



# The Bellcord

*Journal of the Melbourne Tram Museum*

*Number 51 – September 2021*

### Front cover

Z class 25 departs the Starling Street stop en route to the East Burwood terminus at Middleborough Road (October 1985).

Photo: Dick Jones

## Museum News

The lockdown continues and the Melbourne Tram Museum remains closed. Unfortunately this put paid to our plans for the Open House Melbourne weekend at the end of July, which was transformed into a fully online event. The museum was still able to participate, via a *virtual tour* created by Hidden Melbourne, which is available on the museum website.

### AGM

Due to the lockdown, the Annual General Meeting of the Melbourne Tram Museum has been delayed. We anticipate that it will be held in late October. Members will be notified of the date in due course.

### Website change

The museum's website switched primary domains in June 2021 – from hawthorntramdepot.org.au to [trammuseum.org.au](http://trammuseum.org.au). The old address still provides access, but we would prefer it if you switched to the new address.

As part of this activity, we also moved to a new internet service provider. This will support the planned introduction of the online shop by upgrading the security of our website.

### Watermark Apartments

Recently, Noelle Jones hosted a Zoom presentation and lively discussion for our neighbours at the Watermark Apartments. The subject was the long and distinguished career of Leonard Flannagan, architect of the Hawthorn Tram Depot.



*Leonard Flannagan (1864-1945),  
Melbourne architect*

*Photograph courtesy of  
the Flannagan family*

Museum:  
8 Wallen Road  
Hawthorn Vic 3122

Postal address:  
PO Box 6172  
Hawthorn West Vic 3122

E-mail:  
[editor@trammuseum.org.au](mailto:editor@trammuseum.org.au)

Website:  
[www.trammuseum.org.au](http://www.trammuseum.org.au)



The Bellcord is published by the Melbourne Tram Museum Inc, A0048167Z, ABN 11 293 508 607. Copyright © Melbourne Tram Museum Incorporated 2021.

Editing & layout: Geoff Brown

### In this issue

Planning the East Burwood Extension	3
A Transportation Plan	5
The East Burwood Extension	8
The Lost Tramways of Essendon	15
Tramway Brass: the Coburg Tramway Band	19



## Planning the East Burwood Extension: Trams and Politics



*ABOVE: Burwood Highway looking east on the fourth day of tram operations (Sunday 22 July 1978).*

*City-bound Z class 16 climbs the hill from Elgar Road, passing a CAC flat-screen SB Bedford bus.*

*The photo on page 4 shows a very different scene 40 years earlier.*

*Photo: Gary Davey*

In July 1978, Melbourne's first major tramway extension in over 20 years opened between Warrigal Road and Middleborough Road, East Burwood.

Route development had been in a holding pattern in the intervening years. The chairman of the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board (M&MTB), Major General Robert Risson, provided an explanation for this to a Parliamentary Committee in 1967.

The Tramways Board receives no financial assistance from the government for capital works, so it can only contemplate new services where the likely revenue will be sufficient to meet interest and redemption as well as operational costs.

The rising popularity of the motor car, an ageing tram fleet and declining public transport patronage raised questions about the future viability of Melbourne's trams.

However, by the early 1970s public and political sentiment towards the tramways was changing. The rollout of the orange liveried Z class trams from 1975 and the opening of the East Burwood extension in 1978 were a government response to these changing views.

