

Providing the Means to tell the story

For just on 50 years, the Museum's means of telling the Ballarat Tramway's story was by using a tramcar at our depot. Initially, using a tramcar out of service and then a modified tramcar. This was due to a lack of space and the needs of housing and maintaining a working fleet of tramcars. The principle interpretation was by running the tramcar in Wendouree Parade and telling the stories there.

Throughout the period 2010 to 2018, the Museum planned an extension that would give us the opportunity to showcase our trams and collection. In 2021, the means were provided with the construction of a significant new building.



View of the new building on the left-hand side of the original depot buildings within the Ballarat Botanic Gardens Reserve. Photo taken prior to the construction of the connecting tracks.

Background

The Ballarat Tramway Museum is situated on Council controlled land within the Ballarat Botanic Gardens Reserve. This location has restricted our available space – no outside storage allowed. Before the original 335 m² building was constructed in 1972, it took a lot of work by the founding group to convince the Council that we were a worthwhile organisation to provide the land for a building for the original group of six trams. By the mid 1970's the Museum needed additional depot space for its growing collection of trams. The proposal for an additional 670m² of building space was favourably considered by Council but received strong objections from residents at the south end of the Gardens. These were addressed and a permit granted. The extension was completed and formally opened in 1981.



The Museum display tram – 1973 and 1974, rolled out every day and then pushed back in at night. Photos Bill Kingsley.



Tram 39 acting as the display tram and the sales area, but not at the exit point. Photo Warren Doubleday (1995) and Graeme Cleak (2012)

During the mid-1990's the Council undertook a Masterplan for the Gardens' Precinct. The plan considered the tram museum and provided for a one bay, low rise structure to the south of the existing building. At least we had been recognised as being worthy of an extension.

A further study during 2005 confirmed the 1995 Masterplan, though by this time the Australian Ex-Prisoner of War Memorial had been constructed along the southern boundary of the Gardens with only some consideration to its actual heritage value at that location.

During the mid-2000's the Gardens area came under further review which included a detailed Heritage review by the Heritage Victoria. This resulted in the Gardens being added to the Victorian Heritage Register in 2010. The Museum was included in the extent of the Registration. This placed many more restrictions on the use of the Gardens Precincts and meant that any further infrastructure developments required Heritage Victoria approval as well as Council approval.

Planning

The Museum's 2014 Business Plan recognized the need to develop an Interpretative Centre and improve the Museum experience for visitors. This now had to be done within a much more restrictive set of rules than those of 1971 and 1975.

