

**Glen Innes Severn Council Meeting**

**16 MAY 2024**

**ANNEXURES**

**Annexures**

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**REPORT**

**Measuring community attitudes  
to the New England Rail Trail**  
Telephone survey conducted for  
Glen Innes Severn Council

March 2024



RAIL TRAIL: REF 6915, MARCH 2024

## REPORT

# Measuring community attitudes to the New England Rail Trail

## Telephone survey conducted for Glen Innes Severn Council

March 2024

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## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Glen Innes Severn Council (GISC) has commissioned a statistically representative telephone survey of GISC adult residents to measure awareness and support for the proposed New England Rail Trail (NERT), a 103-km walking and cycling path linking Glen Innes and Armidale.

The survey of 300 adult residents (excluding Council employees and councillors) was conducted in February 2024. Random sampling error for this sample size is +/- 5.6% at the 95% confidence level.

### Among the major findings:

1. 90% of respondents claimed to have heard of the Rail Trail.
2. Of those with prior awareness, 35% knew NERT was a walking and cycling path (whereas 10% believed it was a rail service). Fourteen per cent said it would run alongside the existing rail corridor, and 10% said it would run from Armidale to Glen Innes.
3. 39% of all respondents supported the proposed NERT, while 43% opposed it. Opposition was strongest among residents aged 65+ (at 49% oppose, to 26% support), while those aged 18-49 were more likely to support the proposal (42% support against 31% oppose).
4. The main reasons for opposition were a desire to see rail services re-instated (23% of all respondents), concern that Council money should be spent elsewhere (21%) and a belief that Council would bear some or all construction costs (7%).
5. Main reasons for support were that it would be a boost for local tourism (22%), that it would be good for locals in terms of exercise etc (10%), that it would give people additional reasons for visit Glen Innes (10%), that it was a good use for the old rail corridor (11%) and that it would help create new jobs (9%).
6. When asked if they had any specific concerns, half of all respondents (51%) said they had none. Of the remainder, the largest was a desire to see rail services resume instead (13% of all respondents). Construction costs (12%), disruption to landholders adjoining the NERT (11%), ongoing maintenance costs (10%) and a belief Council money should be better spent elsewhere (10%) were also raised as concerns. There were also some residents concerned with issues around potential litter, toilet waste and/or weed dispersal.
7. In relation to perceived benefits, 38% saw none. However 42% saw benefits to local tourism, 20% felt it would also be good for locals, and 10% believed it would create jobs and/or bring money to town.

## 2. BACKGROUND, METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE



### 2.1. BACKGROUND AND SURVEY OBJECTIVES

Glen Innes Severn Council (GISC) and Armidale Regional Council are proposing to create the New England Rail Trail (NERT), a 103-km cycling and pedestrian pathway along the disused Armidale to Glen Innes rail line (which closed to rail traffic in 1993).

The NERT is designed to become both a new tourist attraction for the New England region, and an exercise, leisure and nature resource for locals.

GISC would be responsible for construction of the 35km Glen Innes to Ben Lomond section of the Rail Trail, using grant funding from the State and Federal governments.

As part of its funding applications, GISC has been asked by the State Government to engage with the local community and understand their sentiment towards the NERT. This research, comprising a statistically representative telephone survey of adult residents within the GISC Local Government Area, forms part of that engagement.

#### Survey objectives comprised:

1. Constructing an objective, representative and statistically valid survey of 300 adult GISC residents (random sampling error +/- 5.6% at 95% confidence level), to measure their views towards NERT
2. Measuring awareness of the proposed NERT
3. Measuring support for/opposition to the proposed NERT
4. Understanding the community's key concerns and perceived benefits.

### 2.2. METHODOLOGY

#### Data collection

Data was collected by Taverner Research Group via random CATI (telephone) interviewing during the period February 15<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> inclusive.

Residents were called up to five times at different stages of the morning, afternoon, or evening. Once successfully contacted, they were offered call-backs if necessary to complete the interview at a more convenient time. Council employees and councillors were screened out for participation.

To avoid non-response bias, the survey subject was not divulged during the preamble. Instead, respondents were simply asked to complete a short survey about "an important local issue".

