

NEWSLETTER No 7/2002



Railway Technical Society of Australasia
SA Chapter
Engineering House, Bagot Street
NORTH ADELAIDE SA 5006

SEPTEMBER 2002

Next Meeting – 3rd October 2002

DARWIN RAIL CONSTRUCTION UPDATE

**at Chapman Hall,
IEAust BUILDING, BAGOT St. NTH
ADELAIDE
AT 17.30**

The long awaited Darwin railway, after years of being little more than a bright idea, is now coming into existence. Not just coming but coming at a rate that is quite astounding. From a start in April this year (just five months ago) there is now around 400 km of new railway extending at around 4 km per day from two railheads in the Northern Territory. Within a matter of a couple of months these two will link to join Katherine and Tennant Creek, 633 km apart, and then the construction faces will turn toward Darwin and Alice Springs.

While much of the route is through reasonably easy country there are a number of major bridges and earthworks that are being built. The alignment ranges from a straight section of over 100 km to the relatively rough alignment of a former narrow gauge line for a section north of Katherine.

At the current rate of progress the line will be finished well and truly before the announced date of early 2004 – in other words the whole 1420 km will be completed in little more than 20 months. With construction at this furious pace it is impossible to be entirely up to date except for those who are part of the job. One such person will be at our joint meeting on Thursday 3rd October to give us an overview of the events that are rapidly evolving in the Northern Territory.

FUTURE EVENTS

The meeting after the Darwin Railway Update will be the final event for the year and will also be the RTSA SA Chapter AGM. To make the AGM something worthwhile it is proposed that it will follow the now usual pattern of a dinner function at Classics Restaurant at

Walkerville, with the AGM formalities inconspicuously woven into the evening so as not to disturb the ambience of a good social event. The main 'formality' will in fact be an eminent after dinner speaker fresh from the CORE conference – Mysore Nagaraja from the New York City Transit Authority. This event will be on Tuesday 19th November. Further details will be featured in the next newsletter

The program for 2003 is being organised at present, but will start in early February and as far as possible be monthly through to the AGM Dinner Event that traditionally closes our year.

Bill Edmonds has taken on the role of meetings coordinator. If you have a topic, or know of an appropriate speaker or item, please let Bill know so he can build it into the planning for the future meetings. Bill can be contacted at 08 8356 0488 or by e-mail at billedmonds@picknowl.com.au

LAST MEETING

Graeme Turnbull, from the RMIT University Transport Research Centre in Melbourne came over and gave an excellent presentation of the life and times of Sir Robert Risson.

Sir Robert is best remembered as Chairman of the Melbourne & Metropolitan Tramways Board from October 1949 to June 1970, an era when there were constant suggestions from sections of the media and road transport interests that Melbourne's transport policies were "out of touch" with the rest of the world, that the tramway system was "antiquated" and that trams should be replaced by 'modern' bus services.

Several reasons have been advanced over the years as to why Melbourne retained trams as the principal means of street public transport in the inner suburban area. These include

- The generally flat topography of Melbourne, wide city streets, in comparison with other Australian cities, (although there are a considerable number of narrow streets with tramlines in Melbourne).
- Grid street layout in the city centre (CBD).
- Survival of the Melbourne cable tramway system into the late 1920s and 1930s. The last

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two routes did not cease operation until October 1940. This in turn meant that the replacement electric tram fleet was relatively new in the 1950s and 1960s when the replacement of trams was fashionable.

- Sydney converted its tramway system to buses therefore it would not be appropriate to follow similar trends just because Sydney scrapped trams. The so called Melbourne versus Sydney factor.
- Financially independent Tramways Board (Melbourne & Metropolitan Tramways Board formed 1919) sufficiently removed from day to day political direction. The Tramways were a Semi-Government Authority.
- Conservative nature of the citizens of Melbourne, substantial resistance to change.
- Appointment of Sir Robert Risson as Chairman of the M & MTB.