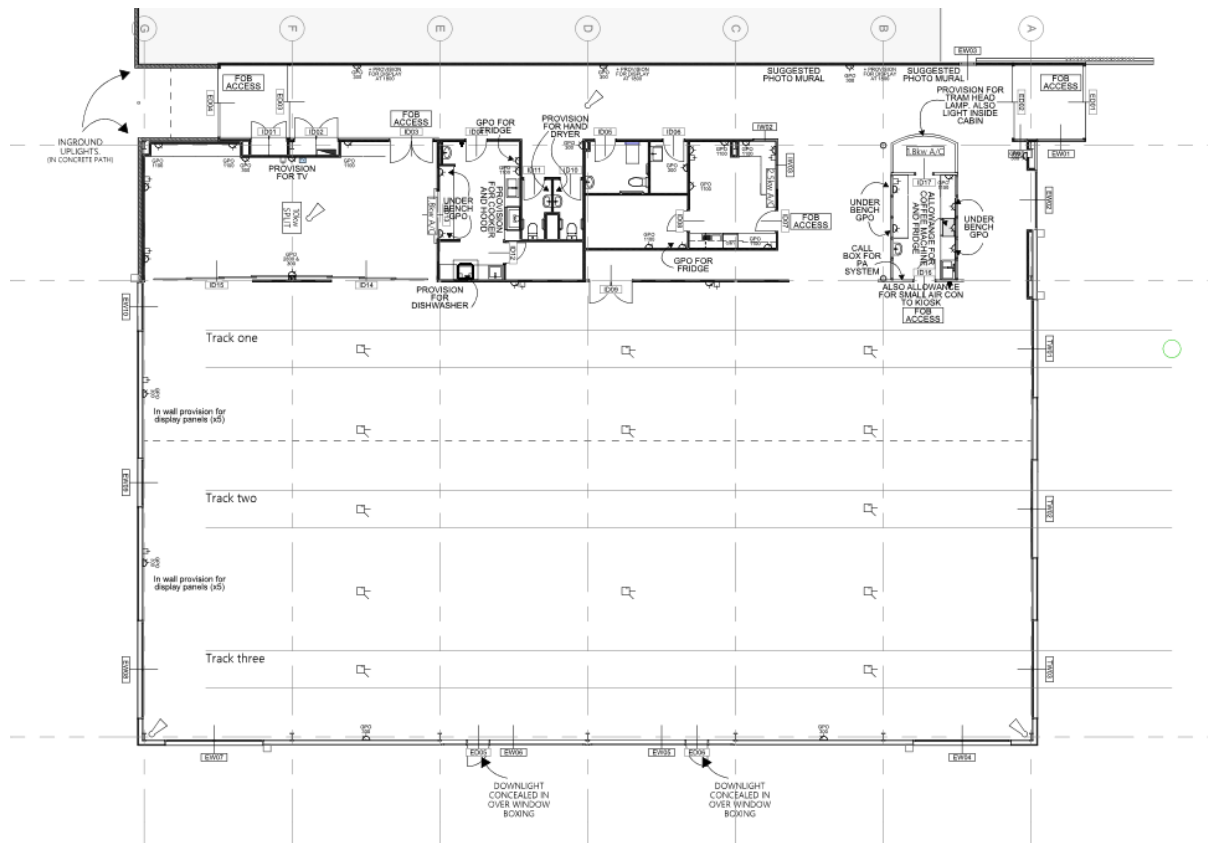
Town planning or Resource Consent and funding for any building works were the primary difficult issues to be addressed. During the period 2010 - 2013, the process to construct the one bay extension to the south with facilities, an exhibition space and offices was prepared, consulted with Council and submitted for approval. Both Council and Heritage Victoria granted the required permit. Unfortunately we could not obtain funding for the project and the permit lapsed.

The Council suggested that perhaps working with the Ballarat Returned Services League (RSL) who were seeking a new home for their displays could increase our chance of funding. A proposal for a joint museum was prepared and further consultations took place. At this time, the Council revisited the Gardens and Lake Wendouree Master Plan. Feedback from the community was that they did not want to see more military items in the Gardens precinct, but an extension of the tramway Museum was seen as appropriate.

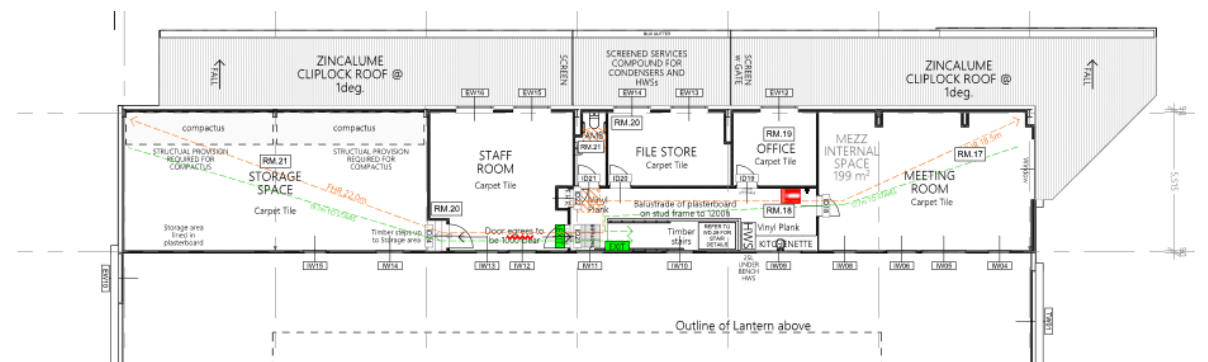
The proposed partnership with the RSL thus lapsed and concept drawings for a larger extension, including facilities, offices, exhibition space and three tracks with generous display space between each track were prepared and submitted for approval. The City was very supportive of the works, but Heritage Victoria required many changes to both the proposed landscaping, carpark and the building exterior. It took many meetings to resolve their issues, including consultation with local residents. Finally, the work was approved in principal and publicly advertised. Some objections