Of the 300 adult residents completing the survey, 201 did so via mobile phone and 99 via fixed-line phone). A copy of the questionnaire is available in Appendix 1. Average interview duration was 6 minutes and 29 seconds.



## 2. BACKGROUND, METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE



Based on the number of households within the Glen Innes Shire Council LGA, a random sample of 300 adult residents implies a margin of error of +/- 5.6% at the 95% confidence level.<sup>1</sup>

### Data Handling

Data handling and analysis was carried out using the statistical database program “Q”. All responses are de-identified to ensure the anonymity of respondents. The collected data often cannot mirror the exact age/sex distribution of the region, due to the voluntary nature of this survey, availability of individuals and other issues. To correct for this, the collected data set is weighted to bring it back to the ideal age/sex distribution as per 2021 ABS Census data.

### Data Analysis

Statistical testing was conducted across results by gender, age, whether the respondent lived in Glen Innes or elsewhere, length of residence, and whether they had prior awareness of the NERT. Significant differences, at the 95% confidence level, are identified in red (below average) or green (above average).

All use of the word ‘significant’ in commentary is reserved for differences expressed via this process. Significant differences are unlikely to have been caused by chance alone.

### 2.3. SURVEY SAMPLE

The sample exhibited the following demographic characteristics:

**Table 1: Demographic characteristics of survey sample (unweighted)**

FACTOR	CHARACTERISTIC	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Age	18-49	65	22%
	50-64	77	26%
	65+	158	52%
Gender	Male	108	36%
	Female	192	64%
Own/rent	Own	270	90%
	Rent	30	10%

As noted previously, the sample has been post-weighted by age and gender to reflect the demographic profile of the GISC LGA as per 2021 ABS Census data,

<sup>1</sup> This means that if we conducted a similar poll 20 times, results should reflect the views and behaviour of the overall survey population – in this case “all GISC adult residents” - to within a +/- 5.6% margin in 19 of those 20 surveys.



## 2. BACKGROUND, METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE

Table 2: Place of residence

TOWN/VILLAGE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Glen Innes	233	78
Glencoe	14	5
Emmaville	13	4
Dundee	11	4
Shannon Vale	8	3
Deepwater	6	2
Other	14	5

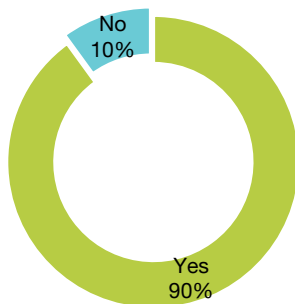
(N.B. Total percentage does not add to 100 due to rounding.)

### 3. SURVEY RESULTS

The survey commenced with questions designed to measure awareness and understanding of the proposed New England Rail Trail.

**Figure 1: Awareness of proposed New England Rail Trail**

**Q1 PRIOR TO THIS PHONE CALL HAD YOU HEARD ABOUT SOMETHING CALLED THE NEW ENGLAND RAIL TRAIL?**  
**BASE: ALL RESPONDENTS (N=300)**

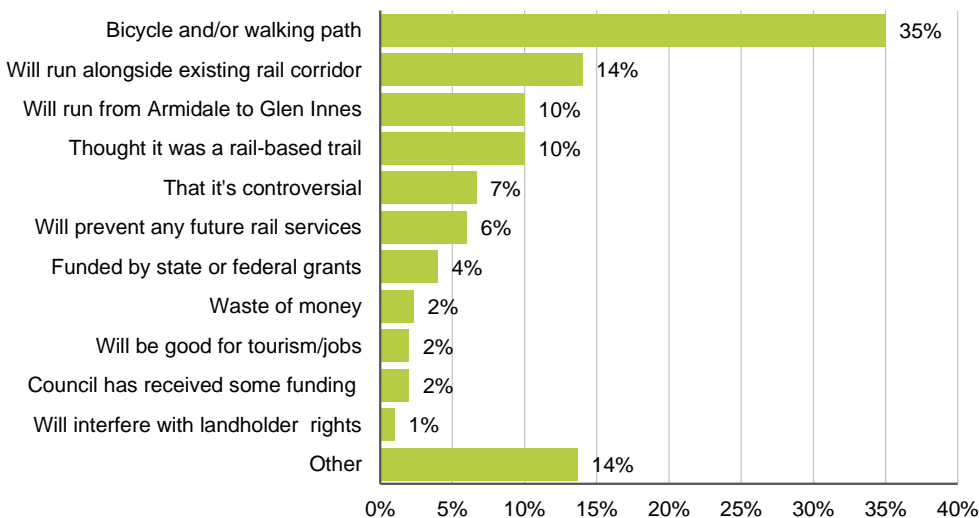


Nine in ten respondents claimed prior familiarity with the New England Rail Trail. Awareness was slightly higher among those aged 65-plus (at 93%) and by those living in Glen Innes (also 93%). There were no differences by gender.

