

THE HOBART TRAM RESTORATION AND MUSEUM SOCIETY INC. ('H-TRAMS')

ABN 73 843 186 279

The Society at a glance

Formation:

H-TRAMS was formally created in May 2014 and registered as an incorporated not-for-profit association the following month. It was formed by a small group of interested individuals who had come together in response to an opportunity to purchase and restore old Hobart bogie tram no. 116 (built in 1940). Remarkably, this tram was still in reasonably good condition, despite having been exposed to the elements in a field on the outskirts of Huonville for the preceding 54 years.



Plate 1: Tram 116 at Huonville

Basic aims:

Restoration of heritage Hobart trams – As mentioned above, a key goal of the Society is the restoration of heritage tram 116, to full operating condition. We also plan to restore other heritage trams available to us, including the older tram 120 (built in 1936) and possibly also tram 136 (built in 1949). Some of the few other remaining heritage tram bodies may become available in future years.

Provision of a specialised 'Men's Shed' facility – Just as important as the end-point of restored trams will be the 'journey' in achieving that goal. We perceive the process as taking place in a 'men's shed' kind of environment (open of course to interested ladies as well!) where a wide range of volunteers, skilled and unskilled, can join the Society and share in the learning, the pride, the satisfaction and the camaraderie arising from the restoration work. The restoration of just one tram generally takes a number of years, so work of this nature is likely to be ongoing for some time.

Offering a tourist heritage tram service – Once we have trams restored to full operational condition, it is our hope to see them operating on selected tourist routes within the city. Our initial objective is to participate in a service along the now disused rail line to the Botanical Gardens and Cornelian Bay. Ideally, this service should one day be extended across the waterfront to Mawson Place or the Elizabeth–Morrison Streets intersection, to facilitate access to the CBD and the Salamanca precinct. A further extension could be a branch line from there to the North Hobart restaurant and entertainment district, via Elizabeth Street.

Establishing a tram museum, workshop and storage facility – Central to these plans will be a depot—ideally in the Macquarie Point vicinity—that will serve as the node for the tourist services, as a tram storage facility, as a restoration and maintenance workshop, and as a museum for Hobart tram-related memorabilia, artefacts, history and static tram displays. This multi-purpose depot facility would of course be where the 'men's shed' tram restoration work would take place.



Plate 2: tram 120 in its heyday

The Society's historical context

Hobart's long-gone tramway system (1893–1960):

Hobart holds the distinction of having had the first complete electric tramway system in the Southern Hemisphere, established in 1893. After being run by a private consortium—the Hobart Electric Tram Company—for twenty years, it was taken over by the Hobart City Council in 1913 and operated as the Hobart Municipal Tramways for the next 42 years. In 1955 the Tasmanian State Government acquired the system and thereafter administered it as part of the Metropolitan Transport Trust. Within five years of this takeover, the system had been closed down, with the last tram journey being completed on 21 October 1960. For the majority of Hobartians today—certainly those born after 1957—the city's trams are very much past history.

The fate of Hobart's old trams:

As the final tram fleet was progressively decommissioned during 1959–60, the trams were stripped of their major metal fittings—their bogie assemblies, their roof-top 'bow collectors', their control systems, most of their seating, and so on—and released for public sale. Once in private hands, they were put to a great many uses: beachside 'shacks', highland fishermen's shacks, farm sheds, change rooms for sporting activities, construction site offices, cafes . . . just to name a few. Over the ensuing years, most of these tram shells disappeared. Some were destroyed in the 1967 bush fires; many just deteriorated through long-term exposure to the elements and were ultimately scrapped; a few were incorporated into seaside holiday homes; and others were built into backyard workshops. Only one was retained in its 1960 operating condition—bogie tram no. 141 (built in 1952), which was gifted to the Tasmanian Transport Museum at Glenorchy, where it is a static display item.



Plate 3: Tram 120 decommissioned, 1959

The Society's 'rescued' heritage trams:

TRAM 116 – Compared to many of its counterparts, tram 116 had a rather placid existence after it was decommissioned in 1960. It was transported to a site on the edge of the old golf course land on the northern outskirts of Huonville, and remained there until it was moved to the other side of the property around 1990 by the new owner of the allotment. Prior to its move, it had become



Plate 4: Tram 116, circa 1959

neglected and overgrown by blackberries. In its new location, it became a children's playhouse. Inevitably, however, the children grew up and the tram again began to suffer neglect, although its partial sheltering under a large tree afforded it some protection from the worst ravages of sun and rain. Following the property owner's death in 2013, his family decided to subdivide the property and sell the tram, expressing a preference for a sale to people who would care for and restore the tram. And so it came into the hands of the H-TRAMS Society.