were received and addressed in the Council permit, in addition to Heritage Victoria's conditions. The ground floor of the new building is approximately 900m² while the first floor is just under 200m².

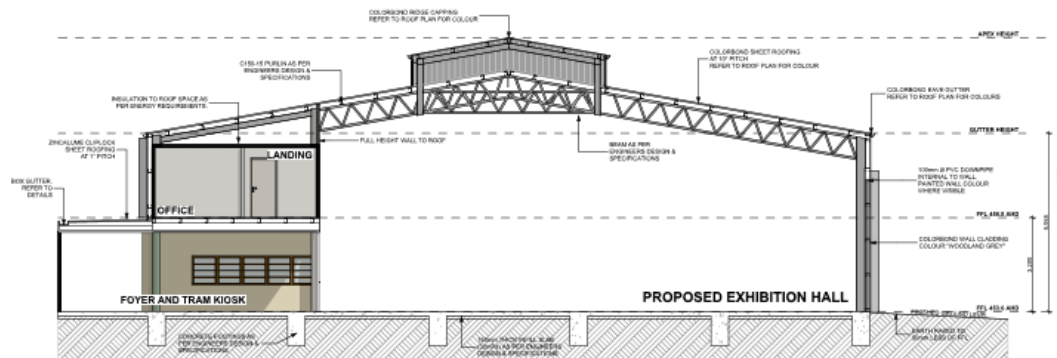
At last we had the means to tell the story; now to implement it.



Floor plan – ground floor



First floor plan



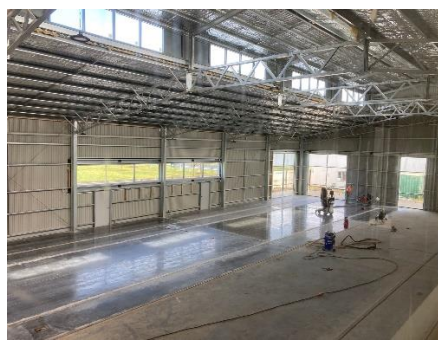
Cross section through the new building

Providing the building

Funding of about \$1.7 million came from primarily member donations and the Museum's own resources.

The design concept work was prepared by an experienced builder, MKM Constructions. The building work was then tendered out and several tenders were received, with two very competitive tenders. The successful builder was MKM Constructions under a Design and Construct arrangement. All this was at the start and then through the COVID-19 outbreak and Melbourne becoming reportedly the "most locked down city in the world". A major issue was the requirement in the permit to protect the tree root zones in the proposed car parking area on the west or Gillies St side; and car parking spaces had to be moved to the north, except for the one accessible space. The consultation and planning for these changes resulted in an eight-week delay in commencing work.

The Tender was awarded just before Christmas 2020 and construction work commenced on site late March, 2021; the 50th year of the Museum. The builder, despite materials shortages due to COVID completed the work during September with a formal hand over taking place on 2 October 2021.



Building underway and polishing the floor – photos Warren Doubleday and Paul Mong.

Trackwork

At the same time, the Museum was awarded a \$1.2m grant from the State Government Regional Infrastructure Fund. This was a matching grant to that received earlier from the Federal Government for track renewal in Wendouree Parade and for the provision of tracks to the new building. This grant was administered by the City of Ballarat on our behalf. The City did all the design work for the tracks with our input regarding standards and layout requirements.

Under the Rail Safety Regulator's Accreditation document, we found due to an original administrative error that we were not permitted to build additional track, only maintain it! This required many more hours of work for new documentation to be prepared and approvals obtained.



