



Return needed: Andrew McEwen of the South and West Gippsland Transport Group said the railway line can and should return to South Gippsland.

Trains can still return

By Jacob de Kunder

TRAINS could once again run between South Gippsland and Melbourne, despite railway line being ripped up at Koo Wee Rup.

That is the view of chair of the South and West Gippsland Transport Group Andrew McEwen, who said the rail will have to return at some stage.

The railway line was removed recently to make a walking track.

"It's been a long term plan to do this walking trail and doesn't stop the return of the railway at all," Mr McEwen said.

"It probably would've been better if there was a public announcement explaining that."

Mr McEwen said there was nothing in the plan of action that would inhibit the return of the railway line.

"The potential is still there. It's not prohib-

ited," he said.

"We're fairly confident given the economic benefits of the railway line, which are important."

The rising cost of petrol makes the case for rail quite compelling, Mr McEwen said.

"People getting into Melbourne is a problem with the current bus system and the real economic issue is finding an affordable way to freight the volume of milk products going out of South Gippsland," he said.

"We know that the Monash Freeway is going to get increasingly congested and there are concerns that it will be a bottleneck."

The dairy industry in South Gippsland would benefit from using the rail system if it was to return, according to Mr McEwen.

"The dairy industry's exports are worth around \$2 million dollars and are the biggest export out of the port of Melbourne," he said.

"In New Zealand they are moving the dairy products on to the trains to lower costs and

their carbon footprint, and the same arguments are valid here."

When asked if there was a future without rail for South Gippsland, Mr McEwen gave a definite "no".

"Globally, more freight is going on to the rail. All the global agencies say there needs to be an increase of freight on the rail," he said.

"It is three to five times cheaper to move goods by rail and it certainly deals with congestion issues in Melbourne. We should be doing everything we can to reduce the costs of the dairy industry in any way to keep it internationally competitive."

Deputy Premier Peter Ryan said: "Whilst the removal of the rail line does not preclude the ability to return it in time to come, for the present time at least, the further development of the shared use rail trail will be very beneficial to the community."