



## 2026 Pioneers' Pathway Advisory Group – Future Options Analysis

The Pioneers' Pathway Advisory Group was established in the late 1990s to provide a coordinated governance and delivery framework for the development, promotion and stewardship of the Pioneers' Pathway Self Drive Trail, a regional heritage tourism route connecting communities from Toodyay to Merredin. The partnership was formalised through successive Memorandums of Understanding, with the current draft 2024 - 2027 MOU committing Member Councils to collectively invest \$72,000 over the three year term, alongside substantial in kind contributions including staff time, infrastructure maintenance, marketing support and tourism development activities.

In addition to Council contributions, external funding exceeding \$100,000 has been secured in recent years to deliver interpretation signage, digital storytelling and brand development, supported by coordinated marketing, website management and tourism promotion activities. The Advisory Group was intended to provide strategic leadership, oversee delivery of marketing and product development initiatives, source external funding and maximise the economic return from regional tourism. However, changes in membership and resourcing have altered the operating environment, with the Shire of Trayning withdrawing from the partnership in 2021 and the Shire of Toodyay withdrawing in 2024, reducing both financial contributions and regional representation.

Current annual operational funding of approximately \$17,500 from remaining Member Councils is largely absorbed by essential coordination and marketing costs, including approximately \$12,000 per annum for Executive Officer marketing support, leaving limited capacity for new project delivery or strategic development. With no MOU currently executed with the recent withdrawal of the Shire of Toodyay it is a timely opportunity to review the effectiveness, structure and future role of the Advisory Group to ensure the Pioneers' Pathway remains a sustainable, relevant and strategically managed regional tourism asset.

### **Current Challenges Identified**

- Lack of clearly defined purpose and measurable outcomes
- Limited funding and resourcing to implement meaningful projects
- Inconsistent attendance and engagement from member Councils
- Limited dedicated project coordination or delivery capacity
- Unclear alignment between marketing, asset development and tourism strategy

Option	What this would involve	Benefits	Risks
<p><b>1. Strengthen the Existing Advisory Group</b> Keep the group in place but give it sharper purpose, better structure and clear accountability.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopt a concise Terms of Reference that clarifies purpose, decision making expectations and meeting rhythm.</li> <li>• Require member Councils to nominate representatives who have the authority and time to participate actively.</li> <li>• Introduce a simple annual workplan with 6 monthly progress reporting to all Councils.</li> <li>• Introduce a rotating Chair and Deputy Chair to share leadership and avoid stagnation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimal disruption</li> <li>• Builds on existing relationships</li> <li>• Immediate improvement in clarity and performance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improvement relies on stakeholder behavioural change</li> <li>• May not shift entrenched perceptions if not implemented firmly.</li> <li>• No/limited funding to deliver any activities beyond marketing.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Transform to a Project Focus Group with Defined Deliverables</b> Shift the group from a general marketing advisory role to a focused group that exists only to deliver specific projects.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Councils agree on a small number of priority projects for the next two years such as trail upgrades, signage plan, digital visitor information, cemetery storytelling, or joint marketing.</li> <li>• The group meets only to progress those defined projects and dissolves once delivery is complete.</li> <li>• Budget and resourcing commitments are agreed at the commencement of each project.</li> <li>• Lead Shire provides project coordination.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purpose is clear and performance can be measured</li> <li>• Conversations shift from broad discussion to tangible outcomes</li> <li>• Easier to maintain engagement because activity feels purposeful</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If Councils cannot agree on shared priorities, project work may stall</li> <li>• Requires significant increase in funding either through grants, upfront Council budget commitment or in kind commitments</li> </ul>

<p><b>3. Fold the Pioneers Pathway Marketing Responsibilities into NEWTRAVEL or other provider</b></p> <p>The Advisory Group ceases and Councils contract an experienced organisation, such as NEWTRAVEL, to deliver the marketing and promotional functions of the Pioneers' Pathway under a formal service agreement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NEWTRAVEL (can be other organisation) becomes the lead organisation responsible for trail marketing, data collection.</li> <li>• Councils pay an agreed fee or reallocate existing Pioneers Pathway funds to support this work.</li> <li>• NEWTRAVEL integrates Pioneers Pathway assets into broader Wheatbelt Way marketing and development plans.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensures consistent branding and professional delivery.</li> <li>• Builds on existing relationships already in place.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requires Councils to have confidence in NEWTRAVEL's governance and resourcing.</li> <li>• Loss of a stand alone group may be resisted by some Councils.</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. Discontinue the Advisory Group and Transition to Independent Management</b></p> <p>Councils cease the formal collaborative arrangement and each Shire independently manages its portion of the trail as they see fit.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared projects, branding and marketing end.</li> <li>• Each Shire takes own responsibility for tourism signage and promotion within its boundary.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Removes an ineffective structure rather than propping it up.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loss of regional cohesion</li> <li>• No unified approach to visitor experience</li> <li>• Harder to secure grant funding for trail based projects</li> <li>• Reinforces siloed thinking that limits tourism growth</li> </ul>

### Suggested Next Steps

Councils are requested to review the options presented and provide feedback on their preferred model to the Pioneers' Pathway Advisory Group by 30<sup>th</sup> April 2026. Subject to Council feedback, a recommended structure and implementation plan can be developed for consideration, including governance arrangements, resourcing requirements and transition timeframes.