



MELBOURNE
TRAM MUSEUM

The Bellcord

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Front cover

Portrait of Malvern Depot pitman, Spiro Troholis, on the side of M&MTB SW5 class no 749, painted to celebrate the opening of Swanston Walk in 1992. The tram was in storage at Newport Workshops, where this photograph was taken in 2018. Photograph by Mal Rowe.

In this issue

Geoff Brown continues the story of the Bundoora extension to the East Preston tramway, describing the construction works from 1982 to 1995 and the events that reshaped Melbourne tramways over this period.

Our archivists have been busy cataloguing a large collection of photographs recently transferred to the Melbourne Tram Museum from the Newport Railway Museum, Inc. Warren Doubleday examines the story behind two of these photographs, from the early days of the Great Depression.

And finally, we were delighted to help the family of a Malvern Depot pitman uncover the true story behind his connection with an art tram. It was a team effort – Russell Jones explains how we tracked down the tram involved.

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Once again, the Melbourne Tram Museum will be participating in Open House Melbourne, a comprehensive program celebrating our city's built environment. One of the most popular events of this program occurs in the last weekend of July when many significant Melbourne buildings and sites, including the Melbourne Tram Museum, will be open free of charge.

The museum consistently rates as one of the most popular venues in the Open House Melbourne weekend – last year, 800 people visited over those two days.

Volunteers are needed to look after our visitors on Saturday 29 July and Sunday 30 July. Museum members will soon receive an email with more details about what is required – if you can spare a day or half a day over that weekend, we need your help!

Solid preparation is essential to the success of the museum's digital imaging project. As previously reported, we are currently digitising our huge collection of tram and bus plans and drawings. With somewhere between 4000 and 5000 unsorted items to scan it is hardly surprising that our team found that compiling the originals into a coherent order proved to be quite a challenge. Note that there are over 300 separate drawings just for a W2 tram! Most of the items have now been catalogued and sorted, and the actual scanning process has started. Our team reports that all the drawings for W, W1, W2 and SW2 trams have now been digitised and they are gradually working their way through the rest of the collection.



Museum volunteer Stephanie Sheahan leading a group tour during Open House Melbourne 2022. Photograph by Mal Rowe.



Bundoora's tramway:

Part of reshaping the network

By the early 1970s when much of the world beyond Europe had discarded its tramways, Melbourne was an oddity.

Its trams remained integral to the city's public transport network. Yet its rolling stock and old-style operational systems had passed their use-by dates. In addition, the tramways required increasing government subsidies that were financially and politically contentious.

A tantalising glimpse of the future appeared in the mid-1970s with the introduction of new Z class trams and the line extension to [East Burwood](#). However these incurred a further cost to the public purse. When the line extension to Bundoora was approved in 1978, no funding for its construction was available.

What lay ahead for Melbourne's tramways?

The election of the Cain Labor Government in April 1982 brought with it a wide-ranging reform agenda across multiple sectors, including public transport. A capital works program was planned to stimulate the depressed Victorian economy — and the tramway extension to Bundoora was one of the first on this list.

Today the Bundoora extension is part of Melbourne's second longest tram route and is operated by E class trams. E 6063 is pictured on Plenty Road south of Darebin Creek bound for Waterfront City Docklands, 2023. Photograph by Geoff Brown.

Premier John Cain, the Member for Bundoora, at the La Trobe University stop during the opening of the extension to McLeans Road, Bundoora, 23 April 1987. The Premier then drove Z3 class tram 224 along the new track to the Bundoora terminus. Photograph by Dale Budd.



This article describes some of the construction works of the Bundoora extension and outlines the reforms that reshaped the tramways during these years. A history of the extension's planning and approval was published in the [December 2022 issue](#) of The Bellcord.

New governance

Within months of its election win, the new Labor State Government announced funding for the Bundoora extension with work to begin in October 1982. In late 1982 it signed a contract for 28 rigid A class trams and two prototype articulated B class trams – a follow-on order to the previous Government's 230 Z class cars.

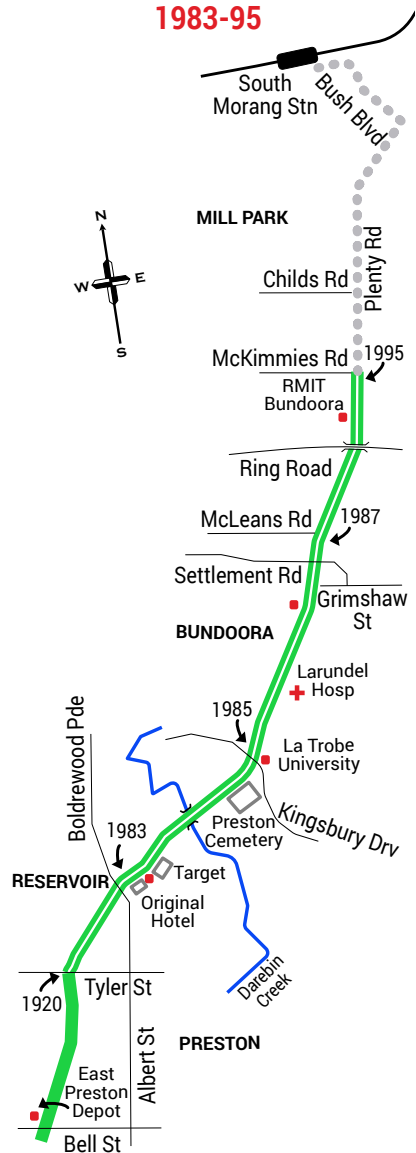
Key to Labor's reforms was the new Transport Act 1983. This Act abolished the long-standing semi-autonomous tramway, railway and roadway authorities, reorganising them into the Metropolitan Transit Authority (The Met), the State Transport Authority (STA) and the Road Construction Authority (RCA).

