	>1500ha
Location	Accessible from public road	40 km from 15,000 population	<180km from airport or major transport links
Exclusion zone	n/a	>45 km from another national or regional trail network	>90 km from another national scale trail network
Road access	Must have clear public road access	< 1km from highway or primary road	Within 1km national or state road
Trail classification	Any	Mixture. Green and Blue as minimum	Mixture of trail classifications. Green, blue and black diamond required as minimum.

NEXT STEPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

Governance

The 2015 strategy's primary recommendation was the establishment of a regional coordination model. Assumptions around collaborative models are typically focused on delivering benefits through collective advocacy, reduced duplication, greater collaboration and cost effectiveness. Based on input from the Steering Committee and messages from the survey and focus area discussions consideration was given to the following:

- Importance of not diluting or disempowering local leadership.
- Maintaining and celebrating the different experiences on offer at each of the regions current and planned trail networks.
- Minimising duplication of existing partnerships or administrative functions and increasing efficiencies.
- Deliver benefits of regional coordination and collaboration realised in other areas of operations of the FNQROC and partners.
- Enabling scalable advocacy to promote local ventures and regional destination development simultaneously.
- Focusing on additional options to augment funding and resourcing for trail maintenance and expansion.
- Reducing unnecessary project management and financial administrative burden on clubs and volunteers to allow them to focus on their core activities and strengths.

Three coordination models were developed to demonstrate the key elements of governance for comparison; and to assist guide the strategy steering committee in identifying a preferred approach. See appendices for this comparison.

These are model approaches only and not all elements of governance are applicable at all scales; one approach may not entirely cancel out the other. For example, management of trail volunteers would generally be delivered at a local/ site scale. Volunteerism might be enabled by region-wide approaches such as reporting apps and incentive programs; but the on-ground action will be delivered locally. This highlights that most, if not all, existing governance arrangements and capacity are still required at a local level even under a regionally coordinated approach. Based on the assessment of the governance options currently available the Steering Committee recommended a stand-alone with regional coordination model be initiated in the region.

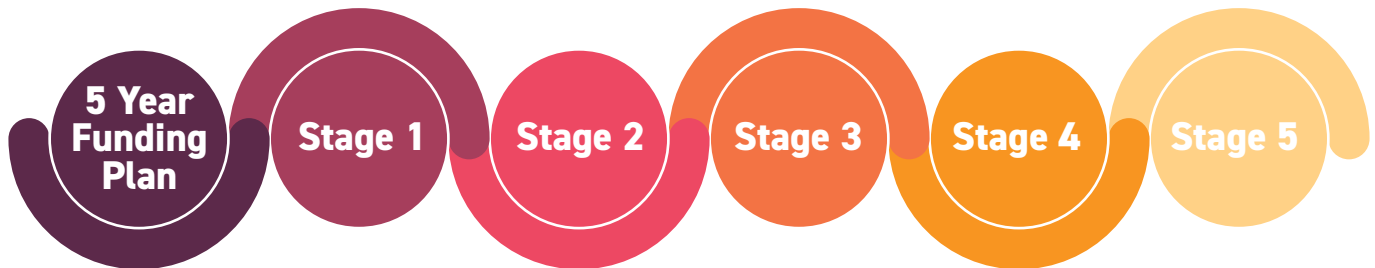
It was acknowledged that the future option of a trail trust could be explored when the current model matured (or be reviewed in 2 years from the establishment of a Regional Advisory Committee).

RECOMMENDATION 1

Establish a **Regional Mountain Bike Strategy Steering Committee** to guide the implementation of Strategy and deliver regional coordination across key projects.

Regional investment plan

A staged regional mountain bike infrastructure plan is recommended to guide regional advocacy for capital works elements of developing the regional mountain bike destination. Models such as the that used by the FNQROC Regional Road and Transport Group (RRTG) might be useful to explore.



In the first instance the current staged funding requests for expansion and development of mountain bike trails and networks will be used to develop a five-year funding request to activate the strategy.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Develop a five-year **mountain bike infrastructure plan and funding proposal** to guide the roll-out of the strategy.

