

The Bellcord



A crowded cable tram at the corner of Market St and Flinders St, Melbourne bound for South Melbourne Beach (c1900). This line was well patronised by beachgoers on Sundays and warm summer evenings and by shoppers and workers during the week. Some of its route into the city was shared with the Port Melbourne line. The building at the right still stands at this corner and the men in the foreground may be horse cab drivers awaiting a fare.

Photo: State Library Victoria

Port Melbourne's Lost Tramway

From 1890 until 1937, tram gongs rang along Bay St, Port Melbourne with residents, workers and ferry passengers riding the cable trams between the foreshore and Collins St, Melbourne.

This early settlement, originally known as Sandridge, had been connected to Melbourne in 1854 by the colony's first railway. Then from 1878, horse omnibuses provided street-based transport to the city via Bay St and Sandridge Rd (now City Rd),

crossing the Yarra River at the Falls Bridge. The introduction of the frequent, fast and relatively more comfortable cable tramway was an enhancement to Port Melbourne.

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First tram network

When the Melbourne Tramway and Omnibus Company (MTOC) secured a monopoly contract to build Melbourne’s first tram network, it originally planned to build a horse tramway to Port Melbourne that followed most of the horse omnibus route. However the success of cable trams on other lines led to a cable tramway being constructed instead.

The cable tram network was an early form of public-private partnership. A tramways trust of local municipalities constructed the track and engine houses, including one in Sandridge Rd west of Cecil St. This powered the cables for both the Port Melbourne and South Melbourne lines that shared part of the same route into the city.

The privately owned MTOC constructed the tram sheds, including one at the tram terminus in Beach St, imported 40 cars and built the rest. It employed all the staff and operated the network until the contract’s conclusion in mid-1916. From that date, the interim Tramway Board then the Melbourne & Metropolitan Tramways Board (M&MTB) took on ownership and management until its closure.

From 1890 the Port Melbourne line ran from Beach St near Station Pier and Port Melbourne Railway Station, along Bay St, Sandridge Rd, Queens Bridge (built in 1889) and Market St. From 1892 services continued via Collins St to Spring St.



The newly built South Melbourne engine house in Sandridge Rd (now City Rd) with track construction in progress (1889). Photo: Jack Cranston collection

From 1929, when the cable track in Collins St was replaced with an electric tramway, the Port Melbourne and South Melbourne cable trams terminated at the corner of Market St and Collins St. Both lines were then serviced by the South Melbourne tram shed and the Beach St shed closed.