One objective of the Act was to engender cooperation among the State's transport bodies which were previously in competition for customer revenue and capital funding.

More significant was the Act's objective to place responsibility for transport squarely in the hands of the Transport Minister and the State Cabinet. While direct Ministerial control of transport had been increasing due to growing [government subsidies](#), this Act cemented government authority.



Bundoora tramway extension 1983-95



Not to scale
G BROWN 2023

Bundoora extension	
East Preston tramway	
Opening date	1920
Proposed extension	
Tramway substation	
Railway and station	

The Met

In July 1983, The Met took over management of the tramways, progressing initiatives introduced by the outgoing Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board (M&MTB) and introducing initiatives of its own. These included:

- Adoption of a new livery of green and yellow for trains, trams and government buses, and the introduction of new staff uniforms.
- Expansion of the recently introduced Day Tripper (1979) and Travel Card (1981) tickets that were valid on all modes of public transport. In November 1983, Melbourne’s three Travel Card zones were replaced by ten Neighbourhood zones and most of the long-standing sectional fares were discontinued.
- Introduction of the ‘Fairway system’ to separate trams from other vehicles on a full-time or peak-hour basis using lane markings and signage.
- Roll out of the previously trialled Automatic Vehicle Monitoring (AVM) system on all government buses and then trams.
- Contracting for a further 42 A class trams and 130 articulated B2 class trams, all to be fitted with pantographs rather than trolley poles.
- Conversion of the St Kilda and Port Melbourne railway lines to light rail, and proposing a similar conversion for the longer Upfield railway line.
- Development of an ambitious public transport plan, known as MetPlan, that proposed extensions and upgrades to Melbourne’s railways, tram/light rail and bus networks. It included a proposal to extend the tramway from Bundoora to South Morang.

Some of these initiatives were incorporated within the Bundoora tramway extension.

Construction in stages

Over four and a half years 5.9 kilometres of track were constructed along Plenty Road in three stages from Tyler Street, East Preston to McLeans Road, Bundoora. Premier John Cain proudly opened each stage, driving a tram to each of the new termini.

After an eight-year hiatus and another change of government, a further two kilometre extension to the RMIT campus at McKimmies Road was jointly opened by the State Minister for Transport Alan Brown, Federal Minister for Housing and Development Brian Howe and RMIT Vice-Chancellor David Beanland.

The table on the following page summarises some of the details of each of the stages.

	Length	Work began	Opened	Destination (route numbers)	Reported cost	Funding source
Stage 1: to Boldrewood Parade	1.1km	October 1982	18 May 1983	East Preston via Bourke Street (88) via La Trobe Street (14)	\$1.7m	State Budget
Stage 2: to Kingsbury Drive	2km	End of 1983	10 January 1985	La Trobe University via Bourke Street (87) via La Trobe Street (14)	\$8.9m	State Budget & Australian Bicentennial Road Development Fund (\$13.4m)
Stage 3: to McLeans Road	2.8km	February 1985	23 April 1987	Bundoora via Bourke Street (86) via La Trobe Street (93)	\$12m	
Final Stage: to McKimmies Road	2km	Second half of 1994	12 October 1995	Bundoora RMIT via Bourke Street (86)	\$12.6m	Federal Building Better Cities Program (part of \$17m)

Roadworks

The first stage of the extension was built from the existing terminus at Tyler Street, East Preston to the Boldrewood Parade/Albert Street intersection. This was a typical suburban main road – 20 metres in width with established private housing and small shop fronts on either side.

Two small parcels of land were acquired from properties on the eastern corners of the Tyler Street/ Plenty Road intersection to allow the new track to negotiate the 45-degree bend. Before road excavations commenced, new kerbside poles were installed and span and trolley wires deployed. A limited amount of road widening was undertaken for a single-track terminus north of Boldrewood Parade.

While the M&MTB had proposed an exclusive right-of-way protected by barrier kerbs for stage one, this was vigorously opposed by the Country Roads Board (CRB) on the grounds it would cause severe motor vehicle congestion. Barrier kerbs were not installed but road markings and overhead signage were eventually added to direct motor traffic off tram tracks during peak hours.

The remaining three stages were constructed as tramway rights-of-way using the centre reservation installed during road duplication works from 1967 onward. As most of this reservation was less than the required 12-metre width, it was widened by relocating some traffic lanes into available open space on either side of Plenty Road.

During these road works, centre poles were installed to hold roadway lighting and tramway overhead. The lights and overhead booms were attached after the track was constructed.