Trail network maintenance

Trail maintenance and resourcing is essential to sustainability of the regional trail offerings as well as to the rider experience and quality of the product. A whole of life asset management approach is the most effective means to deliver this. Given the potential benefits of collaboration across multiple trail managers in the region, it is a recommendation of the strategy that this is embarked on as regional project so that economies of scale and resource sharing options can be properly explored.



The key elements of implementation of a whole-of-life asset management approach would require adoption of new or expansion of current trail auditing systems; the installation of trail usage counters; volunteer management; contractor management; and locally relevant benefit:cost models to provide support to decision making, prioritisation and review .

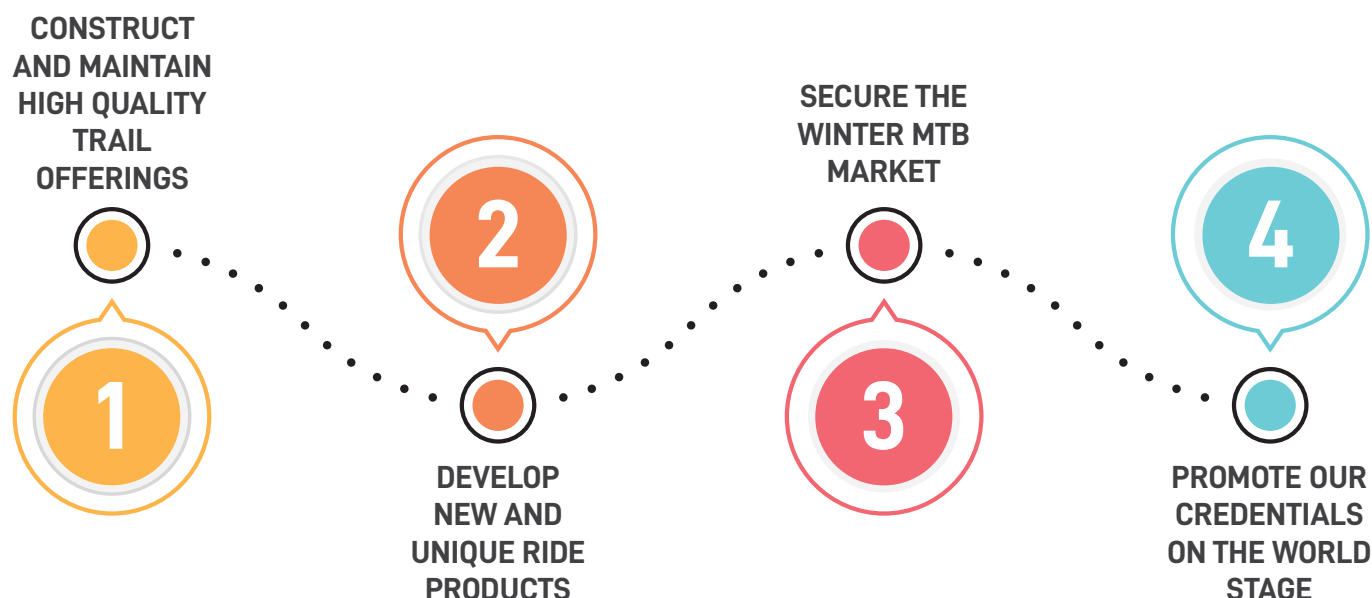
Funding for general trail maintenance outside of initial construction costs requires the parallel development or expansion of sustainable streams of either volunteer resources; in-kind; or financial contributions to implement. It is recommended that a trail network maintenance model include direct input with a proposed regional trail pass system report back on trail management programs and engage and connect with contributors.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Develop or commission a regionally relevant **whole-of-life trail network maintenance model**.

Destination development, events and marketing

Tourism Tropical North Queensland's market analysis report¹⁹ recommends the region could build the MTB market to 2% of total tourist expenditure which would equate to \$95 million to the regional economy by 2030. The central pillars to this are the construction of new trails; new ride product development and owning winter riding opportunities for southern Australians and New Zealanders while bolstering our credentials through major events like CrankWorx.



