

Honoring a legacy while looking toward new horizons

CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF COTMA: ACHIEVEMENTS AND A FUTURE VISION

10/11/2025

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This presentation commemorates the 50th anniversary of COTMA, highlighting its origins, key achievements, challenges overcome, and all going well the exciting future vision for tramway museums in Australasia.



David Verrier – 25/4/1975

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FOUNDATION

Founding Members' Initiative

Key individuals initiated COTMA in 1975 aiming to unite tramway museums across Australasia

Goal of Uniting Museums

The primary goal was fostering collaboration and resource sharing among tramway museums in Australasia.

Establishing Collaboration

Their efforts established a foundation for ongoing cooperation and shared initiatives within the tramway museum community.

Key founding members initiated COTMA in 1975 came with the goal of uniting tramway museums. Their efforts laid the groundwork for collaboration and resource sharing throughout Australasia.

For the story of the foundation of COTMA, see Bill's story in the 2000 conference proceeding along with that Johns. All on the website.

Bill Kingsley – Ballarat
 John Radcliffe – Adelaide
 Dave Rawlings – Sydney
 Dave Hinman - Christchurch

They and others had gotten to know one another through visiting each other's museums and the need for umbrella organisation was seen.



Keith Kings – 26/4/1975

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INITIAL GOALS AND THE ABSENCE OF NEW ZEALAND MUSEUMS

Focus on Australian Cooperation.

Initially the organisers only invited Australian Museums.

Exclusion of New Zealand Museums

Oops they found out about it and attended – start of a long productive relationship.

Goals of Growth and Networking

The primary objectives were promoting growth, networking, and addressing resource challenges among museums.

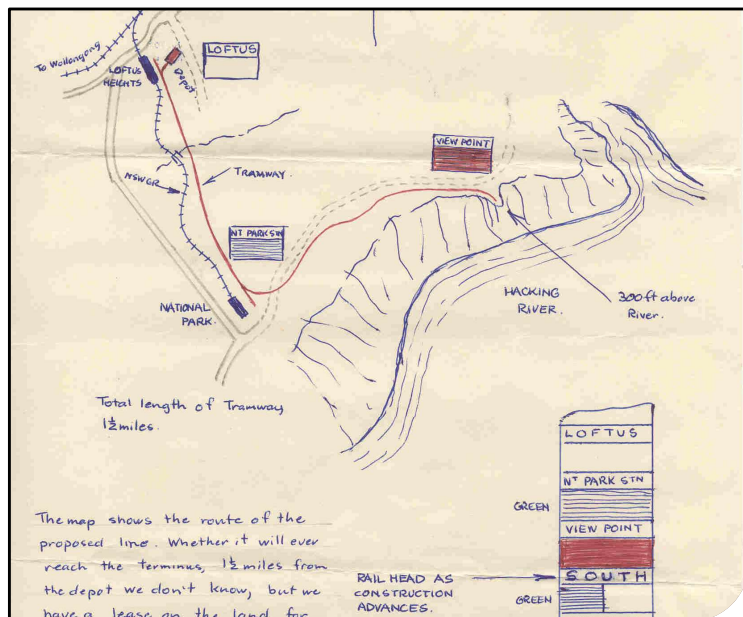
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Initially focus was on Australian Museums which at that time were growing, though there was some competition amongst the three Victorian museums.

New Zealand heard about the conference and invited themselves along – FRONZ formed in 1975 as well. FRONZ is now a very comprehensive organisation with many members. The formation of an Australian rail heritage group – ATHRA took some time – the break of gauge problems seemed to endure.

Initial members

AETM - Adelaide
 BTPS – Ballarat
 BTPS – Brisbane
 MOTAT – Auckland
 SPER – Sydney
 STRPS – Parramatta Park
 THS – Christchurch
 TMSV – Melbourne
 TTMS - Hobart



Map by Ken Macarthy – mid 1950s

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OUR PROJECTS IN THE EARLY YEARS: BUILDING TRACKS, POWER SUPPLY, AND RESTORATION

Track Construction

Early efforts focused on building the track – and many grand ideas that could still happen.