Australian Bicentennial Road Development Trust Fund Act 1982

This Act funded states for the construction of urban arterial roads. The funds could also be used for capital works on urban public transport provided the Federal Minister was satisfied that such projects would reduce traffic on urban arterial roads.

Source: Australian Hansard, Question 538, 1 November 1983, page 2167.

Looking south along Plenty Road with the Settlement Road intersection in the foreground, 1986. On the horizon are the Grimshaw Street intersection and road building equipment.

The centre reservation between these two intersections would soon be widened to carry the tramway right-of-way despite strong objections from local municipalities. Original photograph by Weston Langford.



Some notable features of the following stages were:

- **Stage Two** – Narrow strips of land were acquired from the original Summerhill Hotel, the Target store and the Preston Cemetery, the last requiring a new fence and entrance building.
- **Stage Three** – On the 250-metre length of Plenty Road between Grimshaw Street and Settlement Road, the centre reservation was less than half the minimum required for a tramway right-of-way. Buildings on either side of the road limited road widening. While strong objections were received from local councils and residents fearful of added congestion, the right-of-way was established.

Further north between Settlement Road and McLeans Road a single-track terminus was prepared by widening the centre reservation and including north-bound and south-bound bus bays to facilitate safe passenger interchange.

- **Final Stage** – Eight years later, construction of the tramway right-of-way to McKimmies Road was coordinated with an extensive roadworks program in the area that included a new bridge over Plenty Road for the Metropolitan Ring Road. A single-track terminus was prepared in the centre reservation south of McKimmies Road but no adjacent bus bays were included.

Track laying at the Boldrewood Parade/ Plenty Road intersection in 1983 showing check plates bolted to the curved railway-type T rails to form the flangeway. The tie bars between the rails are used to maintain the gauge. Photograph by Gary Davey.



Track construction for Stage Two looking southward from the Preston Cemetery, 1984. Darebin Creek is located in the mid-ground and Boldrewood Parade is beyond the horizon.

Note the new footpath, kerbing and road surface to the left of the tracks after the widening of the centre reservation and roadway. Photograph by Gary Davey



Track construction

Track for all stages was set in mass concrete using tie bars to maintain the gauge, as seen in the accompanying photographs. The same method was used on the East Burwood extension in 1978.

This had been the method used along shared roadways since the 1960s. Mass concrete provided a stable and long-lasting permanent way. From 1970 when the manufacture of grooved rail ceased in Australia, mass concrete also provided the gap next to the rail for the wheel flange (flangeway). On curved sections of track where the risk of derailment was increased, a check rail was bolted to the rail as shown in the photograph on the previous page.

Since the 1990s, imported tramway grooved rail has been used across the network including on sections of the final extension to McKimmies Road.

Z class 34 at the McLeans Road, Bundoora terminus awaiting departure for the City via Bourke Street, 1987.

Note the single track terminus with north-bound bus bay and shopping centre to the right of the tram. The concrete roadway at the lower left of the photograph is part of the south-bound bus bay. Photograph by Weston Langford.





Tramway substation at the intersection of Kingsbury Drive and Plenty Road, 2012. Its compact size contrasts with the larger substation buildings on older parts of the network. Photograph by Marcus Wong.

Using mass concrete along a tramway right-of-way was a departure from the previous practice of sleepers and open ballast – a method that was still used in the construction of Queens Way, St Kilda in 1968. Sleepers and open ballast are also a characteristic of the St Kilda and Port Melbourne light rail lines, retained when the existing railway tracks were re-gauged in 1987.

Substations

Power for Melbourne's electric trams is provided by over 60 **traction substations** located around the tramway network. The equipment inside each substation transforms high voltage electrical supply to a lower voltage and then rectifies it from Alternating Current (AC) to Direct Current (DC).

Four substations were built for the Bundoora extension as marked on the map on page 6. Compared with the much larger substation buildings on older sections of the network, these substations are modest in size, fitted with solid state silicon diode rectifiers and other compact electrical equipment.

The **older substations** once housed larger rotary converters and mercury arc rectifiers, which have been progressively replaced by more modern electrical equipment. With the introduction of E class trams to the network, additional substation capacity has been added.

Overhead

The method of overhead **power collection** on Melbourne trams changed during the construction of the Bundoora extension, with pantographs gradually replacing trolley poles. Pantographs reduce accidental detachment from the overhead wire, enable hands-free raising and lowering from inside the tram and require no adjustment at a terminus.



B2 class bound for the Bundoora RMIT terminus about to pass under the newly constructed Metropolitan Ring Road bridge, 1997. Photograph by Randall Wilson.

W2 class 646 in Plenty Road operating route 93, Bundoora to the City via St Georges Road and La Trobe Street, 11 December 1987.

This was the final W2 car in regular revenue service as recorded on the board below the driver's window. The location is approximately one kilometre south of the McLeans Road terminus. Z2 class car 113 follows, running in to Preston Depot. Photograph by Ray Marsh.



Pantographs were trialled on various parts of the network from the late 1970s. They were introduced to the Bundoora line in the early 1990s when B2 class cars with pantographs were allocated to the route. When the final stage to McKimmies Road was completed, the Bundoora RMIT route was operated nearly exclusively by B2 class trams.