Track construction in front of the depot - 2022

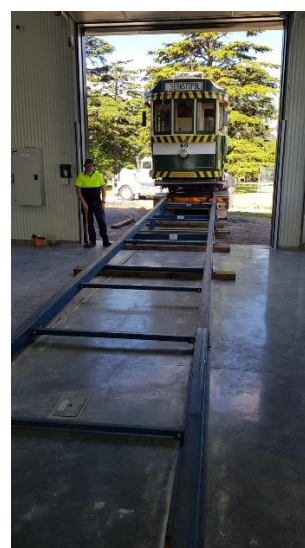
Fitout

The Museum is very pleased with the outcome and the quality of the work undertaken by the Contractor. There have, as always, been a couple of minor issues with the building work, but these have been resolved. The general feedback from visitors and the community has been “Wow!

A comment received on 10-9-2023:

“My Family and I will cherish our memories of The Tram Museum forever.
What an unbelievable experience the staff were friendly The Tram ride and Museum are a must do if you are visiting Ballarat 🚃❤️🚃❤️🚃❤️🚃❤️”

The building has allowed us the means to Showcase the collection, both trams and artefacts, in a spacious, well lit, UV protected environment. It allows for visiting trams, which can be easily moved using the Museum’s systems of ramps, rather than needing cranes. The new building has met the goals of the 2014 BTM Business Plan to improve the Museum experience for visitors; as well as to increase our visitor numbers. Single day visitors are often double our pre-Covid numbers.



Installing the large exhibition photos and delivering No 40 – the first tram in – Photos Peter Waugh

Currently on display are Horse tram No. 1 with replica or outlined horses, Victorian Railways No. 41 (on loan from the MTPA), Ballarat No. 40, Ballarat, Ballarat No. 32, Geelong No. 2, and providing further variety, Launceston No. 14 (on loan from the Sydney Tramway Museum). As well, are a Bedford Tower truck and a No. 15 bogie or truck. The items are not crowded, end to end, but allow the visitor to walk around and appreciate them. There are three trams on display where visitors are restricted from climbing aboard. Two of these we have steps and a platform so visitors can look inside them. These and other accessible steps were provided from a grant by the Vera Moore Trust.

Ballarat No. 32 is a tramcar that was parked for many years under a roof but unsecured. It shows the state of disrepair that tramcars can be in when received by museums before they are rebuilt or repaired back to an operational condition. This display provides a great contrast and comparison with other trams that have been beautifully reconstructed, e.g., Geelong No. 2.

Two large touch screens, a large video monitor/ TV, multiple tablets on stands, and interpretative panels that provide a range of presentations add to the overall visitor interpretative experience. Several points or locations for children’s activities have been installed, along with the purchase of a ride-on truck (BTM Recovery Breakdown truck) that children can sit in and enjoy a “ride”.

A model tramway featuring Ballarat buildings and Lake Wendouree is currently under construction. Internal lighting of the trams, using LED lights rather than 120V fittings, are being installed. These will allow for dual operation from 240V when in the display centre and 600V when operating. There are future plans for a driving simulator and further children's activities.

In preparing the interpretative panels, the word count has been kept low with photos carefully selected to tell the story rather than having a mass of photos and text. Documents for other languages, particularly Chinese are being prepared.

In July 2022, the State Government Regional Development Fund awarded the Museum a \$200,000 grant for further fitout of the new display area with an emphasis on visitor engagement and access. The BTM contributed a further \$100,000 towards the project. This work included a wheelchair accessible ramp, further displays including interactive displays, digital equipment, and lighting with this work essentially completed by July 2023.

The provision of the accessible ramp had to receive approvals from Heritage Victoria and the City of Ballarat. One difficulty was issuing the actual building permit: – the Museum was not a Registered Builder, nor was the selected concrete contractor. Fortunately MKM Constructions came to the rescue and took the builder responsibility for us.