Power Supply Setup

Establishing a reliable power supplies was critical to operate trams.

Tramcar Restoration

Restoring tramcars to operational condition was needed.

Early projects concentrated on essential infrastructure such as constructing tracks, establishing power supplies, and restoring tramcars to operational condition, setting a strong foundation for future development.

Lots of dreams many of which have happened over the last 50 years, though some bodies have fallen by the wayside.

Growing in numbers by 1980

Wellington

MTPA – Haddon

Bendigo

PETS - Perth



John Binns – Launceston 2008

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CONFERENCES

26 Conferences so far

COTMA through its conferences has promoted a unified community among museums to strengthen collaboration and mutual support.

Sharing Knowledge and Resources

Museums share expertise and materials to enhance tramway preservation efforts collectively.

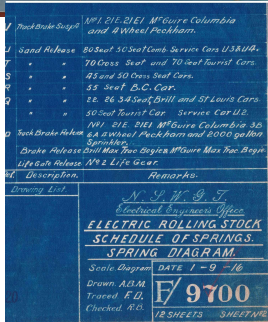
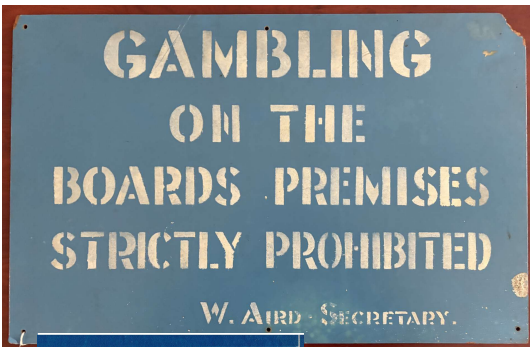
Advancing Tramway Preservation

Shared progress helps museums improve their conservation and restoration of historic tramcars.

COTMA's vision centred on fostering a unified community where museums could support each other's progress, sharing knowledge and resources to enhance tramway preservation. Conferences brought people together – they knew who was who, what they did and what they looked like.

Between conferences, comprehensive newsletters were issued by the Executive Officer – Bill Kingsley, Keith Kings and Richard Gilbert. All by typing a stencil, using a duplicator and then posting it. Today it is via a email system.

PS Trunk phone calls were expensive.



GROWTH IN COLLECTIONS, ARCHIVES, AND KNOWLEDGE

Expansion of Collections

Museums have grown their collections significantly to include diverse artifacts and technical materials.

Detailed Archives

Comprehensive archives preserve valuable documentation essential for research, restoration projects and telling our trammie stories.

Support for Restoration

Technical resources and artifacts aid ongoing restoration and conservation efforts in museums worldwide – swapping of information between members.

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Museums have expanded their collections and maintained detailed archives, preserving valuable technical documentation and artifacts that support ongoing restoration and research.

Provision of information for restoration projects very important and then keeping it somewhere, not losing it. Not easy but something important to achieve. There are extensive collections of photos and films, but is it quickly accessed? Often tricky remembering where you put it, - need a system,

PS the Melbourne tram Museum had contact from the family of Mr Aird recently and were very happy with some photos and information about his work as MMTB Secretary. Lots of sad stories behind that sign.

Metronet – website 2025 – PETS new line.

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RAIL SAFETY: FROM INFORMAL PRACTICE TO REGULATION

Evolution of Safety Practices

Rail safety for Museums has evolved over the years. COTMA has worked with the Regulators to ensure Museum tramways were not forgotten and considered part of the BIG railways.

Ensuring Volunteer Safety

Formal regulations provide a safer environment for volunteers working on and around railways.

Insurance

ATHRA has leveraged off this regulation and our low accident rates to provide favourable insurance rates.