MetPlan and a further extension

A year after the completion of the extension to McLeans Road, The Met published an ambitious and far-reaching plan for further expansion of Melbourne's rail, tram and bus networks. Titled MetPlan, it included a proposal to extend the Bundoora tramway to South Morang, but the timing of this announcement was problematic.

The State Government's expenditure was outstripping revenue and its management of State finances was under heavy criticism. The bitter nurses strike in 1986 highlighted a stretched health system; the stock market crash of October 1987 heralded a global economic downturn; and the collapse of the State Savings Bank of Victoria and insolvency of the Government's Victorian Economic Development Corporation lay ahead.

MetPlan acknowledged these straitened times.

Given the present budgetary climate ... it is expected that the availability of funds for public transport in Victoria will not be increased and may be reduced in real terms over the next decade. ... This will require the achievement of more from the resources available through improved management, efficiency of operations and restructuring of work. Extensions and enhancements of the system can go ahead only if other cost-saving innovations and practices are introduced. [MetPlan, page 38]

These cost-saving initiatives included removing conductors from trams and guards from trains, and introducing a new ticketing system.

Melbourne's longest routes

Route 75: 24.1km *

Route 86: 22.3km

Route 16: 20.4km

Route 109: 19.3km

Route 6: 19.1km

Route 58: 18km

* The Docklands terminus is 600 metres beyond the last passenger stop at Central Pier.

Source: Network Planning,
Public Transport Victoria,
October 2021.

Works tram 11W with a tower wagon making final adjustments to the overhead adjacent to Bundoora RMIT campus, 8 August 1995. Photograph by Hugh Waldron.



MetPlan's proposed tramway extensions

1988-92

- Bundoora to Mill Park (LR)
- Essendon to Airport West
- East Burwood to Vermont South (LR)

1993-2002

- Mill Park to South Morang (LR)
- Fitzroy to Doncaster Shoppingtown via Eastern Freeway (LR)
- Maribyrnong to Avondale Heights (LR)

For consideration

- Re-route Bundoora line via St Georges Road & Nicholson Street to city (LR)
- Vermont South to Knox City (LR)
- St Kilda LR to Elwood
- Port Melbourne LR to Garden City

Light rail (LR) was defined as tramlines in exclusive rights-of-way.

Source: MetPlan 1988

Confrontation

State Government attempts to implement the required efficiencies and to restructure work practices provoked division within its ranks and major disputes with transport unions.

Minister for Transport Alan Brown, Federal Minister for Housing and Development Brian Howe and RMIT Vice Chancellor David Beanland at McLeans Road as they open the Bundoora RMIT extension, 12 October 1995. Photograph by Hugh Waldron



Building Better Cities Program

This Federal Government program was established in 1991 to promote coordinated strategies in urban development. It funded the construction and refurbishment of housing and water infrastructure, and the building and upgrade of railways and light rail/tramways across several states.

The residential and commercial developments along the Plenty Road Corridor received \$97.4m from this fund, \$52.3m from State Government funds as well as parkland and open space previously government-owned.

Source: Department of Transport & Regional Development Performance Audit 1996

The 33-day tram blockade of city streets in January 1990 was a highly visible sign of this conflict. Unable to unify a divided party, John Cain resigned as Premier in August 1990 and Labor lost the October 1992 election in a landslide.

Notwithstanding these pressures during the early 1990s, the Labor Government managed to secure Federal funding for some of MetPlan's first three tramway priorities.

Funding from the Federal Building Better Cities Program was secured for the extension from McLeans Road to Childs Road, Mill Park. Funding from the Federal Urban Public Transport Program was secured for the Airport West extension and part of the Vermont South extension to Blackburn Road, East Burwood.

In October 1992 the Kennett Coalition Government was swept into office with its own plans for major public transport reform. As works on the Airport West and the Blackburn Road, East Burwood extensions were advanced, both were completed and opened by the new State Government.

However, as only the survey and track planning works had been completed for the Childs Road extension, in January 1993 the Kennett Government suspended further work as part of its major public transport cutbacks and reforms.

The ensuing public and union outrage over the extensive cutbacks led to lengthy negotiations and concessions, including the Government agreeing to extend the tramway to McKimmies Road (2km), rather than to Childs Road (3km). Some of the federal funds negotiated by Labor for the longer extension were reallocated to the City Circle tram line.

Bundoora RMIT terminus in 2019 after conversion from a single track to double track terminus with island platform and offset stops. The view is looking south from McKimmies Road. Photograph courtesy Philip Mallis, Wikimedia Commons.



Recent developments

Today the Bundoora RMIT to Waterfront City Docklands tram route 86 is Melbourne's second longest at 22.3 kilometres. Over the past decade all 17 stops along the reserved right-of-way north of Boldrewood Parade have been upgraded to platform stops. In February 2019 the single-track terminus at McKimmies Road was replaced by twin tracks either side of an island platform with offset stopping points.

Since 2016 Melbourne's newest E class trams progressively replaced the B2 class cars. This route usually has featured the latest tramcar models – from the W6 and W7 classes at the 1955 opening of the new line from Bourke Street, followed by the various Z classes and B2 class to the current E class cars.