Sir Robert was born in 1901 at Ma Ma Creek near Grantham in South East Queensland and was educated at nearby Gatton High School. Subsequently he attended Queensland University. He graduated in Civil Engineering before joining in 1922 the Toowoomba Foundry.

In 1923, he joined the newly formed Brisbane Tramways Trust, which came under Brisbane City Council control in December 1925. By the late 1930s Risson was the permanent way engineer and closely associated with the widespread use of mass concrete tram track relays for which the Brisbane system was noted.

He joined the Australian Army Engineers (Militia) as a Lieutenant in May 1933. He enlisted in the 2nd AIF in October 1939 and saw active service with the Seventh and Ninth Divisions in the Middle East (including Tobruk and El Alamein) and with the 1st Australian Corps in New Guinea. He was awarded the DSO and the CBE and was promoted to the rank of Brigadier in March 1943. His outstanding service continued after World War II, and he was promoted to the rank of Major-General and served as the Senior Officer in the Citizen Military Forces in Victoria, and as the CMF member of the Military Board, the highest appointment to which an Australian part-time soldier can be elevated.

After the Second World War Sir Robert returned to the Brisbane City Council (BCC) Transport Department rising to the position of Assistant General Manager.

The BCC was introducing resilient wheel tramcars, with modern interior designs (Silver Bullets), making extensive use of concrete track construction during tram track relays, whilst several tramway extensions were completed (Chermside, March 1947, Belmont, July 1948 and Enoggera, August 1949)

In October 1949 Brigadier Risson (as he was then) was appointed Chairman of the M&MTB succeeding Mr Hector Bell who had been Chairman since 1936.

Sir Robert soon made his own mark on the organization, his straight down the line, "yes meant yes" and "no meant no" management style combined with total integrity was very much admired by the tramways staff.

A major issue of the time was the Bourke St bus service which had replaced cable trams in 1940. These replacements were seen to be a failure, but restoration of the trams (electric this time) was a major test of the M&MTB and Government resolve against concerted opposition. Many would suggest that the conversion of the Bourke Street bus routes to electric traction in June 1955 (East Preston via High Street route) and June 1956 (East Brunswick route) was his greatest achievement. For almost the next 20 years the relative newness of the Bourke St lines and the trams built for it held the Melbourne tramways together.

The importance of the Bourke St routes in terms of the survival of the system cannot be overstated. This was now the era when tramway abandonment was considered fashionable especially in the United Kingdom, United States and other Australian cities. He view has been frequently expressed that the retention of the Melbourne tramway system during this period is due almost solely to Sir Robert's strong management and his very firmly held (and public) view that tramcars were the most appropriate urban transport vehicle for servicing the inner suburban areas of large cities.

Venn (1995,p.26) "The logistical superiority of trams appealed to Risson.....A Major-General in the Army Reserve, he managed the tramways like a military division, and brought the full force of his formidable personality to bear upon politicians and the press".

Cole (1996, p. 257) suggested, "perhaps the simplest answer to the question of why Melbourne kept its trams is that no one in authority ever decided to get rid of them".

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The same year saw the establishment of the Metropolitan Transportation Committee. Sir Robert saw to it that he was elected to the steering committee and furthermore that a senior planning engineer from the tramways was on the working party.

Sir Robert answered any challenge. In tragic circumstances in October 1963 a tram driver died as a result of head injuries sustained after he fell from the roof of a tram in Spencer Street, whilst attempting to replace a trolley pole. The rope had snapped. Tram crews at individual depots introduced a ban on the practice of climbing on to cars to retrieve trolley-poles.

"On the day the accident occurred the Secretary of the employees' association concerned (Mr. O'Shea) stated that he had not yet received any reply to a letter sent by his association to the Tramways Board on August 22 requesting the fitting of pantographs following a mishap at Hawthorn on July 30. On October 14, the Chairman of the Board, Mr. R.J.H. Risson announced that he had written to the Association requesting that the ban be lifted forthwith pointing out that there was no risk to staff involved if the relevant instructions were adhered to".