With no further explanation of the Rail Trail, those respondents claiming prior knowledge were asked (in an open-ended question) what they had heard about it. Their coded (i.e. themed) responses are shown in **Figure 2**, below (with some residents providing more than one response):

**Figure 2: What people have heard about the Rail Trail**

**Q2 AND WHAT HAVE YOU HEARD ABOUT IT?**  
**BASE: ALL RESPONDENTS WHO HAD HEARD OF NERT (N=275)**





### 3. SURVEY RESULTS

Of those (90%) claiming prior awareness, slightly over one-third (35%) knew it involved a walking and cycling trail, while 14% understood it would run alongside the existing rail corridor. One in ten believed it would eventually run from Glen Innes to Armidale, while the same proportion understood the term to mean the return of a rail service between the same two towns (noting that we did not explicitly note in the previous question that NERT was a walking and cycling path).

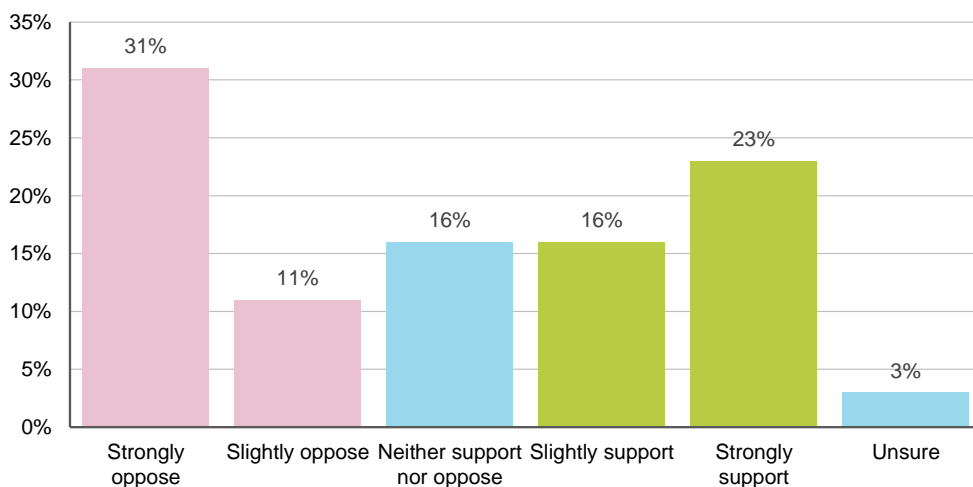
All respondents were then read the following description of the proposed NERT:

*“Armidale Regional and Glen Innes Severn Councils are proposing to build a rail trail which will ultimately link Armidale and Glen Innes, suitable for use by cyclists and walkers, to be funded via grants from the Federal and State governments. Glen Innes Council would construct and manage the section from Glen Innes to Ben Lomond, a distance of 35 km. The Rail Trail is designed primarily as a new tourist attraction for the New England region.”*

Residents were then asked to what extent they supported or opposed the proposed NERT<sup>2</sup>.

**Figure 3: Support/Opposition to proposed NERT**

**Q4 TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU SUPPORT OR OPPOSE THE CREATION OF THE NEW ENGLAND RAIL TRAIL?**  
**BASE: ALL RESPONDENTS (N=300)**



**This indicates that 42% of respondents were opposed, against 39% supportive, and the balance neither or unsure.** Given’s the survey’s (+/- 5.6%) margin of error, this suggests that levels of support and opposition are quite similar within the community.