There have been several campaigns to extend the northern end of the line. The City of Whittlesea still promotes the need to extend it approximately 4.3 kilometres to the Plenty Valley Town Centre and South Morang Railway Station via Plenty Road and Bush Boulevard. However, since the opening of the railway extension to Mernda in 2018, the chances of such a future extension appear low. McKimmies Road may remain the end of the line.

Geoff Brown

Historical note

Two weeks prior to the official opening of the Bundoora RMIT extension, B2 class trams began trials on the new track. The honour of driving the first of these test cars on 28 August 1995 was given to long-time Preston Workshops employee and tram enthusiast, Norm Cross.

Acknowledgements

My thanks to Warren Doubleday, Dale Budd, Randall Wilson, Brian Weedon and Mal Rowe for their assistance with this article.

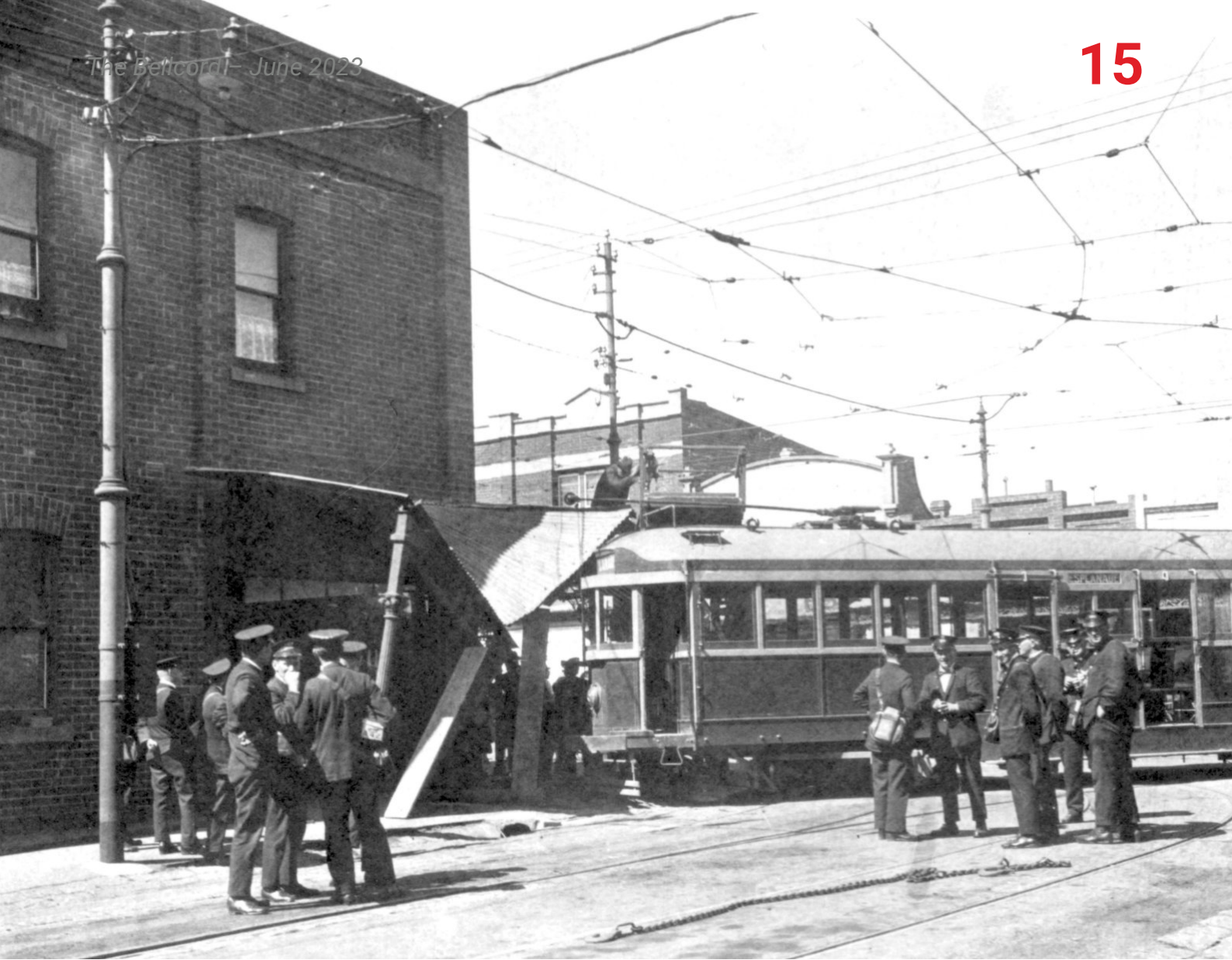
Other sources

Transit Australia (June 1987, December 1995)

Transport Act (1983), AustLII

Trolley Wire (1983,1985,1987,1995)

Victorian Hansard (1988, 1992-3, 1995), Parliament of Victoria



From the archives: The Great Depression

The Great Depression resulted in mass unemployment and extreme poverty in many parts of Australia over the decade before World War II. These two photographs characterise the early days of the era just before the W2 class tram became the predominant tram in Melbourne.

Australia's economy at the time was very much dependent on the rural sector. Wheat and wool prices were falling even before the stock market crash of October 1929 that triggered the worldwide economic depression. We certainly were not exporting coal, gas or iron ore in vast amounts as we do today. Unemployment reached a peak of 32% in 1932. It took almost a decade for the Australian economy to recover.