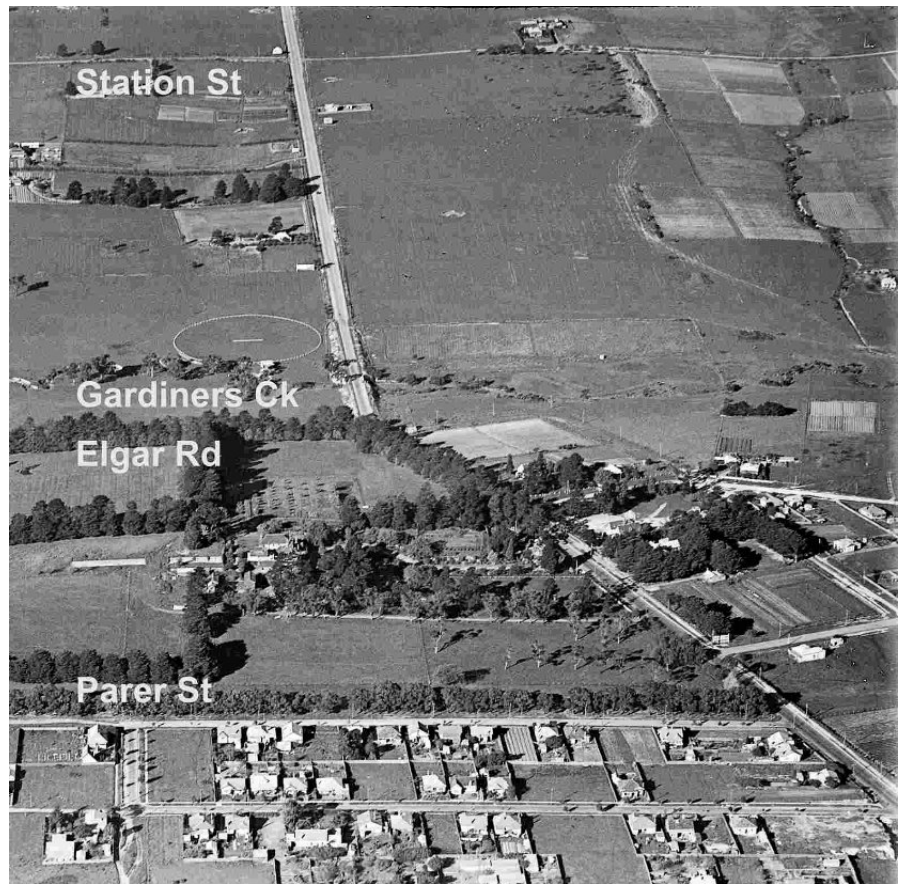
This article traces the plans and decisions that led to the construction of the East Burwood extension.

*RIGHT: Aerial view of Burwood Road, Burwood looking east from Warrigal Road and showing the transition from residential streets to farmland (c1938).*

*On the northern (left) side of Burwood Road among the trees is the newly relocated Presbyterian Ladies College Junior School (PLC). The land beyond the oval will become the site of a teachers' college and several schools built in 1953 and 1954.*

*The land on the southern (right) side of Burwood Road either side of the creek will be the site of the Skyline Drive-in Theatre, Australia's first such venue, built in 1954.*

*Photo: State Library Victoria*



### **Growing city**

Melbourne's population doubled to 2.5 million between the late 1940s and 1970. The motor car fuelled the construction of post-war suburbs beyond the reach of public transport and this population boom called for government action.

Burwood was one of many parts of Melbourne to experience this growth. The Burwood tramline had reached Warrigal Road (previously named Boundary Road) in 1916. It was built and initially operated by the Hawthorn Tramways Trust based at the Hawthorn Depot, which today is the site of the Melbourne Tram Museum.

The Country Roads Board (CRB), the main roads authority, pursued a major program of road and bridge development across Melbourne, regional cities and throughout the state. In 1951 it secured funding to widen Burwood Road. Between 1956 and 1960 the first stage from Warrigal Road to a point just west of Middleborough Road was widened adding a centre reservation for most of its length. These works continued further eastwards during the 1960s. Burwood Road was renamed Burwood Highway in 1960.

The Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW), the government water and town planning authority, developed a scheme for metropolitan development. Completed in 1954, the *Melbourne Metropolitan Planning Scheme Report* proposed growth corridors along principal rail and road routes, separated by green wedges of open land. Fourteen years of discussion and debate ensued before it became law in 1968.

### **Country Roads Board (CRB)**

*The CRB was established in 1913 as a central road authority responsible for main roads within Victoria. Initially it shared this responsibility with the MMBW – but in 1974 it took over all road responsibilities.*

*The CRB was replaced by the Road Construction Authority in 1983 which became part of VicRoads in 1989.*



**Sir Robert Risson**

A summary of Sir Robert Risson's career is provided in Graeme Turnbull's article, [The Sir Robert Risson Era: an Enduring Legacy](#), on the museum website.

The article quotes Vernon Wilcox, the Minister for Transport and Chairman of the MTC saying in 1971, "I had my doubts about the future of trams a few years ago, but no longer. They are proving their worth in moving people in the mass ..."

Risson retired as M&MTB Chairman in June 1970 and was succeeded by Deputy Chairman Francis Kirby.

BELOW: Burwood Highway looking east from PLC as preparatory tram works commence (September 1977).

Photo: Weston Langford  
[colour correction, minor cropping]

**A Transportation Plan**

In 1963 the state government established a new transport advisory body, the Metropolitan Transportation Committee (MTC), to advise it on the city's transport needs to 1985.

It engaged consultants Wilbur Smith and Associates (from Connecticut, USA) and Len T Frazer and Associates (of Melbourne) to conduct a six year *Metropolitan Transportation Study* involving extensive research, consultation and several revisions.