The recommendation of the TTNQ report²⁰ incorporated directly into this strategy with minor amendments are:

Gather and build data.

Establish a new mechanism to measure visitor MTB activity in TNQ to establish a baseline and a metric for measuring the effectiveness of marketing and product development.

Market for the southern winter.

Winter is not a favoured time for MTB riders in the cooler climates. This provides an excellent opportunity for TNQ to offer the 'year-round' experience as the southern winter coincides with the best times to ride in the region.

Advocate for more product that meets the Holiday market's needs.

If crafted well, TNQ could provide a compelling and exciting product ecosystem that has the potential to expand both the market and the average length of stay. Engaging with existing products such as new breweries and distilleries in the region would be particularly attractive to the market.

Focus on NSW, Victoria and NZ destination mountain bikers.

The range of riding locations in these places and size of population ensure an engaged local riding fraternity, many of whom are seeking new and different places to travel to in groups.

Work to build a high-capacity MTB operator network.

Critical to the experience of MTB riders is the shop, uplift or hire station. Working with these operators in the Region to offer on-ground support to visitors, customise product for the market's needs and build effective marketing strategies is a straightforward way of accessing the market, supporting local business and providing a better experience for visitors.

Provide connected and real-time information.

Working to incorporate Trailforks trail reports and information on track closures, degrees of difficulty, etc. as a real-time input into information for visitors will improve the TNQ riding experience.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Develop or commission a **regional destination mountain biking marketing plan** to develop and promote the regional mountain bike product (link to recommendations 5, development of a regional trail pass system).

¹⁹ Tourism Tropical North Queensland Mountain Biking Market Analysis Report, 2021

²⁰ Tourism Tropical North Queensland Mountain Biking Market Analysis Report, 2021

Clubs, volunteers and rider contributions to trails

The region is renowned for its world-class mountain biking venues, terrain, and events, reflecting the strength of the local community of riders. Building and maintaining volunteer capacity is crucial for trail maintenance and the success of major events like CrankWorx and local race series especially for marshalling and race support. Research²¹ by the cycling industry shows that up to 80% of mountain bikers are not club members, and only 10% of club members are actively involved in club activities. The implication for this is that a small number of individuals are responsible for the essential functions of a club which can lead to burn out and fatigue of passionate members crucial to their success. The region is also somewhat constrained by a relatively small population within Cairns and more so in other regional centres like Atherton and Mareeba with trail networks nearby.

Reviewing the membership profile of clubs establishes that regional membership is somewhere in the order of 500 members. In contrast the number of people following clubs on social media is around 17,750 indicating many informal members are either interested in the event and trail information provided by clubs; or also use this to connect with the local community of riders if they are visiting the region. In the strategy survey 56% of riders received information on trails they visited from social media and 66.7 % word of mouth. The survey also queried riders' perception and participation in trail work as well as their willingness to contribute more financially to trail maintenance. The findings show that over 95% of riders would consider contributing more to trail upkeep provided they were confident the resource was spent on local trails; or that the option to volunteer time as in-kind rather than financial contributions was included.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Develop and pilot a voluntary **regional trail pass system** as a collaborative project of the Regional Mountain Bike Strategy Steering Committee

Based on the survey responses, individual conversation with riders and local business and reviewing other contributions models in locations like Mystic Bike Park²² and Rotorua Trails Trust²³ a model approach for a regional trail pass approach was considered. The following recommendations were made to the committee:

- 1 A voluntary rider contribution model could be initiated across the region through a trail pass system.
- 2 Additional revenue for trail maintenance could be generated through the trail pass.
- 3 In the absence of a formal trail trust model in place, contributions would be directed to a rider's nominated club.
- 4 Volunteer contributions could be integrated into the pass to allow riders to choose their preferred way to participate (and log volunteer hours made).
- 5 Special deals and discounts from local businesses and industry would be incorporated to incentivise and reward membership.
- 6 Different tiers and styles of membership could be incorporated to ensure the trail pass was not a deterrent to club membership or rider participation.
- 7 Trail data and condition reports as well as ride beta could be included in the application.
- 8 The current social media networks and information services provided by clubs could be augmented through the digital connectivity provided by the trail pass system.