The Melbourne & Metropolitan Tramways Board (M&MTB) started to see the effects of an economic downturn prior to 1929 with traffic peaking in 1927-28. Conversion of cable trams to electric trams ceased in 1930, the rate of tramcar construction reduced and other cost saving measures were implemented. However, work continued building new W2 class trams and converting W class trams into W2s.

Above photograph of M&MTB W class no 301 derailed at the corner of Coldblo and Glenferrie Roads, Malvern, late 1929. From the collection of the Melbourne Tram Museum.

“In order to reduce operating costs, the Board ceased bus services. The workforce was reduced by just over 900 between 1929 and 1932, and capital expenditure cut to a fraction of what was spent during the 1920s. Furthermore, the Board reduced the frequency of tram services to something commensurate with the lower patronage and reduced the salaries of executives and Board members, in order to show solidarity with the workforce.”

Russell Jones (2004), *Fares please! An economic history of the Melbourne & Metropolitan Tramways Board*

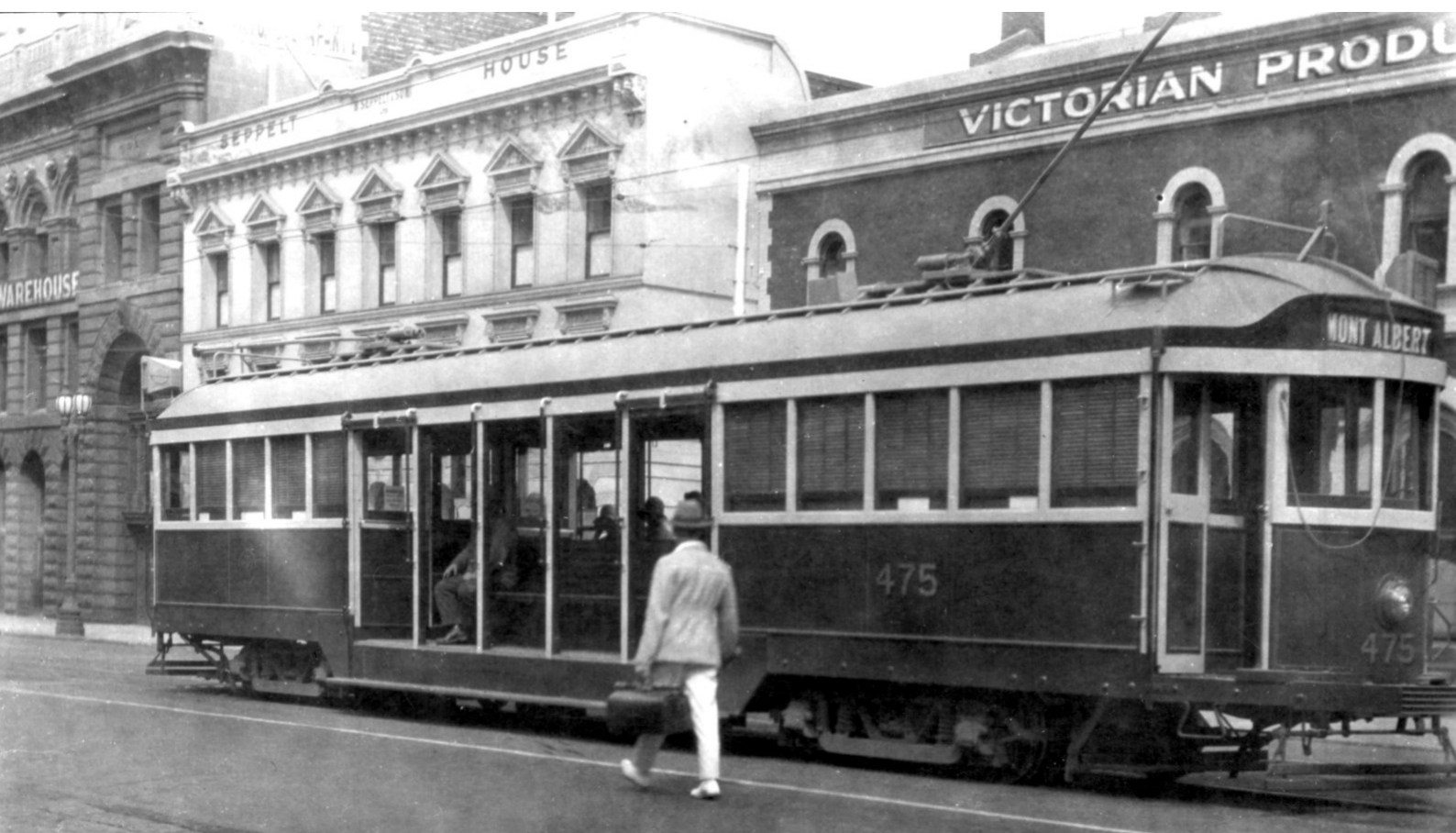
M&MTB W1 class no 475 in Collins Street, Melbourne, January 1930. Photograph from the collection of the Melbourne Tram Museum.

