

THE USE OF VINTAGE BUSES TO SUPPLEMENT A TRAMWAY MUSEUM INCOME

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Editor's Note: This presentation was illustrated by colour slides.

In this paper, I am going to outline briefly the way in which the Society's 'Vintage' Bus fleet complements and works with the Tram fleet and tramway to increase the income the Society generates. The Society has had a policy for many years of endeavouring to preserve examples of urban public transport, from the early horse, steam and electric trams, to cable cars, to early modern trolley buses and to early and modern diesel buses.

The Tramway Historical Society has been very fortunate in its motor vehicle operation in the good working relationship the Society has with Christchurch Transport Limited and its predecessor, the Christchurch Transport Board. This relationship commenced back in the early 1960s when horse Tram No 43 was being restored for running at Papanui. Working with the then General Manager of the Christchurch Transport Board, Mr John Fardell, the Society proved its worth, and this then led to our activities being accepted by the then Engineer, and later General Manager of the C.T.B., Mr Max Taylor. Max is now President of the T.H.S.

The acquisition of our vehicles is interesting - In 1974 the Society was in a position to purchase - for \$5000.00 - an ex-London RT double-decker bus from the women members of the English Commonwealth Games Team after the Games finished in Christchurch. Prior to operating the RT, a protocol was drawn up between the Society and the C.T.B. for back-up services that could be activated at short notice should this become necessary.

After full Ministry of Transport certification of the Double Decker, and after being granted certain exemptions from regulations which the bus could not comply with (eg the width of the tread on the spiral staircase was not uniform), the Society obtained a Transport Services Licence which enabled fare paying services to be run to and from Ferrymead and also at specific School Fairs. The bus was made available to the C.T.B. for sub-charter work.

During this time, negotiations were going on with the C.T.B. (now with the new General Manager, Max Taylor) regarding the acquisition of AEC Regal Mark IV No 290. 290 was the class leader of the imported British-built tram replacement diesel bus fleet, and, as such, had been mentioned by the Society as being worthy of preservation. The vehicle was finally made available on permanent loan to the Society at the COTMA Conference in Christchurch in 1978. While the Double Decker was the most popular vehicle, the addition of 290 now gave us the capacity to carry nearly 100 passengers and this was put to good use with some charter work.

1989 saw the formal abolition of the C.T.B. with local authority reorganisation in New Zealand, and, to mark this occasion, the Society was donated a 1967 AEC New Reliance, No 452 as well as the Mark IV and some other vehicles which had been on a permanent loan basis. AEC Short Reliance No. 410 of 1958 was gifted to the Society in 1991 in a very sad state by Mr Ian Fisher of Rununga on the West Coast and has now been fully restored (by our own members working in the C.T.L. workshops). 410 has been repainted into the original 1958 livery and has since been re-engined, again with the help of the workshops.

With transport de-regulation and the breaking up of the former CTB fleet and services, the Society felt that we were essentially three vehicles short of having preserved a class representative of all the major groups of C.T.B. buses since 1952. Accordingly, a submission was made to the Christchurch City Council (which inherited the ex-C.T.B. bus fleet at deregulation) for a Mark I Bristol (1974), a Mark II Bristol (1978), and a Bristol/Hess (1979) to be donated to the Society for preservation. This was approved, and suddenly our working preserved bus fleet was seven. While this seemed a large number of vehicles to keep certified and in working order, it

also gave the Society the flexibility to carry out many charters requiring a number of vehicles - work which could not have been contemplated earlier.

The seating capacity of the fleet is now 318, and this being utilised to its fullest by conventions, as well as the Banquet Section of the Christchurch Parkroyal - who use our vehicles because of their novelty value - to transfer Incentive Conference Delegates to various venues all over Christchurch. Many other groups and organisations such as schools, pensioner groups, kindergartens and social groups also use one or more vehicles at a time for outings, dinner transfers, progressive dinners and trips to and from Ferrymead.

