

GETTING VICTORIA'S PUBLIC TRANSPORT HERITAGE ON THE MOVE
AN ADDRESS BY: HON ALAN BROWN MP, MINISTER FOR PUBLIC TRANSPORT
COUNCIL OF TRAMWAY MUSEUMS OF AUSTRALASIA
12TH BIENNIAL CONFERENCE - BENDIGO

Monday 5 December, 1994

Ladies and Gentlemen, fellow tram enthusiasts,

I am very honoured to be here tonight to address this very important conference on Tram Heritage. I am particularly pleased that Bendigo has been chosen to host the 12th Conference of COTMA as this Government has established a very close working relationship with the Bendigo Tramway Trust. In fact, we currently have a very successful exchange program underway between The Trust and the Met Tram business unit of the Public Transport Corporation. We were happy to lend The Trust our precious Birney Tramcar for Saturday's magnificent "Calvacade of Trams". In return, an historic Bendigo Tram is currently running on the very

successful free City Circle Trams for the benefit of visitors like yourselves. I am pleased to announce tonight that the expression of interest process has been so encouraging that we now intend to invite the five highest rate respondents to tender for the supply and maintenance of on-board announcement technology on our ten City Circle W-Class Trams.

I would like to revisit the area of Heritage Trams later in my address. However, I have been specifically asked by your Conference organisers to provide a brief outline of the Victorian Government's Public Transport reform strategy since the coalition was elected to office a little over two years ago. Without in any way wishing to politicise my comments tonight, you cannot fully understand what this Government has achieved and why it had to be done unless you recognise the absolute mess we inherited in transport. Under the former Labor Administration, Victoria had the worst performing public transport system in Australia. The services were generally unclean, unsafe and unreliable. It was also unaffordable to taxpayers who had to meet the cost of an escalating deficit. Let me give you two examples from the tram area which graphically illustrate my point. Between St Georges Road, Thornbury and High Street, Northcote, in Melbourne's northern suburbs, there was a tram route of a mere 500 metres known as the 'Hump'. In the past, this service was used on average by one passenger per tram run. In fact, the staff generally outnumbered the customers as these trams had both a driver and a conductor on board. This service cost the Public Transport Corporation around half a million dollars a year to operate. It would have been far cheaper for the PTC to have paid for a taxi for each passenger trip. Under this Government, route No. 9 no longer operates and Victoria's taxpayers are \$480,000 per annum better off. Similarly, you would all be familiar with Melbourne's very successful Colonial Tramcar Restaurant. In the past, this privately managed service was forced to carry a conductor on each trip, even though for ten years a fare was never collected nor a passenger helped. The conductor just sat in the back driver's compartment and read the paper or did her knitting. Under Labor, this unnecessary conductor was costing the restaurant proprietors in excess of \$50,000 per annum. One of my first decisions on taking office was to remove conductors from Melbourne's restaurant trams. As a direct result, Melbourne can now expect to see a third restaurant tram on the tracks by February bringing additional jobs and tourist dollars to the State Capital. I am of the view that this is a concept which vintage Tramways like those operating here in Bendigo and also in Ballarat should seriously consider. As an incentive, the Victorian Government would be prepared to provide, free of charge, surplus W-Class trams to Victoria's heritage tramway to establish their own restaurant tram ventures. Problems such as conductors on restaurant trams and tram services that only carry one passenger were just the tip of the iceberg.

By 1992, unless public transport was turned around quickly, its very survival was in jeopardy. All up, the system was costing Victorian taxpayers \$2 billion a year in losses, subsidies and interest payments. In short, the new Government had to transform Victoria's public transport system into a service which customers would use and taxpayers could afford. Consequently, in January 1993, I announced a reform program to create a world-class public transport service and cut its budget subsidy by half in less than three years. The total cumulative savings of the reform strategy by 30 June 1996, will be a massive \$633 million. This is equivalent to an average saving of \$429 per Victorian household. Despite these unprecedented savings, everyone who had access to public transport prior to our reforms will continue to have access no matter where they live in the State. After the January announcement last year I negotiated two landmark agreements with the Rail and Tram Unions which have ensured public transport reform without industrial disruption. For the first time in over a decade, Victoria's public transport system is now starting to become a service once again. The service is much cleaner with private sector contractors removing graffiti within 24 hours of it being reported. The service is safer with Victoria Police now solely responsible for law enforcement on public transport. The service is more reliable with cancellations down to a minimum and punctuality improving all the time. Most impressive of all, the service is significantly more affordable with vast savings for taxpayers as I mentioned before. On this basis, the long-term future of public transport in this State looks secure. There is still much more work to be done before Victoria's public transport 'service' is as good as any in the world but we are well on track to achieving this ambitious goal.