Safety practices have transitioned from informal arrangements to formal regulations, ensuring safer operations for volunteers and visitors alike.

COTMA early meetings considered electrical, drivers, track and tramcar maintenance and safety. Many of us based their maintenance on what the BIG tramway did, and their maintenance manuals. They may have been a bit of flying by the seat of your pants, but it worked and so far no major accident has occurred – please keep it that way.

We did get tramway level crossings defined with a bit of work.

Medicals – that’s an area which has largely been taken off us and is impacting on our activities.

Public Liability Insurance while not a huge problem in NZ, it has been in Australia. ATHRA through its work has brought it under control and at good rates, saving many thousands of dollars for its railway and tramway members. Another good example of the work of an umbrella body.



From Wanganui's Facebook page.

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SPARE PARTS & TRAMCARS

Careful Tramcar and Parts Management

COTMA has overseen the acquisition and disposal of tramcars with a focus on strategic and thoughtful management, with our thanks to VicTrack for enabling this.

Enabling tramcars to live again

Have assisted most museums in obtaining parts; for example, providing Wanganui with a set of parts ex a W5 tram.

Balancing Preservation and Practicality

Decisions balance preserving historical value with practical needs for operation and resources and the future.

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COTMA has managed acquisition and disposal of tramcars carefully, including significant work with post-W class vehicles, balancing preservation with practical considerations.

The recent work by the Spare Parts Committee led by Mal Rowe is to be congratulated on its work. Once Newport is cleared, which it almost has been, there will be no more W class parts – will rely now on each other to swap parts as needed.



Assisted Isle of Man with motor information

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LAISON WITH OTHER BODIES

International Collaboration

Engagement with other organizations such as FRONZ, FEDECRAIL, HRA UK facilitates sharing of knowledge, best practices and equipment.

Innovative Practices

Seeing what others are doing and providing information helps all of us, eg the COTMA Technical Library and our newsletters.

Adaptation in Australasia

Best practices are adapted to suit our needs of Australasian tramway museums.

Engagement with international tramway organizations has inspired innovations and best practices that have been adapted within the Australasian context.

Seeing what is going on in other countries in terms of rail safety and volunteers can be useful and give guidance of what to do and not what to do or avoid. Know the possible pitfalls.

Our Technical library is very comprehensive and always looking for more documents. Recently added some information on PCC cars.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DEDICATED VOLUNTEERS AND NEW GENERATIONS

Role of Dedicated Volunteers

Volunteers play a crucial role in preserving tramway heritage through ongoing commitment and hands-on work.

Involvement of New Generations

Younger volunteers bring energy and fresh perspectives that help sustain tramway preservation efforts over time.

Passing Down Knowledge

Knowledge and passion are shared between generations ensuring continuity in tramway preservation.



Perth's volunteers and their H class.

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Committed volunteers, including younger members, ensure that knowledge and passion for tramway preservation continue to thrive across generations.

Starting to see a new generation of volunteers coming on board replacing us grey beards. Give them the knowledge, background history and the training for the future. Foster their enthusiasm – we all still have it, though we may not be able to lift heavy stuff now or drive a tram. Their knowledge is based on the digital systems of today, not the past – they have whole different methods of communicating – involve them.

While many of volunteers bring skills with them, they will need to be trained for “steering” trams, maintenance, and restoration. Many of our new volunteers have skills that they may not tell you about. Involve them, invite them to join committees and you may find that they may bring others in a well. Build the team. Don't forget the recent retirees – they have skills they can use too.



BUILDING AND ENHANCING TECHNICAL, COLLECTION AND INTERPRETIVE SKILLS

Technical Restoration Skills

Ongoing training improves expertise in preserving and restoring museum artifacts effectively.

Collection Management

Using cloud-based systems to show to the world what you have in your collection and how it is relevant to our stories that we tell as Museums to our visitors whether they be physical or virtual.

