Option Paper 1
National Mountain Bike Trail Standards
Overview

The popularity of mountain biking in Australia is increasing rapidly. Participation in both recreational and competitive mountain biking has increased significantly across the nation, which is reflected in the 23% increase in Mountain Bike Australia (MTBA) membership in the last 15 months.

To support this increase in mountain biking, significant investment has been made into trail construction and supporting infrastructure across the country. Land managers are increasingly opening, or being pressured to open, new areas to mountain biking through the construction of new trail networks.

Currently there are no national standards for mountain bike (MTB) trail design and construction in Australia. In lieu of national standards, trail builders and land managers currently rely on high level guidelines published by the International Mountain Bike Association (IMBA) to justify design and construction decisions. Some state land management agencies have also developed their own sets of MTB trail guidelines that generally align closely with the IMBA guidelines. An existing Australian Standard for Walking Tracks was established in 2001 consisting of 2 parts: Classification and signage (AS2156.1-2001) and Infrastructure design (AS 2156.2-2001) which many land managers refer to in relation to MTB / shared-use trail development.

Land managers and trail builders, together with the wider MTB industry, have identified the need for national standards to be developed in order to better manage MTB trail developments and to ensure that the trail building industry is fully recognised as a profession, with a peak body and career pathways for people wanting to work in the industry.

MTBA in collaboration with stakeholders from across the mountain biking industry have initiated a project to assess how to best develop and implement national MTB trail standards and to establish a professional trail builder’s certification framework.

Background

At the 2014 Australian MTB Summit, MTBA raised the idea and need for nationally recognised standards to guide the design and construction of MTB trails. The following year, at the 2015 Australian MTB Summit a project initiation working group was established to investigate the options and methodology to develop and implement national mountain bike trail standards and to establish a professional trail builder’s certification framework.

Members of this working group are: Louise Wallace (former President, WAMBA) replaced with Peta Demidenko (WestCycle), Craig Stonestreet (Director, Natural Trails), Marty Krieg (Principal Consultant, Ediacara Consulting), Craig Meinicke (Director, TouchPoint One) and Denise Cox (Operations Manager, MTBA).

By November 2016, the working group will aim to have investigated a range of options to deliver national mountain bike trail standards and to establish a professional trail builder’s certification framework in line with registered training organisation requirements.

This document outlines the options identified for the development of national MTB trail standards. A separate options paper has been developed for the professional trail builder’s certification framework and establishment of a not for profit peak body to represent the Australian MTB trail building industry.

Key drivers for standards

The key drivers for the development of national mountain bike trail standards are:

- Land managers and trail builders have clear minimum standards for the design and construction of trails
• Stakeholders and investors in trail networks have more confidence that the commitments they are making to projects will result in sustainably built trails
• Land managers are better able to justify and progress trail developments with political and community stakeholders
• Land managers are better able to manage public safety risks and environmental risks associated with trail development
• Trail builders will have the ability to become accredited against the standard, to assist with ensuring that the mountain bike trail building industry is recognised as a professional body
• Land managers are better equipped to develop tender packages, and to assess and evaluate tender submissions
• Trail builders are better equipped to competitively scope, tender and price trail design and construction work
• Ongoing maintenance costs will be reduced as trails are built to minimum quality standards.

Project constraints and considerations
While there is a strong case for the development of national mountain bike standards, there are a number of issues that need to be considered, including:
• **What form the standards will take** – there are a number of options for developing national standards (e.g. new stand-alone national standards (AS/NZS), amending existing standards to accommodate mountain biking requirements, national guidelines, etc.).
• **Who will own and administer the standards or guidelines** – as with any national standard, in order to stay relevant, ongoing updates are required. This project will identify the most suitable method for administering and managing the standards into the future.
• **Funding to develop and implement national standards** – the development of national mountain biking standards or guidelines will require substantial funds to complete. Currently there are no confirmed sources of funding to complete the work. Sourcing funding through traditional avenues may limited as there will not be any ‘infrastructure’ directly delivered as a result of the work.
• **Trail ‘normalisation’ as a result of national standards** – There are concerns in the wider mountain bike community, that national standard or guidelines will result in all trails being built the same, with the same features providing a very similar riding experience wherever they ride. Any standards developed need to allow for a level of trail ‘individualisation’ and to incorporate regional trail identity. This issue needs to be addressed through effective engagement strategies and ensuring the wider mountain bike community has buy-in and real input to the development of the standards.
• **Adaptive mountain biking considerations** – any new standard or guideline will need to include Adaptive Mountain Biking requirements to continue to grow the number of participants, national events, and to enhance and build inclusive trail networks
• **Professional certification of trail builders** – a key benefit of national standards for mountain bike trail design and construction is the ability for trail builders to become accredited against the standard. Accreditation, if combined with the establishment of a peak body for trail builders, will ensure that the mountain bike trail building industry is fully recognised as a profession and will allow for the establishment of accredited training courses and the establishment of career pathways within the industry.

