

THE GREAT DEBATE

**"THAT RAILWAYS ARE
OVERGROWN TRAMWAYS"**

Chairman: Les Stewart

Team for the Affirmative (C.O.T.M.A.)

John Radcliffe (Leader)
Dave Hinman
Lindsay Richardson

Team for the Negative (N.F.R.S.)

Paul Dillicar (Leader)
Russell Paul
Ken Henderson

Introduction:

Mr Stewart introduced the teams and announced he had appointed himself Chairman as, in the absence of a more suitable person, he was the most impartial by virtue of being Treasurer of the NFRS and Secretary of the WTM.

There were no rules except for time which was allotted on the basis of 5 minutes per speaker with a 3 minute summing up by the leaders at the end.

John Radcliffe (Affirmative):

Dr John Radcliffe began by establishing his teams credentials. Everyone knew the affirmative side and all of them had had expertise on tramway and railway matters having indiscriminately flogged equipment from such institutions over the years (laughter from the audience).

He then went on to argue that tramways preceded railways by citing dictionary references as confirmation:

- Tram derives from Traam in Low German
- A wooden road in the 17th and 18th Century

References in the Oxford English Dictionary were also quoted as supporting the view that railways evolved from tramways. The definition of a tramway dated from 1800 whilst that of a railway dated from 1832. Various items of Australian, New Zealand and British legislation were also quoted to emphasise the evolution from tramways to railways.

He also mentioned Benjamin Outtram, a British entrepreneur who produced a wooden mining tramway in the 18th Century.

Dr Radcliffe noted that the first Australian railway, at Victor Harbour in South Australia, was a tramway being established in 1856 and not having steam until 1885. Referring to Sydney, he recalled the more recent use of tramway equipment to get the Eastern Suburbs railway in Sydney into "a fit and wholesome condition" prior to opening.

Dr Radcliffe concluded by saying that railways derived from the earlier definition of tramways and were merely a little larger, "to whit, a little overgrown".

Paul Dillicar (Negative):

Mr Dillicar opened by pondering on where he had first heard of the topic of overgrown tramways and then recollected it was at a subcommittee meeting of the conference organising committee. (Mr Dillicar suggested the topic at the meeting. - Editor). He then tried to recall an overgrown tramway and remembered the Wellington Tramway Museum (WTM), referring to a photograph in a recent issue of Tramway Topics (published by WTM) which showed museum members out on a "tussocking expedition" - clear proof that the tramway was overgrown. It was so overgrown, in fact, that a HORSE!! (the nickname of a WTM member) had to be employed on the track gang (hoots of laughter).

Railways on the other hand were tidy and trim, not at all like tramways!

He then quoted a number of situations where railways were totally different to tramways and asked people to imagine the difficulties, if not the impossibility, of trying to take a full size passenger train up Queen Street in Auckland.

Finally and to conclude his case, Mr Dillicar mentioned the reported exploits (Moscow, 1 October 1989) of a Mr E. Frenkel who was a Soviet psychic healer and mentalist. This man he related, had stopped bicycles, automobiles and

trams to test his powers. But when he tried to stop a train he was killed instantly. Clearly a case of a railway being different to a tramway!

Dave Hinman (Affirmative):

Mr Hinman began his argument by commenting on the appropriateness of the Negative Teams' dress for a tramway subject. Two of that team being dressed in green, which was a common tramway livery, and the third being dressed in a bush singlet so typical of a bush tramway!

He then drew several comparisons between tramways and railways to illustrate that railways were overgrown versions of the former. These included:

- Railway gauge in Australia often being larger
- Railway mileage normally being greater
- Railways being faster, tramways being slower
- NZR 30 Class locomotives, which delegates had inspected earlier in the day, being an overgrown tram
- NZR electric locomotives at Otira being called trams

Finally, he referred to the NZR light rail proposal for Auckland called a modern tramway in the NZR publicity and asked "what is heavy rail?". The answer, "heavy rail is overgrown light rail!"

Russell Paul (Negative):

Opened by commenting on dress sense being uniforms complete with badges. (He was suitably attired to prove it! Editor).