<sup>2</sup> To ensure best research practice, the scale was randomly assigned between different respondents, to be either Strongly Support to Strongly Oppose, or Strongly Oppose to Strongly Support



### 3. SURVEY RESULTS

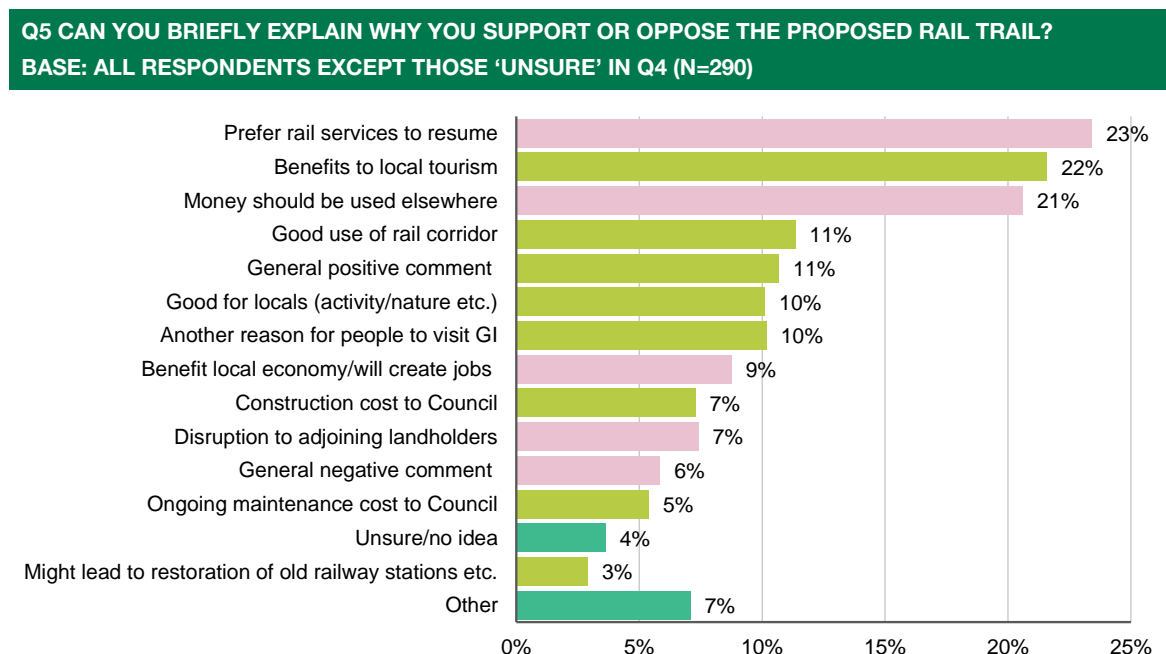
As shown in **Table 3**, below, younger residents were significantly more likely to support the proposed Rail Trail, while those aged 65+ were more likely to oppose it. While there were no statistically significant differences by gender or place of residence, newer residents (i.e. those living in the LGA for less than 20 years) were significantly more likely to support NERT than longer-term residents (at 48% and 38% support respectively).

**Table 3: Breakdown of support/oppose by age, gender and place of residence**

	AGE			GENDER		RESIDENCE	
	18-49	50-64	65+	Male	Female	Glen Innes	Rest of LGA
<b>Support (strongly+slightly)</b>	42%	39%	36%	40%	38%	37%	46%
<b>Oppose (strongly+ slightly)</b>	31%	46%	49%	45%	38%	42%	41%
<b>Neither/unsure</b>	27%	16%	15%	15%	24%	22%	13%

Respondents were next asked to briefly explain, in an open-ended question, why they supported or opposed the proposed NERT. Their answers have been coded, and the broad themes are shown in **Figure 4**, below. Positive comments are shown in green, negative in pink and neutral in blue. Note that respondents could provide multiple comments.

**Figure 4: Main Reasons for support/opposition**



The main source of opposition (23%) was from residents keen to see a resumption of rail travel from Glen Innes to Armidale (and/or Queensland). However this was counterbalanced by 22% saying the Rail Trail would be good for tourism.



