Chairman's Report

It is with pleasure that I present this report for the period following on from the previous conference meeting held in Christchurch, New Zealand, on 2 June 1998.

Membership

There has been no addition to or loss of membership in the period from the last conference and our membership numbers stand at 16 plus two affiliates.

Office Bearers

There was only one change to the executive structure at the Christchurch Conference General Meeting when Richard Gilbert did not seek re-election as Executive Officer. Craig Tooke accepted nomination for this role and was duly elected.

Those continuing in office were as follows:

Chairman – Lindsay Richardson
Deputy Chairman – Bill Kingsley
Assistant Executive Officer – John Lambert
Treasurer – Carolyn Dean
Australian Executive Member – Howard Clark
New Zealand Executive Member – David Hinman
Immediate Past Chairman – John Radcliffe
Honorary Auditor – Robert Paroissien

Since the Christchurch Conference, John Lambert, our Assistant Executive Officer, resigned and Rod Atkins was appointed in his place.

The Operations Group in Victoria, under the chairmanship of Bill Kingsley, continues to function very effectively and has met on four occasions since the last conference. Other members of this group are Craig Tooke, Richard Gilbert, Carolyn Dean, John Phillips, Rod Atkins and Tim Borchers. I extend appreciation on behalf of the COTMA membership to this group of people who give freely of their time for our collective benefit.

Meetings

The 1999 and 2000 Annual General Meetings were held at the ARHS rooms, Windsor, Victoria, on 19 June and 17 June of those years. Two executive meetings were also held respectively on those dates.

Policy Issues

Following the full privatisation of the Melbourne tramway system and its splitting into two parts and operating as Swanston Trams and Yarra Trams, the Kennett state government was defeated

towards the close of 1999. A new government under Premier Steve Bracks took office and soon turned its attention to tramway heritage matters through the Department of Infrastructure.

In May this year COTMA was invited to make a submission on the future preservation of Melbourne's tramway heritage and in particular the stored surplus W-class trams and other infrastructure.

To date there has been no official response to our submission although it is believed that a position paper is very close to release. I would commend the effort put in by our Executive Officer plus input from others in formulating the COTMA response in a very tight timeframe and it is hoped that this will be fruitful for the benefit of all COTMA members in the near future.

Notable Events

In November 1999 the opportunity was given by the DOI to COTMA at very short notice to remove a substantial quantity of spare parts stored at Preston workshops. These items were intended for the benefit of the Victorian tramway museums and through the co-ordinated efforts of representatives of each of those museums all of the parts were removed, albeit not without some difficulties and misunderstanding, and the items transported and stored at both Bylands and Bendigo.

In my 1998 conference report I referred to the possibility of extensions to the Sydney light rail system from its terminus at Wentworth Park to Lilyfield and also through the heart of the CBD to Circular Quay. Happily, the Lilyfield extension became a reality with its official opening on 13th August last year, but sadly the inner-city proposals have fallen on barren ground due to the vitriolic opposition of the retail traders and their association body. Hopefully a change of attitude may ultimately enable this very worthy proposal to take place.

In Brisbane, a positive turned to a negative. Again a change of government plus an apparent excessive consumption of bananas by the new Transport Minister caused an ongoing dilemma as to the track gauge and the later insistence that the new LRV's must be able to operate over the railway tracks through Brisbane's tunnels and therefore would be of 1067mm gauge. It must have got all too hard, particularly with Brisbane's Lord Mayor taking an opposing light rail view and Premier Beattie suddenly announcing that the scheme was being abandoned. Sadly, the end result is a severe blow to the Brisbane Tramway Museum Society as the proposed building development on their Ferny Grove site for the TAFE centre in the rebuilding and restoration of up to 20 former Brisbane trams to operate on the proposed light rail has also been abandoned. Hopefully President Peter Hyde may be able to give us better news on the previously-proposed museum to Ferny Grove railway station tramway link.

It now appears that the Canberra Heritage Tramway proposal is on permanent hold because of funding problems.

On the brighter side, however, is the more recent news of the continued support of the Hobart City Council in the development of the proposed waterfront tramway in providing a tourist link to the heritage precinct of Salamanca Place. It is very pleasing to have several representatives of

the Council present at this conference and I feel sure that all COTMA members wish them well in pursuing their objective.

Member Museums

Since the last conference most of our museums have continued to achieve forward progress in varying degrees. To some extent progress has been retarded by the need to gain accreditation and for compliance in terms of the rail safety enactments in our respective jurisdictions. However, like so many painful exercises I am sure we will all be better informed from the experience and will have developed a greater awareness of operational risks and hazards and the need for high levels of maintenance of rolling stock and infrastructure.

Our host museum in Ballarat has been involved over the past two years in exploratory discussions for the development of a tramway between the city and Sovereign Hill, with the possibility of a link to the museum tramway in Wendouree Parade.

The Tramway Museum Society of Victoria has undertaken a huge task in the re-erection on their Bylands site of the former exhibition goods shed from the rail yards west of Spencer Street, now occupied by the Colonial Stadium, and on completion will be a great enhancement of their site.

Tram restoration of both active and inactive vehicles is a major activity of most of our museums and in particular congratulations to the AETM members with their excellent work on H360 and at STM for the work on W2 411, now gracing the city streets of Christchurch as a restaurant car, is equally very commendable. Also, across the Tasman an outstanding restoration project was completed by THS members of CTB No 1, built in 1905 and recommitted to traffic on 21 January, 2000. Not to be outdone by the electric cars, we have seen the hard work and toil of the Valley Heights Steam Tramway members come to fruition with the passing back into service of the 1892-built Robert Stephenson locomotive CPC 2, a most fitting reward for a group of people who picked up the pieces from the disastrous Parramatta Park fire of 1993 and then undertook the huge physical task of relocating the whole of their undertaking to Valley Heights.

Infrastructural improvements have been carried out by many of our museums, with STM completing an excellent service pit, AETM with the refurbishment of their trolleybus shed, Central Deborah with relaid and new track in their paint shed, PETS with its track renewal programs with steel sleepers and MTPA with its tramcar washing plant.

All of the foregoing activity within our member groups indicates a progressive and healthy situation.

Acknowledgements

To Bill Kingsley as Deputy Chairman and Chairman of the Operations Group, for his unflagging enthusiasm for our COTMA objectives and his support to me over this past period.

To Craig Tooke as Executive Officer. Craig has found the demands on his time in this role cannot always be quickly accommodated, owing to the demands of his job at Yarra Trams and a young family at home, but he gives of his time for COTMA benefit whenever he is able.

To Carolyn Dean for her continued efficiency in keeping the accounting records as Treasurer in very good order.

To our Honorary Auditor, Robert Paroissien, for his valued input and my thanks to other members of the Executive for their contribution to COTMA matters.

Finally I would like to refer to the continued high-quality production of *Trolley Wire* by Bob Merchant. Although it is not produced on behalf of COTMA, its excellent coverage in each issue of the achievements and happenings within the COTMA membership is the bonding agent which gives us excellent insight and information on a nationwide basis for the greater enjoyment of our tramway hobby.

Lindsay Richardson
Chairman