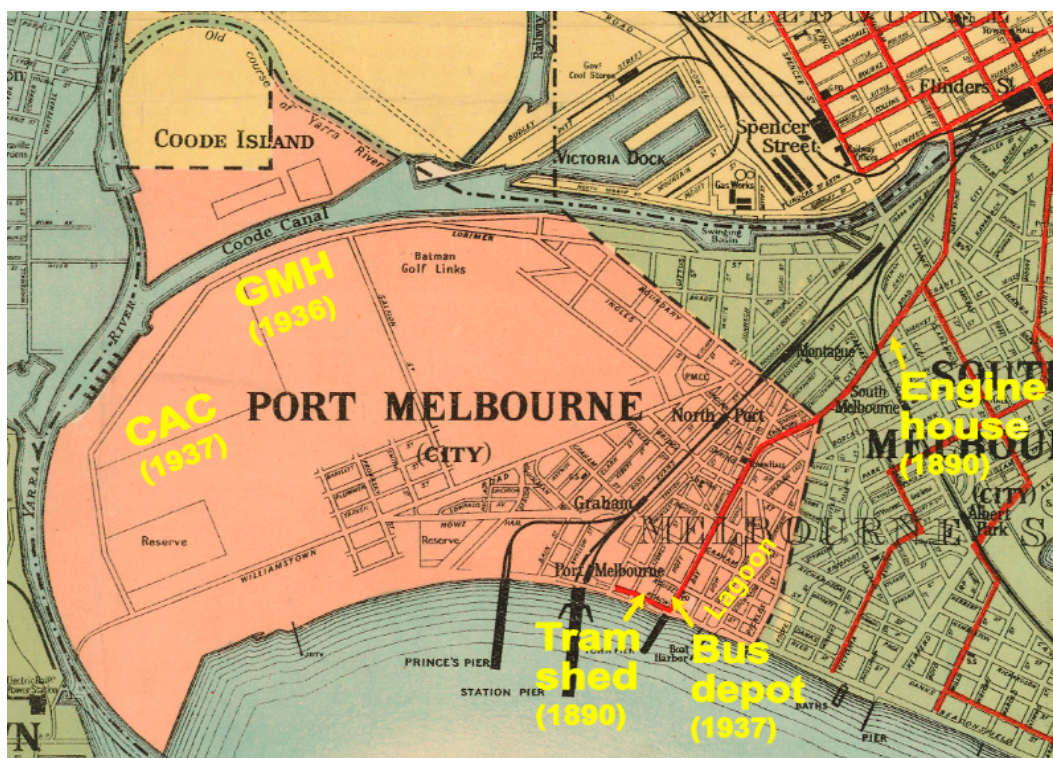
Low patronage

The cable tram network was a profitable business overall, but not all 17 cable lines were well patronised. The South Melbourne line served an attractive beachfront, residential areas and a shopping precinct leading to high patronage.



Cable trams in Bay St, Port Melbourne (c1920). The view is from Liardet St toward the bay with the Sandridge Town Pier in the background. This pier provided a tramway connection with the Gem Steam Ferry to Williamstown.

Photo: State Library Victoria



RED LINES: tram lines (cable & electric)

BLACK LINES: railway lines

GMH: General Motors Holden factory

CAC: Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation factory & aerodrome

DATES indicate first year of operation

Port Melbourne in 1935 before the cable tramway closure. Note the large under-developed area of Fishermans Bend to the west, the Coode Canal constructed in the 1880s, the original course of the Yarra River to the northwest and the reclaimed Sandridge Lagoon east of Bay Street. Map: Department of Lands & Survey Melbourne (1935), State Library Victoria

In contrast, the Port Melbourne line ran through industrial areas bordered by the undeveloped Sandridge Lagoon and the railway line with which it competed. This led to lower patronage.

The table below illustrates this difference in 1910. The Brunswick and West Melbourne lines are included for comparison as the highest and lowest patronised city services. In the 1930s the low patronage of some of the nine cable tram lines still requiring conversion was a significant issue for the M&MTB.

Line	Daily passengers	Maximum trams required	Average peak headway
Brunswick	25,718	51	1 min
South Melb	14,688	25	2 min
Port Melb	6,052	10	5½ min
West Melb	1,837	4	8½ min

Passenger numbers and headways for selected cable lines on Tuesday 25 October 1910.

Source: Royal Commission Report (1911)

Bus option

The frequency of breakdowns on the cable network, often due to the poor quality of the cables, increased the travelling public's desire for modern electric trams. However the Great Depression of 1929-32 brought three years of financial deficits for the M&MTB and the Board could see that the high construction costs of electric tramways would not be recouped on some lines.

At that time cities in the USA, UK and Europe were replacing trams on low ridership lines with crude oil (diesel) buses operated by a single crewman. The Board came to the view that this would also suit the Port Melbourne and five other cable tram lines.

Port Melbourne residents learned the likely fate of their tramway in February 1935 when Chairman Alexander Cameron stated: "Buses will probably be substituted for cable trams on the Port Melbourne line, which is unprofitable. The only new settlement likely in this area would be at Fishermans Bend,

which could be served by the buses in addition to [buses on] the present cable tram route.” (*The Argus*, 13 February 1935).

Major changes in the Board membership at the end of 1935 did not alter this preference. The new chairman, Hector H Bell, was convinced of the economic necessity of introducing buses and the Board formally decided on the bus conversion of the Port Melbourne line in July 1936.

The Board’s decision occurred just a month after Prime Minister Lyons announced that a new Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation (CAC) factory and aerodrome would be constructed at Fishermans Bend near the newly opened General Motors Holden (GMH) factory. He lauded these new enterprises as key industries for Melbourne and the nation.