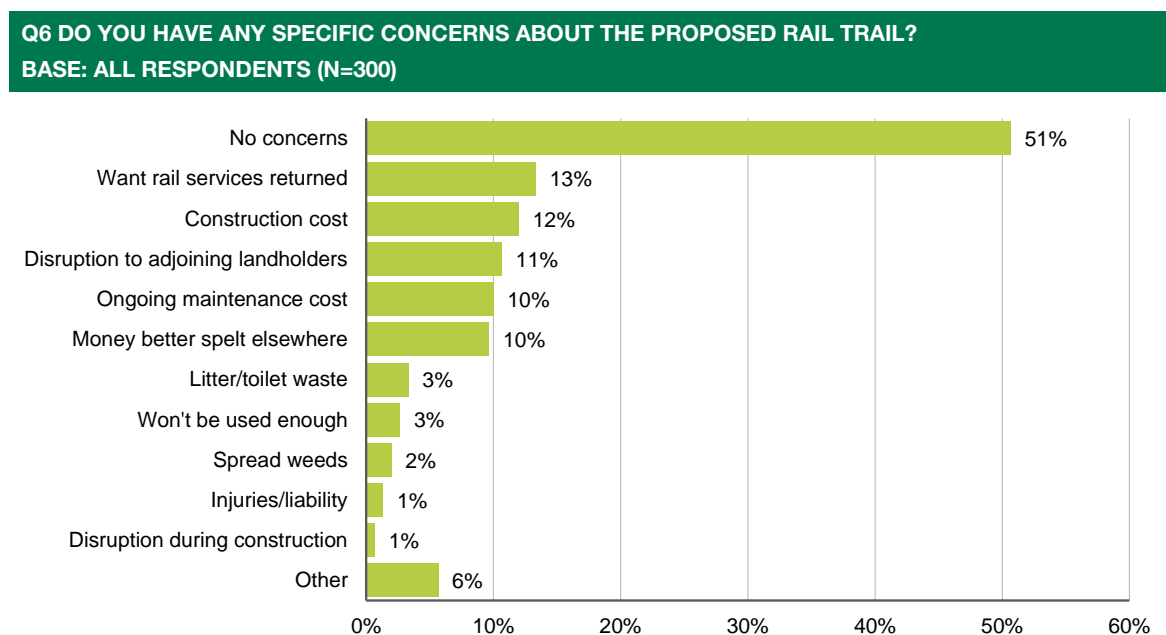
### 3. SURVEY RESULTS

Other positive themes included a view that the Rail Trail would be good for locals (10%), that it would provide an additional reason for people (tourists, friends, family etc) to visit Glen Innes (also 10%), that it would help create new jobs (9%), and/or that it may help lead to a restoration of old disused railway stations along the route (3%).

Apart from those (23%) preferring to see a resumption of rail services, the main sources of opposition arose from a belief that Council funds could be better spent elsewhere (22%), a perception that Council would incur construction costs (7%) and the potential for disruption or annoyance to adjoining landholders (7%). This final comment also included some concerns that a lack of toilet facilities along the proposed route would be problematic for landholders and the environment.

Finally, respondents were asked if they had any specific concerns about the proposed NERT and, conversely, what they saw as the main benefits. Again the open-ended responses have been coded into themes, and these are shown in **Figure 5** and **Figure 6**, below. (Respondents could provide multiple responses, hence graphs will not total to 100%.)

