



Council of Tramway Museums of Australasia Inc.

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Conference General Meeting

Monday 17 October 2016

Chairman's Report

Welcome to the 23rd Conference General Meeting of COTMA.

When we last met in Sydney, two years ago, I referred to on going challenges for our member groups, as well as some notable successes. These have continued and have been reflected in your presentations during this conference.

Your Executive has met regularly over the last two years, with two meetings in 2015 and two in 2016 – the most recent of which was immediately before this conference. I would like to formally record my thanks to the team for their support and hard work. All are busy people both in their own museums and in their work and private lives, yet can still find time to devote to this part of their hobby.

The executive has addressed several issues which are relevant to us as museums over the last two years, including:

- A submission to ONRSR (the Australian Regulator) on a new policy on level crossings in Australia – we succeeded in avoiding having the definition of a level crossing changed so that street tramways were not banned!
- Rules update to comply with Victorian law changes
- Worked with FRONZ (NZ Rail Groups Organisation) on a submission concerning a paper prepared by Museums Aotearoa and presented at a combined conference with Museums Australia, entitled "Working Objects: Guidelines For Their Operation And Care" which seemed to have a bias against operating heritage vehicles.
- Worked with THS to plan this conference
- Invited Warren Doubleday to take up the role of Communication Manager with ex-officio attendance at executive committee meetings.

Mal Rowe has supported me as Deputy Chair and continued to assist Rod. My particular thanks also to Warren Doubleday who unfortunately had to withdraw from attendance at the conference due to illness and the need for hospitalisation and surgery which he is now recovering from. In the absence of an "Immediate Past Chairman" on the executive (owing to Ian Seymour's resignation) Warren has continued his support in many ways, including as an advisor to the Executive Committee. He also continues to publish the COTMA News Update, looks after the website, and has made a major contribution in reviewing our Rules, with help from Mal Rowe.

The review of the rules was required because the Victorian law under which we operate requires them to be updated. This has been made a little more complicated by the fact that we are an organisation of organisations – not individual members. Warren's experience in carrying out the same job for a similar group has been valuable.

We are now over 40 years old and have come a long way since that first get-together in Ballarat back in 1975. From my own observations COTMA has come a long way since that time but we now face fresh challenges which will see at least as much change over the next 40 years. One key challenge is the retirement of what we have always thought of as 'modern trams'. Both Sydney and Melbourne

have retired their first generation of modern vehicles and only one is preserved in working order. New skills and approaches are going to be needed if we are to continue to represent the history of tramways in Australasia.

Over the years we have got to know and respect each other, we have had the opportunities to meet and to showcase our museums and home towns on both sides of the Tasman and have worked well together over issues such as spare parts acquisition and other issues as they have arisen such as rail regulation.

In this conference we have done some work on skills transfer – working out how best to carry out our work – both from an organisational and technical perspective. This will be an ongoing task if we are to remain relevant and effective.

The Victorian Government and the various tramway heritage resources still in that state remain important, but changes in management and ongoing outsourcing of management mean that we are finding it hard to manage the relationships with key players – or even to know who they are! This is a matter we will continue to address over the next two years.

Numbers of attendees this year from some groups are a bit down, and looking at the age of many of those present we are going to have to engage younger members to ensure that tramway museums and COTMA are still alive and well in 2024. For one museum, a survey of the membership list revealed an average age of 66 years. While the wisdom and experience that comes with age is valuable, so is a bit of youthful energy!

Is our current conference format and frequency still relevant? Some museums embrace COTMA and have multiple attendees at conferences while others struggle, or fail, to send a single representative. How do we regain the interest of both their executives and their general membership?

Having been in the unique position of being both COTMA chairman and an active member of the Christchurch conference organising Committee I am very aware of the time effort and resources needed to put together a successful conference, and I am particularly grateful to Mal Rowe for arriving in Christchurch several days early and giving valuable assistance and advice in the final stages of preparing for and helping us (THS) in the running of the conference. I can foresee a similar need to assist future conference organisers, and perhaps more particularly if they do not have a “local” COTMA Executive member nearby as part of their planning team.

From both a COTMA and THS perspective I would like to thank those who have contributed to make this conference a success, our partners and sponsors, Christchurch Tramway/Welcome Aboard Group, and inspirational speakers such as Andre Lovatt, Shaun Hardcastle, Stephen Ryan and Michael Lund. Thanks especially to Mikael, who is “one of us” and who during our association with him over the past few days has both inspired and challenged us with his description of the Danish Tramway Museum and the European Museum scene – we have learnt a lot and deeply appreciate his contribution.

Finally, thank you Mal, and Peter Hyde for assisting with the small group of pre-conference travellers and their hosts in Auckland and Wellington, the Christchurch conference team, and to Richard Gilbert who is about to set off to the West Coast with around 20 lucky people for what no doubt will be another great post-conference event, prior to returning home.