



The Motu Trails Cycle Project

Initiative: Opotiki

Themes: Leading in and leaderful, Working together in place

Four organisations have successfully worked together over the past few years to bring a \$1.7million cycle trails project into being in the Opotiki area. The Motu Trails project has provided employment opportunities for local people and will continue to do so. More importantly it has been a catalyst for developing relationships and sharing leadership across boundaries. DANNY PARURU reflects on the process, its learnings and the outcomes already apparent as well as those yet to come.

The test of true community leadership was trialled in the East Coast recently with four organisations collaboratively working to construct and develop the Motu Trails Cycle Project. The trails, which were officially opened in May 2012, have already attracted much attention and use by a number of visitors and locals and are considered a major attraction to the Opotiki and Gisborne Districts as well as being one of the best trails developed so far.

The trails were developed as part of a national initiative where John Key and the National government looked for an innovative way of using tax payer's money to keep people employed and create new employment during a recession and came up with the unexpected solution of creating a series of cycle trails. Stretching along the length of New Zealand, the trails give communities a chance to showcase the natural, cultural and historical beauty of their local and regional areas. Not only do they invite new tourists to each of the regions, but they also bring much welcomed money that helps diversify local economies and helps keep local businesses functioning.

Together, the Opotiki District Council, Gisborne District Council, and Department of Conservation saw the opportunity to apply for this funding for the Motu area. A long process of research, drafting and submitting a comprehensive business plan on a proposed Cycle Trail within their region was rewarded when the project, became the first of 17 to receive funding of \$1.7m dollars for construction in July 2010.

At around the same time the Whakatohea Maori Trust Board had undertaken significant research to look at the aspirations of its beneficiaries and the wider community. A good majority of the 750 people surveyed indicated that meaningful employment was the most important factor for them¹.

As an interested party the Whakatohea Maori Trust Board was invited onto the working and governance groups to help with construction. Whakatohea is an Iwi in the Opotiki District that has traditional boundaries running through the length of the proposed cycle trail, along with Ngai Tai, and Te Aitanga a Mahaki. Each of these Iwi played an important role in communication, cultural significance and history of the area during the construction period. As well, these roles, and those of the actual construction have helped to realise the aspirations of meaningful employment for approximately 15 people in new jobs, as well as providing additional work for a number of contractors required for specialised tasks.

The [Motu Trails Cycle Trust](#) manages the marketing and promotion of the trail, assists the coordination of additional services and hosts information about the trails. The Trust also hopes to support locals into tourism ventures such as transport, accommodation, tour guiding, marae stays and unique cultural experiences. Without the construction of the Motu Trails these opportunities may not have been created. A number of new businesses have been set up specifically for the cycle trails market.

Since the turning of the spade and a karakia to celebrate the start of work in October 2010 the construction was continuous. As soon as sections were completed, riders, walkers and runners were keen to start making use of them. From Matawai to Motu and return to Opotiki the trails take in collectively 180kms of quality scenic views of mountains, bush, valleys and coastline, enhanced with the stories of its history and heritage told on interpretation boards.

In many ways the shared agency model used to develop the trails was very successful. The creation and execution of a grand project was achieved with combined skills and coordination of the four partner agencies. Each has played a significant role in the final product for which each should be equally applauded. The relationships built between the agencies continues to grow stronger with a good team of project managers and a governance group in place to see the plan into completion.

Throughout the length of the construction there have been as many challenges as successes. The project team faced social and relational issues either with people opposing the new trails for various reasons, such as land owner negotiations, or through planning variations and contractor reviews. As the issues were predominantly relational the project team spent a number of hours consulting with a wide range of individuals, groups, and the community as a whole to ensure their concerns were addressed.

Although many tax payers queried John Key's decision to develop a cycle network during a recession the Motu Trails have already provided benefits to the region as intended. Four agencies working closely to see the project to completion was important, as it created cohesion, coordination, partnership and reflected an example of community leadership. As a benefit to the community the trails already successfully encourage locals as well as tourists to enjoy a recreational walk, run or

¹ He Oranga o te Whakatohea Wellbeing Survey 2010

cycle providing health benefits to individuals. There are indirect benefits too. Parents, for example, are able to teach their children how to ride their bikes along a dedicated track building social cohesion within families. In the long term operators will have opportunities to build businesses, creating a new aspect to the tourism industry in the region. Local Iwi will see its history and heritage reflected along the trails with stories of the past on interpretation boards.

The Motu Trails will be remembered by many as one of the best trails in Aotearoa New Zealand, which is a huge achievement. For the four organisations involved in developing them, however, the relationships built and leadership displayed will be the treasured highlights.

The Motu Trails project revealed a number of key lessons:

1. The inclusion of the four partner agencies was a critical success, and showed true community leadership.
2. Although the project over-ran the original budget, it is important to note the value of effective planning, using the appropriate time, resources and people to complete the plans.
3. Every organisation, group and individual had their opinions on the Motu Trails, and what benefit the project would bring to the community. To address this, it was important we presented to groups who had concerns or interests to ensure they were addressed. This challenged the project team to ensure all considerations during the development, and management plans put in place to alleviate concerns.
4. Regular weekly contact as a project team was important to keep the project team on task. Even if it was only two people available, those two people met.

Key learnings:

- The key to a successful project is based on successful relationships. Building the appropriate trust and leadership with all affected stakeholders impacts positively on the project outcome.
- A comprehensive plan is only as good as the people you have to operate it. It is important to ensure the activities required in the project are undertaken by competent and capable individuals and teams.
- Developing a project with partner agencies takes trust and tests every individual's core values. It is important to develop a team culture that allows for open and respectful discussion to alleviate personal tension among team members during the project.
- Where one person struggles, another may have the appropriate skills and knowledge. It is important not to underestimate the value of the entire team, where eventual solutions can be found.
- A community project is nothing without a community. Include the community's aspirations and ideas when and where appropriate.

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The Video of the Grand Opening: <http://youtu.be/ROBf7r60KDA>

Story by Danny Paruru

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