

TROLLEYBUS TRIBULATIONS

Presenters: Craig Tooke (MTPA), Bruce Dale (THS) & Peter Beale (WTM)

Trolleybus preservation seems to be well established in New Zealand and various museums in Australia have vehicles stored in varying states of preservation. However actual operation of the vehicles only occurs at Ferrymead in Christchurch. (noting occasional historic operation on the streets in Wellington). What are the prospects for operation in Australia? Could a national trolleybus museum be established operating vehicles currently held by the various tramway museums? Where should it be located? Is it a COTMA function to facilitate this?

Following a short video presentation, Bruce Dale opened by supplying the following synopsis of the situation at Ferrymead.

- Trolley Bus preservation in Christchurch happened as part of a long term vision to have all forms of urban transport - horse, steam and electric trams, cable car, trolley and diesel buses - preserved on one site.
- In 1966 I happened to be working for a transport Company that had the body of English Electric trolley bus No 210 that they planned to turn into a staff mess room. Fortunately for us, this never happened.
- With the donation of 210, the Society mounted an all our effort to acquire the ancillary equipment needed to make a trolley bus system operable.
- Jointly with the Wellington Tramway Museum, we put in a tender for the entire New Plymouth trolley bus system. This included the overhead, trolley buses and ancillary equipment. The project was to be self funded from the sale of half the overhead, the rest to be split between the two museums.
- Self funding or donations have been the key to the success of this project - a concept which is becoming more difficult in the modern commercial world.
- One of the Auckland Farmer's trolley buses was the next to be donated, followed by a more modern vehicle.
 - The small Timaru rectifier was located and donated (this was OK for tram operation but not Trolley bus - not big enough - see later) The late John Fardell, former GM of the Christchurch Tramway Board, also suggested that we contact the Dunedin City Transport about rectifiers. It emerged that the CTB had sold their surplus rectifiers to Dunedin knowing that Dunedin input voltage was different to Christchurch and that the equipment would not work in Dunedin. So, what the Dunedin City Council had paid 15,000 pounds for, they donated back to the Society - and so got rid of some embarrassing boxes.
- The Society continued to locate other ex Christchurch trolley bus bodies, and obtain spare parts from them. Christchurch had two types of buses - English Electric and Ransomes - and one body shell of each were obtained and transported to Ferrymead.
- Representations were made to Dunedin and No 79 was donated to the Society - No 79 was the last trolley bus built in the South Island. No 5 was donated to the Society by a member.
- With the acquisition of a Wellington trolley bus, the Society had a National collection - a bus from every system in NZ.
- An important factor in the success of the trolley bus project was the ability to obtain buses and equipment from operators either at the time of closure of the system or while the system was still in operation, rather than having to purchase new equipment at a later date.
- 210's restoration was in two stages - initially an external paint restoration that enabled the bus to be used for publicity purposes (including use in a Queen Carnival that attracted enough attention to smooth the way for funding for our tram barn). The publicity also attracted new members. I gather that a number of the Perth members joined

PETS at the time of the closure of their trolley bus system. The second phase of the restoration - the full monty - took 15 years of dogged determination. The motor for 210 had been located in a DC operated shingle crusher at Timaru, but the owner would not make it available, even though it was not in use. Finally, Mike Kerr bid for the motor at the estate auction after the owner died, and was successful. But for all involved, the operation of the vehicle in Wellington - on the streets - made it all worthwhile.

- The need for a depot was solved, when Ferrymead Construction, a division of the then Ferrymead Trust offered to erect the barn and offices in return for access and sole use of the office space. This was gladly agreed to.
- The trolley bus route at Ferrymead was planned, negotiations with the local power authority carried out and poles were erected accordingly.
- The need for hard surface roading was identified and arrangements made.
- The running vehicles have now been certified up to Ministry of Transport standards. This was largely achieved at the time of the Wellington visit, and has been carried on at Ferrymead. This is essential if fare paying passengers are to be carried. It is also necessary for drivers to hold a passenger licence.
- We feel we have been very lucky in achieving what we have, as the availability of genuine British BUT spare parts is now very difficult. Traction motors, control equipment and overhead parts (at acceptable costs) are now much harder to source. I am aware that an Australian Museum has already sourced overhead equipment from the Tramway Historical Society.
- The power plant needed for trolley bus operation needs to be a larger unit. I mentioned earlier that we had sourced a small rectifier from the Timaru Harbour Board, but, while this can power trams, because of the greater current needed to start a trolley bus, it is not suitable for this system.
- I wish the project well and hope that the above may provide some food for thought for the planners as they progress the project.

Peter Beale then briefly described the situation in Wellington where trolleybuses remain in active commercial service. Stagecoach (the operating company) are planning on rebuilding their vehicles commencing with two prototypes. The Omnibus Society acts as “caretaker” for several historic trolleybuses owned by the company. The Society envisages its own depot connected to the operational system to service places of interest for visitors etc. He canvassed the possibility of the construction of a replica of the original “trackless tram” in Wellington. The successful staging of the Trolleybus Festival three years ago created much interest, and a repeat is planned for the weekend following the COTMA Conference in Auckland in 2004. This will be held in conjunction with celebrations to mark the centenary of electric traction in Wellington. He also flagged the possible building by Stagecoach of doubledeck trolleybuses for Hong Kong, with testing in Wellington.

Ian Seymour raised the issue of power supply and the high current drawn on starting by the compound wound motors. Richard Clarke compared this to the 4 x 40hp motors typically found in Australian trams, and noted the greater rolling friction of a trolleybus. With continuing improvements to motor generator sets, towable trailers may be an alternative to overhead and fixed power supply. Bryce Pender commented that the new Wellington trolleybuses may be similar to the long rigid buses currently being delivered to Sydney and Christchurch. He noted that the height of the prospective doubledeckers for Hong Kong would preclude their operation in Wellington.