Fishermans Bend

The City of Port Melbourne included the large expanse of Fishermans Bend in its west. Until the 1920s much of this location remained a wet, sandy and undeveloped part of Melbourne with noxious industries such as boiling down works, abattoirs and sewerage disposal sites. It had a reputation for poverty, gambling and crime.

By the 1930s new industries such as GMH and CAC were locating there. To serve the workforce increased public transport was needed.

Tramway closure

Legislation was not required to abandon tram lines. Formal notification to the responsible minister and the parliament was sufficient. However, the M&MTB was required to maintain the centre road surface until formally abandoning it, and then fund track removal and road restoration. This occurred in the early 1960s.

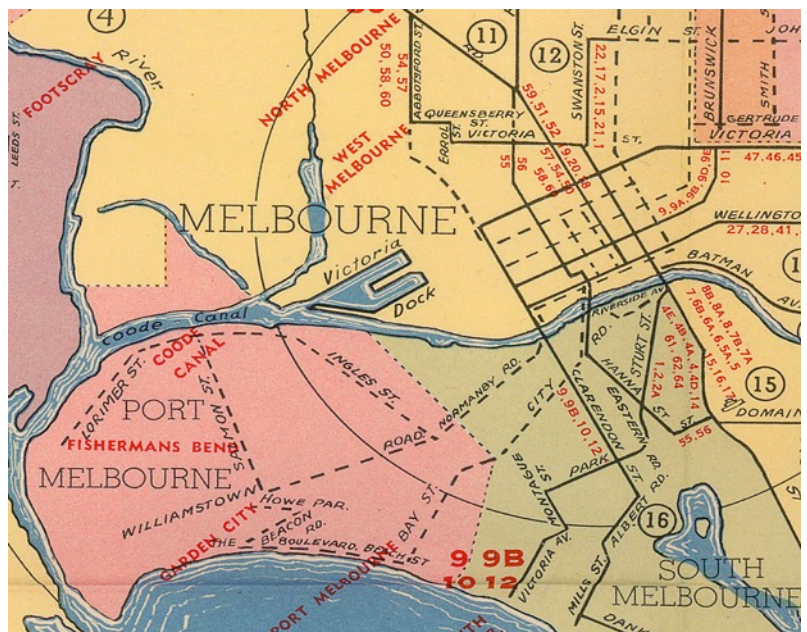
Both the Port Melbourne and South Melbourne cable lines closed on Saturday 13 March 1937. Newspapers reported 1,000 people at the Port Melbourne terminus with piles of road metal to pelt the last half dozen trams. They smashed the windows and souvenired anything that could be removed.

Police in cars and on foot were assigned to control crowds. Similar behaviour was reported at the South Melbourne and city termini with one newspaper headline reading: “Damage by Wild Crowds”.

Buses from the Central Bus Garage in North Fitzroy began replacement services on both lines from the next day. The new Port Melbourne bus service was through routed to Rathdown St (now Rathdowne St), which had been converted from cable tram to bus seven months earlier. The temporary South Melbourne bus service was replaced by a new electric tramway four months later.

A network of bus routes developed in the following years connecting Fishermans Bend, Coode Canal, Garden City and Port Melbourne with the city, many of which were through routed to other suburbs.

Coinciding with the introduction of buses to Bourke St in October 1940, the Port Melbourne bus was redirected to Collingwood via Johnston St. The Collingwood route had been converted from cable tram to bus 18 months earlier. In December 1940, the route was extended to North Kew after the M&MTB purchased a local private bus line. The 1952 map below illustrates sections of these bus routes.



M&MTB tram and bus route map (1952). DASHED lines indicate bus routes; CONTINUOUS lines indicate electric tram routes; RED NAMES indicate destinations; RED NUMBERS indicate electric tram route numbers. Bus route numbers are not shown as they duplicated some tram route numbers. MAP: Melbourne Tram Museum collection

Bus fleet

Chairman Bell strongly favoured British Leyland buses over the British AEC (Associated Equipment Company) vehicles and this preference continued until his retirement in 1949.

The Board ordered medium sized Leyland Cubs and many were initially assigned to Port Melbourne Depot. It also ordered the larger Tiger TS7, TS8, TS8c, TS11c models and the Titan TD5c double deck bus for other services on its expanding network.

