COTMA Conference General Meeting
Melbourne 2006
Chairman's Report

At the 2004 Conference in Auckland, I reported on the initial contacts COTMA had with the National Transport Commission (NTC), the Australasian Railway Association (ARA) and the possible formation of a sorely needed Australian Rail Heritage Organisation; the equivalent to the very successful FRONZ. Since the intervening two years, COTMA has built extensive relationships with the NTC, the ARA and the Association of Tourist and Heritage Rail Australia (ATHRA). An excellent working relationship with FRONZ has continued. This relationship building, not only with rail heritage organisations but others as well, are an essential part of the work of COTMA. These networks must be in place if our Member museums are to survive and prosper. It is very easy for the political / regulatory environment to change to our detriment.

Working successfully with the commercial rail and tram organisations is essential for the heritage rail sector. Work through the ARA, various rail consultative forums with regulators, commercial operators and other bodies, such as the Transport Distribution Training (TDT) group, has improved the understanding of the issues faced by volunteer bodies. COTMA will continue to closely work with ATHRA and the various bodies that control our destiny in Australia and continue to assist wherever possible with work in New Zealand. I often feel at a loss when the *News Updates* are primarily associated with Australian matters and seem to neglect New Zealand Members.

Since the last conference, COTMA Conference, 18 *News Updates* have been issued, trying to give useful and timely information about what is going on around us and give information about resources that may be of use to your museum work. These will be continued, as they are part of the communications mechanism with members and friends. The COTMA Web site has been expanded and more work will be done after the conference to put past Conference papers on it and links to other documents that could be of assistance to Members.

Collaboration with VicTrack, the owner of the Hawthorn Tram Depot, assistance by the Friends of Hawthorn Tram Depot, with the heritage fleet and all those stored W's continues, with an excellent working relationship having being developed. While things may not be moving as fast as we would have all hoped over the last two years, often due to time pressures and political reality checks, things have happened. Many trams from Melbourne have gone to new homes since the last Conference, some spare parts have been distributed or sourced. Arrangements to distribute further surplus equipment are being put into place. This will take time to fully implement.

I wish to record the generosity of the State of Victoria in providing former Melbourne trams or their equipment to enable other heritage trams to live and work. A lot of work has been put into this area by the Executive and others to make this happen, many thanks to them.

One of the problems of being the Chairman of COTMA is the time required for its good work to continue. Many other things I would like to have done have been put

aside. Working closely with ATHRA has seen invitations to join the Australian Rail Safety Regulators Consultative Forum and partake in ARA forums. With my Vice President of the Association of Tourist Railways position, comes a lot of liaison work with the Public Transport Safety Victoria, the Victorian Regulator. While this may be good for COTMA, I need feedback from Members. I was very disappointed on the amount of feedback we received on the NTC draft regulations, the TDT tram driving competency assessment criteria and other documents. Some Members are providing useful thoughts or advice, but I would like to receive more. Without it, it could be easy to go down the wrong path.

An aim when taking on the job of COTMA Chairman was to assist to improve Museum standards of conservation, collection management and sustainability. Hopefully by 2008, the regulatory issues will have lessened and I can promote these better.

One thing I have promoted is that all Member museums should be an active member of their state or local Rail Heritage body, their relevant Museum Association and the relevant local community heritage organisations. It is through your membership of these local networks that great assistance can be obtained through contacts and grant availability. It is all part of working with your community.

On a personal note, I formally wish to record the passing of Bruce Gamble and Graeme Breydon who were leaders in the field of assisting COTMA to build relationships and to continue the excellent work done by some many volunteers in our museums and their organisations.

COTMA has expanded its number of Associate members since the last conference. We welcome in order of application, Heritrac, Tramcar W2 568, Glenreagh Mountain Railway and Tramways Wanganui Trust. Further organisations are the horizon.

Where do I see the problems that our Member Museums must face in the future? My view is that Museums face the following challenges:

- New Rail Safety Act and Regulations and its implications.
- Changes in Tourism spending patterns
- Continuing and improving Museum governance processes and collection management.
- Succession Planning – to maintain the tramway operational capability in the long term – particularly tram crews and workers
- Improving our Community Involvement.
- Maintaining your enthusiasm.

Your feedback on these views and other issues is sought in order for the Executive to prioritise its future work.

Lastly, my thanks to the Craig as the Executive Officer and to the Executive Committee and to many others for their support and guidance.

Warren Doubleday