Standards development options
This options paper will define and compare the options available for the development and implementation of national mountain bike trail standards.

The options considered are:
• MTB specific Australian Standard (via Standards Australia)
• Combined MTB and shared use Australian Standard (via Standards Australia)
• Amend AS2156-2001 to incorporate MTB and shared use requirements (via Standards Australia)
• Australian guideline for MTB and shared use trails (via a peak body).

Each of these options is examined in detail in the following sections.

Option 1 – MTB Specific Australian Standard

Description
A new Australian Standard for MTB trails (excluding shared-use trails) developed in collaboration with, and endorsed by, Standards Australia.

The new MTB trails standard will include:

• Trail and infrastructure design
• Materials specifications
• Construction standards
• Classifications and signage.

Development options
The following two pathways are available for the development of new standards with Standards Australia:

1. Standards Australia Resourced Pathway – if the project can meet Standards Australia ‘Demonstrated Net Benefit Criteria’ the standard development can be supported by Standards Australia resources.
2. Externally Funded Pathway – the project is funded by a proponent or a group of stakeholders and the standard is developed in accordance with normal Standards Australia processes.

Both of these development options will require commitment and active contribution from stakeholders over a defined period of time. Additional information is available at:

• Standards Australia website http://www.standards.org.au/

Key stakeholders
The following stakeholders will be critical to the success of this option:

• Standards Australia
• MTB Governing Body (MTBA)
• Australian Professional Trail Builders Association (APTBA) (to be established)
• Commonwealth government land management agencies
• State government land management agencies
• Local government
• MTB tourism industry.

Benefits
Development of Australian Standard for MTB trails (excluding shared-use trails) via Standards Australia will realise the following benefits:

• Would strengthen basis for land management agencies to justify and progress trail developments through access to a nationally recognised standard.
• Would assist land managers to improve trail project procurement and project management practices by applying best practice standards.
• Would improve land manager’s confidence that the commitments they make to MTB trail projects will result in sustainability of trails.
• Would improve management of public risk and environmental risk in relation to MTB trails.
• Will provide added legitimacy for the MTB trail industry in Australia with trail builders being able to gain accreditation against the standard.
• Exclusion of non-MTB trail stakeholders would potentially reduce complexity of standard development process.

Constraints

Development of Australian Standard for MTB trails (excluding shared-use trails) via Standards Australia will involve the following constraints:

• If the project does not meet the Standards Australia ‘Demonstrated Net Benefit Criteria’, funding the project may be a constraint.
• Developing specific MTB standards without including shared use trails may be seen as a missed opportunity by some stakeholders.
• The development process will be resource intensive and time consuming for key stakeholders and content contributors.
• Standards will need to balance the level of prescription of requirements with providing flexibility and interpretation to ensure that all trails are not built the same and allow for regional factors.

Indicative cost

$35,000+ (estimate based on the development of similar standards).

Indicative timeframe

To be confirmed however all options will have similar timeframes.

Potential funding sources

Funding options are yet to be fully investigated, however the options could include:

• Land management agencies (Federal and State bodies)
• MTB industry / MTB community (membership, donation, crowd funding, etc.)
• Tourism development agencies
• Recreation agencies
• Australian Sports Foundation
• Grant programs.

Option 2 – MTB Trail and Shared Use Trail Australian Standard

Description

A new Australian Standard for MTB trails and shared-use trails developed in collaboration with, and endorsed by, Standards Australia.

The new MTB trails and shared use trails standard will include:

• Trail and infrastructure design
• Materials specifications
• Construction standards
• Classifications and signage.
Development options

The following two pathways are available for the development of new standards with Standards Australia:

1. Standards Australia Resourced Pathway – if the project can meet Standards Australia ‘Demonstrated Net Benefit Criteria’ the standard development can be supported by Standards Australia resources.
2. Externally Funded Pathway – the project is funded by a proponent or a group of stakeholders and the standard is developed in accordance with normal Standards Australia processes.