"The next day officials demonstrated the correct method of replacing a trolley-pole at Hawthorn Depot: the Chairman was in attendance and the proceedings were televised. Mr. O'Shea then went on record as saying that it was only appropriate that Mr. Risson (a Major-General) should "lead his men into action" and demonstrate the correct procedure.

The challenge was accepted on October 16 when the Chairman climbed on to the roof of tram No 960 in Collins Street in his full formal suit and wearing his trademark homburg. This event received wide coverage by the press and also television".

The continued operation of trams was called into question when plans were first drawn for the St Kilda Junction Project and associated road improvements. Initial plans included the retention of the East Brighton and Malvern Burke Rd trams in narrow Wellington St. The Board fought successfully for trams to utilise the centre medium strip in the divided roadway. The new tramline opened late in 1968. It proved to be more than a symbolic relocation. Even if the trams were old, Melbourne had a glimpse of what was becoming commonplace in Europe.

In December 1969, eight months after the last tram ran in Brisbane, the Metropolitan Transport Committee

released the long awaited fifteen year transport plan for Melbourne (1985 Transport Plan). The report recommended the continued operation of trams in Melbourne and that further studies be undertaken into proposed tram or bus extensions.

Quietly Sir Robert Risson had won the battle. For the first time there was public (Government) recognition that Melbourne's trams were to be retained. In the words of a very senior road transport engineer Risson had the war won before the battle started.

The person who more than anyone had contributed to the survival of the Melbourne tramcar was a Queenslander, a person whose transport and tramway career had been built on both the foundation and experience of the Brisbane tramways.

Sir Robert was a tall, imposing figure. He was very astute with his interventions. When appropriate he used his booming voice to maximum effect. He stood shoulder to shoulder with his critics in the media. He openly, without fear, debated public issues in the public domain. Not surprising given his military background, he was strong on discipline and would not tolerate practices or activities that he considered improper. Many of his staff vividly recall the distinctive way Sir Robert pronounced the word 'improper'. Risson managed the Tramway Board finances as if the funds were his own.

In this era (1950s to 1960s) virtually everyone in Melbourne knew that (Sir Robert) Risson was the Chairman of the Tramways Board. In effect Risson was the Board, which if required Sir Robert forcefully reminded those who indeed, had the courage to question or even doubt - the words "I am the Board", "I am the hierarchy" were vigorously echoed.

Risson on initial observation would often appear aloof and pompous. To those tramway staff accustomed to the style of the previous Chairman Mr Bell, Risson was seen as aggressive and unapproachable, and to many intimidating.

Under, the at times rigid façade, Risson was really a shy person. Equally as Risson exhibited a sense of vision (even if not everyone shared that vision) well in excess of the average transportation manager, perhaps he realised even in 1949, when one could argue that Brisbane's tramway 'modernisation' was at its height, that the Melbourne tramway system was more secure

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and could more fittingly accommodate his professional aspirations.

As a fitting footnote the day after our meeting the first of the M>Tram Combino trams, 3501, was named Sir Robert J H Risson in honour of the former chairman.

COMMITTEE NOTES FROM 1 AUGUST, 2002.

As a new initiative it is intended to include a short summary of the RTSA SA Chapter committee meetings each newsletter to keep members up to date with events and trends. The first comes from the committee meeting that preceded the Robert Risson meeting.

Deputy Chairman Duncan McLeod chaired the meeting in the absence of George Erdos

SA Division of the IEAust is investigating implementation of a mentoring scheme to assist engineering students and young graduates. The Chapter committee has expressed support for a scheme should it be implemented.

It has recently been agreed locally and at National Committee level that the SA Chapter will expand its role to include catering for the needs of Northern Territory members. Contact is being established with potential NT members of the SA/NT Chapter.

