

COTMA Conference – Melbourne 2006

Opening Address

Geoffrey Claydon, Vice President, National Tramway Museum, Crich UK.

(After extending a welcome to Melbourne for the delegates from elsewhere, conveying fraternal greetings from Winstan Bond and David Frodsham of the UK, expressing sympathy for Winstan's sudden ill-health problems preventing his attendance at the conference and complaining about the Australian Visa processes, Geoffrey proceeded to the subject matter of his address)

Umbrella Organisations: Their Nature & Value

When Warren Doubleday suggested I talk about umbrella organisations, it occurred to me that this was appropriate for me, coming from Britain, well-known for its rain! But of course the term is used to denote something in the nature of a trade association – a body devoted to assisting and defending the interests of member organisations representing a particular area of activity. COTMA is of course an excellent example of such a body, and doubtless much of what I shall be saying about umbrella bodies will take on the air of preaching to the converted.

So far as enterprises of the kind with which we are concerned, there are basically two facets of relevance to the role of an umbrella body:-

1. there is the actual museum role, with its curatorial responsibilities and conservation requirements. In the UK this facet is represented by such bodies as the Museums Association and the Association of Independent Museums, Internationally, there is the International Council of Museums (ICOM).
2. then there is the transport role brought about by the operations of a working tramway.

Then these two roles may conflict. In the UK we had the problem of the Museum and Galleries Commission (the regulatory body for museum registration), which asserted that it was wrong to operate vehicles since this wore them out and thus was contrary to the concept of conservation. In the end, the Commission conceded the point to the National Tramway Museum, accepting that the operating of tramcars in motion was an effective way of demonstrating the nature and purpose of the vehicles and was also a means of perpetuating specialist skills.

For the purposes of this address, I shall concentrate on the transport role.

The term “museum” is not always appropriate in this context. There are instances where so-called museum lines operate in the street – examples such as at Ballarat, Bendigo and Christchurch in Australasia, Birkenhead in England, Buenos Aires in Argentina and Oporto in Portugal. I suggest that it is preferable therefore to use the wider term “heritage tramway”. In this context, I would draw attention to the definition of heritage tramway which appears in UK legislation (The Railways and Other Guided Transport (Enforcing Authorities) Regulations 2006):

- “heritage tramway” means a tramway which is operated to –
- (a) preserve, re-create or simulate tramways of the past; or

- (b) demonstrate or operate historical or special types of motive power or rollingstock;
and is exclusively or primarily used for tourist, educational or recreational purposes.

So we have the concept of an umbrella body with responsibility towards the objectives of heritage tramways. But should the scope of such a body go further? Should it be established so as to embrace:-

- (a) heritage railways, such as Puffing Billy;
- (b) conventional tramways and new light rail systems, such as that at Sydney;
or
- (c) bus and coach operations?

Obviously the wider the membership, the greater the authority and influence of the organisation. But diversity may weaken the purely heritage trams interests, particularly if they are in a small minority within the organisation. In this respect I examine the UK position.

The UK has some eight heritage tramways: Beamish, Black Country, Carlton Colville, Crich, Heaton Park, Seaton, Summerlee and Wirral; two conventional tramways: Blackpool and Great Orme and seven light rail systems: Birmingham, Croydon, Docklands, Manchester, Nottingham, Sheffield and Tyne & Wear. The National Tramway Museum, by joining umbrella bodies, has been able to punch a great deal above its weight.

1. By joining the umbrella body for bus, coach, tramway and light rail operations, the Confederation of Passenger Transport, it has the use of a large London office for meetings and the use of secretarial services. More importantly, it is represented on the Light Rail Operators Committee (which sets driving standards) and the Light Rail Engineers Committee (which sets engineering standards). It has also been on a working party with HM Railway Inspectorate which issues guidance for the construction and operation of tramway and light rail systems.
2. By joining the umbrella body for heritage railways, the Heritage Railway Association, it has joined an organisation which represents over a hundred preserved steam lines, allowing it to tap into the general fondness and nostalgia associated with steam (such as Thomas the Tank Engine), permitting consultation over the imposition of disability discrimination legislation (for which a blanket exemption has been achieved) and the modification of other regulations which could otherwise impose unduly burdensome safety requirements for heritage lines. In the latter case, it has been possible, for example, to secure a four-year deferment of the coming into force of new regulations (The Railways and Other Guided Transport Systems (Safety) Regulations 2006 (ROGS)) which would otherwise have been imposed heavy administrative and financial obligations. Significantly, none of these modifications have been allowed for mainline railways, London Transport and other metros.

Thus I submit that there is need, or at least great value, in belonging to appropriate umbrella organisations. I put forward some of the perceived benefits:-

1. **Networking:** By bringing together like-minded personnel carrying out similar activities, experiences can be shared to the general benefit. I cite as an example, the experience of the National Tramway Museum when seeking “designated status”, which would recognise our status of possessing a collection of exhibits of international importance. To demonstrate this international aspect, we were able to enlist the support of John Radcliffe, then chairman of COTMA, to confirm this state of affairs.
2. **Mutual Benefits:** Coordination of supplies and the securing of equipment, such as rails and tyres, can more easily be achieved. There is the further benefit of the economy of scale, joint marketing, insurance benefits and reciprocal rights of entry to member installations.
3. **Monitoring of Performance – imposition of standards** (such as the COTMA “Principles for Membership Relations” and the Riga Charter in the case of Fedecrail). These standards may be particularly relevant in the case of safety (one disaster could, by association, have implications for us all). Conversely, outstanding achievements can be recognised by offering awards.
4. A united front can be offered to Government and other authorities in challenging taxation initiatives, procedures for grants, protection of young persons and, especially, safety requirements. I have already explained how much has been achieved in the UK in respect of this last-mentioned topic.
5. Dealing with the media, particularly in emphasising the importance of heritage lines or in controlling the fall-out resulting from a safety disaster.

COTMA has already played a leading role in this field. Currently there are negotiations with FRONZ and the Australasian Railway Association, to name but two developments.

A major step forward in umbrella organisations took place last month in Argentina. A congress was held in Tierra del Fuego with representatives from Australia, the UK, Germany, Sweden, India, Japan and, of course, several South American countries (but sadly none from the United States). The Australian delegation was led by Tim Fischer, the former Deputy Prime Minister and Chris Le Marshall. The British had Lord Faulkner in the lead with David Morgan.

At the congress it was resolved to establish a world body:-

“For the purpose of promoting the interests of owners and operators of museum and tourist railways, tramways, steam, charters of luxury trains and rolling stock of historic or technical interest throughout the world.”

It is proposed that the inaugural meeting of this body should take place in Australia in two years time. Warren Doubleday says that the venue is likely to be Cairns. So COTMA should be well placed to participate in influencing this new umbrella body.

Question:

Bob Pearce (PETS) asked about Discrimination Disability Access (DDA) issues and their implications.

Response:

DDA is a welfare matter, not safety. In the UK all heritage rolick stock has a permanent exception from the requirements. All other operators have to be disability compliant by 2020. For heritage lines therefore many difficult issues such as floor services, wheelchair restraints, induction loops, visual and aural announcements are avoided. But heritage lines are expected to do their best for the disabled, so that their premises should be equipped with wheelchair ramps, lower service counters and induction loops at admission and retail counters. The basis is "Do your best". The National Tramway Museum is also providing two tramcars equipped with wheelchair lifts.