TRAMS versus TRAINS and BUSES: THE CASE OF SYDNEY IN THE 1920s

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COTMA CONFERENCE
LAUNCESTON
August 2008

This paper based on Stage 2 Essay:

"THE FAY-RAVEN ROYAL COMMISSION OF 1924 AND SYDNEY TRAMWAYS"

For the Graduate Certificate in History of Transport, Traffic and Mobility
UNIVERSITY OF YORK
Institute of Railway and Transport Studies (National Railway Museum and University of York)

http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/irs/irshome/academic/leaflet_transport_hist.htm

Why 1924?

- Tramways successful but with signs of trouble
  - Expansionary period over
  - CBD congestion
  - High capacity but low comfort
- Buses only part of the problem
- Pre- the heyday of "The Great American Streetcar Conspiracy"
- Government focus on Electric Railways
  - Suburban electrification
  - City underground
  - Sydney Harbour Bridge
- Royal Commission on Railways 1924
  - Evidence
  - Conclusions
- 1920s Melbourne Consolidating
  - Organisationally
  - Electrification
  - Standard (saloon) tramcars introduced
  - Rights of way (and broader streets)

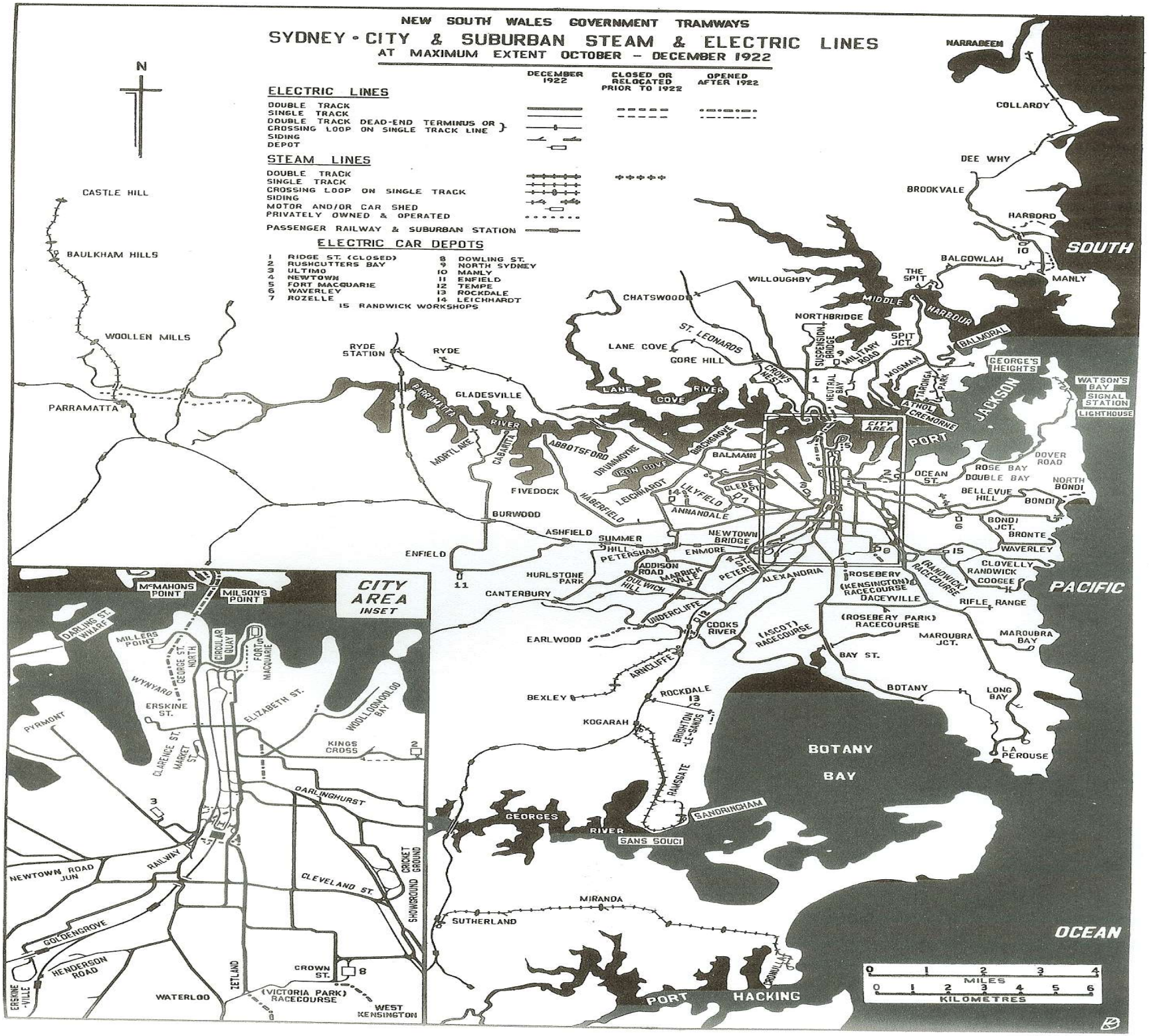
Features of the 1924 System

- Publicly-owned and operated as part of Railways Department
- C. 180 miles system
- C. 1500 trams in service
- 317 million annual patronage (1925) c.f. 43 million on ferries
- 1,367,568 passengers on one day – 1924
- Core system profitable

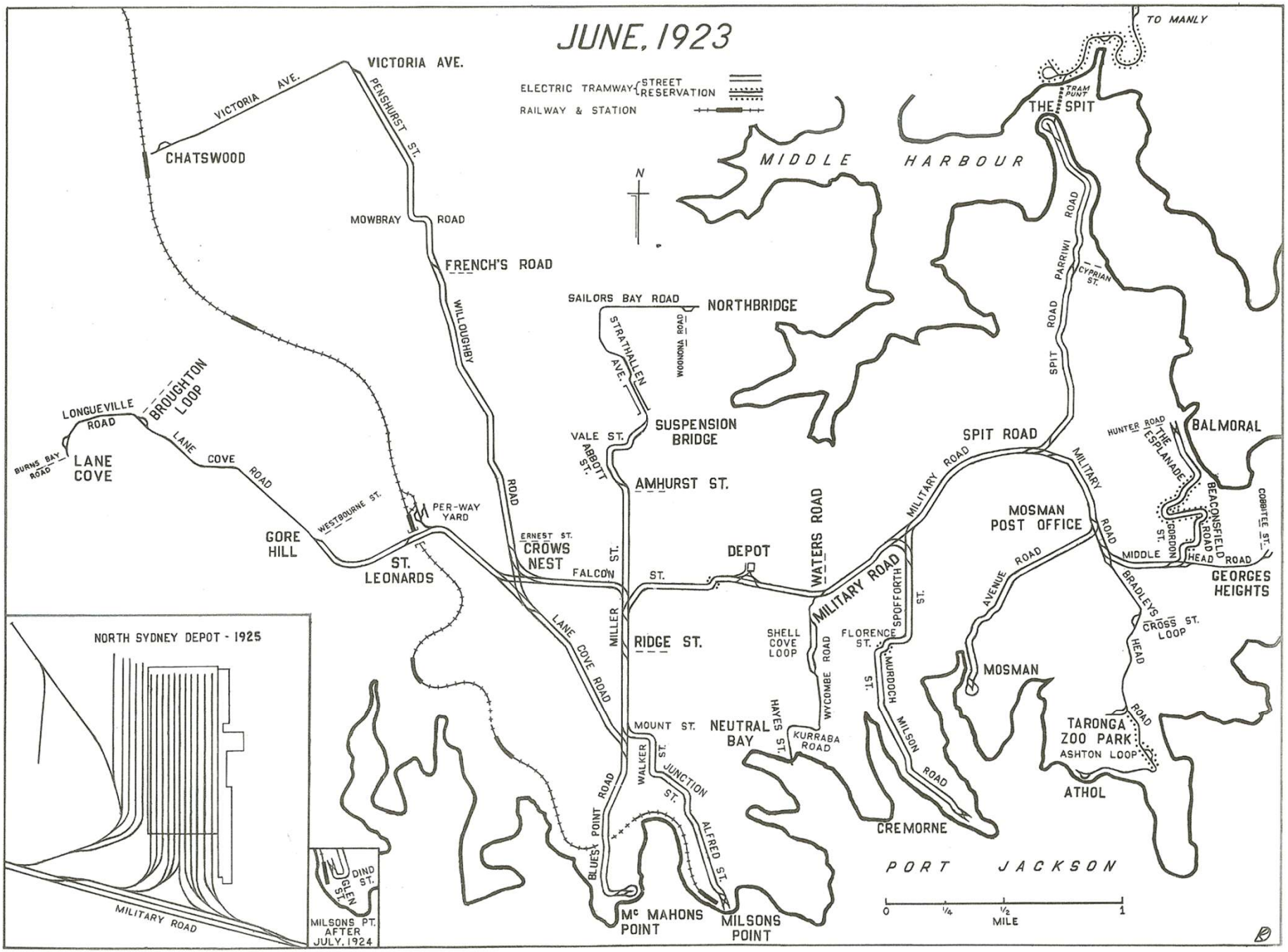
Features of the 1924 System (cont'd)