TRAM 120 – In direct contrast to tram 116, tram 120 must surely be the most travelled of Hobart's old trams. Upon its decommissioning in 1959, it was first acquired by the owner of the guest house at Interlaken, on the edge of Tasmania's Central Highlands wilderness area. It was installed adjacent to the guesthouse for use as cheap, additional accommodation for fishermen seeking trout in the highland lakes. There, it was soon accompanied by Tram 111, and—in the late 1960s—by two trolley buses. At one end of the tram, the driver's cabin was modified by the installation of a

fireplace and chimney for the comfort of guests. Around 1985, after enduring about twenty-five years of exposure to the harsh highland winters, it was purchased by the owner of a gaming venue in Canberra and relocated to that city. The new owner had restored old trams from around Australia and had incorporated them into his premises to serve as intimate nooks where patrons could enjoy a drink, have a meal and ‘play the pokies’. He had similar plans for tram 120, but instead it stood for 20 years—along with Launceston Tram No. 1 and several others from across the country—on an industrial allotment on the city outskirts. Then, in 2005, a young Hobart tram enthusiast—a foundation member of H-TRAMS—contacted the owner to ascertain how the tram came to be in Canberra. The inquirer was informed that the tram was no longer required and that, if he wished, it was his free of charge. By early June, following a challenging and expensive



Plate 5: tram 120 at Interlaken

logistical exercise, the tram was back in Tasmania. Ironically, the intention was to site it initially next to tram 116 at Huonville, but the plan was thwarted by the ground conditions at the time, and a temporary home was found in a former apple cool-store shed nearby. After a few months it was relocated to secure premises on the old ‘carbide works’ industrial estate at Electrona, and the long slow process of restoration was commenced. Tram 120 is now available to the Society for the completion of its restoration.



Plate 6: tram 120 leaving Canberra, 2005

TRAM 136 – The history of this tram in the years immediately following its decommissioning in 1960 is unclear, but in its own way its story is just as bizarre as that of tram 120. At some stage prior to 1980, an owner decided to cut it in half, and for a time the two halves were stored behind a service station in Hobart’s northern suburbs.

One of these half-trams came to be used as a ‘dine-in’ facility at a pancake cafe in Main Road Glenorchy. Some years later, new owners purchased the cafe property and removed the half-tram in the process of modifying and extending the premises. The site is now that of



Plate 7: Tram 136, 1959



Plate 8: first half Tram 136, Dilston 2010

the ‘China Diner’. This half-tram was then relocated to a property at Old Beach, where it stood for several more years. It was then again sold, and relocated to Dilston, on the East Tamar Highway north of Launceston, where it was protected under a weather-proof structure. In March 2010, because of a planned interstate move by the owner, it was advertised for sale and purchased by the current owner of tram 120, who relocated it to the same site as 120. Like its older counterpart, it is available to the Society, possibly for restoration to a full tram or perhaps for use as a museum display feature.

The other half of tram 136 no longer survives, but before its demise it too led an interesting life. At some stage it was acquired by a Tasman Peninsula family, who planned to utilise it for tourist-related purposes. They recreated a full tram by building a reasonably accurate replica new half, and featured the renewed object at the Royal Hobart Regatta for a number of years. Later, these two halves were attached to a house at Eaglehawk Neck, for use as children's bedrooms. Eventually, the replica half fell into disrepair and was demolished. The original half was turned into a greenhouse, but was later destroyed in a fire.

Other heritage Hobart trams with which the Society could provide useful assistance:

As part of a plan to establish a heritage tram service across the Hobart waterfront in the early years of the 21st century, the Hobart City Council (HCC) acquired a number of old Hobart trams. Three of these trams have been restored almost to operating condition, with the process including the re-installation of 'running gear'—fixed 'trucks' for earlier, shorter trams, and pairs of independently swivelling bogies for later, longer trams.

Two of these substantially restored trams date from the early 1900s—namely, the 1915-built double-deck tram no. 17, and the 1917-built single-deck tram no. 39. The third is tram 118, a single-deck 1941-built bogie saloon car, which was recovered from a farm in Sorell, where it had lain abandoned since being withdrawn from service in 1960.



Plate 9: 1915-built double-deck tram 17



Plate 10: 1917-built tram 39



Plate 11: Tram 118 in the 1950s



Plate 12: tram 133, awaiting restoration

The HCC has acquired other complete or partial tram bodies which could provide interesting restoration challenges. One of these—complete but in fairly poor condition—is the bogie saloon car number 133 (built in 1947), which had stood on a farm in Bridgewater since it was decommissioned in 1960. The Council also has two partial double-deck trams: one missing its driver cabins and one that survives only in the form of its side frames.

Funding the Society

As a not-for-profit society, H-TRAMS is to a large extent dependent upon the generosity of individuals, of private businesses large and small, and of the various tiers of government. The Society is registered as a charity for taxation purposes, entitling it to income tax exemption and GST concessions, but it is yet to obtain 'Deductible Gift Recipient' status, which would allow individual and business donors to claim their contributions as tax-deductible donations.

Numerous sources of potential funding will be explored:

- There are various government grants available for funding organisations such as H-TRAMS, and applications for these grants will of course be lodged, although there is no guarantee of success.
- We will be seeking corporate sponsorship and donations, and encouraging donations from supportive private citizens.
- Some funds will be raised directly through the sale of relevant materials and through fund-raising events.
- The relatively new strategy of 'crowd funding' will be trialled.
- Given the particular nature of the Society's work, we may well be able to obtain some support through AMSA, the Australian Men's Shed Association.
- Some funding will of course come from membership subscription fees and donations by individual members.

Membership of the Society

The Society hopes to attract members from amongst a wide range of potentially interested people. As stated in our basic aims, skilled and unskilled individuals are equally welcome, as are both women and men. While retired people generally have more time on their hands, we are just as keen to attract younger people who would like to assist in their spare time.

There will be a diverse range of roles to be filled:

- For tram restoration work, people with skills in trade areas such as spray painting, sign writing, panel beating, welding, wood-turning, carpentry, upholstery, glazing, electrical work etc. will naturally be particularly useful to the Society, but anyone willing to help and learn will be just as welcome.
- People who are happy to assist with publicity, fund-raising, committee responsibilities etc. will be equally—if not especially—welcome.
- The establishment of an operating tram museum with heritage tram services for tourists will open up many further roles for people interested in joining the Society, as we will need members willing to work as tram drivers and conductors, and as museum curators, receptionists and guides.

For those interested in joining the Society, an application form can be obtained from the Secretary (see the contact details on page 6).

The current membership subscription fee is a very modest \$15 per annum.

Establishing a mutually beneficial relationship with the HCC

HCC Plans – The Hobart City Council currently has standing resolutions in favour of a proposal to bring its restored heritage trams into operation as a tourist-oriented attraction. In particular, the proposition is to establish a suitable tram storage and maintenance depot in the Macquarie Point area, and to provide a service from that site along the now disused rail line to the Botanical Gardens and possibly further to Cornelian Bay.

Common aims – To a large extent, the Council's plans align with those of H-TRAMS, and the case in favour of a partnership arrangement is overwhelming: there are huge mutual benefits to be derived from a cooperative working relationship.

Implications of the Council's plans – The Council has made a considerable investment in acquiring and substantially restoring its three heritage trams, but these valuable assets have been gathering dust in a storage shed for a number of years. To realise its plans for these trams, the Council would need to: (a) complete the restoration of these trams; (b) acquire (or construct) and fit-out a 'depot' that could function as a combined museum-display venue, restoration and maintenance workshop, and secure storage facility; (c) provide new rail to link the depot to existing track, and provide the necessary overhead wiring infrastructure or—as an interim measure—a towable diesel generator; and (d) obtain staff to operate the trams and perform tram and track maintenance work.

How the Society can assist the Council – Through a partnership with H-TRAMS, the Council could significantly reduce its expenditure. The Society's membership will be effectively a skilled voluntary labour force, thus enabling a substantial reduction in labour costs. It should also be recognised that the Society's membership will provide a source of specialised heritage tram knowledge and expertise that currently does not exist in the Council. In specific terms, H-TRAMS members could assist with the operation, restoration and maintenance of the Council's trams, with the fitting-out of the depot facility, and with the museum aspects of the depot. In addition, the Society would be able to provide some help with the provision of materials for setting up the museum-workshop depot and for the restoration and maintenance of the trams. Such assistance would be possible because H-TRAMS would be sourcing money independently from a wide variety of sources, in order to fund its role as both the joint tenant of the depot facility and as the primary contributor to the restoration and maintenance work on the trams.

Benefits for the Society – Through a partnership with the Council, H-TRAMS would derive significant benefits in terms of cost sharing, both in fitting-out and maintaining the depot facility, and in restoring and maintaining the trams. Very costly items such as acquiring a depot building and laying and maintaining new track infrastructure would be well beyond the resources of the Society, and the input of the Council would be essential. A significant factor with such 'big ticket' items might well be the availability of Federal and State Government assistance.

Donation of items and funds to the Society

Donations to the Society of tram memorabilia and artefacts for its museum would be particularly welcome, as of course would be offers of financial support, no matter how small.

Contacting the Society

The Society can be contacted via its web site, at www.hobarttramways.com or at www.facebook.com/hobarttramways.