Initially the Port Melbourne routes were operated by one-man buses. In October 1938 the union's *Tramway Record* complained of the crowded driver-only buses on the Port Melbourne-Carlton-Brunswick service. "Passengers must be jammed in like sardines because the service is inadequate. Too high a speed must be maintained because not enough time is allowed to do the trip. ...[This] forces the operator to collect fares while the bus is moving." (*The Age*, 29 October 1938)

Bus conductors were eventually employed but the Board's attempts to reintroduce driver-only buses during the following decades caused disputes, notably in 1954 and 1966. Not long after the latter, the Port Melbourne Depot closed with the fleet and crews transferred to other bus and tram depots.

Cable tramway remnants

Little of the old cable tramway survives today. The engine house at 357-361 City Rd was in disrepair for a number of years but has recently been refurbished as an office and showroom. The cable tram shed at 65 Beach St was replaced by a new residential complex in 2000 and the bus depot site was also replaced by new residences a few years earlier.

The disused cable tram track along Market St, Queens Bridge and Queensbridge St was replaced by an electric tramway in 1944, with a small cable track section remaining in the tram crossing at Flinders St until the early 1970s. Much of the remaining track was left in place covered with bitumen until the early 1960s. The M&MTB then paid the municipal councils to remove it and restore the roadway.

Fifty years after the cable tramway closed in 1937, electric trams returned to Port Melbourne in

December 1987. This time it was along the converted railway line.

Acknowledgements

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Geoff Brown

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Life on the Bend, Helen Doyle, Context Ltd (2017)
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Royal Commission on the Railway & Tramway Systems of Melbourne and Suburbs (1911)
Trove (numerous newspapers)



The cable tramway engine house at 357-361 City Rd, South Melbourne, now an office and showroom (2020).

Photo: Warren Doubleday



A2 class tram 260 at the former Port Melbourne Station (January 1988), a few weeks after the opening of the converted railway line.

Photo: Randall Wilson

On the Buses

The M&MTB's Port Melbourne Bus Depot operated for 29 years, closing in July 1966. Kevin Stanes worked as a driver at this depot during its final two years and recalls some of his experiences on the buses.

I joined the M&MTB in the 1960s and became a driver at Port Melbourne Depot in 1964. The depot was located in Bay St not far from the foreshore and had originally been occupied by the Port Philip Stevedores' Association. When the Board wanted to purchase the property in 1936, the trustees did not have the authority to sell it. So the *Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways (Port Melbourne Land) Act 1936* was required to allow its purchase.

The former club rooms were converted to crew rooms and administrative offices and space was provided for 29 buses then later expanded. The new depot opened on 9 September 1937 and took over most of the local route operations.

Port Melbourne was an industrial suburb that generated heavy passenger loadings as workers arrived by train and bus to supplement the local workforce. The developing industrial area of Fishermans Bend saw the building of new factories and increased activity along the South Wharf. Port Melbourne was also a popular beach and picnic area, especially during the hot summer months.

Weather

Driving over some routes operated from Port Melbourne Depot could be interesting and sometimes dangerous, especially if there were sudden weather changes.

One afternoon I picked up my bus going to Garden City. There were very strong winds blowing off Port Phillip Bay. I arrived at the bottom of Bay St and made the right hand turn into Beach St where I saw very high waves crashing over the bluestone dividing wall. As I drove along Beach St the wind was so strong the bus began to rock violently. About 100



Port Melbourne Bus Depot on the first day of operation (9 September 1937).

Photo: M&MTB Official

metres from the Port Melbourne Railway Station a king wave crashed over the wall and hit halfway up the side of the bus shaking it violently and pushing it sideways about 30 centimetres.

Water gushed into the bus and over the passengers even though the doors and windows were closed. As well it gushed over the engine almost causing it to stall, water hitting the radiator blades and forcing it into the cabin followed by steam. Visibility was extremely poor for a short period and my uniform was soaked through to my underclothing, making for some uncomfortable driving until it dried out.

Fog

On another occasion I was working a late shift and was about to pick up the bus going to Bulleen. When we went for our meal break it was mildly cold. After the meal, as we walked outside to pick up, a very thick fog had developed. I climbed into the cabin and could see no more than three metres in front of the bus.