The final report, the *Metropolitan Transportation Plan*, was presented to government and the media in December 1969. Its wide-ranging recommendations played a part in changing public and political sentiment towards public transport — in ways that were unexpected.

The MTC was a 12-member body that included key government ministers and chairmen of several transport authorities. One of these was the (then) Minister for Local Government, Rupert Hamer; another was Major General Robert Risson, Chairman of the M&MTB.

Risson became an influential member of the MTC, both as M&MTB Chairman until his retirement in June 1970 and then, as the newly knighted Sir Robert Risson, MTC Executive Director until 1978 (see adjacent box).

The *Metropolitan Transportation Plan* was focused on road and freeway development, estimating the full implementation costs at \$2.6 billion:

- 85% for nearly 500 km of new freeways and 500 km of highways and arterial roads.
- Over 9% for railway improvements including the Underground Rail Loop, new railway rolling stock and new lines to East Doncaster and Rowville.
- Approximately 2% for tramways and 3% for buses and CBD parking.



**Recommended extensions****Burwood** to Station Street**East Malvern**to East Malvern Station,  
Dandenong Road & Chadstone  
Shopping Centre.**East Preston** to Boldrewood  
Parade**Mont Albert** to Box Hill Station**North Balwyn** to Doncaster  
Shopping Centre**North Coburg** to Fawkner Station**Princess Street/Queens Parade**  
from Lygon Street to Smith  
Street**Toorak Road** from Glenferrie Road  
to Camberwell Road**West Coburg** to Hadfield**Social and economic changes**

- *Social activism and opposition to governments was on the rise in Australia and internationally from the mid 1960s.*
- *The 1970s saw the economic problems of rising wages and unemployment, higher inflation and the 1973 Oil Crisis.*
- *The Federal Whitlam Labor Government was swept into power in December 1972 with policies of increased government funding, such as the 'State Grants (Urban Public Transport) Act 1974'.*
- *Tram patronage and fare revenue had been falling steadily since the late 1940s, plateauing in the 1970s and stressing the M&MTB's finances. From 1970 tramway operating costs required increased annual subsidies from government.*

Of significance, the plan recommended the retention of most of the tramway network, the purchase of 910 new trams to replace the current fleet of 691 and nine tramline extensions (*see adjacent box*). A cost of \$55 million (2% of the implementation cost) was allocated for the new trams but no amount was estimated for the line extensions. The plan noted on page 42:

The [tramway] system cannot be lightly scrapped ... The majority of tram tracks are in excellent condition as are other parts of the system. However, the trams themselves, although well maintained, are generally obsolete in design becoming increasingly expensive to maintain...

The tram car as a public transport vehicle is ideal for moving big loads for distances up to 7 or 8 miles (11-13 km) ... and has a 50% greater passenger carrying capacity [than modern buses].

Wherever possible trams should operate in reserve rights-of-way ... Tram routes may require modification with some being converted to buses.

**Backlash**

When this plan was made public in December 1969, the proposed freeway network provoked dismay and protest from a large cross section of people. It was included in Melbourne street directories of the time with many freeways cutting paths through long established suburbs and threatening to change the face of inner Melbourne.

The incumbent Liberal state government led by Premier Sir Henry Bolte had been in office since 1955. Soon after the plan's release, the opposition Labor party gained six seats in the May 1970 election, narrowing the government's majority. There were concerns that Labor could gain enough seats in the 1973 election to take government. In response to the public backlash, the government removed several freeways from the plan.

These years were unsettling for a long standing government. Along with anti-freeway protests, there were other social and economic changes underway (*see adjacent box*).

**A political solution**

In February 1972, Transport Minister Wilcox told parliament he was aware of the criticism being made of the *Metropolitan Transportation Plan*.

It is not unusual to receive some criticism of a plan that looks as far ahead as 1985. In September or October last year ... the government decided ... that [one major freeway] project should not proceed and that public transport should be upgraded ... by carrying out the plans submitted by the committee concerning public transport.

*(Victorian Hansard, 29 February 1972)*

Two of the plan's tramway recommendations would be implemented – 100 new trams and an extension of the Burwood tramline. A number of railway projects were also selected, including the Underground Rail Loop (in 1970).