The delivery of the platform most suited to the regions needs at the time of writing application Hive Pass²⁴ which has been established primarily for this purpose. The procurement and administration of the trail pass platform could be a regional collaboration.

²¹ Mountain Biking in Australia: An Economic and Participation Analysis, AusCycling, 2021

²² <https://www.elevationmystic.com/>

²³ <https://www.rotoruatrailstrust.co.nz/index.php>

²⁴ <https://hivepass.app/>

A green mountain bike with 'SUPPLY' and 'MAXXIS' branding is parked on a dirt trail. In the background, there's a wooden fence, trees, and a sign that says 'National park'. The scene is set in a park with trees and a clear sky.

Adventure and wilderness trails

Despite the incredible riding experiences on offer the visibility of those offerings is largely unrepresented on international forums due to a lack of described and resolved routes. In addition, there are several tenuous or unresolved connections between otherwise comprehensive through-routes which could unlock multi-day riding journeys for a broader audience if formalised or sanctioned. Unused local road easement in some local government areas offer potential links as do sections of closed infrastructure or management roads in National Parks and irrigation infrastructure networks on the Tablelands. Routes which could be augmented by new connections and trails include the Bicentennial National Trail, Wangetti Trail, Bump Track, Misty Mountains, Twin Bridges, Culpa/Red Road and other established routes).

There are also options for sanctioned wilderness trails routes to enable access to new or upgraded descents from the uplands to the lowlands.

There are currently limited transport options for the planning of through routes and multi-day adventure rides in the region. Transport is not readily available for bikepackers and adventure riders to return to Cairns Airport to complete multi-day rides.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Establish a **regional adventure trail working group** to resolve, reinstate or establish single and multi-day routes.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTIONS

The strategic framework provides the direction for the strategy recommendations and actions



PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

There are six priority recommendation essential to the delivery of the strategy

Priority recommendations	Strategic framework alignment				Timing	Complexity	Priority
	1	2	3	4			
1 Establish a Regional Mountain Bike Strategy Steering Committee to guide the implementation of Strategy and deliver regional coordination across key projects.	X	X	X	X	Immediate	L	H
2 Develop a five-year mountain bike infrastructure plan and funding proposal to guide the rollout of the strategy.	X	X	X		Immediate	M	H
3 Develop and pilot regionally scalable approaches to whole-of-life trail network maintenance	X		X	X	1-2 years	M	H
4 Develop or commission a regional destination mountain biking marketing plan to develop and promote the regional mountain bike product	X	X	X	X	1-2 years	M	H
5 Develop and pilot a voluntary regional trail pass system as a collaborative project of the Regional Mountain Bike Strategy Steering Committee.			X	X	1-2 years	M	H
6 Establish a regional adventure trail working group to resolve, reinstate or establish single and multi-day routes.	X	X	X	X	1-2 years	M	H

TIMEFRAME:	COMPLEXITY:	RELATIVE PRIORITY AND IMPACT:
Immediate – 0 -1 years Short term – 1 to 2 years Mid-term – 2- 5 years Long term – 5- 10 years Ongoing – continue once established	Low – relatively simple to implement within existing resources Medium – relatively straight-forward but requiring some increase in capacity or external resources High – complex to implement requiring additional resources and capacity	Lower – desirable but not essential to deliver the strategy Medium – important to deliver the strategy High – essential to deliver the strategy

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The general recommendations of the strategy are aligned to the four strategic framework goals