Entering service in mid-1927, the **W2 format** had a door layout of two wide doors and a narrow centre door, rather than the three equal width doors in the drop centre used for the earlier **W class**. However the Board continued to build **W1s** with open longitudinal drop centre seats until April 1928.

Tram no 301, built by the Holden Bodyworks in Adelaide, entered service as a **W class** car on 13 August 1924. The tramcar allocation records show the tram was allocated to Malvern depot during 1927.

The photograph on page 15 shows a serious derailment of tram W 301 on the corner of Coldblo and Glenferrie Roads. The tram, with destination of Esplanade, derailed when running out of Malvern Depot – the rear swung around, hitting the verandah of the furniture manufacturer on the corner. A prop has been put under the verandah and a tower truck is in attendance, most likely stowing the tram’s trolley pole. All the crews are in full uniform, though with some variations, including one chap with narrow jacket lapels sporting a bow tie. Many are shouldering their ticket bags, with some carrying their cash tins as well. A heavy towing chain is on the roadway.

We have not found a newspaper report on the derailment, but based on the tram record card, it was most likely November or December 1929. The record card indicates tram 301 was converted to a W2 during January 1930 together with other work, including the fitting of a route number box. Accident repairs of some £34 were incurred which compared with other accident repairs at that time was a relatively large sum.



Acknowledgements

Australian National University Archives, Cooperative Federation of Victoria, National Library of Australia (Trove), National Museum of Australia and SA History Hub.

Both photographs were part of a large collection transferred to the Melbourne Tram Museum from the Newport Railway Museum Inc. We thank them for this collection, which includes some fascinating historic photographs.

The newly built M&MTB Head Office, 616 Little Collins Street, Melbourne, 1937. Official M&MTB photograph, in the collection of the Melbourne Tram Museum.



Our second photograph is of M&MTB W1 class no 475, which entered service on 18 April 1928. The 1934 depot allocation sheet indicates it was at Preston Depot (the former Thornbury Depot), opposite Preston Workshops. This photograph of Collins Street near the Spencer Street corner is dated January 1930, which is consistent with the tram being fitted with a route number box during that month. A point of interest is that the roof number boxes are in the same colour as the roof. This particular tram was converted to a W2 during July 1937. In November 1969 it was relocated to the Conductor's Training School, Fitzroy.

Melbourne in January can be very hot. The gentleman with the Gladstone bag is dressed for summer and all the louvre window shades on the tram are raised. Passengers would have appreciated the open centre section on a hot day. There are relatively few photos of W1s carrying passengers.

In 1930 the three buildings behind the tram – now long gone – housed some well-established Australian companies, all with strong agricultural ties.

The building on the left, at 573-9 Collins Street, was part of warehouses for the Australian Estates & Mortgage Company Limited. The London-registered company was a wool and produce broker, and a stock and station agency. In addition, it owned pastoral properties, sugar mills and sugar cane farms. The company was founded in 1894, with its Australian head office located in Melbourne. In 1975 the company was acquired by CSR Limited.

B. Seppelt & Sons moved into its own freehold premises at 581-7 Collins Street in 1929, the year before this photograph was taken. The building, which extended through to Flinders Lane, included offices as well as a cellar department where wine was bottled, stored and despatched to customers. The original Seppelt vineyard had been established in South Australia's Barossa Valley in 1851. By 1900 Seppelt was Australia's largest winery and it continued to expand over the next seven decades. The company was publicly listed in 1970 and in 1984 was taken over by SA Brewing. The Seppelt brand is now part of Treasury Wine Estates.

The building on the right is the head office of the Victorian Producers Cooperative Company Limited (VPC), at 589-605 Collins Street. Founded in 1910, the VPC was an agricultural co-operative that became the fourth largest wool broker / stock and station agent in Australia, serving 25,000 farmers. It had wool stores in Melbourne, Geelong and Portland, plus around 50 branches across Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia. However the VPC, like many wool-related businesses and sheep farmers, did not survive the collapse of the Wool Price Reserve Scheme in the 1990s. It was taken over by Elders in 1999.

There is also a connection between the VPC and Melbourne tramways. The M&MTB's Head Office at 616 Little Collins Street – built over the period 1936-37 – was on a site purchased from the VPC for around £19,000.

Warren Doubleday and Noelle Jones



Family research, Trove and an art tram

Our museum receives many enquiries from the public about relatives who worked for the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board (M&MTB) or its antecedents. Unfortunately, we can't answer most of them, as the museum doesn't hold personnel records.

Usually, the best we can do is to point people to the [Public Record Office Victoria](#), which holds partial tramway employment records at the Victorian Archives Centre in North Melbourne. The employee record books for the Melbourne Tramway & Omnibus Company are particularly interesting, detailing among other things traffic incidents and disciplinary infractions for gripman and conductors.

Unfortunately, these records have not been digitised, so family history researchers must order the relevant records and physically visit the Visitor Archives Centre to read them.

Another direction we recommend is searching the digital newspaper archive held in Trove, the online service operated by the National Library of Australia. Details about Melbourne tramway employees between 1885 and 1955 frequently appear in news items and personal advertisements.