At Graham St I called my conductress, Jean Harefield, forward and suggested she might have to walk ahead of the bus as per the rules, i.e. *M&MTB General Rule 87 – Fog, Mist, etc.* Jean then walked ahead of the bus, using a torch guiding me all the way to the city until we crossed Queens Bridge where the fog lifted.

Sulphur

One Saturday I copped it pretty bad because bulk sulphur was being unloaded somewhere along the North Wharves across the Yarra River opposite General Motor Holden. There were no containers in those days and to make things worse there was a mild northwest wind blowing. Generally, the wharfies didn't load or unload bulk minerals or grains under these conditions, but for some reason on this Saturday they did.

Before the day had ended tears were running down my cheeks. Looking in the rear view mirror I saw my eyes very blood shot, not to mention I was finding it difficult to breath. By the time I returned to the depot in the late afternoon, the minerals had begun to cut into my face. Small amounts of blood were running down my cheeks.

There was no medical kit at the depot, so I headed to the local doctor on the corner of Bay St and Graham St. He was alarmed at my condition, telling me I should have requested to be relieved from duty and have sought medical attention at the first sign of the tears running from my eyes. He added that I was lucky I was not in hospital.

The wharfies finishing at 3:00 pm were an uncontrollable bunch. Bus crews never attempted to interfere with their behaviour. If they didn't want to pay their fare, they were not pushed. They'd smoke

anywhere on the bus and crack open a few bottles of beer passing them around on the way to Flinders St Station.

Rivalry

In those days where you grew up was where your allegiance lay. Once a Portonian, always a Portonian. You were born in Port Melbourne; you went to school in Port Melbourne; you worked in Port Melbourne. You also met your future partner in Port Melbourne, or at the very least in South Melbourne, and you bought your house in Port Melbourne!

Port Melbourne bus crews hated the North Fitzroy crews. Most loved working the industrial routes to Fishermans Bend where there were only a few North Fitzroy buses. But to work the Bulleen - Garden City route was to some crews likened to working in hell.

Drivers were under constant pressure from their running mate, the conductor, as they came down Russell St hill and along Flinders St to Flinders St Railway Station. Here the Bundy clock had to be recorded before heading to Port Melbourne, so it was often a race to see who got to the clock first.

Efforts to block a North Fitzroy bus from passing your bus were not uncommon. Good drivers would constantly be checking their rear-view mirror for any buses coming up behind. Port drivers usually put their parking lights on as a sign of their allegiance.



AEC Regal Mark III 353 at Port Melbourne Depot (30 July 1966), the last bus that I drove into the depot.

Photo: Kevin Stanes collection

Drivers would take the risk that the police officer at the corners of Flinders and Russell Sts or Flinders and Swanston Sts would not give them a ticket for straddling the centre white line and blocking traffic lanes. This ploy was used to stop North Fitzroy drivers passing them and "giving them the stick".

If a Port bus was on time and overtaken by a North Fitzroy bus, it was said they were "eating time".

One-man bus strike

The 1960s saw a booming economy. The workers, once loyal to public transport, were deserting services in their droves for the motor car. Seeing the passenger numbers ever decreasing, the Board decided that if services were to survive then one-man bus operations would need to be introduced. The union resisted this aggressively which resulted in the One-Man Bus Dispute. The strike began in December 1965 and was not settled until February 1966, when the High Court of Australia ruled in favour of the Tramways Union.

The Board was not pleased with the Court's decision. Management believed that to make the services viable once more, the move to one-man bus operations was the only option.

During the long strike many of the bus crews had found other forms of employment, leaving extreme staff shortages. This meant that drivers and conductors had to be brought in from other depots resulting in the increased costs of overtime and travelling expenses. There was also a massive decrease in passenger numbers resulting in a substantial drop in revenue. With these pressures the Board had no choice other than to close the depot on Saturday 31 July 1966.

Closure

The bus depot site in Bay St was leased to a reclamation company and later sold. The day after the depot's closure buses were moved to North Fitzroy and Collingwood Depots under very tight security, and over the following days the administrative block and all maintenance equipment were cleared out. Staff were offered a transfer to other bus and tram depots.