**Figure 5: Major perceived concerns regarding NERT**



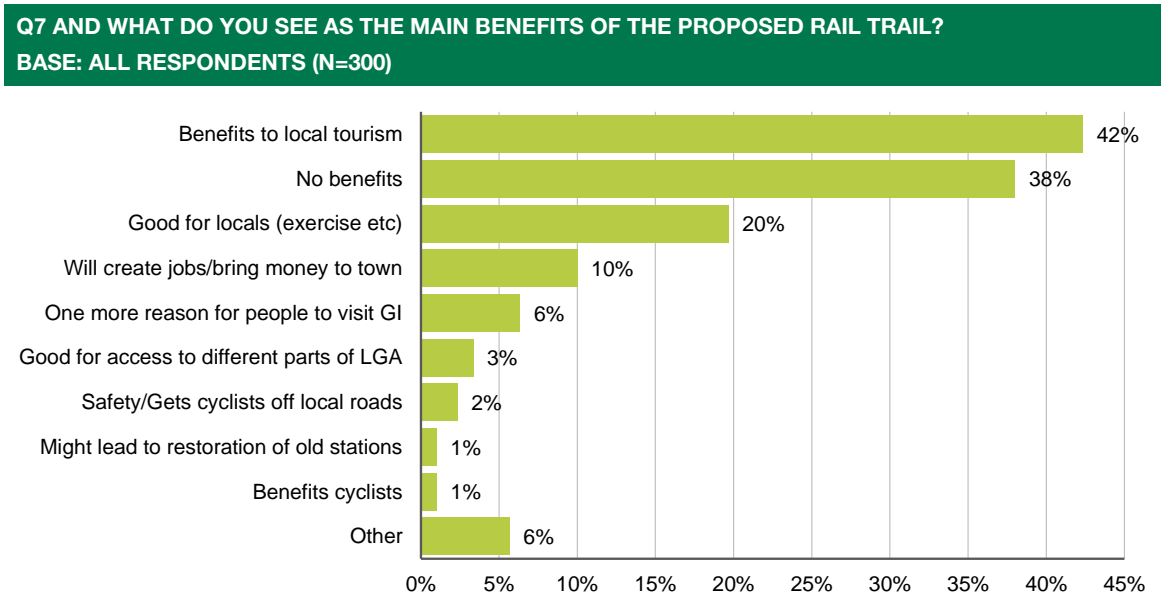
Half of those surveyed said they had no concerns about the proposed Rail Trail. Of those with concerns, the main issues raised were: that this would prevent a resumption of rail services to the region (13%); that Council would incur construction costs (12%); that adjoining landholders would be disrupted by people using the trail (11%); ongoing maintenance costs to Council (10%) and that Council funds would be better spent elsewhere (also 10%).

A number of respondents also raised concerns about litter, toilet waste and weed dispersal, while a couple were worried about potential liability claims from any injuries suffered on the trail.



### 3. SURVEY RESULTS

Figure 6: Major perceived benefits of NERT



In relation to benefits of the proposed rail trail, just over four in ten focussed on the tourism benefits such an attraction would create. Conversely, 38% saw no benefit from the proposal.

Other perceived benefits were that it would be good for the health and wellbeing of locals (20%), that it would bring money and/or jobs to town (10%) and that it would provide more reasons for people to visit Glen Innes (6%). A few also mentioned that it would be a good way to promote or invigorate other parts of the LGA, or that it would make both cyclists and motorists safer by moving cyclists off local roads.



## 4. APPENDIX 1 - QUESTIONNAIRE

Good afternoon/evening, my name is [NAME] and I'm calling from Taverner Research on behalf of Glen Innes Severn (pron: Se-VERN) Council. We are conducting a short five-minute survey of local residents aged 18 and above about an important local issue. As I say, the survey will only take around 5 minutes, and all responses are confidential. Would you be willing to assist Council by completing a survey this afternoon/evening?

5. Yes
6. No

IF RESPONDENT WANTS TO CHECK AUTHENTICITY OF SURVEY, ARRANGE CALLBACK AND ASK THEM TO CHECK COUNCIL FACEBOOK PAGE, REFER TO COUNCIL WEBSITE, OR CALL COUNCIL ON 6730 2300.

IF ANSWERING MACHINE- LEAVE THE FOLLOWING MESSAGE: "Hello, we are conducting a community survey on behalf of Glen Innes Severn Council, and would greatly appreciate your feedback. If you see this phone number again, please pick up so that we can explain more about the research. Thank you."

(If no, try to arrange a callback. If still no, ask if another member of the household may be willing to take part instead. If still no, thank and terminate.)

### SECTION A - SCREENING QUESTIONS

**S1. Before we start, can I please confirm that you live in the Glen Innes Severn Council area?**

1. Yes
7. No **Thank and Terminate**

**S2. And do you or an immediate family member work for Glen Innes Severn Council or are an elected Councillor?**

- Yes **Thank and Terminate**
- No

**S3. Which suburb/village do you live in or closest to?**

DO NOT READ OUT

1. Deepwater
2. Dundee
3. Emmaville
4. Glen Elgin
5. Glen Innes
6. Glencoe





## 4. APPENDIX 1 - QUESTIONNAIRE

7. Red Range
8. Shannon Vale
9. Stonehenge
10. Wellingrove
11. Wellington Vale
12. Other (please specify)

### S4. And could I just get your first name for the survey please?

OPEN ANSWER – IF RESPONDENT DECLINES TO PROVIDE A NAME, TYPE NA

## PPENDIX A: SECTION B – AWARENESS

**Q1 Thanks so much (S4). To kick things off, prior to this phone call had you heard about something called the New England Rail Trail?**

Appendix B: Yes

8. No

### Q2 (Ask if Q1=1) And what have you heard about it?

DO NOT PROMPT. ACCEPT MULTIPLE RESPONSES.