Both of these development options will require commitment and active contribution from stakeholders over a defined period of time. Additional information is available at:


Key stakeholders

The following stakeholders will be critical to the success of this option:

- Standards Australia
- MTB Governing Body (MTBA)
- Governing bodies/representative agencies for other trail user-groups (i.e. walking, equestrian)
- Australian Professional Trail Builders Association (APTBA) (to be established)
- Commonwealth government land management agencies
- State government land management agencies
- Local government
- MTB tourism industry
- Outdoor recreation tourism industry.

Benefits

Development of Australian Standard for MTB trails and shared-use trails via Standards Australia will realise the following benefits:

- Would strengthen basis for land management agencies to justify and progress trail developments through access to a nationally recognised standard.
- Would assist land managers to improve trail project procurement and project management practices by applying best practice standards.
- Would improve land manager’s confidence that the commitments they make to MTB trail projects will result in sustainability of trails.
- Would improve management of public risk and environmental risk in relation to MTB trails.
- Will provide added legitimacy for the MTB trail industry in Australia with trail builders being able to gain accreditation against the standard.
- Inclusion of non-MTB trail user-groups may encourage stronger buy-in from land management agencies.

Constraints

Development of Australian Standard for MTB trails and shared-use trails via Standards Australia will involve the following constraints:

- If the project does not meet the Standards Australia ‘Demonstrated Net Benefit Criteria’, funding the project may be a constraint.
- The development process will be resource intensive and time consuming for key stakeholders and content contributors.
Large number and diversity of stakeholders adds complexity to standard development process.

Indicative cost
$40,000+ (estimate based on the development of similar standards).

Indicative timeframe
To be confirmed however all options will have similar timeframes.

Potential funding sources
Funding options are yet to be fully investigated, however the options could include:
- Land management agencies (Federal and State bodies)
- MTB industry / MTB community (membership, donation, crowd funding, etc.)
- Tourism development agencies
- Recreation agencies
- Australian Sports Foundation
- Grant programs.

Option 3 – Amending AS2156-2001 (parts 1 & 2) Walking Track Standard

Description
An updated version of the existing Australian Standard for Walking Tracks that accommodates and integrates specifications for MTB and shared use trail development, creating a single Australian Standard for recreational trails.

The recreational trails standard will include:
- Trail and infrastructure design
- Materials specifications
- Construction standards
- Classifications and signage.

Development options
Standards Australia has an Aged Standards Review process for existing Standards that have been published for more than 10 years in their current edition. Additional information is available at:
- Standards Australia Development Guide

Key stakeholders
The following stakeholders will be critical to the success of this option:
- Standards Australia
- All stakeholders supporting the development of AS2156 – (i.e. the Committee CS-029 specified within AS2156)
- MTB Governing Body (MTBA)
- Governing bodies/representative agencies for other trail user-groups (i.e. walking, equestrian)
- Australian Professional Trail Builders Association (APTBA) (to be established)
- Commonwealth government land management agencies
- State government land management agencies
- Local government
- MTB tourism industry
• Outdoor recreation tourism industry.

Benefits

Amending the existing Walking Track Standard to become a Recreational Trail Standard for walking, MTB and shared-use trails via Standards Australia will realise the following benefits:

• Simplification and consolidation of recreational trail development standards in Australia through a single recreational trail standard may have great appeal to land management agencies and benefits to trail industry as a whole through a standard that is easier to apply in practice, the removal of duplication and through economies of scale.
• Would strengthen the position of MTB and other trail users as legitimate outdoor recreation activities on public lands, and increase adoption of shared use trails as the norm by land management agencies Australia wide.
• Would propagate and standardise the improvements to trail development practices that have been driven by the MTB industry.
• Would strengthen basis for land management agencies to justify and progress trail developments through access to a nationally recognised standard.
• Would assist land managers to improve trail project procurement and project management practices by applying best practice standards.
• Would improve land manager’s confidence that the commitments they make to MTB trail projects will result in sustainability of trails.
• Would improve management of public risk and environmental risk in relation to MTB trails.
• Will provide added legitimacy for the MTB trail industry in Australia with trail builders being able to gain accreditation against the standard.
• Inclusion of non-MTB trail user-groups may encourage stronger buy-in from land management agencies.