However, public transport is not just a means of getting people from point A to point B. It can also be a valuable heritage and tourist asset to ourselves and visitors to our State. This is very much the case with Victoria's Public Transport Corporation which has the largest and most precious collection of historic public transport rolling stock in Australia. Victorians could be forgiven for being ignorant of this fact as previous Governments have hidden away these public transport treasures in the vaults of the PTC, only rarely brought out into the light of day. It would come as a surprise to many to discover that the Corporation had a fleet of vintage buses hibernating in the 'Batcave' under the Westgate Freeway as well as numerous heritage trams and trains gathering dust in workshops and depots. This vintage rolling stock is in addition to Melbourne's much-loved W-Class trams which only a few years ago were in danger of being scrapped and sold off to American

Amusement Parks. Under this Government, fifty three W-Class trams have been saved to operate as an integral part of the daily Met service with ten of these W-Class trams running on the very popular and free City Circle service. Equally important, all these W-Class trams will be fully overhauled for the first time in decades and sensitively refurbished with long-awaited enhancements such as public address systems and heating. No longer will commuters have to put up with leaky roofs and draughty Melbourne winters as they enjoy a ride on one of the Met's historic W-Class trams. It should be noted that San Francisco's world-famous cable car fleet numbers only 37 vehicles and runs on only 8.5 kilometres of track. On this comparison, Melbourne's 53 restored W-Class trams in their distinctive heritage liveries running on four high-profile tourist routes should soon rival the best heritage tram services in the world. No visit to Melbourne will be complete without a trip on a W-Class tram. But that's not all, the PTC also has a vintage tram fleet of over twenty vehicles, many of which pre-date the W-Class trams. The Government has recently announced its intention to restore these trams to their former glory. Instead of locking them away, we will be contracting-out the management of this fleet to the private sector so they can be readily available for charter for the first time. What better way to celebrate a birthday or carry a wedding party than on board a faithfully restored vintage tram?

Country Victoria will also benefit because V/Line is now offering its fleet of "Classic Carriages" for hire, including the Royal Train which has not been on the tracks since the Prince and Princess of Wales last rode on Victoria's railways. If you wish, a steam locomotive can be used to haul your historic railway carriage on its leisurely journey. The PTC also owns a fleet of vintage buses, some of which hail from as far back as World War II and the 1956 Olympics. As recently as last Friday I personally handed over eight of these vehicles to organisations on a complimentary long-term basis for suitable tourist purposes. My good friend, Andy Hall from the Tramway Museum Society of Victoria, is now the proud custodian of two of these buses for use at the TMSV's Bylands Museum. Andy knows all about driving buses as he is also an employee of mine driving for Met Bus in Melbourne's southern and western suburbs. Victoria's public transport heritage doesn't stop at our rolling stock. The PTC also has a responsibility for heritage infrastructure that can range from railway stations to tram poles. In recent months sixteen historic Melbourne tram shelters, including the Batman Avenue Tram Terminus, have been refurbished for the benefit of our customers.

If you visit Melbourne after the Conference you can see for yourself that Flinders Street Station, the jewel in the crown of our great city's rail system, is being refurbished and repainted in its heritage colours. When completed by Christmas, we plan to floodlight it for all to see. I also take personal pride in the fact that the Victorian Railways "Honour Board" from the Great War is now cleaned up and back where it belongs in the foyer of Transport House. It had inexplicably been left behind when the former railway's headquarters building in Spencer Street was sold for redevelopment in the late 1980s. On Remembrance Day, for the first time in many years, we even conducted a service at the Honour Board in conjunction with public transport war veterans. I have also recently named the new Elizabeth Street Tram Terminus after the late Sir Robert Risson. As many of you would be well aware, Sir Robert was chairman of the Melbourne Tramways Board for 21 years and the man who deserves full credit for saving our city's trams. Once again, this demonstrates this Government's respect for those who have made Victoria's Public Transport System one of the greatest in the world. In my public transport portfolio, we recognise that the past should and must be preserved.

However, it should not be forgotten that the needs of our customers and taxpayers are paramount. There will be occasions where operational and/or financial considerations outweigh heritage concerns. In most cases, workable compromises can be negotiated. A good example of where the Government has helped strike the right balance is the PTC's recent offer to the South Gippsland Tourist Railway to run services on the railway line from Nyora to Leongatha. This is the first time a tourist railway has been allowed to lease an operating railway line with full responsibility for the management and maintenance of 41 kilometres of track. Once this is achieved, the local tourist railway will be able to give travellers an unparalleled view of the scenic delights of South Gippsland. There is no reason why more tourist and vintage rolling stock cannot operate on the road and public transport infrastructure. We can retain our public transport heritage without turning them into museum pieces. What we need are "Living Museums" where people can experience first hand the thrill of a steam train ride and the joy of a vintage tram trip. Along these lines, it is proposed that the historic Hawthorn Tram Depot will be leased to the new private sector manager of the PTC's vintage tram fleet to provide an authentic home for this precious collection. Non-profit transport preservation groups such as "Puffing Billy" and heritage tram bodies have shown what can be done to restore and operate our transport heritage. It only takes imagination and cooperation with the private sector and heritage groups to do for the PTC's historic trains, trams and buses what the Government is doing for the State as a whole: