

PRESIDENTS ADDRESS TO THE 2023 CONFERENCE GENERAL MEETING.

Welcome to this years Conference General Meeting. This is a significant event as it means that things have returned to normal after one of the most disruptive periods in the history of our organisation. Since the last face-to-face Conference held in Perth in 2018, a lot has happened in the intervening period.

The impact of COVID has meant that most of our member groups were forced to close down their operations with a consequent negative impact of revenue streams. Members were unable to participate in their chosen hobby and many projects had to be put on hold until their local authorities removed the various constraints they had imposed on their societies.

It was unfortunate that in many cases member groups still had to meet compliance and insurance costs from their own resources with very little income to offset these.

On a more positive note, it was very encouraging to see that COTMA members all came through this period without any serious effects and have been able to return to their pre COVID activities. Passenger numbers are recovering and I hope that none of us will feel the effect of any financial down turns in the economy that may be threatening us.

While our Tramway Operations may have been curtailed, I am pleased to be able to report that the Spare Parts Committee have been very active and achieved some very positive results.

Members will be aware that in 2018, Vic Track-who own the Victorian transport assets-announced a process to re-purpose the large accumulation of redundant Melbourne W class trams that had been stored at the Newport Railway Workshops for many years. While some of these were accident damaged or had wheel profiles that no longer met the required standard, there were many parts suitable for onwards use by member museums.

COTMA members were given the opportunity to ask for complete trams and 10 trams were allocated under that arrangement. Subsequently some museums asked for and received additional trams in a round of public offerings.

COTMA then set up a Spare Parts Committee, spearheaded by Mal Rowe and lead by Tony Smith to address this issue and liaise with members as to what their wishes were. Unsurprisingly, the most sought after item was running gear and motors in good condition and suitable for either placing under service trams with life expired items or else trams being restored.

My sincere gratitude is extended to Mal and Tony for the most competent and professional way that they have handled this task and made it possible for 21 sets of tramway trucks to be delivered to museums with more yet to be distributed

In tandem with this, thanks to the the Ballarat Tramway Museum who made available facilities for COTMA to store a number of containers at Bungaree that are stacked with spare parts for future access to COTMA groups. My thanks would not be complete without acknowledging the very generous offer from VicTrack on two accounts. One for their very generous financial support to the spare parts effort and secondly in making all of these items available to COTMA at little cost.

I must also acknowledge the large number of members who keep our Tramways operating day after day mostly on a volunteer basis. We could not operate without people such as tram crew,

maintenance and restoration staff, track gangs, administration staff who collectively allow us to keep us in business and provide and demonstrate what a Heritage Tramway system is all about.

What lies ahead ? Our museums are all facing the issue of an aging membership and the question of how to attract and retain younger members who are the lifeblood to keeping our Heritage tramway groups in business. This is a vexed question with no quick answer especially if there is a waning interest in Tramways with more competing interests in society combined with more leisure time. I encourage our members to continue with promotions such as open days, events on site, discounted prices for special occasions while at the same time maximising the use of social media to advertise coming events.

Increased compliance costs are another unavoidable fact of life and these combined with in some instances, safety and other legislative changes, can make for challenging times. I encourage all of our members to “work smarter” but at the same time continue to enjoy our chosen hobby.

I conclude in acknowledging Howard Clark who has elected to relinquish his position of Treasurer and thank him for his input over many years and welcome Tony Weston who has agreed to take over these duties and finally my sincere thanks to the COTMA Executive who have ably assisted and supported me during the past two years.

Henry Brittain
President
9 October 2023.