*RIGHT: Z class 2 in Toorak Road, Burwood at the Warrigal Road terminus a few months before the track extension (7 January 1978).*

*Photo: Colin Hirst*

### **New tram timeline**

- **August 1966:** The M&MTB advertised for tenders to design, manufacture and deliver 100 'silent' trams, but no contract was signed. The press lampooned talk of 'silent' trams. However, a timber mock up was built at the M&MTB's Preston Workshops.
- **June 1972:** M&MTB advertised for tenders in a two step process.
- **March 1973:** Main contract awarded to Commonwealth Engineering (Victoria) Pty Ltd.
- **August 1974:** Passing of the federal government 'State Grants (Urban Public Transport) Act 1974' to fund many works including two-thirds (\$150,000) of the first delivery of Z class trams. Victorian Hansard indicates that the state government fully funded the later deliveries of this order.
- **1975:** First Z class trams entered service.

*RIGHT: Z class 26 in Toorak Road, Burwood at the Warrigal Road terminus as extension works begin (27 May 1978).*

*The line was first extended to an interim terminus 400 metres along Burwood Highway.*

*Photo: Colin Hirst*



### **Z class trams**

Tenders had been called for 100 new trams in 1966, but no construction was undertaken. In May 1972, Transport Minister Wilcox announced that a prototype tram costing about \$100,000 was expected the following year and that he had asked Cabinet to approve the purchase of 100 new trams.

On 17 June 1972, the Board advertised in the press:

Prospective Tenderers are invited to register with the Board for the supply of 100 All-electric trams ... Registrations close 10 July 1972.

This was the first stage of a two stage process to compile a short list of companies. A second stage was then conducted with a closing date of 15 November 1972 to prepare a list of recommended tenderer(s) and prices.

After the Cabinet approved the new trams and the tender process was underway, Sir Henry Bolte retired as Premier on 23 August 1972. He handed the party leadership to his more progressive deputy, Rupert Hamer, who went on to win the May 1973 state election with an increased majority.

This sequence of events clarifies a common misconception that authorisation of the new trams was only possible after Bolte's retirement.



## The East Burwood Extension

Of the nine recommended tramline extensions, the Burwood line could best provide a tram priority right-of-way by using the existing centre reservation in Burwood Highway. This would showcase the new Z class trams and also serve a new growth corridor not already served by rail. The East Preston line would do the same beyond Boldrewood Parade.

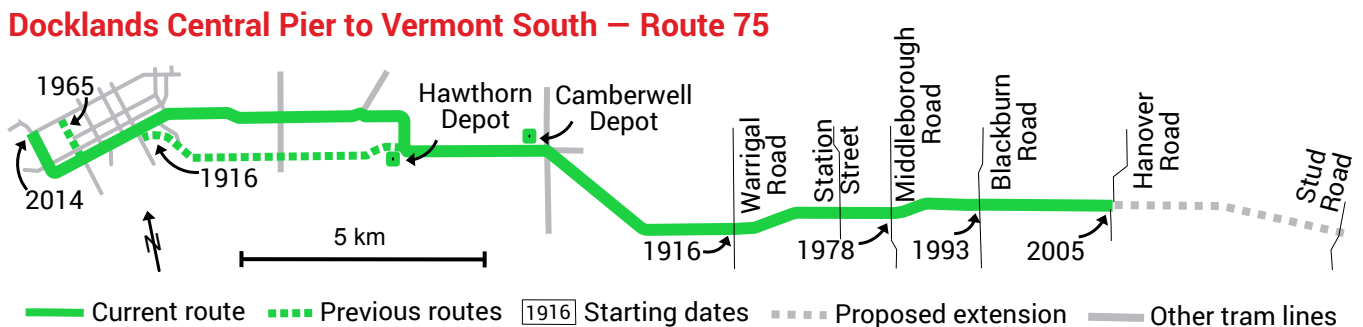
Burwood was also Liberal Party heartland, which may have been an additional factor in choosing it as the first project.

As required by the M&MTB Act, the Board drafted a detailed plan, the *Proposed East Burwood Tramway Extension Feasibility Study*, and presented it to the Transport Minister in June 1974.

It proposed a 3.4 km extension to Middleborough Road rather than the shorter extension to Station Street as recommended by the MTC. It did so on the following grounds:

- The specialised use of land by schools and industry between Warrigal Road and Station Street had limited residential development and would limit patronage.
- Using the 1971 Commonwealth Census and other research, it was predicted that population densities beyond Station Street towards Middleborough Road would increase and provide a higher patronage to justify the extension at a cost of \$2.01million (revised to \$2.5 million in 1975).
- The MTC's 1971 local survey showed that nearly 40% of street public transport trips in the area were for work, 30% for schooling and 17% for shopping and personal business. These figures were also expected to apply to the tram extension. This was relevant in countering the argument that the East Burwood extension would be under utilised because of the excessive travel time for city-bound passengers.
- An extension beyond Middleborough Road would increase capital costs and reduce average patronage — but it may be considered in the future when the area in the east was fully developed.