I moved to North Fitzroy for a short time then to Doncaster Depot In October 1967. Over the years I worked at every tram and bus depot and eventually Radio Centre, firstly as a conductor or driver, then from 1972 as a Starter and Inspector.

Kevin Stanes
Museum member

Museum News

The museum has been closed since mid March due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The committee is working on procedures to protect the health of our visitors and volunteers for its reopening. Once these are fully in place, the date of the first open day will be announced with a week's notice on our website and social media accounts.

AGM

The date of our Annual General Meeting has been set as Saturday 26 September 2020. However, it has not yet been decided if the meeting will be held via teleconferencing or physically at the museum. Members will be advised closer to the meeting date regarding the time and arrangements, or if the meeting will be deferred.

Bellcord distribution

Due to cost concerns, future issues of *The Bellcord* will be distributed electronically to members via the internet. The mailing of printed copies of *The Bellcord* to most members will cease after this June 2020 issue. Those members without internet access will continue to receive a printed black and white copy of *The Bellcord* in the mail.

We understand that this change may not be popular with some members, but it is necessary to ensure the ongoing viability of *The Bellcord*. We look forward to your continued support.

Committee of Management

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Editor: Geoff Brown

Photo Supplement



Port Melbourne, January 1946

*Photo: State Library Victoria
(handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/21072)*

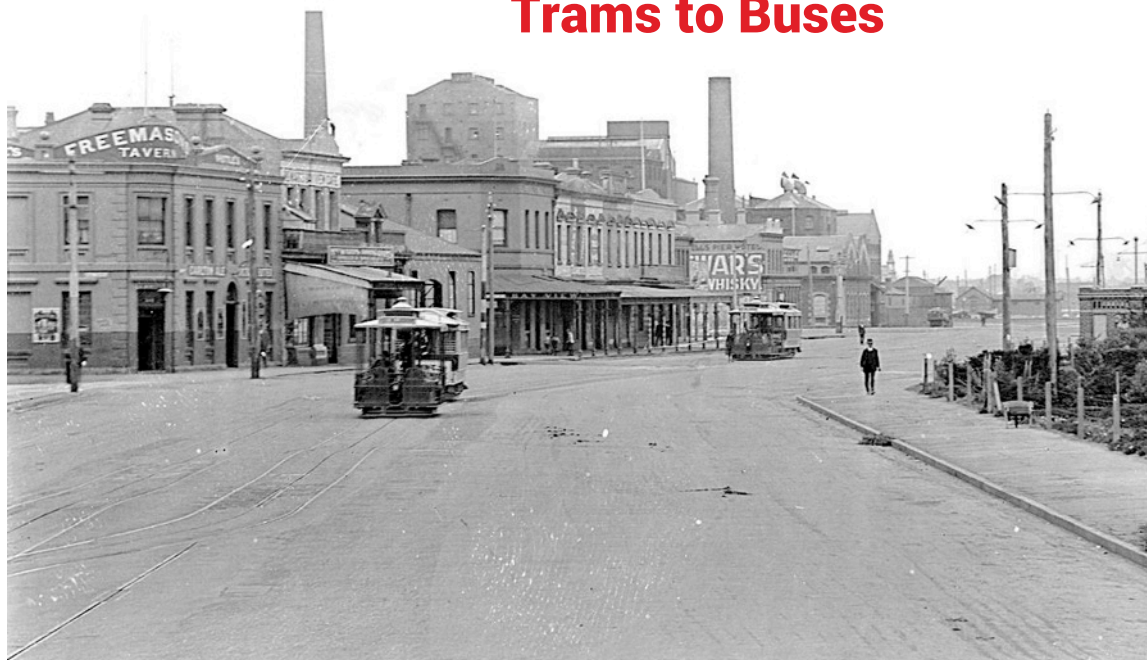
This scene is from a larger aerial photograph taken nine years after the closure of the cable tramway. In the foreground are the Port Melbourne Railway Station, Centenary Bridge and Station Pier.

In the mid-ground, the abandoned cable track in Beach St and Bay St is highlighted by the strips of concrete roadway laid either side of the track between 1925 and 1929. The single level tram shed (depot) with entrance track is located at the gap in the concrete strip about halfway along Beach St.