Up until this point, much of the maintenance work carried out on our vehicles was carried out by the C.T.B. on a very non-commercial "when time permits" basis. However, C.T.L. was now in the real commercial world, and the Society was getting more bookings which required vehicles to be available on time. It was jointly decided to enter into a commercial arrangement with C.T.L. to carry out our maintenance - C.T.L. was chosen because many of the staff had worked on our vehicles and were familiar with the little vagaries such vehicles could throw up now and again. After successful negotiations a favourable charge-out rate was struck so that, from that time on, the vehicles have been maintained mechanically by C.T.L. but crewed in service (where possible) by volunteers.

You will be able to see that this operation now has all the elements together to enable it to earn income for the Society. As you will appreciate such ventures never make a profit, but suffice it to say the monies generated are not kept specifically for bus restoration, but may be used on the tramway. Last year we were fortunate to carry out heavy maintenance on one vehicle and repaint three others commercially (and still make a slight profit). It is interesting to note that last year the income from both the trams and the buses was very similar.

The key to this operation is six-fold:-

1. We now have a good fleet in place;
2. We have a transport licence in place;
3. We have a good maintenance arrangement with a large local operator in place.
4. We have a wonderful pool of Society members who are interested in buses, as well as sympathetic, retired drivers who help out on a volunteer basis and enable us to keep the fleet moving.
5. This operation accords with the long-standing society philosophy that all exhibits should operate and carry passengers, rather than being merely static and "lifeless" museum-pieces.
6. We have a "co-ordinator" available who has a full time work phone available for Kaiapoi Depot outside contacts. We still have one major hurdle to overcome - that of permanent covered storage for the vintage bus fleet. An ex-C.T.B. building was available, but unfortunately we were unsuccessful in obtaining this. We are now actively searching for a suitable building within our budget.

While I am very aware that each State in Australia has different rules and regulations, I have presented this short paper in order to stimulate some lateral thinking to encourage groups to consider if there are any methods by which vehicles that a number of groups are already holding in their collections could be used to generate more income for their museums.

Finally, all transport museums, like all transport operators, realise that the bottom line, is to get more "bums on seats". I feel it will be good for all of us to go away reflecting on this cartoon from the 1960's which featured the then General manager of the M. & M.T.B.

Questions

Lewis Nyman: Asked re basic costs of the buses?

Answer: \$1.50 per hour. Dollar per km based on C.T.B. day hire (no drivers wages). T.H.S. could undercut (with volunteer crew) but has not the intention to do so. The cost with crew supplied was \$42.00 per hour.

A question was asked about advertising on buses. Cosmetic or revenue?

Revenue - through submissions of advertising proposals (with the profile of T.H.S.). All over advertising was considered. Suggested costs of \$250.00 per year for a small panel.

One had to prove oneself to get a track record. The attraction of the double-decker bus for use by advertising was a major spinoff.

Chris Steele: Spoke (as a bus driver) that the experience appeared to be that people are attracted to drive the buses rather than advertise the Museum.

Bruce Dale: Recounted his experience - he joined the T.H.S. for the trams but then got involved with the trolley buses and then motor buses by default.

The T.H.S. bus crews are in T.H.S. generally for the buses.

The promotion of the buses was twofold:-

1. To the public
2. To the bus companies.

Communication with the bus companies was necessary to ensure an awareness of the reasons for having buses, but not as competition.

The "English Connection" with the double decker bus was promoted as a specific sightseeing tour. The bus was chartered by the C.T.B./C.T.L. for six weeks for city-sights tours. It is now operated as a private double-decker tour.

Alan Robb: Mentioned that at times in the early days the Authorities were concerned about the proposals ; however T.H.S. obtained a license to operate and subsequently have shown a proven track record.

Frank Doherty: Commented about overhead dimensions.

David Verrier (Chairman) thanked Bruce Dale, noting that the THS had been very business-like in their promotion of their buses.