BELOW: Map of the current Docklands Central Pier to Vermont South tram route showing previous routes and termini.



### Docklands Central Pier to Vermont South – Route 75

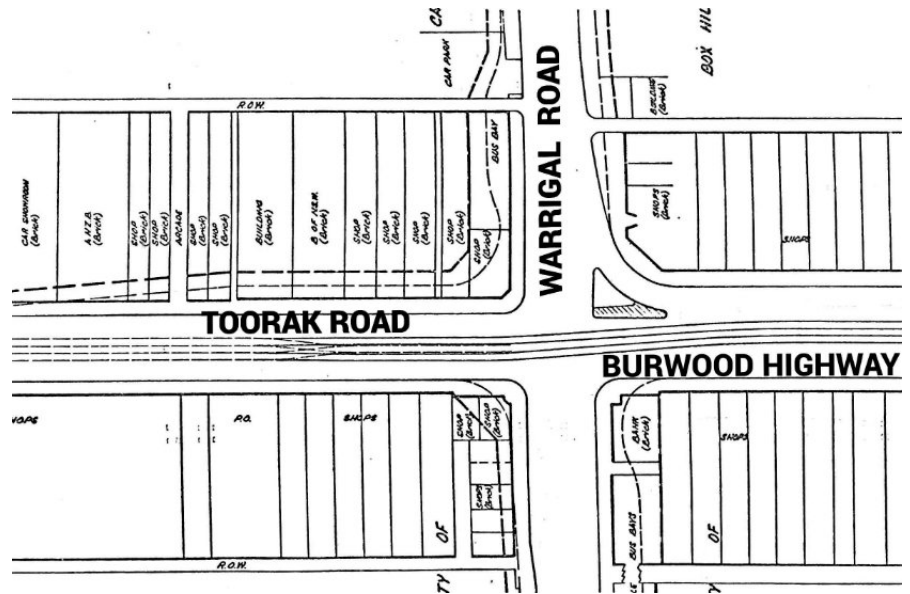


RIGHT: Illustration of the proposed extension and property boundary changes to widen the intersection (1974).

These changes were not made during the construction phase.

The track layout in Toorak Road prior to the extension is shown by dashed lines.

Source: M&MTB Feasibility Study, Melbourne Tram Museum collection



The Feasibility Study included numerous details of the proposed construction. These included constructing the tracks using concrete to the surface, which would require little maintenance and allow for easy cleaning with mechanical equipment.

A new tramway substation would also be required, located at the southeast corner of Burwood Highway and Elgar Road.

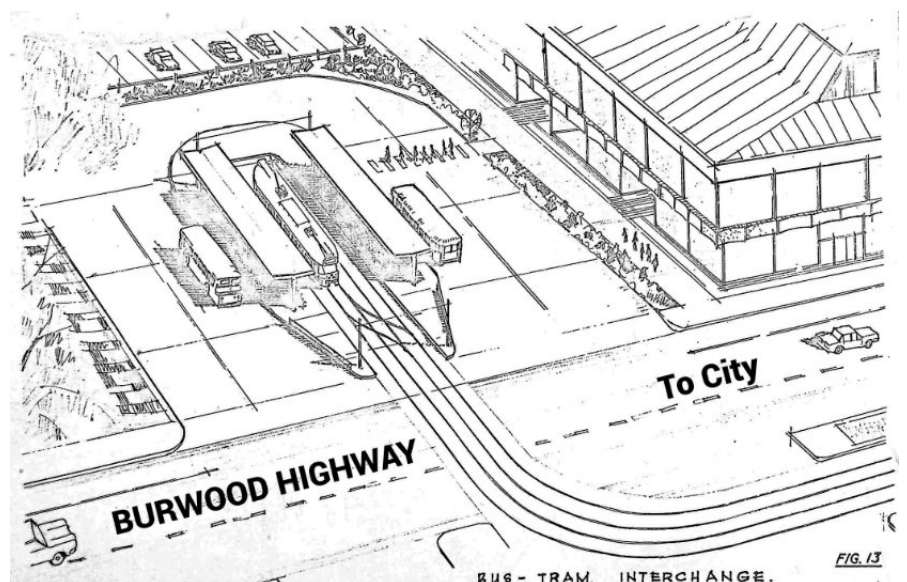
The study included illustrations of options for the widening of the Warrigal Road intersection and the Middleborough Road terminus.