2. Bicycle and/or walking path
9. Will runs from Armidale to Glen Innes
10. Funded by state or federal grants
11. Will run alongside existing rail corridor
12. Will be good for tourism/jobs
13. Council has received some funding for the Glen Innes to Ben Lomond section
14. Will prevent any future rail services
15. Other – specify
16. Other – specify
17. Nothing much/can't recall



## 4. APPENDIX 1 - QUESTIONNAIRE

**Q3 Armidale Regional and Glen Innes Severn Councils are proposing to build a rail trail which will ultimately link Armidale and Glen Innes, suitable for use by cyclists and walkers, to be funded via grants from the Federal and State governments. Glen Innes Council would construct and manage the section from Glen Innes to Ben Lomond, a distance of 35 km. The Rail Trail is designed primarily as a new tourist attraction for the New England region.**

### PPENDIX C: SECTION C – SUPPORT/OPPOSITION

**Q4 (Ask all) To what extent do you support or oppose the creation of the New England Rail Trail?**

PROMPTED EXCEPT UNSURE.

ALTERNATE SCALE SUPPORT TO OPPOSE OR OPPOSE TO SUPPORT

Article I. Strongly oppose

18. Slightly oppose

19. Neither oppose nor support

20. Slightly support

21. Strongly support

Appendix D: Unsure

**Q5. (Ask if Q4=1-5) Can you briefly explain why you (Q4) the proposed rail trail?**

PROBE FULLY RECORD VERBATIM CONTROL THE CALL

**Q6. (Ask all) Do you have any specific concerns about the proposed rail trail?**

DO NOT AID PROBE FOR MULTIPLES

- Construction cost to Council

22. Ongoing maintenance cost to Council

23. Disruption during construction

24. Disruption to adjoining landholders

25. Removes possibility of resumption of rail services

26. Will take too long to approve and/or build

27. Other (specify)

28. No concerns



## 4. APPENDIX 1 - QUESTIONNAIRE

**Q7. (Ask all) And what do you see as the main benefits of the proposed rail trail?**

DO NOT AID PROBE FOR MULTIPLES

- Benefits to local tourism
29. Will create jobs (during construction and/or beyond)
30. Good for locals enjoying physical activity/nature etc.
31. One more reason for people to visit Glen Innes
32. Might lead to restoration of old railway stations etc.
33. Other (specify)
34. No benefits

### SECTION D: DEMOGRAPHICS QUESTIONS

**D1. Thanks (S4), just a couple of demographic questions to finish. Please stop me when I read out your age group.**

5. 18-34
6. 35-49
7. 50-64
8. 65 years and over
9. (Do not read out) Prefer not to say

**D2 Which of the following best describes the dwelling where you are current living?**

READ OUT EXCEPT "OTHER"

- 1) I/We own/are currently buying this property
- 2) I/We currently rent this property
- 3) (Other (specify))

**D3 And finally, how long have you lived in the Glen Innes Severn area?**

AID IF NECESSARY

1. Less than 5 years
- 6 – 10 years
- 11 – 20 years
- More than 20 years

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## 4. APPENDIX 1 - QUESTIONNAIRE

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**D4 Gender (determine by name and/or voice):**

3. Male
4. Female

**OUTRO: Thanks so much (S4), that's the end of the survey. Glen Innes Severn Council, greatly appreciates your feedback today.**

IF RESPONDENT ASKS WHY RESEARCH IS BEING CONDUCTED, YOU CAN SAY THAT "IT IS SOME TIME SINCE THE ORIGINAL CONSULTATION WAS UNDERTAKEN, AND SO COUNCIL WISHED TO CONFIRM PREVIOUS OUTCOMES"

**ISO and close.**