Much of the committee's efforts are devoted to developing and managing the program of meetings, presentation topics and speakers. The new committee position of Program Director has been created and Bill Edmonds has volunteered to fill this role. Currently, the program is firming up as far as March 2003 and Bill has a number of potential topics or speakers for further meetings in 2003.

Arrangements for the SA Chapter AGM and Dinner on 19th November are proceeding.

National Committee has agreed that CORE2004 will be held in Darwin (not long after the railway has opened) and our chapter has been asked to form the organising committee. Robert Schweiger will chair this new committee and the inaugural meeting will take place within the next week or so.

It was noted that the RTSA website is out of date in several respects. Robert Schweiger was able to advise the committee that National Committee has already

become aware of the problem and has taken steps to have the site maintained regularly.

RAILWAY STUDY TOUR TO PORT AUGUSTA AND THE PICHIRICHI RAILWAY

The Railway Study Tour to Port Augusta and the Pichirichi Railway was held on Friday 9th and Saturday 10th August. Feedback from participants indicates that the tour was a great success both from educational and social viewpoints. Twenty-three people participated in the tour including three from interstate.

The tour observed a wide range of track infrastructure including two track wayside monitoring stations which record and analyse wheel and bearing condition, new culvert installations and trackwork including two new concrete bearer turnouts associated with the ARTC Port Augusta Continuity Project (which improved the control and operation of trains through Port Augusta as well as reducing the transit time by 20 minutes) and the underpass that had been built at Stirling North to carry the Pichirichi Railway extension to Port Augusta under the Leigh Creek Line.

The tour inspected both the EDI Rail Port Augusta Workshops and the Pichirichi Railway Workshops at Quorn. At both workshops a wide range of repair and maintenance activities on locomotives and wagons were observed including progress on the rebuilding by EDI Rail of three 'Q' class locomotives from Western Australia.

A range of heavy and light track maintenance machines were inspected at the Transfield Track Maintenance Depot at Port Augusta along with some of the workshops used to maintain the machines. Some of the machines inspected included the SMD80 track laying machine, a hi-rail truck mounted mobile blashbutt rail welder, tamping machines, ballast regulators, a rail weld grinding machine, which is used to level welds after the welds had been straightened, rail handling machines and various gage trucks and inspection vehicles.

The highlight of the trip was a journey over the Pichirichi Railway between Port Augusta and Quorn in the 'NSS' observation car, which had been specially attached to the rear of the Pichirichi 'Afghan Express'. This journey, on a beautiful northern day, allowed the full extent of the works associated with the extension of the Pichirichi Railway into Port Augusta to be appreciated. The scenery, as always in this part of the

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country, was magnificent with a touch of winter green softening the semi arid outline of the hills and valleys. The Afghan Express was hauled by 'W' Class steam locomotive 934 and was driven by Pichi Richi and PWI member Hayden Hart. Another Pichi Richi and PWI member, Richard Atkinson, acted as car captain and answered questions about the track extension, historical details and current activities of the Pichi Richi railway. Large flocks of emus near the track in saltbush country approaching the Flinders Range proper added a bit of the 'Oz outback' flavour to the journey

On the Friday night, a tour dinner was held at which Stuart Glynn, Project Manager from Transfield Services gave a presentation of the difficulties of maintaining tracks in the sparsely settled desert regions west of Port Augusta and of the works associated with the Continuity Project through Port Augusta. After the presentation, Keith Charlton gave a vote of thanks to Stuart. The opportunity was also taken at the tour dinner for John Dring, Chairman of the PWI South Australian Section and Rob Schweiger, National Chairman of the RTSA to give an official welcome on behalf of the respective organisations. The generous sponsorship of the dinner drinks by John Holland Construction added to the conviviality of the occasion.