**Parliamentary inquiry**

Another requirement of the M&MTB Act was the calling of a Parliamentary Public Works Inquiry to examine major tramway extensions. It was an all-party committee that provided elected representatives with the opportunity to scrutinise tramway developments, taking over the role of the Standing Committee on Railways from 1958.

RIGHT: Illustration of an option for the East Burwood terminus that included a tram-bus interchange within a future shopping centre (1974).

Source: M&MTB Feasibility Study, Melbourne Tram Museum collection



*RIGHT: Burwood Highway looking east toward Middleborough Road before tram works commenced (September 1977).*

*Photo: Weston Langford  
[colour correction]*



### **Submissions of support**

*Australian Broadcasting  
Commission  
Burwood High School  
Burwood Teachers' College  
Chavoin College Parents and  
Friends  
City of Box Hill  
City of Nunawading  
Committee for Extension of  
Burwood Tramway  
Member for Bennettswood  
St Scholastica's Church*

The inquiry was held over three days between December 1974 and June 1975 with many supportive submissions presented (*see adjacent list*). The major objections to the proposal were made by Ventura Motors Pty Ltd, a privately owned local bus company, and by the CRB.

### **Objections**

Ventura Motors feared the loss of patronage and proposed an alternative. The company would operate an express bus service from Springvale Road, and eventually from Stud Road, via Burwood Highway, Toorak Road and the South Eastern Freeway to a Batman Avenue terminus in the city. Ventura Motors ran a concerted publicity campaign of letterbox drops and a public meeting in the first half of 1975 to foster support for its position.

The City of Hawthorn supported this bus proposal because it would provide additional public transport to the southern parts of its municipality.

Ventura Motors also proposed that the existing Burwood tramline terminate at the corner of Camberwell Road and Toorak Road. This would reduce road congestion along Toorak Road and passengers could transfer between bus and tram at this point.

*RIGHT: Burwood Highway looking west towards the city from Starling Street before tram works commenced (September 1977).*

*Photo: Melbourne Tram Museum  
collection*





The CRB presented the most detailed list of objections. It argued that the M&MTB's projected patronage figures were too optimistic and that an express bus service would satisfy passenger demand and be less disruptive to road traffic.

It also argued that the tramway extension would diminish the expensive road widening and traffic management works it had undertaken over 20 years to enhance traffic flow and safety.

It is worth noting that during the preceding years, the CRB and government had developed increasingly divergent views on road and freeway policy. However, this had not prevented the CRB assuming full responsibility for main roads in mid 1974, a year before its submission to the inquiry.

The CRB's submission addressed many features of the M&MTB's construction plan, some of which are summarised below.

### Disputed features

**Intersection redesign:** The CRB had earlier proposed a redesign of the Warrigal Road, Toorak Road and Burwood Highway intersection. The M&MTB had illustrated how the tramway extension could be added to these options, but the CRB objected that the tramway would remove right turn lanes for east and west bound traffic. No intersection widening works occurred during the tramway construction.

**Right-of-way:** The M&MTB proposed constructing the tramway extension wholly in a separate right-of-way. This would require barrier kerbs beside the track for 700 metres between Warrigal Road and Parer Street and the widening of the narrow centre reservation for 500 metres between Parer Street and Elgar Road. The latter would require land acquisition from Presbyterian Ladies College (PLC).

The CRB argued that such a right-of-way would greatly restrict motor traffic and street parking and therefore no right-of-way could be provided in this section. Most of the M&MTB's proposal was constructed.

*RIGHT: Road widening works in Burwood Highway following land acquisition from PLC (18 March 1978).*

*While the new road surface is finished, the new retaining wall along the PLC boundary is still under construction and the tramway is yet to be built in the widened centre reservation.*

*Photo: Colin Hirst*



*RIGHT: Z class 64 city-bound in Burwood Highway with Warrigal Road on the horizon (22 July 1978).*

*Note the new safety zones and traffic signals for passengers and the right-of-way that protects the tram tracks.*

*Photo: Colin Hirst*



**Loading platforms:** The M&MTB proposed passenger loading platforms/ safety zones with shelters at all stops. The CRB objected to these between Warrigal Road and Elgar Road on the grounds they would narrow the footpaths. They insisted that intending passengers wait on the footpath. The M&MTB also proposed modifying the existing pedestrian underpass between Gillard Street and the education precinct for access to a safety zone.

Safety zones were installed at all stops and stairs were added to the existing pedestrian underpass.

**Overhead wires:** The M&MTB proposed that the overhead wires be supported by poles on the footpath for 700 metres between Warrigal Road and Parer Street, centre poles on one side of the reservation between Parer Street and Elgar Road, and then centre poles between the tracks to Middleborough Road.

