Council of Tramway Museums of Australasia Inc.

www.cotma.org.au

News Update

December 2025



Christchurch Tram No. 24, the Winner of the Bill Kingsley Award for Excellence 2025 – Photo from THS Submission;

UPDATE IS FOR ALL OF YOUR MEMBERS.
PLEASE FORWARD IT TO ALL ON YOUR E-MAIL LISTS

Your To-Do List – Consider your Museum needs for the final batch of No 15 trucks from Newport. There are NO more after this lot.

Presidents Christmas Message 2025

On behalf of the COTMA committee I would like to wish you all of you a Merry Christmas and a safe, successful and happy new year in 2026. 2025 has been a very successful year with excellent work and achievements with all member groups moving forward with projects and ongoing public relations as part. of each Museum's activities.

The success of the Brisbane conference last October, led by Peter Hyde and his team, opened our eyes to some of the new issues facing all the groups and therefore highlights the need to keep working together as a team. The next Conference to occur in Ballarat in 2027, will no doubt flag both ongoing problems and new issues.

Attached with the email is a Christmas Greeting from Mikael Lund of the Danish Tramway Museum.

COTMA Conference Report

The 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Council of Tramway Museums of Australasia was celebrated at its biennial conference from 10 to 13 October, hosted by the Brisbane Tramway Museum and the Queensland Museum. The first day's venue was Queensland Museum's Rail Workshops campus at Ipswich. Brisbane Tramway Museum's Peter Hyde chaired all sessions, starting with the first, and was a hard-working and at times necessarily creative convenor and chair throughout the conference. COTMA was very fortunate to have Peter as the conference host.

Jen Garcia, director of the Ipswich campus, opened the conference with a lively presentation urging all museums to improve their levels of engagement with their visitors and audience, by making visitors and their experiences the main focus of a museum's activity. This is a move away from the collection-oriented approach of the traditional museum, but Jen spoke convincingly and passionately about the advantages of engaging visitors on their own terms, by offering them experiences connected to their own life experiences and interests. Jen produced evidence that such an approach had much improved levels of visitation and engagement at Ipswich.

The Ipswich campus is enormous, and the site is shared with an operating railway workshop, where Queensland Rail's heritage rolling stock, and also its diesel tilt train sets are maintained. QR fitter Don was a great host for the inspection of the QR workshop side of the site, and answered all queries with enthusiasm.

The Saturday and Sunday sessions were held in the lecture theatre at the Queensland Museum Kurilpa in Southbank. This was everything one could wish for as a conference venue and delegates much appreciated Queensland Museum's generous hospitality. Most of the papers were reports from the various museums, and fascinating they were. The levels of achievement in terms of engaging younger members and the public; and in restoration and site presentation, often were inspirational.

The first two papers addressed safety management and regulation. Greg Wagner, Queensland Manager of the Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator discussed what ONRSR does, and what it doesn't do, and urged museums to take a practical and achievable approach to safety management, commensurate with risk. Medical testing is increasingly an important responsibility for tram crews, and Dr Jim Bradley AM, who is the Chief Medical Officer of a number of heritage rail operators in Queensland, explained in practical terms what health requirements are for drivers in particular.

The conference dinner on Sunday night at Easts League Club in Coorparoo was excellent. Retiring President Henry Brittain, ably assisted by Secretary Mal Rowe and our host Peter Hyde, presided over the awards ceremony, which as usual punctuated the courses of the dinner. Six volunteer awards were made, three to Perth (William Allnutt VII, Michael Stukeley, and Ray Blackmore), and one each to Haddon/Ballarat (Tony Smith), Wellington (John Tier), and Sydney, whose member No 28, Vic Solomons, had joined as a 17-year-old in 1959, was recognised for his lifetime of service.

The Bill Kingsley Award for outstanding achievement went to the Tramway Historical Society for their restoration of Christchurch Hills car No 24, which Trolley Wire has covered with interest and admiration, and which benefitted from a $255,000 lottery grant. Achievement awards also went to Ballarat Tramway Museum for their work in providing an accessible tram in the form of newly restored W7 1029, assisted by a Vic Track grant of $27,000, and to MOTAT in Auckland for their relaying of their dual gauge track at a cost of $NZ2.75 million.



BTM Tram 1029 – photo Benjamin Boehle-Mitchell



Track renewal at MOTAT – from their report.



The President's Award went to Richard Gilbert (left) of the Ballarat Tramway Museum, who was one of the organisers of the first COTMA conference in Ballarat in 1975 and has been involved in the movement for well over five decades.