- Isolated systems mainly unprofitable:
  - North Sydney
  - Manly
  - Glenfield
  - Rockdale
  - Kogarah (steam)
- CBD congestion

Sydney Tramways Metropolitan 1924

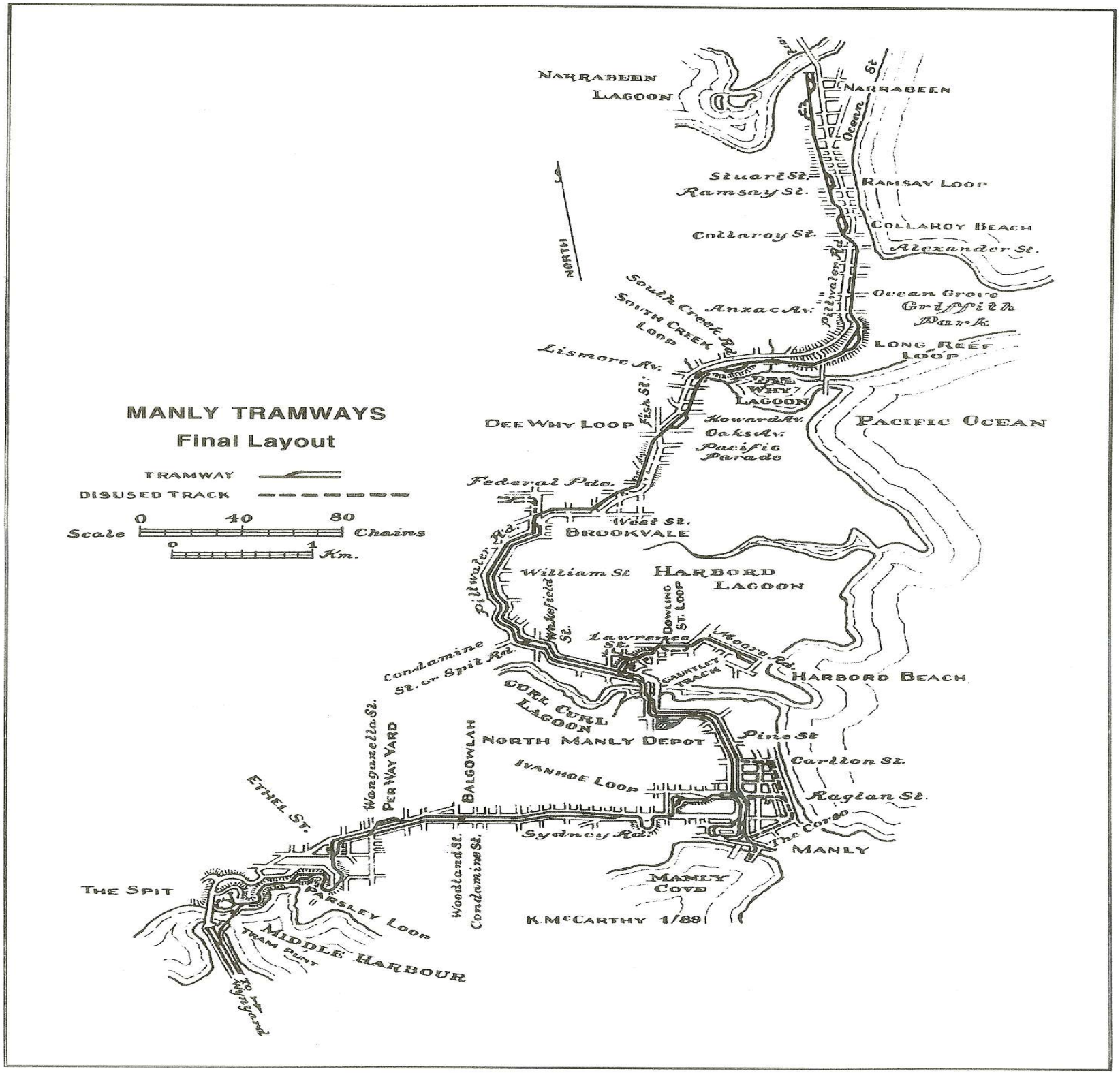


Sydney Tramways in 1924
NORTH SHORE



Sydney Tramways

Manly 1924



Sydney O Class Tram



Sydney P Class Tram



The Bradfield Plan