The CRB objected to poles on one side of the reservation on safety grounds, insisting on poles on the footpath to Elgar Road. The M&MTB proposal was constructed.

**Traffic lights:** The M&MTB proposed modification to traffic light cycles to allow trams to call up a green light. The CRB pointed out that this would reduce intersection capacity and impact motor traffic. To ensure the retention of right hand turn lanes, the CRB also specified that tram stops be located on the departure side of intersections or mid block. A traffic light phase for trams was installed and tram stops were built on the departure side of intersections and mid block.

**Gaps in centre reservation:** The M&MTB planned to remove a number of intermediate gaps in the centre reservation where vehicles entered and exited the highway. The CRB required provision of alternate gaps so as not to disadvantage traffic movements. A lesser number of alternate gaps were installed.



### Enthusiastic approval

The Public Works Committee submitted its report to the Governor in Council a year later in July 1976. It enthusiastically supported the tramway extension, noting that most of the CRB's issues of concern were already included in the M&MTB's proposal. Regarding the CRB's position that the M&MTB fund all modifications and adjustments to road and traffic infrastructure, the report referred this to the Ministry of Transport. How this was resolved is unknown.

Victorian Hansard indicates that the state government fully funded the East Burwood extension with no mention of a federal contribution. The September 1976 state budget allocated \$26.9 million as an annual subsidy towards the M&MTB's operating expenses but did not itemise the cost of the extension. Parliament passed the *Melbourne & Metropolitan Tramways (East Burwood Tramway) Act 1976* in December.

At the end of its report, the committee encouraged the M&MTB "as a matter of urgency" to examine the feasibility of extending the tramway beyond Middleborough Road. This study was not presented until 1981.

### Construction

The construction of this extension began in the second half of 1977, taking approximately a year to complete. Details of these works and the two subsequent extensions will feature in the next edition.

### Acknowledgments

Thanks to Gary Davey, Warren Doubleday and Brian Weedon for their assistance with research for this article.

Thanks also to the Australian Electric Traction Association (AETA) for its large donation of government transport documents to the museum's collection, many of which are listed below.

*Geoff Brown*

*RIGHT: City-bound Z class 6 waiting to depart the new Middleborough Road terminus on the fourth day of operations (Sunday 22 July 1978).*

*Note the driver standing beside the Bundy clock and the tramway T-light above the traffic signals on the left.*

*Photo: Gary Davey*



**Long term outcomes**

The initial East Burwood extension and new Z class trams showed that increased capital investment in tramway infrastructure was popular and productive.

Tramway development continued in the following decades – but questions of the system's viability persisted due to the large government subsidies required.

A transport review in 1979-80 and transport reforms in the 1990s recommended the downsizing of the tram network. While this did not eventuate, the network was franchised to private companies in 1999 on the grounds of improving its financial viability.

**References**

- Country Roads Board Annual Reports (1955-1966), State Library Victoria*
- Electric Traction (June, July 1972)*
- Fares Please: An economic history of Melbourne & Metropolitan Tramways Board (2004), Russell Jones*
- Melbourne & Metropolitan Planning Scheme (1954), MMBW*
- Melbourne & Metropolitan Tramways (East Burwood Tramway) Act 1976, AustLII*
- Metropolitan Transportation Study, Volume 3: Metropolitan Transportation Plan (1969), Metropolitan Transportation Committee*
- Proposed East Burwood Tramway Extension Feasibility Study (1974), M&MTB*
- Report from the Parliamentary Public Works Committee on the East Burwood Tramway Inquiry (1976)*
- Report from the Parliamentary Public Works Committee on the Plenty Road, Preston Tramway Extension Inquiry (1967)*
- State Grants (Urban Public Transport ) Act 1974, AustLII*
- Transcript of Evidence given before the Public Works Committee regarding the East Burwood Tramway Inquiry, (4 Dec 1974, 24 March 1975, 2 July 1975)*
- Victorian Hansard (1965.1972, 1976), Parliament of Victoria*
- Weston Langford Railway Photography website (2021)*

RIGHT: M&MTB track construction crew working at the corner of Burwood Highway and Evans Street, adjacent to Burwood Cemetery (May 1978).

Photo: John Ward

**Next edition: Building the extension**

Construction commenced at Middleborough Road in the second half of 1977 and progressed westward toward Warrigal Road. Between April and July 1978, track at the original terminus was extended 400 metres to Evans Street where both tracks were joined.

Details of the extension to Middleborough Road and the subsequent extensions to Blackburn Road and Hanover Road, Vermont South will feature in the next edition of *The Bellcord*.



