

## **DRIVING COTMA**

from Bill Kingsley (Retiring Chairman)

COTMA is the Council of Tramway Museums of Australasia and is Incorporated as an Association in the State of Victoria. But just what is the "Council" and how does it operate?

Our constitution refers to the big M's and the small m's. By definition, the Members (note the big M) are the Museums themselves, and we refer to them as Member Museums. But COTMA is not primarily about serving the Museums. We exist to serve the people who make those Museums function, that is, the members (note the small m) of those Museums. So we actually have members of Members.

From here on you will need to follow this description with reference to the accompanying graphic illustration.

The Member Museums should be open to the public and preferably operational. So we also have Affiliate Museums. These tend to be the small, the new, and museums which do not fit our constitution. However, their members are just as important, and we are pleased to have them amongst us. They enjoy all the privileges and benefits of full Membership except that they have no voting rights. We encourage our Affiliates to move up into full Membership when they can.

So COTMA, as a Council, really works at 2 levels. At the definitive top level are the Museums themselves. But buildings and tramcars and track have difficulty communicating and have to rely on human beings to do this for them. So the next level is the members. At Conferences and Meetings we call them Delegates.

Because we would have real trouble trying to fit all the members into a Council Meeting (it is hard enough to squeeze in all the Delegates), each Member Museum elects or appoints a single Representative to speak for them at a General Meeting. These are the Annual General Meetings (AGMs) and Conference General Meetings (CGMs). The constitution also allows for Special General Meetings if needed. The CGM is the supreme meeting at which issues are discussed, directions determined, major decisions made, and elections undertaken.

Elections! COTMA is interesting in that the Representatives elect their own non-voting Chairman, Deputy Chairman, Executive Officer, Assistant Executive Officer, and Treasurer, of Council. These folk are preferably not Representatives, and automatically become voting members of the Executive.

An Executive is needed because the number of Representatives is large (and growing), and the actual operation of COTMA by the full Council would be extremely awkward. The Executive therefore consists of the above 5 officers, plus the Immediate Past Chairman, plus just one Executive Member representing all our Australian Museums, and one representing all our New Zealand Museums.

These 2 Executive Members are very important as they are the means of co-ordinating their national flocks and should be the first point of reference for problems from, or needs of, their constituent Museums.

At this point it has to be stressed that the full Council in General Meeting is the supreme decision maker. The Executive exists to do as the Council commands and to report back to it. The Executive serves the Council, not vice versa.

Then there is our essential but quite misunderstood Operations Committee. Our constitution allows for sub-committees, and this is it! The Operations Committee is a support group to the Executive Officer. I started the then Operations Group in 1992 when I was Executive Officer and with oodles of problems, queries, requests etc, from Museums that I could not satisfy. Too many, too varied. I needed to spread the workload and expand the expertise. I needed to bring together an Electrical Officer, a Spare Parts Officer, a PTC Liaison Officer, and, of course, the Treasurer. And it worked marvels, attacking 38 (!) items on its first agenda. It had another advantage. It was the only group in COTMA meeting regularly, face to face, around a table, so we discussed all sorts of things and made recommendations to the Executive. Just recommendations. We had (have) no power beyond that.

Finally there are the sundry bodies (!), those support officers not part of Council who are points of reference and are appointed or recognised at CGMs. They include an Auditor, our Legal Officer, and representatives for the National Federation of Rail Societies (NZ), National Tramway Museum (UK), and the International Association of Transport Museums (of which COTMA is a Member. So you can be a member of a Member of a Member of IATM!)

All of that may have left the reader a little confused. I hope that the graphic diagram helps. It is a system that has evolved out of experience and need. It works quite well. But that does not mean that it is necessarily perfect. So I will pose a few questions (homework to follow the study).

1. Could the Executive be abolished?

Advantage. With e-mail the need for meetings is not so important. ALL Member Museums, through their Representatives, could then be directly involved in all discussions & decisions by e-mail.

Disadvantage. This would remove the constitutional need for the Aus and NZ Executive Members, but these people are important channels of communication.

2. Should the Representatives be permanent rather than chosen on a meeting by meeting basis? Some Museums already have permanent Representatives and this is the preference of the constitution.

Advantage. This person would be THE contact with COTMA (with Alternatives available). Rather than not knowing whether to communicate with a Museum's President or Secretary (or both or neither), COTMA could communicate solely with this dedicated (deliberate double meaning) person.

Disadvantage. What happens when the Representative is not communicating with their own President and Secretary and members? (Of course, there is nothing to stop the President or Secretary being the Representative.)

3. Should we be AOTMA (Association of Transport Museums of Australasia)? (This is resurrecting an old discussion point.)

Advantage. This would clarify between the Association (Museums) and the Council (people) with little change to the constitution.

Disadvantage 1. COTMA is now a well known entity.

Disadvantage 2. The pronunciation of AOTMA sounds awful. (Perhaps just ATMA. Or AATM.)

I leave you to ponder. It's your organisation. You have a voice.

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