The kiosk & shop and the new accessible ramp. Photos Warren Doubleday

Heritage considerations

The building design reflects Ballarat Tramway history through using design elements, the roof and roof lantern arrangement from the original tram depot. The roof lantern allows for both air flow and light into the centre of the building and along with large windows on the southern and western ends ensure all displays and the trams are well lit. The windows also allow passersby to see what is in the building with just enough detail to encourage them to come in for a visit.

Heritage Victoria laid down stringent requirements for the appearance of the building to fit into a heritage zone and the final Heritage approved plans took six months of detailed negotiation. Protecting the trees on the Gillies St side and on the eastern side where the tracks passed through or over large Cedar trees that needed root zone protection was a significant issue that had to be addressed with the assistance of an arborist and the Council gardening department. The new access track to the new museum building was effectively bridged over significant tree root areas.

Outcomes

The new Interpretive facility has made BTM a Ballarat visitor destination, rather than just a place to have a tram ride whilst visiting the Botanic Gardens. Many of the visitor comments note the tram ride seemingly as an extra.

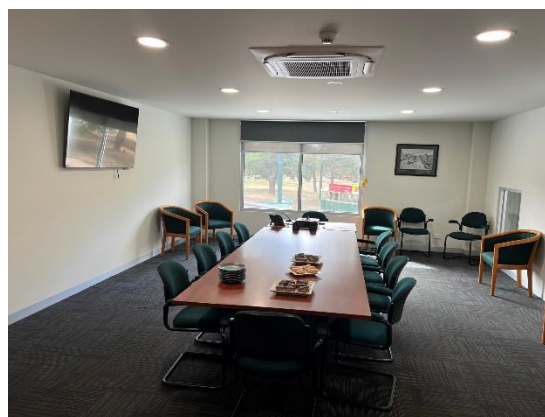
On the ground floor are an exhibition room, extensive amenities, an office, an entrance kiosk and a well-stocked shop. The provision of an upstairs collection store, library, office and Board Room complete an excellent set of volunteer and visitor's facilities. The kiosk provides a facility to welcome visitors, collect their entrance fee, and manage sales from. All under cover and we do try to keep our volunteers warm or when needed cool, through extensive HVAC systems. We have found the building itself does not get excessively hot or too cold.



Display cabinets and small screens. No. 15 (all Australian made) truck and its interpretative panel



Geelong 2 on display and the exhibition room with colouring-in sheets a plenty.



Archive storage racks and the Board Room. photos Warren Doubleday, Peter Waugh.

In the short time since the building was opened, it has been used by the community for various events, a cycling event management control centre, launches or publicity for events by the City Council and others. These events have utilised either the exhibition room or the Board meeting room on the first floor. We are hosting a steady number of tour groups and providing personalised club tours and presentations. The commercial quality kitchen next to the theatrette and two smaller kitchenettes on each floor provide flexibility for the type of events than can be supported.

In the 2021 COTMA Achievement Award submission, we stated that Community Awareness and support had been invaluable in obtaining the funding for the track reconstruction. For the permits and funding to build the new facility and to fit it out, this Community support was again invaluable along with that from the local members of Parliament. The City of Ballarat gave us great guidance and support to achieve this project of building a new tramway Museum Interpretative centre. It is proving to be a great community means of preserving Ballarat's tramway heritage, just over 50 years since the State Electricity Commission of Victoria closed its Ballarat tramway network.

Finally, we had to change the way operate the tramway. Most visitors arrive at the new Museum building. By issuing coloured (coin like) tokens to passengers who exchange them with the Conductor or Driver for replica tickets maintains the tradition of issuing tickets for the exchange of a coin. The token system replicates an earlier practice used by the Electric Supply Company of Victoria in Ballarat.



View of the main display area with a large touch screen and the model tramway under construction.

Photos Warren Doubleday

Conclusion

It has worked; we are telling the story in a completely different way through a variety of means. The feedback we are receiving is confirming this.

The new building has provided an opportunity the means to tell the story of Ballarat trams in comparison with other tram systems. It has made us a tourist destination in our own right rather than just a place to have tram ride with perhaps a brief look at the depot facility whilst visiting the Botanical Gardens.

Paul Mong and Warren Doubleday