

## Tramway Topics report to COTMA 2010

18/9/10

I was appointed by the Wellington Tramway Museum to edit and publish Tramway Topics in May 2008, three months after the death of the previous editor, John Murphy. I was appointed on the basis of being a self-employed technical writer and desktop publisher with an involvement in the tramway heritage movement back to 1963, when I joined the Tramway Historical Society.

I am also heavily involved in the promotion of modern trams for Wellington, and have done a Winston Churchill Fellowship tour, attended 3 major light rail conferences overseas, etc to that end.

My objectives on taking up the job were:

- a. **Appeal to a larger market:** the enthusiast market, which is the core but is somewhat static, **plus** the rapidly increasing interest in public transport, electric transport, light rail etc. The idea was to enthuse enthusiasts and act as a shop window for the tramway museum movement, thereby attracting new volunteers and customers.
- b. **Increased sales:** I proposed to position Tramway Topics to have an appeal outside the membership of the museum organisations and current subscribers. I wanted to see it sold through selected major magazine retailers (such as Magnetix in Wellington), all rail hobby shops in NZ, all transport museum bookshops, and selected overseas outlets.
- c. **Advertising:** If (b) is successful there would be scope for increased paid advertising, even if that is to some extent a 'pro-bono' on the part of the advertisers. This assumed business support from the owners which I would not provide as editor but which I would assist.
- d. **Graphic redesign:** an upgraded graphic design to develop newsstand appeal to compare favourably with local and overseas publications like Heritage Matters, NZ Railway Observer, NZ Railfan, Trains, Tramways & Urban Transit, Modern Railways, etc. A full colour cover would be standard for every issue; the development of further colour content would be driven by affordability, which would be affected by the success of (c).
- e. **Content balance:** while it is possible to achieve only so much with voluntary input, I would try to achieve a balance of 1/3 each of:
  - "Scholarly" historical material - longer articles and photographs such as has been traditionally provided by the likes of Alan Smith, Graham Stewart, Bruce Maffei, Ian Spicer etc
  - Current material - museum news, urban transport news from Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch, overseas news that has NZ-relevance

- Future development - industry news, proposals etc particularly from overseas.

Eight issues have so far been produced on my watch, meaning that a roughly quarterly output has been achieved but there has been some slippage at times. This meant that one issue was a so-called combined issue – 238 and 9 – to get back on track, and the latest one, 244, the so-called winter issue, didn't 'hit the streets' until early this month, the start of spring.

I have a good range of material in hand for 245 and it should be published well before the official start of summer.

The standard format is 8 full colour and 24 black and white pages, digitally printed because of the low print run. My personal time input is up to 120 hours per issue of concentrated time, plus distractions

Something I have introduced is a theme for each issue. Past issues have covered light rail and tram-train, trolleybuses, double-deckers, the tramway museum early days and so on. The next issue will focus on heavy rail urban transit in New Zealand, but of course there will be coverage of the usual tramway historical and museum stuff as well.

This is all highly dependent on the magnificent support of volunteer researchers and writers. Special mention must be made of the support I get from Ian Spicer. Once the secretary of the THS and an early editor of Topics, Ian is a professional journalist, sub-editor and proofreader. As well as writing a series of fluent and highly entertaining articles, Ian also tidies up the contributions of others, provides writing standards guidance, and excels at the task of proofreading.

Graham Stewart's photographic support has been essential for a heavily-illustrated magazine and his provision of photos has been unstinting and generous.

The researched contributions of major feature writers Alan Smith and Bruce Maffei have been essential for creating interesting content. Other major feature contributors have been John Shanks, Dave Hinman, Bill Campbell, Colin Zeff, Ian Robertson, Greg Harris, and Barry Palmer.

The museum notes contributed by Keith McGavin, Bruce Pullar and other writers are at the heart of Topics and much appreciated.

All this would be pointless were it not for the WTM's administrative support by Henry Brittain in distribution and Michael Boynton in handling payments in and out.

Thank you everyone, and apologies to any supporters who I have inadvertently missed.

To finish, I would like to review the objectives set when I took the job up.

Objectives (a) and (b) – greatly increased circulation and wider retail sale – have not been achieved. The wider marketing was anticipated to be undertaken by the proprietors, the Wellington Tramway Museum, but that was assumed to be

dependent upon the WTM retaining and developing its Commercial Manager position, which has not happened. This means that an upgrade to full CMYK and maybe more pages, to put Tramway Topics on a par with comparable NZ publications like the Railway Observer and Heritage Matters, is not financially feasible.

Objective ( c ) – advertising content – is limited to ‘quid pro quo’ and ‘thank-yous’ for volunteer contributors like Ian Robertson and Graham Stewart. Paid advertising has not been pushed due to the low circulation; development of this potential income stream would be up to the proprietors.

Objective (d) – graphic design – has been achieved. My daughter is a professional publication designer and illustrator and she came up with the current design. An updated design for issue 245 on is planned.

Objective (e) – content balance – has been achieved within the constraints of what volunteer writers provide or what can be cribbed from other publications and the internet.

Although my aim of expanding circulation to support full colour and other improvements has not yet been achieved, I am confident that the foundation for achieving that outcome has been laid.

**Brent Efford**

**Editor, Tramway Topics**