Constraints

Amending the existing Walking Track Standard to become a Recreational Trail Standard for walking, MTB and shared-use trails via Standards Australia will involve the following constraints:

• If the project does not meet the Standards Australia ‘Demonstrated Net Benefit Criteria’, funding the project may be a constraint.
• The development process will be resource intensive and time consuming for key stakeholders and content contributors.
• The need to liaise with stakeholders supporting the development of AS2156 – (i.e. the Committee CS-029 specified within AS2156) will introduce complexity.
• Large number and diversity of stakeholders adds complexity to standard development process.

Indicative cost

$30,000+ (estimate based on the development of similar standards).

Indicative timeframe

To be confirmed however all options will have similar timeframes.

Potential funding sources

Funding options are yet to be fully investigated, however the options could include:

• Land management agencies (Federal and State bodies)
• MTB industry / MTB community (membership, donation, crowd funding, etc.)
• Tourism development agencies
• Recreation agencies
• Australian Sports Foundation
• Grant programs.
Option 4 – National Guidelines for MTB and Shared Use Trails

Description

A National Guideline for MTB Trail Development and Management to be developed and promoted by the MTB industry as a benchmark for best-practice (i.e. not recognised / endorsed by Standards Australia and not an Australian Standard).

The MTB trail guideline will include:

- Trail and infrastructure design
- Materials specifications
- Construction standards
- Classifications and signage.

Development options

Numerous State land management agencies in Australia have developed or are currently developing their own guidelines, with the recently developed Western Australia MTB Management Guidelines probably the current best practice benchmark.

Options for the development of national guidelines include:

1. Collaborate with an existing land management agency or cycling peak body who have existing MTB trail guidelines to review and update the guidelines to include shared use trail requirements and to include national considerations.
2. Establish a project to develop a new national guideline for MTB and shared use trails.

Key stakeholders

The following stakeholders will be critical to the success of this option:

- MTB Governing Body (MTBA)
- Australian Professional Trail Builders Association (APTBA) or equivalent (to be established)
- Commonwealth government land management agencies
- State government land management agencies
- Local government
- MTB tourism industry
- Outdoor recreation tourism industry.

Benefits

The development of a National Guideline for MTB Trail Development and Maintenance by the MTB industry as a benchmark for best-practice will realise the following benefits:

- Relatively simple to develop with numerous existing trail guidelines documents to draw upon.
- Keeps the number of stakeholders to a relative minimum which simplifies the process.
- Allows the MTB industry and MTB trail construction industry to play a lead role in development.
- Would help formalise and propagate the improvements to trail development practices that have been driven by the MTB industry.
- Would strengthen basis for land management agencies to justify and progress MTB trail developments through reference to a nationally recognised guideline.
- Would assist land managers to improve trail project procurement and project management practices by applying best practice standards.
- Would improve land manager’s confidence that the commitments they make to MTB trail projects will result in sustainability of trails.
- Would improve management of public risk and environmental risk in relation to MTB trails.
Constraints

The development of a National Guideline for MTB Trail Development and Maintenance by the MTB industry as a benchmark for best-practice will involve the following constraints:

- A guideline does not have the industry recognition of an Australian Standard and therefore may not attract a high level of buy-in from stakeholders and therefore lack influence and legitimacy.
- Will need to develop and implement a transparent development, review and approval process to ensure the guideline is accepted by end users.
- Will need to identify an existing body or potentially create a new body to administer and maintain the guideline once completed.
- The development process will be resource intensive and time consuming for key stakeholders and content contributors.
- Large number and diversity of stakeholders adds complexity to standard development process.

Indicative cost

$20,000+ (estimate based on the development of similar guidelines).

Indicative timeframe

To be confirmed however all options will have similar timeframes.

Potential funding sources

Funding options are yet to be fully investigated, however the options could include:

- Land management agencies (Federal and State bodies)
- MTB industry / MTB community (membership, donation, crowd funding, etc.)
- Recreation agencies
- Australian Sports Foundation
- Grant programs.

Where to from here?

Key stakeholders and the wider MTB community will be consulted during this process with the results of these investigations to be presented at a 2016 Australian MTB Summit.

The MTB community will be kept up to date via MTBA newsletters and other communication opportunities.

Further information about this project can be found on the MTBA website www.mtba.asn.au or by calling Denise at MTBA on 07 5628 0110.

How to provide feedback?

Written submissions in response to this options paper can be provided through completion of the https://goo.gl/forms/27VR079V4tCR1ett1 or via email to trails@mtba.asn.au

Submissions close Sunday 27 November 2016.