Visitor Interpretation Skills

Developing interpretive skills enhances visitor engagement and educational experiences.

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Continuous training and skill development in both technical restoration and visitor interpretation have strengthened museum capabilities.

Tell our trammie stories to our visitors. Give them hands on experiences.

Ensure that those undertaking tramcar restoration know what they are doing and the heritage of the vehicle and why it is important to the Museum. Keeping the past alive.

ENCOURAGING RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNITY SPIRIT

Reciprocal Support Culture

COTMA fosters a culture where member organizations mutually support each other for collective growth and success.

Enhanced Collaboration

Promotes collaboration by encouraging open communication and shared goals among members and supports reciprocal visits.

Community Camaraderie

Camaraderie among members builds a strong sense of community and shared enjoyment within COTMA.



MOTAT – Website

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Know the Community that you work in is vital. This includes local government, associated bodies, other railway and heritage groups. You may need their support one day and vice versa. Been seen by the locals as a worthwhile place to take their visitors to.

When visiting another museum, make them know who you are and what you do. Introduce yourself. Reciprocal visiting rights has been a long established principle of COTMA



While they may look the same on the outside, there is a lot of new tech under the bonnet.
Bendigo Tramways Facebook page.

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EMBRACE DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE?

50 years of Technology Change

1975 – mail, long distance or trunk calls were expensive – now emails and Zoom meetings.

Restoration with AI?

A new area that could assist us – yet to be explored and documented in our field.

Visitor Engagement

Interactive digital experiences powered by AI to enhance visitor understanding and connection with tramway heritage are being developed.

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Knowledge of technical changes in control systems, equipment, safety expectations of the public and safety people is important. Need to ensure that our tramway are safe and meeting expected community standards.

The impact of AI on our work is an area that is new to us and where it will lead to is just starting to be seen. Our younger volunteers are encountering AI in the workforce, but us oldies are not noticing it so much. It is out there. Can't ignore it. Not expecting "self driving" Museum trams any times soon.

Could be a topic to be explored at the next conference.



SUSTAINING RELEVANCE AND GROWTH IN A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

Evolving Challengers

Continuous innovation is essential to stay relevant and address changes in the cultural landscape.

Community Engagement

Active involvement with communities strengthens cultural connections and fosters mutual growth.

Adaptability to Change

Adapting to societal shifts ensures sustainability and long-term impact in a changing environment, otherwise you are left behind.

Draft of 19-9-2025

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Maintaining relevance will require innovation, community engagement, and adaptability to societal changes. We need to secure COTMA's role in the cultural fabric for decades to come.

Society has changed a lot in the last 50 years, for example when many of us were formed, there were no-drink driving laws, colour television, or Social Media. Now we have an almost cashless Society and use often our smart phones or devices to pay. We all have to adapted over the years. Don't get left behind.

Our Museum tramways are a view to the past and the methods that city dwellers used once to move around with. We are creating a window to the past that our visitors can step back through to for a little while.

Don't forget that we have owned many of our vehicles longer than their previous owners. Will they still be operable in 500 years?

CONCLUSION

Legacy of Resilience

COTMA's 50-year history demonstrates strong resilience in preserving tramway heritage.

Collaboration in Preservation

Collaboration among members and communities has been key to COTMA's success.

Bright Future Outlook

Ongoing dedication and innovation ensure a vibrant future for tramway celebrations and preservation.

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COTMA's 50-year journey reflects resilience, collaboration, and passion for tramway heritage. With continued dedication and innovation, its future is bright, ensuring the preservation and celebration of tramways for generations ahead.

Conferences, though they could be replaced by an on-line forum perhaps, you won't be able to swap notes and stories over a beer at dinner or a cup of coffee. Conferences are vital. Hope to see you all in Ballarat.

Oh yes – keep visiting each other and meeting with them.

PS this was written with a bit of AI.