The M&MTB bus depot can be seen in Bay St near Beach St with its large covered garage and uncovered parking yard containing 20 or so buses. Two buses are also parked at the old tram terminus.

In the background are the gasworks with storage tanks and the reclaimed Sandridge Lagoon. The lagoon was progressively back filled over decades and thought unsuitable for building construction. During World War Two, the naval base HMAS Lonsdale was built on a section close to the bay.

Trams to Buses



ABOVE: Beach St, Port Melbourne (c1920) with two cable tram sets queueing at the terminus. The tram shed is located directly behind the front set.

Photo: State Library Victoria

RIGHT: Beach St (early 1960s) showing the abandoned tram shed (left), the bitumen covered cable track with exposed slots and the concrete road surfaces laid between 1925 and 1929.

Photo: Hugh Ballment

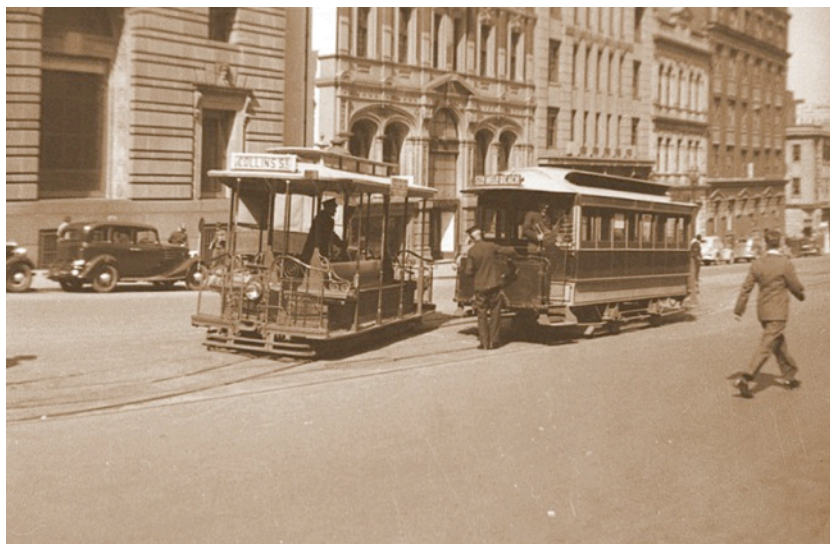


LEFT: Outbound Port Melbourne cable tram in Collins St at Swanston St (c1910).

Photo: State Library Victoria

BELOW: Bay St, Port Melbourne looking towards the bay with M&MTB buses in service (mid 1960s). A new median strip has recently replaced the abandoned cable track but the deteriorating concrete roadway either side remains in place.

