COTMA Conference General Meeting
Auckland 2004 - Chairman's Report

Its two years since I took over Bill Kingsley's baton; as he put it then. In two years – a lot of things have happened; some we knew were on the horizon and many we did not. Some of the issues in Bill's report have been resolved, some have disappeared while others have not and are still on the table.

To quote from Bill's last report:
"When COTMA was formed, it was to bring together the PEOPLE in all our tram museums, in a supportive and harmonious way, so that they could share their skills, knowledge, learning, opportunities, and, above all, friendships. We wanted our people to look beyond the limitations of their own museums so that they could enjoy the dedication to tramway heritage on an Australasian wide scale."

Two years ago in Australia (and some of these may cross "the ditch" eventually or are happening vice versa)

- Public Liability - was appearing on the horizon
- National Rail Reform (Medicals) – not on the horizon
- Rail Safety and its systems - been adopted and settled to an extent
- Newport store – a possible solution in sight
- Hawthorn Depot – was being built, but not on the COTMA Radar
- The National Transport Commission (NTC) and its reform agenda – who?

Some of these issues have been handled well, others not so well.

New Zealand has seen some similar events; with FRONZ helping its members with COTMA involvement and assistance. The working together of the two organisations is a good example of what umbrella groups can achieve.

Back in Australia, each state at the time did not have a fully active rail heritage organisation – they do now. Why – because all the rail heritage rail organisations were being threatened by the "Environment", even though it did not mean to. However, our tribalism is still getting in the way. We must help to address this, show the rail heritage movement some leadership, COTMA has been around since 1975.

The NTC was missing the heritage rail aspect in its deliberations and so was the Australasian Railway Association (ARA), but they now have heritage rail in their sights and are even starting to learn about tramways. The Executive Officer and myself have met with both organisations. We will try to be at the table. This takes time and resources. The table will not always be in Melbourne. COTMA needs to grow its "political involvement" – this will cost $'s. Australian Standard AS4292 is to be revised – street tramway systems, heritage railways and tramways are virtually unknown to Standards Australia.

A FRONZ type organisation is sorely needed in OZ. COTMA is not big enough or never could be to employ for example a "Development Officer". This is what an Australian Rail Heritage Organisation needs to do in the future, it must be National. National Rail Reform is going to take us places that we may not want to go to, or need to go, but if we not up front, standing there, we will get overlooked and overrun.

COTMA when you read Bill's comment was "anti-tribalism". Unfortunately a couple of years ago, we were slipping back into that mode. Today circumstances are forcing us out of it and into the real world. If we do not act together and as one, we will be rolled over and become unsustainable. COTMA cannot solve your organisational problems, but it can help with the environment that your management and members work within. Bendigo Tramways has since reactivated its membership and the TMSV is applying to rejoin.

Collaboration is occurring with the Victorian Department of Infrastructure (DOI) and VicTrack. In particular with the proposed Hawthorn organisation – which will transform itself into a standalone organisation in due course, with representation from COTMA. Collaboration with Yarra Trams is being explored. We need them to be on board industry wise, watch where their systems are developing too and try to ensure that they are at the National table supporting tramways within the railway environment as well. The Newport tram store; still not a public solution, but relevant issues are basically resolved and pending a formal announcement of the disposal method. Overall, it is all still there.

Spare Parts – again all still there – a more equitable approach has been adopted by the Victorian DOI towards all our members, not just one or a few. If you need something urgently, to keep a tram going, we will probably be able to source it. If you want it for the stockpile – just hang on, it will occur.

The Executive has formulated a Mission Statement, Goals and Objectives. Arising from this Conference, it will more sharply focus its planning for the future. However we must balance our goals and planning with the available:

- Human resources - we are volunteer based – all with other lives.
- The time available
- At a reasonable cost.

The challenge to COTMA is to focus its attention on the big items that can be of a benefit to all our Members and their members – so that they are sustainable and our volunteer members enjoy the things that they are passionate about.

An Australian rail heritage organisation is possibly in the formation, we must be part of this through our members – but will it be a federal (tribal) body rather than a National one? COTMA is Australasian.

Finally, we must accept that we no longer have exclusive control over our organisations – others control our destinies as well – we must adopt a collegiate approach. Community expectations are shifting continuously; we must adapt, shape and keep up with the times, see the trends coming over the horizon. This is not going to be easy – one strong tramway heritage clan would help.

Lastly, my thanks to the Craig as the Executive Officer and to the Executive Committee for their support and guidance. Cya in Melbourne in November 2006.

Warren Doubleday