He then proceeded to argue that there was no similarity between trains and trams, even their purposes were different. Railways were there to cart freight and passengers thousands of miles with the passengers being conveyed in comfort. Trams he argued were clattering, rattling, overgrown electric motors designed to carry a few passengers a short distance in bone-shaking conditions and they frequently caused congestion by getting in the road of other traffic. Trams were often pulled by horses whereas railways had steam power.

Further he contended that tramways were not designed properly when a check rail was necessary for the full length of the line.

Mr Paul then quoted the Guinness Book of Records to show that the longest tramway in the world was of 105 kilometres in length compared to the longest railway (the Trans Siberian) at 9438 kilometres.

Finally he concluded it was a myth that railways were overgrown tramways and stated that "Trams can't take West Coast coal to Lyttleton" to prove it.

At this point the Chairman had to remove the speaker from the rostrum as the allotted time had expired. The Chairman commented that he had allowed the speaker 30 seconds extra at the start for dressing time (Applause).

Lindsay Richardson (Affirmative):

Mr Richardson began by saying the thread of the argument had been lost by the Negative and the fact remained that trams originated in the 18th Century whilst railways dated from 1825. In the intervening years there were a variety of tramways such as mineral, bush and port. In Western Australia tramways were frequently served by railway waggons.

He didn't give much credence to the argument that railways were too heavy to use tramways and cited the example of the East Perth tramway being used by the railway for coal supply purposes. (Interjection from the Negative "Aussies are different!" followed by "Wasn't the tram strong enough?")

Mr Richardson concluded by reiterating that railways are overgrown tramways.

Ken Henderson (Negative):

Mr Henderson requested 30 seconds dressing time to don a cap with an imitation pantograph mounted on top and to carry a rivet counter (abacus) as no self respecting rail fan would be without one.

He indicated he had been delegated to do the serious part of the debate but wanted to know "who the guy was who dreamt up the topic for the debate as he should be punched, clipped, hump-shunted into a round house and retubed?" (laughter) (Mr Henderson was unaware that his own leader dreamt up the subject -Editor). He also noted that he preferred to spend his Saturday nights at Conferences watching 200 slides taken from the back of the Southerner between Ashburton and Timaru (laughter).

Mr Henderson's understanding was also that the word tram came from low German but stated that in the Negative's dictionary r came before t and therefore by extension railway came before tramway. There was also a Latin connection as railway is derived from the Latin regular/rule. This prompted him to suggest that Caesar may have been the first train spotter and that railways had been around a lot longer than tramways.

The initials of COTMA came in for some comment as well. As revealed in his

wife's mirror, COTMA should read AMTOC which is an ancient Mason-like organisation called the "Association of Manic Tram Observers". They even have a secret handshake called a "Dead Man's Handle". In other words these people were closet rail fans.

After a brief spell of comparing trams to mobile billboards and commenting on a tram shown in a church window dating back to 1350 in Freiburg he ran out of time and was escorted from the rostrum.

John Radcliffe (Summing Up for the Affirmative):

Dr Radcliffe referred to the case presented by the Negative as an "overgrown bunch of incredulity" in its attempt to justify that railways had some independent claim to existence.

He then proceeded to restate the evidence for the Affirmative's case.

Referring to developments in the transport sector, he noted that electric trams have lead to trackless trams, and railways have lead to trackless railways and the country is full of them!

Dr Radcliffe concluded the case for the Affirmative by commenting that the issues all support railways as being overgrown tramways and that no case could be made to contradict them.

Paul Dillicar (Summing Up for the Negative):

Mr Dillicar referred back to Frenkel, the Soviet psychic and mentalist, to show that railways could never be overgrown tramways. He considered this to be the ultimate test of powers.

There was also an attempt by him to show that WTM was in fact trying to prove that they were a railway which provoked some mirth.

He considered the case well and truly proved that railways weren't overgrown tramways.

Conclusion:

The Chairman commented on the amount of ill-conceived logic he had heard during the debate (applause) and then asked the audience to vote for a winner by a show of hands. A draw was declared.