New alignment for Centennial Trail project

By Megan Doherty
City Reporter

The route of the proposed $3.3 million Centennial Trail was been realigned to avoid new tracks having to be built through nature reserves.

The nearly 140-kilometre self-guided walking and biking route around the territory is expected to be opened by early next year as part of centenary celebrations.

The government is also considering issuing a certificate of accomplishment to people who complete the trail, similar to one given to pilgrims who complete the El Camino de Santiago in Spain.

Some new trail sections will still be built, generally to a width of 1.2 metres but likely to decrease to less than a metre wide as surrounding vegetation regenerates.

Chief Minister Katy Gallagher today released the revised trail saying more than 100 submissions had been received from the community about the route.

"Community input on the proposed alignment will ensure the trail is sustainable in terms of its route, usage and management into the future. Detailed heritage and ecological surveys will now be undertaken for all the proposed new sections of the trail to assess potential impacts," she said.

A report for the government found the topic most frequently raised in community consultation was the trail alignment, with many changes recommended to avoid environmentally sensitive areas.

Examples of the changed route included having walkers use the existing trails to reach the top of Red Hill and directing bike riders along existing fire trails on the eastern side of Red Hill to avoid the need for a new trail.

Similarly, plans for a new multi-use track for the eastern slope of Mount Ainslie have been replaced with an alignment along the existing fire trail at the base of Mount Ainslie. This meant cyclists would be unable to cycle to the summit of Mount Ainslie, except via Mount Ainslie Drive. Walkers would still be able to access the summit via existing walking tracks.

The route was also being directed on to existing trails in the Aranda bushland and Gossan Hill Nature Reserve to protect the local area and prevent the need for additional trails.

And on the advice of the Mulligans Flat Board and subject to access conditions, the trail had been realigned from the ACT border to the main access track through the centre of the reserve, which has been opened to cyclists.

The idea for a Centenary Trail originally arose from the community as part of the Centenary 100 call for projects.

It will have a symbolic start-stop point within the Parliamentary Triangle and loop around the ACT through locations including Anzac Parade and the War Memorial, Lake Burley Griffin, the National Arboretum, Stromlo Forest Park, various nature parks and several rural leases. The trail, which will be 138 kilometres for walkers and 135 kilometres for cyclists, is being promoted as something to take some time on, with walkers able to complete it in seven days and bikers three days.

"While it is difficult to predict the number of users the Centenary Trail will attract, the experience of other trails and expert opinion sought in the preparation of the feasibility study demonstrates the potential for a real tourism benefit, based on the rail trail model, with flow on effects to the wider community," the report read.

Work on the trail was due to start later this year. It would provide a valuable recreation asset for local and interstate visitors and to boost nature-based tourism in the region.

The revised Centenary Trail alignment can be found at www.tams.act.gov.au while a summary of community feedback is available at www.timetotalk.act.gov.au