

# PRESS RELEASE

## **The FRIENDS of Lithgow – TAKE A NEW DIRECTION**

At the recent AGM of the Friends of the Lithgow District Ltd it was decided not to wind up this organisation established by the late John Buckley but to channel the enthusiasm and commitment of its members in a new direction.

There was unanimous support for the change of name of the company to the **Friends of the Wolgan Valley Wilderness Railtrail** whose aim will be to develop a walking and cycling track along the original right of way of the old Wolgan Valley railway.

The original railway, which ran from Newnes Junction on the Main Western line to the Wolgan Valley, was a distance of 51 kilometres. It was used at the turn of the last century to transport shale, refined oil, coke and bricks from the Commonwealth Oil Corporations works at Newnes to markets far and wide.

Working in conjunction with the Wolgan Valley Wilderness Railway and Railtrail committee and sponsored by COC Limited, the Friends group will play a major role in assisting with the development of the Wolgan Valley Wilderness Railtrail. The Railtrail concept is relatively new to New South Wales but other States such as Victoria and Tasmania have been developing these trails very successfully for many years and have become very big tourist attractions and money spinners for the communities they run through.

Apart from developing a world class tourist attraction through some of our most spectacular country into the Wolgan Valley there are other drivers for developing this Rail Trail. The collective aim of all

the groups involved in this project will to ensure that the history of the railway line and that of the oil shale works it serviced will be preserved and protected for future generations to enjoy.

Deputy Chairman of the Friends group Michael Wilson said; unfortunately over the years this important part of our industrial heritage has been largely forgotten with very little money spent on the sites nor have those areas been recognised as having far greater tourist potential than they are given credit for. Even now the glow worm tunnel and the works site at Newnes are very popular with tourists, day trippers and campers. However if the sites were linked via an accessible rail trail to establish an integrated development it would soon triple the visitation to the area and would pave the way for other entrepreneurial opportunities to support the visitors not to mention bring people into Lithgow.

If the Railtrail concept is achieved it will provide for a family friendly attraction for people of all ages and diverse interests to enjoy and will subsequently enhance eco and heritage based tourism in the district.

It is hoped that this new direction will better achieve some of the objectives of the original Friends Company and will ensure that John Buckley's vision to showcase Lithgow's heritage lives on.

Details on getting involved with this exciting new project or becoming members of the Friends group can be made by going to our website at [www.wolganwildernessrailtrail.org.au](http://www.wolganwildernessrailtrail.org.au) or telephoning us on 63522513.

Michael Wilson

Deputy Chairman

0427455580