GOVERNANCE AND PLANNING

Deliver regional coordination and collaboration

	Timeframe	Complexity	Priority and impact
1.1 Identify and adopt a club and trail management app to manage agreed rider contribution model.	1-2 years	M	H
1.2 Establish a regional data collection and management agreement to support maintenance of trail and user data.	1-2 years	L	M
1.3 Develop return on investment reporting to provide guidance to local government and other potential investors in trail maintenance of the economic returns from mountain bike parks and infrastructure.	1-2 years	M	H
1.4 Formalise and review trail heads and trail signage into a locally distinct but regionally consistent format and duplicate trail data on Trailforks.	1-2 years	L	H
1.5 Identify opportunities for regional scale efficiency programs for procurement of services.	2-5 years	M	H
1.6 Facilitate local administration and management of trail data.	Ongoing	L	M
1.7 Support clubs and trail managers to network and grow membership.	Ongoing	M	M



QUALITY TRAILS AND SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTS

Diversify our regional trail offerings and enable best practice administration and management

	Timeframe	Complexity	Priority and impact
2.1 Deliver the stage 2 trail network expansion for Atherton Forest Mountain Bike Park on approval of business case.	1-2 years	H	H
2.2 Register a regional showcase of self-guided multi-day adventure routes on bikepacking.com	1-2 years	L	M
2.3 Investigate and implement a regionally scaled trail audit and usage monitoring system.	1-2 years	M	H
2.4 Invest in opportunities for First Nations trail construction, maintenance, and business development opportunities.	1-2 years	M	H
2.5 Establish management MOAs across key stakeholders within each hub.	1-2 years	M	H
2.6 Deliver the trail network expansion concept for Smithfield on completion of business case and management model.	2-5 years	H	H
2.7 Deliver the trail network expansion concept for Davies Creek on completion of business case.	2-5 years	H	H
2.8 Deliver new trail network for Cardwell.	2-5 years	H	H
2.9 Deliver new dual use trail for Croydon.	2-5 years	M	M
2.10 Investigate tenure resolution (e.g. land swap, land acquisition, leases or MOU) processes for relevant areas of mountain bike trail networks.	2-5 years	H	H
2.11 Investigate re-classification of historical unauthorised trails through a review and audit system.	2-5 years	H	M
2.12 Deliver new trail network for Edmonton, Mount Peter.	5- 10 years	M	H
2.13 Include mountain biking investment in the FNQROC regional advocacy portfolio.	Ongoing	L	H
2.14 Support and document club managed volunteer programs.	Ongoing	L	M

3

ECONOMIC IMPACT

Deliver a world-class tropical mountain bike destination and industry

	Timeframe	Complexity	Priority and impact
3.1 Update and develop regional mountain biking marketing package for user groups identified in TTNQs Mountain Biking Market Analysis Report.	1-2 years	M	H
3.2 Initiate a business incentive and partners program in conjunction with regional trail pass initiative.	1-2 years	M	H
3.3 Establish or formalise seasonal shuttle and uplift services for Atherton, Smithfield and Kuranda.	1-2 years	L	H
3.4 Create experience orientated communication materials for suggested laps, rides and navigation or technical trail features for trail networks.	1-2 years	L	H
3.5 Extend Kuranda Downhill exit trail along road corridor to carpark.	1-2 years	M	H
3.6 Secure training centre opportunities for the region in the lead up to the 2032 Brisbane Olympic and Paralympic Games.	2-5 years	M	H
3.7 Support the development of regional MTB transport network with private enterprise to transport riders between trail networks.	2-5 years	M	H
3.8 Develop a regionally consistent mountain bike trail guide service as a product offering for visiting riders.	2-5 years	L	M
3.9 Investigate rider targeted infrastructure at Cairns Airport.	2-5 years	M	M
3.10 Formalise bicycle passage infrastructure at Lake Morris.	2-5 years	M	M
3.11 Formalise safe trailhead access for Kuranda Downhill with directional road signage and marking.	2-5 years	M	M
3.12 Investigate establishment of a mountain biking centre of excellence and National training centre in conjunction with QAS and AusCycling alongside local universities. Pair with NZ or southern Australia as a winter campus and seek partnerships with Pacific and Oceania.	5-10 years	H	H
3.13 Continue the development of world class events hosting such as CrankWorx, UCI Masters, Red Bull Defiance and others.	Ongoing	M	H
3.14 Resource partnership and leadership opportunities for First Nations in MTB and related industries.	Ongoing	M	H

