

GOOD THINGS TAKE TIME AND COMMITMENT



That's the take away lesson from the group whose vision in late 2005 was to create an 11km off-road walking and cycling facility in Mawhera/Greymouth to promote active transport and link people to places they want to be.

The formation of the West Coastal Pathway (the Pathway) was in response to a local policeman identifying the need to have a safer commuter route for cyclists and walkers. The main thoroughfare, a state highway, was becoming busier with a growing number of heavy vehicles. This, along with previous pedestrian and cycling 'incidents' and a lack of off-road facilities, had led to a decline in walking and cycling and a growing perception that it was unsafe to do so.

Within a short time the initial group (policeman, Sports Trust rep, local Public Health worker and a member of the WCDHB Planning and Funding team) had identified the spectacular Coastal area as a possible route. They promoted the idea and canvassed support from the community and organisations including the Grey District Council, DOC, Tourism and Business representatives and set up the West Coastal Pathway group (WCP). The expectation was that we would be able to make a start on the Pathway within 18 months!

After becoming incorporated and achieving charitable status the WCP succeeded in gaining funding for a Scoping and Design study. This showed the project exceeded the (then) NZTA funding criteria for a sealed active transport facility. Unfortunately a subsequent change in the Government Transport Policy refocused NZTA Funding towards roading infrastructure which meant the WCP had to recommit to finding funding through other sources.

To keep the vision alive the WCP ran a competition for a logo, submitted to the District and Regional Council's Plans and the Regional Transport Strategy and Transport Programme and fundraising activities. We talked it up wherever we could; encouraging community members to show their support for the pathway. We

brought in experts from other areas to tell their stories about how such facilities benefit communities.

The call for applications to the Ministry of Tourism Cycleway project in 2010 resulted in the Grey and Westland District Councils forming a 4-day cross-district project from Greymouth to Ross (the Westland Wilderness Trail) with the Pathway identified as the first section of the project. While the application was successful, the WCP remained a key driver of their section.

Construction of the Pathway eventually started in 2011 with an 800 metre section enough to stimulate more community support. As construction progressed more and more people got out and used the Pathway, bike sales and interest increased, even among people who had not initially been in favour of the project.

The WCP have run community planting and clean-up days which have been hugely supported. A partnership with the local High School's Air New Zealand's Kidz Restore New Zealand project has involved students from local schools planting natives to protect the coastal environs the Pathway winds through.

Apart from the high number of daily users, the Sports Trust have run two Fun Walk and Run events along the Pathway. These events have been well supported with a large number of families, friends and the more competitive turning up to participate.

The Pathway is now nearing completion with the final section due to be finished by the end of 2013. The work the WCP has put in to making the pathway become a reality, even in the face of many barriers and the number of hours put in by the members has shown commitment to a vision the result of which is now being enjoyed by the local community. And it's only taken eight years!

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