COTMA Conference General Meeting
Launceston 2008
Chairman's Report

Since my last report to the November 2006 Melbourne Conference, COTMA has continued to provide assistance one way or another to our members to try and help them survive and prosper in these often difficult times. Our relationship with the three Australasian industry umbrella bodies; the Association of Tourist and Heritage Rail Australia (ATHRA) the Federation of Rail Organisations of New Zealand (FRONZ) and the Australasian Railway Association (ARA) has continued. Without these networks in place, the life for our members would be that much harder.

In 2007 and 2008, I attended the European Federation of Museum and Tourist Railways (FEDECRAIL) conferences in Denmark and Austria. Both of these conferences have been well worthwhile to attend, even just to build my network of contacts let alone visiting European railways and tramways. Following the Austrian tour, I visited the UK, in particular meeting up with Geoffrey Claydon, our guest speaker at the 2006 Conference. I subsequently visited the Tramway Museum Society at Crich. The challenges we face are very similar to theirs, although sometimes to differing extents.

In Australia, we are seeing the possibility of a single rail safety regulator rather than each state and the NT having one. This will mean further change to us and without the relationship with ATHRA and the ARA, our tramway operations could be a lot more difficult all of a sudden.

At the time of the last report, we were expecting to see in place in Australia, a National rail safety system. This has not occurred and is likely not to occur for some time yet due to many and varied issues and problems. A single rail regulator may be an alternative system. In the meantime, COTMA by working with ATHRA can influence albeit in a small way, the future direction of regulation of our area. It is now becoming oppressive in many ways and often impeding our development due to the volume of paperwork that must be submitted, let alone maintained.

On the good news side, our good working relationship with VicTrack, the owner of trams and equipment now surplus to Melbourne's needs has continued to grow. Many trams and extensive equipment has gone to our members since the last conference and further is in the pipeline.

The draft protocol[1] with Victrack, to be discussed at this Conference is seen as an important document that will ensure continued support from Victrack. COTMA Members are effectively being donated this equipment by the Victorian Government and cannot be seen by Government as effectively providing an avenue for financial gain to our members in the future through sale to other parties. This equipment must be used to assist in the restoration or maintenance of our running fleet or future projects.

[1] Protocol For W Class Tram Equipment And Tramway Infrastructure Obtained By COTMA Members From Victrack – Draft 27 Feb. 2008

The generosity of the State of Victoria is again recorded. The Executive continues to put a lot of work into this area, in co-ordinating items etc. It is not easy given the workload that we are all under these days. Thanks to those outside the Executive who continue to assist us in advice regarding condition, transport etc. The generosity of Trans Adelaide is also recorded in supplementing the COTMA purchased materials with further small items no longer required for the Adelaide H class trams.

COTMA News Updates continue to be issued; nine since the last conference. The distribution of these has been widened to include ordinary members on e-mails. More names are always welcomed. Printed copies continue to be sent to each Member organisation.

The COTMA web site continues to be maintained, on an as-is basis. Although it may be a bit clunky in terms of style and feel, it provides a resource to Members. Papers from the last conference were available on the web site within a month and it is aimed to do the same again.

As I noted in my last report, a lot of time is spent on ATHRA matters which are of benefit to us as a sector. This has reduced my time available on other matters and personal projects that I would like to have spent time on, in particular my involvement with the Ballarat Tramway Museum.

Feedback from Members about various issues is important, even if it is a quick e-mail, with some "scribbled" thoughts. It all helps me to understand your problems and situations and gives me a broader perspective when attending meetings with Regulators and others.

Since the 2006 Conference meeting, the following Australian Railway Historical Society (Vic Div) has joined as an Affiliate Member. COTMA now has 16 full members and 13 Affiliate Members.

In my last report, I saw the problems/challenges that our Member Museums face in the future as

- 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.

These challenges remain, albeit in slightly different guises. I will continue to try and assist our Members where possible in facing these challenges.

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

Warren Doubleday