

## Report – from a COTMA perspective

### Victorian Tourist & Heritage Railway sector forum #1 24 May 2019

Rod Atkins & Mal Rowe attended the first forum for the Tourist & Railway sector in Victoria on Friday 24<sup>th</sup> of May 2019.

This report will primarily be of interest to Victorian groups, but there may be some interesting parallels in other jurisdictions.

The prime driver for the forum and related processes being conducted by VicTrack is to clear the Newport Railway Workshops site of all heritage activities. As such, this is the next stage of the process begun with the “Retired Trams Strategy” which VicTrack sees as successful.

We were told that there is no intention to sell or privatise the site, but that it is needed for railway operational requirements, the most pressing of which will be the decommissioning of the ComEng train sets as the new Metro (“HCMT”) trains enter service.

A full set of the presentations is available for download. It comprises 175 pages and this introduction aims to point to some key issues – with page numbers!

**Background History** - in the early 1980's the Victorian Government started to rationalise its rail system. Melbourne was becoming a "rusty" city; now it's the fastest growing capital in Australia. This rationalisation made the mid 1880's era East and West blocks of Newport Workshops (refer page 40, areas A, B, E and F redundant. The workshops were consolidated to area D. Steamrail first moved to area F in the late 1980's and then to West Block (Area B) along with R707 Ops and DERM PAV groups in the early 1990's. Area F was subsequently redeveloped as an electric train stabling yard.

### Program

Pages 1 to 4 are the program – with page 4 listing the Workshop groups conducted late in the day. The reports from those groups are at the end of the document.

### Welcome

Pages 5 to 12 cover the welcome speech, introductions and outline of key issues from the CEO of VicTrack, Cam Rose. He makes the point that Newport needs to be cleared, but that VicTrack want to consult with groups about how the sector can continue with a ‘bright future’. He also noted the consulting work being done including interviews with groups and examination of best practice in other countries. MOTAT gets mentioned and Mal Rowe has suggested that the Christchurch groups and FRONZ would be worth investigating.

### Current Operators

Pages 17 to 30 are Brad Murnane’s summary of the sector in Victoria – comprising 16 Tourist and Heritage Railway operators, 4 mainline, 4 broad gauge branch line, 4 tramway (Ballarat, Bendigo, Haddon & Portland), 4 narrow gauge branch line, Puffing Billy (Listed separately as it has its own Act), 6 static organisations (Including TMSV and Melbourne Tram Museum at Hawthorn) and smaller community organisations with vehicles preserved.

### Mainline Access

Pages 31 to 49 outline the emerging problems with providing mainline access for heritage train operation. Increased traffic at all times including weekends makes getting a ‘path’ problematic. This is a strong point of concern for the operators of steam hauled trains out of Newport. The arguments are strong, obviously driven by the VicTrack agenda to clear the heritage trains out of Newport – and probably out of Melbourne altogether. It will be interesting reading to those looking at the future of regional train operation in Victoria.

## Consultation

Pages 50 to 126 are an initial report on the consultations with the heavy rail sector by the consultants from Deakin University. The interviews with the tramway operators are not included – primarily because the forum was for the rail sector and they had to prioritise that part of the report. No tramway related recommendations are included at this stage. Home location of the volunteer base was noted for some groups – showing that many volunteers come from well outside Melbourne. It was also noted that many volunteers were members of multiple groups. Skill retention and development was a strong theme. A coordinating body was suggested – with ATHRA being the name mentioned, but not all groups are ATHRA members. This is a clear contrast with tramway groups and COTMA. VicTrack have been impressed with the COTMA model.

Regional bases were suggested – Bendigo, Ballarat and Castlemaine being described in rough detail, as well as mention of the possibility of a Melbourne metropolitan base.

Government support was briefly described – based on some form of coordinating body. ATHRA would see themselves as being able to provide that service.

Some comments from Deakin included:

- “You are all divided; there is no strategy”
- “There is no future in the way you are working today”

## Safety

Pages 127 to 144 outlined the emerging ONSRR takeover of rail safety regulation in Victoria. The message was one of support in developing appropriate safety management systems based on the ONSRR 29 elements and there was an indication that the idea of ‘appropriate’ could mean that some elements might be covered with some simple processes or statements – we are not all mainline mass freight of passenger operators.

ONSRR are considering exemptions for ‘static railway museums’ to enable movements of empty rolling stock with a much-simplified SMS

Dementia is an emerging safety issue in the T&H sector – needs to be addressed.

## Workshops

Pages 145 to 175 covered the workshops:

- Workshop A The Future of Mainline Operations
- Workshop B Preserving our Heritage
- Workshop C People, Communities and Committees - Governance
- Workshop D Remaining Safe

Two groups worked in each area, with members allocated by VicTrack, not self-selected.

Each group came up with a short list of issues and solutions based on the questions given to them and listed on posters. The groups then ‘voted’ on the importance of each issue/solution using green dots placed on the posters outlining the issues and solutions.

On return to the plenary, the forum members as a whole voted on the issues and solutions that mattered to them most using red dots. It is interesting to compare the items that have very large numbers of dots with those receiving very few.

Mal Rowe