4

PARTICIPATION

Celebrate our roots and grow our mountain biking community

	Timeframe	Complexity	Priority and impact
4.1 Establish an interschool or clubs pump track competition series.	1-2 years	L	M
4.2 Continue or establish partnerships programs between schools, clubs and councils.	1-2 years	M	M
4.3 Establish a women's designed and managed trail and skills progression zone at Smithfield.	1-2 years	M	M
4.4 Investigate installation of an indoor or all-weather foam pit/air bag for jumps and skills progression.	2-5 years	H	H
4.5 Invest in a trials riding arena at Atherton or Smithfield.	2-5 years	L	M
4.6 Secure regional accreditation for coaching for PMBiA advanced air and technical.	2-5 years	M	H
4.7 Establish an annual MTB skills academy program.	2-5 years	M	H
4.8 Establish a pump track bike library and coaching service for regional and remote communities (e.g. Wujal Wujal, Yarrabah, Hope Vale).	2-5 years	M	M
4.9 Establish a progressive learning jump line and technical skills park (green to blue) at Smithfield.	2-5 years	M	M
4.10 Investigate and initiate transport links for junior riders between Smithfield, Davies and Atherton.	5-10 years	M	M

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APPENDICES

REGIONAL MOUNTAIN BIKE GOVERNANCE MODEL OPTIONS

	Stand-alone	Stand-alone with regional coordination	Regional Trail Trust
Stakeholders	- Land manager/s - MTB Club - Council - Traditional Owners - Local DTIS rep - Volunteers	- Land managers - MTB Clubs - Councils - Traditional Owners - Local/Regional DTIS rep - Volunteers	Trustees - Land managers - MTB Clubs - Councils - Traditional Owners - Regional DTIS rep Beneficiaries - MTB Clubs/Trail Network - Volunteers
Agreements in place	- NCA- S34, EMP, MOA - FA- Collaborative Deed	- NCA- S34, EMP, MOA - FA- Collaborative Deed - Steering Committee Terms of Reference	- NCA- S34, EMP, MOA - FA- Collaborative Deed - Trail Trust Terms of Reference and - Trust Deed
Resourcing	- Club revenue - Land manager operational budgets - Sponsorship (Local/ Regional) - Trail donations (riders) - Competitive grants - Some local FTE and other in-kind (LG) - Events and services	- Club membership revenue - Trail revenue (regional trail pass membership and fee system) - Trail donations (riders) - Land manager operational budgets - Sponsorship (Local/Regional) - Competitive grants - Some regional and local FTE and other in-kind (LG, FNQROC) - Events and services	- Club membership revenue - Trail revenue (regional trail pass membership and fee system) - Land manager operational budgets - Some regional and local FTE and other in-kind (LG, FNQROC) - Trail donations (riders) - Events and services - Sponsorship (Local/Regional/Corporate) - Trust fund (raised from trail pass/ membership) and augmented by sponsorships or grants
Regional coordination	- Adhoc, social networks and relationships - Trail maintenance working group	- Trail maintenance working groups (local) - MTB infrastructure/ investment plan - Regional steering Committee/Advisory Group	- Trail maintenance working groups (local) - MTB infrastructure/ investment plan - Trail Trust (Trustee's)
Supporting plans	- Concept plan - Trail maintenance plan - Local strategy or plan - Tourism plan	- Concept plans - Trail maintenance plans (nested) - Local strategy or plans (nested into regional strategy) - Regional Strategy - Regional marketing strategy	- Concept plan - Trail maintenance plan (nested) - Local strategy or plans (nested into regional strategy) - Regional Strategy - Regional marketing strategy
Additional roles and opportunities	- Trail maintenance crew or trainee's - Trail audits and condition reporting - statutory and proactive maintenance - Volunteer coordinator	- Trail maintenance crew or trainee's - Trail audits and condition reporting - statutory and proactive maintenance - Regional Resource Sharing - Regional Advocacy - Regional marketing - Regional procurement	- Trail maintenance crew or trainee's - Trail audits and condition reporting - statutory and proactive maintenance - Official partners program - Regional Resource Sharing - Regional Advocacy - Regional marketing - Regional procurement - Trails manager/Project Manager - Administrator

