Keeping the Rails Cleaned and Lubricated

Presenter: Dennis Bell
Session Chair: Bruce Dale
Session Secretary: Bill Cox

Dennis Bell introduced his topic by stressing the need to keep rails clean, especially where street operations were involved. Debris falls from motor vehicles in the form of oil, nuts and bolts etc., also sand and silt. A variety of method can be used to clear the rails—blowers not popular with other users of the streets while vacuum has only limited success. Bendigo Council has co-operated with provision of their street sweeper but perhaps not as often as preferred.

After cleaning, keep rails lubricated on curves which reduces wear and squeal—the latter vital in residential areas. At Bendigo, that is done twice weekly, with an adapted oilcan and gear. Safety factor for the employee doing the oiling, plus a risk factor to the public by slipping on the oil—a fall could bring a claim for injury.

Len Miller: noted the objection by NPA(?) at the effect of oil on concrete roads; can activate "slip mode" on some of the modern trams in Melbourne.

Phil Bertram: noted that currently graphite is seldom used.

John Shanks: added that they use graphite grease.

Richard Gilbert: said that most museum trams operate on private track.

David White: said they had no problems.

Len Miller: added they now get their supplies of lubricant from the PTC which lasts and works well, similar to that used by railways.

Warren Doubleday: said railways also use lubricants but stressed must be on rail side and not rail top. The W4 used in Melbourne had had its flange extended which caused some problems upon its return until "worn in" on track. Use of flange lubricant on trams themselves would be too expensive to contemplate in Melbourne. Wet weather eases the problem; dry compounds it.

John Phillips: said that mixed operations in street and parks can make life difficult but leaves also cause major problems with trams "skating" on the scum reside.

Jim McCrum: noted that plane trees in Melbourne are not a major problem compared to the native trees which dump leaves or noodles all year round. There is a need to keep pressure on local bodies to keep the streets clear.

Scott Parker: noted they had a gum tree in the mall set-up which caused problems.

Philip Archer: stated that leaves had caused a derailment and impacted onto brake blocks.

David White: added that grass (and grass clippings) on the track can cause problems.

Philip Bertram: noted that use of appropriate equipment in track cleaning was important which drew a response from another member that it was a daily routine.

Richard Gilbert: said that ballasted track needs special care and on curves with road "trash" being hazardous, also pine cones!

A question was asked regarding how the new street tramway in Christchurch coped? John Shanks saying it was a commercial operation and was left to its own devices but if any assistance was called for it was at cost to operators.

Dennis Bell concluded by noting the provision of an oil pad at the entrance to their depot.

Dennis was thanked for his address.

Closed 12.35 p.m.