On the return journey to Adelaide a Railway Quiz was conducted with questions related to historical and contemporary aspects of the Australian, South Australian, Port Augusta area and Pichi Richi Railways. The winners of the quiz were those well-known and knowledgeable members of the South Australian railway community, Max Michell and Geoff Smith who correctly answered 44 out of the 50 questions asked. Their prize for this feat was a commemorative bottle of Hardy's Whiskers Blake Port, which had been kindly donated by OneSteel Trak-Lok.

The successful operation of a tour such as this requires the support of various organisations and individuals. In addition to the individuals and organisations listed above, due acknowledgement should be made to the following:

- i) ARTC for permission to enter their property and inspect their track infrastructure.
- ii) EDI Rail for conducting the group on an inspection of their workshops and for generously providing lunch to the group.
- iii) The Pichi Richi Railway Preservation Society for permitting access to the railway

- iv) RTSA for sponsoring the cost of the road coach and thereby making the tour affordable to the participants.
- v) Transfield Services for permission to enter their Port Augusta depot and inspect their track maintenance machines and support facilities.
- vi) Tim Calver who greatly assisted with the organisation of the track inspections and who acted as the contact person between ARTC train control and the group thus allowing safe access to track.
- vii) And last but definitely not least is Stephen Townsend who has a career in tour organizing if he ever gets a bit bored with steel. Stephen did an amazing job in getting together one of the best outings for a long time

For those participants who keep a record of their IEAust CPD hours for College membership and registration the Pichi Richi study tour has been calculated to be worth 0.875 hours of Category B (informal learning) and 6.5 hours of Category C (conferences and meetings). Just a little bonus for two very enjoyable days!

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PHOTO GALLERY – PICHİ RICHİ STUDY TOUR



The Afghan Express wends its way through the Flinders on a delightful late winter day.



The 'army' advances on the Stirling North underpass where Pichi Richi rails pass under the Leigh Creek line.



The gathering around Transfield tamper TM14 at Port Augusta



The group surveying historic operating narrow gauge equipment at Quorn workshops.



John Dring (surveying the outside world) Robert Schweiger and Charles Duncan get very little attention from the ornamental waiter.

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RTSA CHAPTER COMMITTEE

George Erdos	8218 2209	Chairman
John Adams	8276 9658	IPC
Roger Wyatt	8344 6939	Secretary
Rob Schweiger	8238 3412	Treasurer
Duncan M ^c Leod	8366 5212	
Malcolm Menadue	8270 2873	
Bill Edmonds	8356 0488	
John Dring	8294 0384	
Ian Milroy	8361 8333	
Max Michell	8390 3300	

Articles or editorial comment for Newsletter is always welcome.

Send copy to the Editor, Max Michell at samrom@bigpond.com or fax to 08 8390 3772

ACROBAT READER

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This and future Newsletters will be distributed in Adobe Acrobat Reader Version 5 format, rather than the past practice of using Acrobat Reader Version 3 format. If you are reading this without having to make special arrangements you are ok, but otherwise please make sure that you have upgraded to version 5 prior to the next newsletter.

Note that the download file size is 8.6 Mb, so be prepared to chuck the kids off the computer for a while when you intend upgrading to the new version.

CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Those of you who are members of I of E (i.e. are professional engineers) should be aware that attendance at RTSA meetings can be counted toward your CPD requirements. The most convenient way to record this will be in your professional diary or similar form. A short paper covering CPD in some detail is available from Malcolm Menadue or Max Michell.

NEWSLETTER DESPATCH

The majority of SA RTSA Chapter members receive their newsletter by e-mail. Every so often the e-mail will bounce (in effect the electronic equivalent of 'address unknown'). In these cases the member will automatically revert to hard copy mailing until a new e-mail address is advised. The main issue here is to let Malcolm Menadue know IN ADVANCE of any e-mail address change so that you don't fall on hard (copy) times. Please also advise if you would rather receive via e-mail instead of hardcopy post.

In all cases let Malcolm Menadue know at mmenadue@ozemail.com.au