On Monday the delegates relocated to the Brisbane Tramway Museum at Ferny Grove for the Conference General Meeting. Ferny Grove MLA Mark Furner warmly welcomed delegates and, in his brief, but interesting speech, informed delegates that a Queensland bipartisan parliamentary committee had been formed to advise government on rail heritage matters and advocate for rai heritage operators.

Henry Brittain and Mal Rowe stepped down after long service as an urbane and kindly president and secretary respectively. Mal in particular has been obliged to do far more than the normal workload of a secretary because of his involvement with managing the disposal of spare parts from the trams stored at Newport. This process is now almost complete, and museums are reminded that now is the last opportunity to obtain parts, as any still at Newport after the end of 2025 will be scrapped.

Rod Atkins of the Melbourne Tramway Museum and Robert Lee of the Sydney Tramway Museum have assumed the roles of the president and secretary. Tony Weston of Launceston remains as treasurer. COTMA's financial year will move to end of 30 June instead of 31 March from 2026. Following confirmation that the 2027 conference will be hosted by Ballarat Tramway Museum, but with the opportunity for delegates to visit tramways in Bendigo and Melbourne, the conference concluded with the usual tram rides.

Robert Lee
Secretary

Who is Who on the Committee

President – Rod Atkins of the Melbourne Tram Museum

Immediate Past President – Henry Brittain – Wellington Tram Musuem

Deputy President – Alex Hunter – Christchurch Tramways

Secretary – Robert Lee – Sydney Tram Museum

Treasurer – Tony Weston – Launceston Tramway Museum

Ordinary Committee Members – Warren Doubleday – Ballarat Tramway Museum

Ordinary Committee Members – Peter Hyde – Brisbane Tramway Museum Society

Australian Museums Liaison Officer – Darcy Baird – Bendigo Tramways

New Zealand Museums Liaison Officer – Vincent Chan – MOTAT Auckland

COTMA parts management

Last chance to get Melbourne No 15 trucks

COTMA has been allocated 35 pairs of MMTB No 15 trucks over the last 5 years. Most of those have been passed on to member museums and taken by those groups.

- 4 pairs at Newport are already allocated but 3 of those pairs are still under trams yet to be taken away by recipients under the VicTrack process.
- 3 pairs are unallocated and stored at Bungaree. These sets have some low tread wheels but are otherwise in 'good as withdrawn' condition.
- 2 pairs with good tread are still at Newport and are available for allocation.

If your museum want any of these 5 pairs then you will need to make a formal application as soon as possible using the Tramway Parts and Equipment Application Template at:
https://www.cotma.org.au/documents/cotma_admin/partsapplicationtemplate.doc

Applications should be sent to the COTMA Parts Management Group secretary (mal.rowe@gmail.com) by early January 2026.

You will need to arrange collection and removal of the trucks promptly. Through the generous support of the Railway Museum at Newport we are now able to load trucks without the need to hire a crane. Recent recipients have used a tilt tray truck to carry a pair of trucks.

Mal Rowe

Hugh Ballment Slide and photograph collection

The massive collection of slides and negatives from the Late Hugh Ballment of Transit Australia Publishing who passed away during November 2024 has been sorted through. Most were of his extensive trips around the globe to all types of places, not just for trams or trains but cities and countries as well. Many were distributed at the COTMA Conference to those representatives of our Members. Further negatives and slides have been sent to Museums and the various railway archives as well. A large box of slides and negatives is about to be posted to the On-Line Transport Archive in Shrewsbury UK – see https://www.onlinetransportarchive.org/



Hugh's photo of the 1956 illuminated Olympic Torch in Swanston St – yes there are a couple of trams in the view.

Thanks to Warrington Cameron, Rod Atkins, Mal Rowe and Warren Doubleday with special thanks to Trish for the lunches.

COTMA Technical Library

The COTMA Technical Library continues to grow with recent materials received from the Seashore Trolley Museum. Currently being added are extracts from International Textbook Company (later known as the International Correspondence Schools) 1905 book on Electric Railways (Tramways). The various documents ranging from power supplies, construction and design of the line or track, motors, to controllers are very relevant to understanding where our technology came from and how it developed at the start of the 1900s.

We are always on the lookout for further technical documents to put on our library page which is accessed by people from around the world.

See http://www.cotma.org.au/library.html

COTMA Website

The Website has been updated for the Conference papers, Awards and Museum Presentations.