Readers will remember that in the [previous issue of *The Bellcord*](#) we reported meeting with the Federal Member for Kooyong, Dr Monique Ryan, regarding the widespread public concern about funding for the Trove service, which was due to run out at the end of June 2023. Subsequently, the Commonwealth Government announced in a [pre-Budget statement](#) on 4 April 2023 that Trove would be funded for the next four years,.

Above: M&MTB SW5 tram no 749 at Newport Workshops, 2022. The portrait of Spiro Troholis is at the far left of the tramcar. Photograph by Mal Rowe.



Detail from the side of M&MTB SW5 tram no 749, showing Spiro Troholis, pitman at Malvern Depot. Photograph by Mal Rowe.

As part of our lobbying efforts to support Trove, we also contacted the office of our local state member, John Pesutto, and met with his electoral officer – Natalie Litsas – to discuss our use of Trove. At the end of our meeting, she mentioned her late grandfather was a pitman at Malvern Depot and that there was a family legend that he was somehow involved with the painting of an art tram at the depot. She asked if there was any truth to the matter.

This question set off our investigative instincts. From our research several years ago to support the [Transporting Art](#) exhibition, we knew that all the official art trams were painted at the Preston Workshops, and all of those trams were accounted for. However, there were some other art trams not part of the Transporting Art program that had been painted to publicise various State Government initiatives.

At least one of these art trams was painted by artists in conjunction with tramway staff of the Public Transport Corporation, only we didn't know any details.

A couple of weeks spent searching our archives – including trawling through Public Transport Corporation (PTC) and union newsletters from the late 1980s and early 1990s – drew a blank, until diligent work by Mike Ryan turned up a VicTrack folder detailing the condition of art trams held in store at Newport Workshops. A quick flip through the folder identified SW5 class tram No 749 as the subject tram, together with some photographs. No 749 was painted in early 1992, for the opening of Swanston Street Walk, when part of the street became car-free.

Museum member Mal Rowe found some more photographs of No 749 and its artwork in his personal collection, as well as posters in the internal advertising racks documenting the artists and the staff members who painted No 749. The staff were from multiple depots, and included Natalie's grandfather Spiro Troholis.

One of the posters carries the following message:

Trammie trams

To celebrate the opening of Swanston Street Walk, the Public Transport Corporation commissioned two artists, Megan Evans and Sue Anderson, to design two trams depicting 'tram life' and to paint them, with the assistance of tram staff who worked in their time off on this project.

This tram painted by drivers, conductors and maintenance staff at Kew, South Melbourne, Camberwell, Glenhuntly and Malvern Depots represents the private experience of being a trammie – you feel like a you're in a fishbowl, exposed and your uniform is a barrier between you and the world. The experience of tram depot life is of people from many different backgrounds working together and gaining strength from the varying cultures from which people come.

Acknowledgements

Members of the museum who contributed to the research for Natalie and her family were Warren Doubleday, Mike Ryan, Mal Rowe and Russell Jones.

Natalie and her mother visited the museum in April and were ecstatic to identify her grandfather Spiro pictured on the exterior of No 749, wielding the spanner of his profession.

Russell Jones

Spiro Troholis: Malvern Depot pitman

Spiro Troholis (Trohoulias) was born in Ithaca, Kollieri, Greece in February 1932. He arrived in Sydney on 5 January 1949 – just before his sixteenth birthday – travelling from Trieste, Italy on the S.S. Partizanka. Initially he found work at a general store in Sydney but moved later that year to Melbourne where he found work in a number of cafes and fruit shops.

In Melbourne, Spiro was a member of the [Ithacan Philanthropic Society](#) – founded in 1916, the club offers support to immigrants from Ithaca and their descendants. Every Wednesday he enjoyed visiting the Club to get together with his friends for a good chat about old times and a game of cards. For many years, Spiro held the position of Secretary at the club where he remained a lifelong member.

In 1957 Spiro joined the Victorian Railways as a guard, travelling in the guards' van on "red rattlers". His duties included observing passengers getting on and off safely and blowing a whistle to inform the driver when it was safe to leave the station. The role also involved the protection of mail, guards being armed with a revolver while on duty¹. For a young man having lived through World War II, Spiro found this quite confronting and decided to seek employment with the M&MTB later that year.

Living in Glen Iris, Spiro started work at the nearby Malvern Tram Depot as a pitman. This job required him to ensure the day-to-day operation of trams, by checking, lubricating and maintaining them, as well as keeping them clean. The job was critical for safety, especially adjusting the tram brakes.

During the early 1990s, a local artist approached the depot and asked to paint Spiro's portrait on the side of a tram, which he was very delighted to be a part of. Details about the artist and the painting of the tram remained a mystery to his family for many years.

Spiro enjoyed his time at the Malvern Tram Depot, working there until his retirement in 1999.

Spiro became an Australian Citizen on 8 October 1962. In 1967 he married Helen Hionis from Kefalonia. The couple had two children, a daughter Georgia and son George. In 2001, his only granddaughter Natalie was born. Spiro sadly passed away on 16 October 2009, but we are proud to have uncovered the mystery of his portrait on Tram No 749 and can look at it fondly and reminisce about his story.

Natalie and Georgia Litsas

Spiro Troholis, 1966. Photograph provided by Natalie Litsas.



¹ At that time the cash takings from stations were transported in the guards' compartments, accompanied by an armed railwayman.