Photo: Melbourne Tram Museum collection



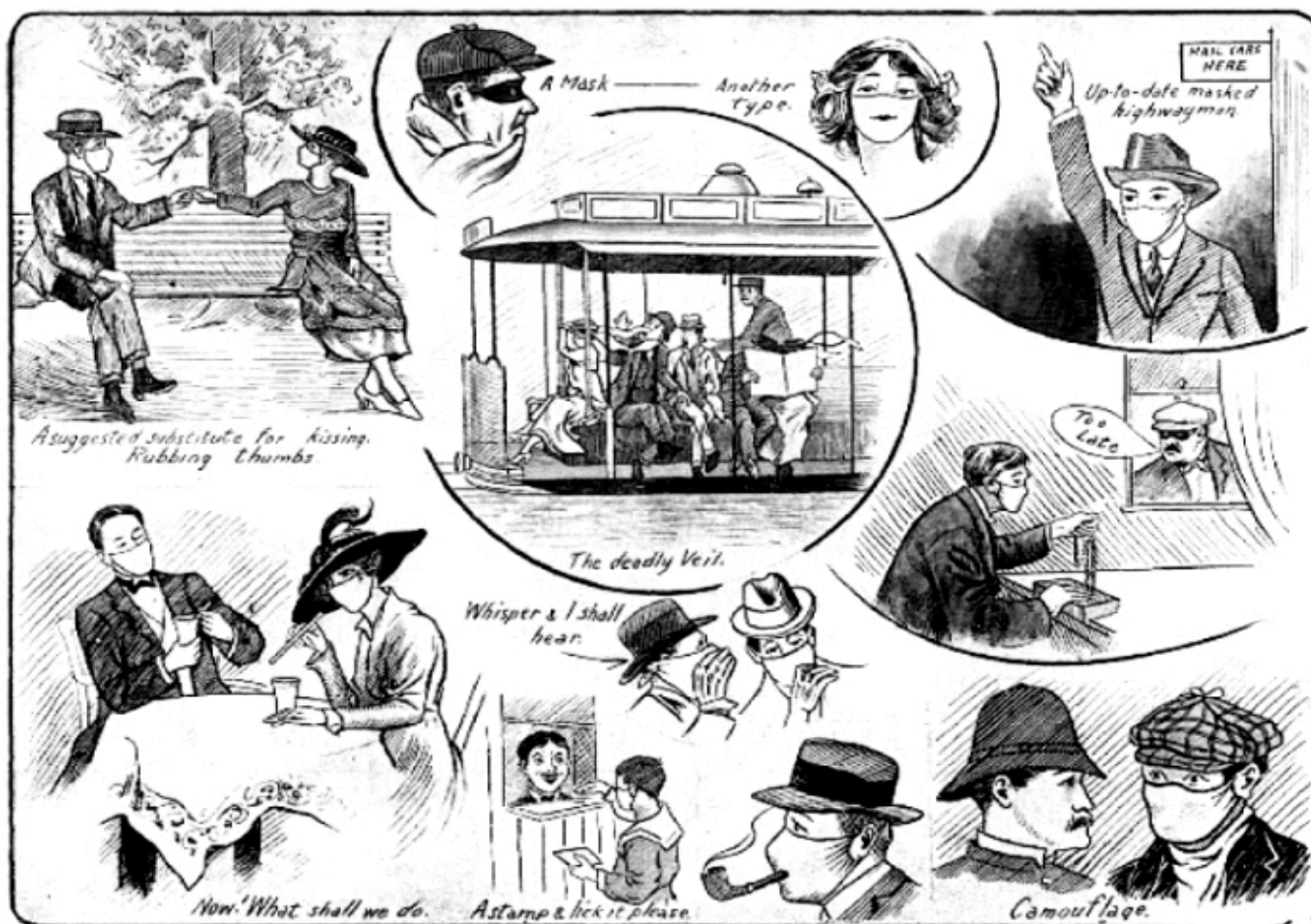
ABOVE: South Melbourne cable tram shunting in Market St at Collins St terminus (1936). Photo: Wal Jack

BELOW: M&MTB Central Bus Garage in North Fitzroy (c1940). Six Leyland models are evident including the small 'cubs' in the foreground and double deck buses in the background. For the first six months, this depot provided the buses for the Port Melbourne bus route.

Photo: M&MTB Official



1919 Flu Pandemic



During Australia's first wave of the influenza pandemic, the above light-hearted sketch was published in *The Australasian*, a Melbourne newspaper that closed in 1946. To avoid the flu, keep your distance by rubbing thumbs rather than kissing; avoid hat veils while riding on a cable dummy; don't be alarmed if a masked man hails the tram; and so on. Cable trams were still the major form of street transport in Melbourne in 1919.

This paper reported: "Travelling on trams and trains, it is quite the exception to find [a mask] being worn. Just now the front seats of the dummy are the ones most desired; but four persons only can find space there, and so there is a big rush for a vacant one as the tram draws up. In some instances people walk some distance to secure a seat there, whilst others allow several trams to pass in the hope of eventually finding this space unoccupied."

The Victorian government took a less rigorous approach with health measures than some other

Image: *The Australasian* (15 February 1919)

states and was strongly criticised by doctors and others. After a few weeks government and some businesses staggered work hours and the cable tram network extended its peak period services.

In Sydney stronger regulations were enforced. "Police have been stationed at all the busy intersections and have been instructed to arrest unmasked persons travelling in railway carriages or trams." (*The Herald*, 4 February 1919)



Sydney (1919).

Photo: *The Australian*, City of Parramatta Heritage Centre collection.