- Suburban railway electrification
- Harbour Bridge
- City Underground Railway

COST (in 1980 values):

- Electrified track: $253m
- Electric rolling stock: $85m
- Harbour Bridge: $236m

(C.f. Increase in Tram Capital Cost 1900–1930: $75m)

Gibbons at 165

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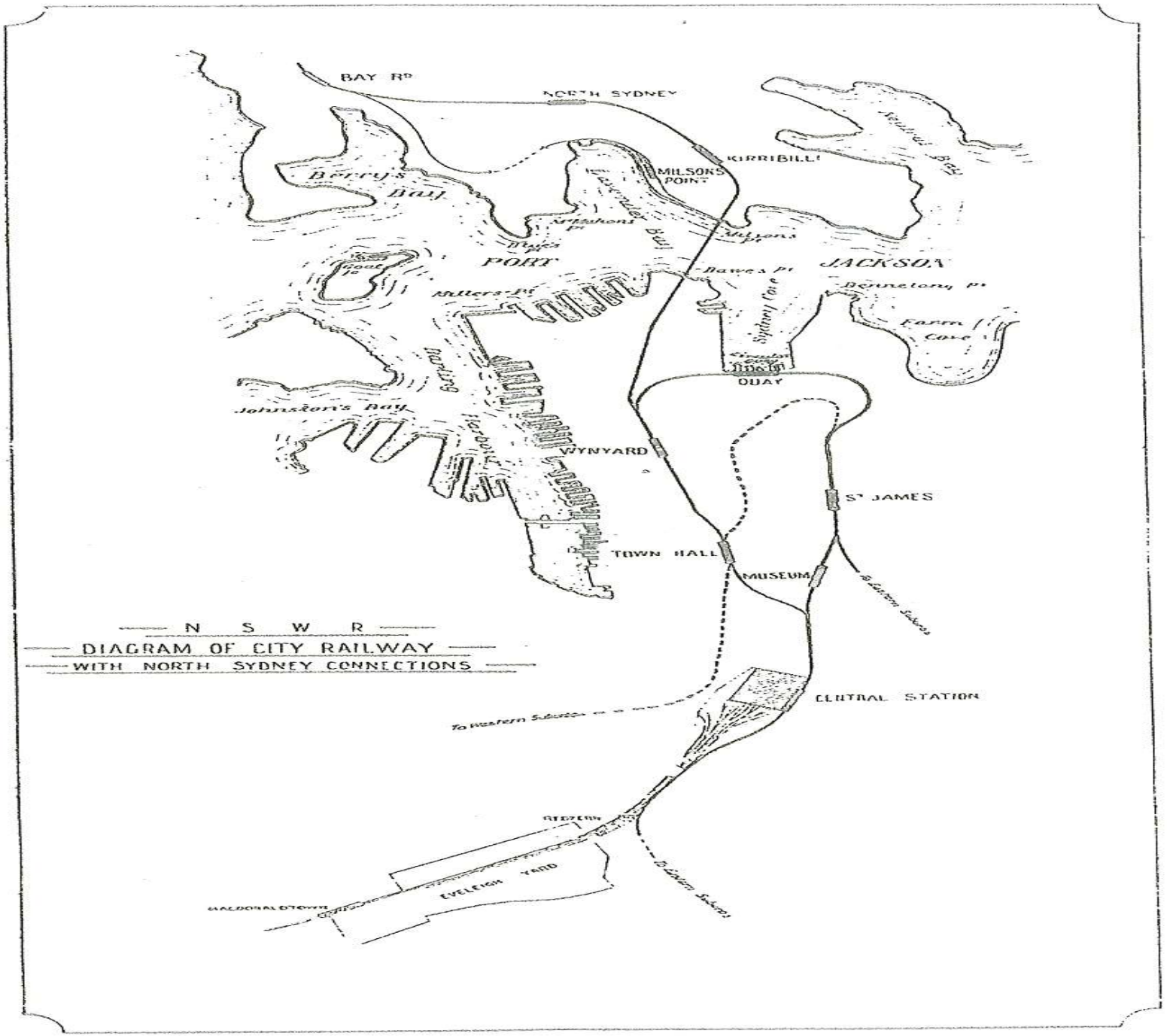