DISCUSSION OF GOVERNANCE MODEL OPTIONS

Options for governance approaches for the administration of trail networks were collated from existing and proposed approaches for comparison. Elements of each model have been broken into categories to highlight common traits and fundamental differences across approaches. This also allows for customisation of approaches.

Model description	Advantages	Disadvantages
Stand-alone <i>A stand-alone approach would largely resemble the status quo with any additional governance or coordination delivered through tenure-relevant trail maintenance coordination (i.e. – as required by Section 34 or Collaborative Deed unless freehold).</i>	• Little or low start-up costs • Lower transition transaction for Clubs/Trail Networks (i.e. less political) • Performance against a basic framework could allow for more effective leverage of resources • Clubs/Trail Networks maintain autonomy • Individual councils can continue to resource or advocate for local trails • Existing co-management arrangements with State land managers not altered	• Without a governance structure in place securing or allocating regional funds would not be as streamlined • More substantial commercial partnerships might not be as attractive to secure at a local level (e.g. commercial sponsorship or incentives) • Coordination across the region as a destination would not be as well resourced • Individual trail networks may be competing the for the same grant streams and funding • State and Federal departments might be less inclined to consider local advocacy requests over regional
Stand-alone with regional coordination <i>A regional coordination model would require the hosting of a regional steering or advisory committee in addition to stand-alone clubs. A coordinated approach could be used to scale-up local initiatives and provide the necessary governance for programs such as a regional trail pass system.</i>	• Regional coordination may be able to be delivered out of existing FTE resources • Individual councils can continue to resource or advocate for local trails • Existing co-management arrangements with State land managers not altered • Regional advocacy would be more streamlined and bigger picture • It would be more effective for external agencies to engage with a collective rather than individual entities (for most purposes) • A regional trail pass system could be governed by a regional committee • Competitive grants as well as project work could deliver benefit to multiple clubs/trail networks simultaneously • Regional contracts and procurement may be able to deliver benefits otherwise inaccessible to stand alone clubs • Would allow for nesting of local plans and initiates into an overarching plan for advocacy and resourcing • Could potentially be used to transition to a trail trust or other governance arrangement in the future	• Requires regional agreement to allocate resources to coordination • Requires additional resources to coordinate • Requires commitment from local clubs to operate in a regionally scoped environment • Additional level of governance (although informal and non-binding) • Complexity of some projects may take additional time to mature/deliver (of not externally resourced)
Regional Trail Trust <i>A trust is a legal arrangement where trustees represent the beneficiaries of the Trust e.g. clubs, community. Trail trusts have been used successfully in a range of locations to deliver both singular trail networks as well as regional trail/cycling initiatives.</i>	• State and Federal investors may be more confident in allocation of resources to a regional entity • Commercial sponsors and partners may find the coverage and reach of a regional trust more attractive • Capital works may be able to be undertaken based on pre-determined prioritisation process (as in a roads maintenance and construction model) • Dedicated FTE/s could deliver a higher level of specialisation to regional coordination, administration and works programs • Charitable trusts may be able to attract and manage a more diverse range of revenue e.g. – bequests or commercial sponsorship	• Existing co-management arrangements with State land managers may need to be altered for management of trails to be transferred to a trust. • Requires establishment of trust or company governance structure including policies for managing conflict of interest • Requires specific allocation of FTE to administer • Requires establishment of banking and auditing processes • Additional administration and potential duplication of governance required at a local trail level • Potentially higher political risk or transaction cost for individual clubs/trail networks • May require additional effort to other approaches to communicate transparency



Photo courtesy of Tourism Tropical North Queensland





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