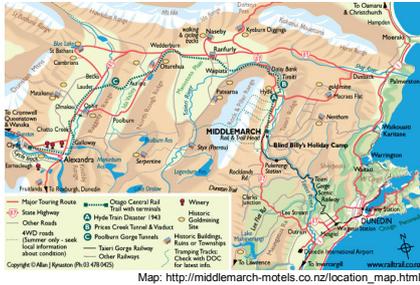


The main aim of this research was to assess the demand for increased frequencies of service offered by the Taieri Gorge Railway between Dunedin and Middlemarch.

Central Otago Map



Objectives

- To measure demand for creating an improved link between Taieri Gorge Railway (TGR) and Otago Central Rail Trail (OCRT).
- To assess the constraints for the development of an extended TGR option, and examine stakeholder perspectives.
- To obtain demographic and motivational data from train and rail trail users.

Study Area

The construction of the Central Otago Railway began in 1879 and extended from 12 km south of Dunedin to Cromwell, a length of 235 km. In 1990, railway use was discontinued. The Otago Excursion Train Trust purchased 60 km of the railway, from Dunedin to Middlemarch.

Much of the remaining disused track was purchased by the Department of Conservation and 150 km, from Middlemarch to Clyde, was converted into the Otago Central Rail Trail.



Photograph: Taieri Gorge Railway website

Methods and Response

A mixed method approach included both a quantitative survey administered to train and rail trail users and qualitative interviews with train, community and rail trail stakeholders. 498 train and 190 rail trail surveys were completed with 13 interviews and 16 businesses/community groups represented.

RESULTS

Respondent Demographics

	Railway	Rail Trail
Gender		
Male	47%	50.3%
Female	53%	49.7%
Nationality (top 3)		
New Zealand	47.6%	81.7%
Australia	18.4%	8.1%
British	14.2%	3.7%
Age (top 4 categories)		
35-44 yrs.	11.9%	15.2%
45-54 yrs.	23.3%	25.5%
55-64 yrs.	28.7%	36.4%
65-74 yrs.	18.7%	9.2%

Summary of Trip (most rated responses)

Railway Visitors
88% first trip using TGR
80.3% used TGR to 'sightsee'
42% plan to use TGR again
63.5% very satisfied with train trip
89% prefer service to Middlemarch
Rail Trail Visitors
87.7% first trip to the OCRT
97.7% cycled the OCRT
93.7% spent more than one night
78.8% used trail to 'sightsee'
79% NOT aware of train service
40.7% access OCRT by private car
57.1% plan to use railway in future

Opinions on Train Service

Should the Pukerangi service be extended to Middlemarch?

Comments from train respondents who indicated "yes".....

"...because it will be easier to cyclist [sic]... we were not sure about the shuttle or the train because we had no train yesterday but we decided to cycle until Pukerangi."

"...because that's where rail trail finishes so obvious choice."

"...it feels like stopping in the middle of nowhere in Pukerangi when Middlemarch would be like going to a destination and back, as it's more as a town/village."



Photograph: www.luxurytraveltours.co.nz



Photograph: <http://www.taieri.co.nz/>

Stakeholder Perspectives

General Views:

Existing service creates confusion between the two options, Pukerangi and Middlemarch; logistical problems exist with extending a daily service to Middlemarch (would eliminate half day service option); yet, benefits of an extended service include improvement of tourism options in Dunedin, Middlemarch and flexibility with airport access.

Level of Current Satisfaction: High

Most interview participants were satisfied with current service with few reports of concern.

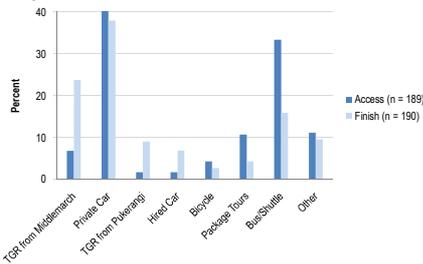


Photograph: T. Duncan



Photograph: C. Jellum

Rail Trail Respondents Mode of Travel to Access and Finish the OCRT Trip



Photograph: C. Jellum

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Conclusions & Recommendations

Linking the Taieri Gorge Railway and the Otago Central Rail Trail from Dunedin to Middlemarch helps the train become an effective and indispensable part of the rail trail experience. Visitors should be encouraged to 'discover' sites of historical/cultural/environmental significance in the surroundings to stay for at least one night in a township.

A recommendation includes the gradual increase in Middlemarch services, as a way to prepare the Middlemarch community and to test the feasibility and profitability of a regular service, perhaps with a summer season, Wednesday service. From a tourist perspective, it is argued that one other option during the week would spread visitation across the week and reduce pressure on accommodation providers during the summer season.