Fig. 1—Diagram of City Railway.

Why Royal Commission?

- Non-remunerative railway branch lines
- Railway deficits
- Pressure to reduce fares and freight rates
- Criticism of railway management
- Pending expiry of Chief Commissioner Fraser's term

The Royal Commissioners
2 English Railway Knights

Sir SAM FAY

- Last General Manager of Great Central Railway
- Traffic expert
- Little experience of electrification

Sir VINCENT RAVEN

- Last Chief Mechanical Engineer of North Eastern Railway
- Technical and locomotive expert
- Enthusiast for railway electrification

The Royal Commissioners
Experts…but not on Australian conditions

- Railways intimate connection with politics
- Emerging Country Party supporting political control to pursue country infrastructure spending
- Sectarianism
- NSW dependence on primary industries
- Sentimental attachments to “the Bush” and low-density suburbia

The Royal Commissioners
Pre-dispositions

ORGANISATION & FINANCE

- Reduction of political interference
- Financially self-sufficient
  - Bradfield
  - Doran
  - Hartigan
- Run on a commercial basis
- Decentralised organisation
  - Functionally
  - Geographically

In NSW context, an approach unlikely to find favour

Royal Commission Recommendations & Results

Recommendation	Result
1. Financial independence	1. No
2. Financial self-sufficiency	2. No
3. Tramways Assistant Commissioner	3. No

Royal Commission on Tramways

- Tramways to remain under railways control
- Electric tramways impressed Commissioners
- ‘Sydney is to be congratulated upon the tramway system it possesses’: Royal Commission Report at [407].
- Encouragement to electrify steam tramways
- But…the devil in the detail

Tramways – The Fine Print

- Failure to analyse implications of steam to electric conversion
- Extreme caution against any considerable extension of tramway system
- Limited future for tramways
  - Inner suburban
  - Short distance railway terrific, if trams more efficient
  - No other prospects of major growth
  - North Shore system to feed railways rather than ferries

Tramways – The Fine Print (cont'd)

- Assumed railway electrification and city railway would address CBD congestion but ignored:
  - Residual tram passengers e.g. Eastern Suburbs
  - Projected increase in tram traffic
- Ignored suburban growth and in-filling
- Confirmed popular impression that tramways were becoming outmoded
- Treated the implications of growing bus competition too simplistically

Trams v Buses

1925:

- 535 buses in Metropolitan area
- 340 buses competing with trams, carrying c. 80 million passengers annually to tramways 324 million
- Tramways proposal:
  - A board controlling competing buses
  - Tramways to set up own service to:
    - Pioneer proposed lines
    - Augment peak-hour trams
    - Feed tramways
    - Replace non-viable steam lines
- Slow response in Sydney vs decisive action in Melbourne

Conclusions

1. Public ownership a two-edged sword
2. Control by railways: ditto
3. Transport modes are dependant on factors other than technological suitability or superiority
4. Transport modes must compete for:
    - Political support
    - Finance
    - Public support
    - Space

Conclusions (cont'd)

5. That competition may involve tramways and any or all of:
   - Railways
   - Metros
   - Buses
   - Ferries
   - Private transport
   - Walking

6. Sydney Tramways in the 1920s found themselves squeezed between electric trains and motor buses



The End?