## The Lost Tramways of Essendon



*RIGHT: A North Melbourne Electric Tram and Lighting Company tramcar at Moonee Ponds Junction (c1906).*

*Photo: Moonee Valley City Council collection*

The 'Essendon Tramways' commenced operations in 1906 and ran from the cable tram terminus at North Melbourne to the Maribyrnong River and to North Essendon at Keilor Road. These are the oldest electric tramways of the current Melbourne system. Both routes have been extended over the years and have also had sections removed.

Two of the sections which have been removed were built to serve sporting venues and two sections were removed because of changes in the environment in which they were located.

### **The Victoria Street tramway in Flemington**

The Essendon Tramways connected with the cable trams and the Victorian Railways at Flemington Bridge. The cable trams ran right up to the bridge which carried Mt Alexander Road across the Moonee Ponds Creek. From that point the electric trams headed north along Mt Alexander Road past 'Debney's Paddock', the site of a tannery and associated cattle and sheep yards beside the creek (*see map next page*).

The first street after Debney's Paddock was Victoria Street – running southwest to Racecourse Road. The double track tramway to Maribyrnong River took that route, while the Keilor Road trams continued up Mt Alexander Road.

In 1925, the North Melbourne cable tram was cut back to the corner of Abbotsford Street and Flemington Road and the Essendon trams gained access to the city via Flemington Road, Peel Street and William Street.

RIGHT: Map of City of Essendon with RED lines showing the location of electric tram tracks (1915).

Image: State Library Victoria



In 1929, with the cable trams gone, the opportunity was taken to remove the tramway from narrow Victoria Street and build a new tramway from the junction of Flemington Road and Racecourse Road to join the Maribyrnong River line at the corner of Victoria Street and Racecourse Road.

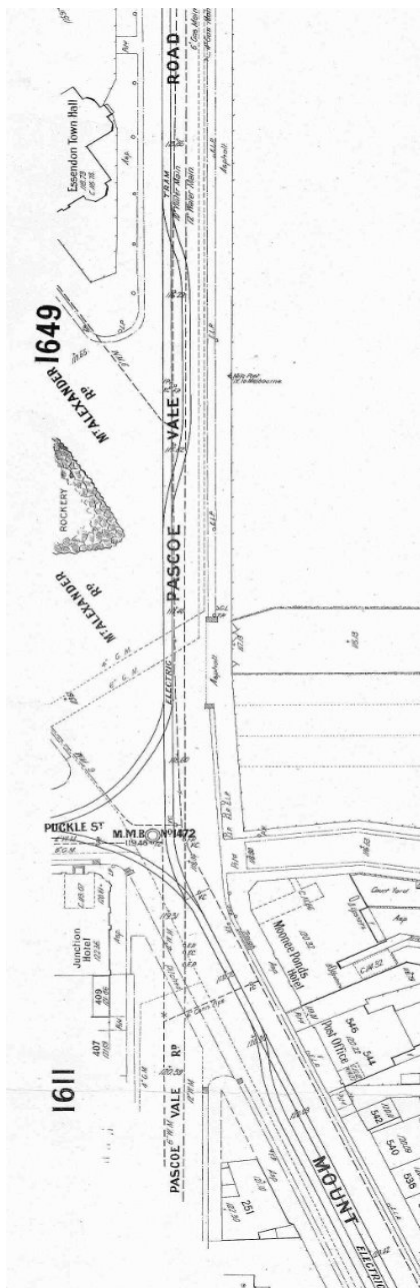
In the report from the Standing Committee on Railways in 1928, it was noted that the deviation would reduce congestion, reduce the route length for the Maribyrnong River line by 30 chains (600 metres) and reduce running time by 2 minutes. It was also argued that the Victoria Street line was due for renewal within two years, and it was better to invest in the new line. It opened in August 1929.

There are no visible remnants or artifacts of the Victoria Street line and no photos of a tram or tramway in the street are known to exist.

### The Puckle Street tramway

A single line tramway was built along Puckle Street – the main shopping centre for the locality – as part of the initial construction. It was connected via a triangle junction at Moonee Ponds Junction with the inbound and outbound lines of the tramway to Keilor Road (see adjacent map).

At the western end it was adjacent to the Moonee Ponds Railway Station and terminated in double track, which would have enabled trailer operations. It has been suggested that the line was built to curry favour with local politicians.



ABOVE: Segment of MMBW map showing electric tram tracks at Moonee Ponds Junction and the tramway loop north of the junction (1908).

The transition from double to single track south of the junction is incorrectly drawn. It was a Y turnout.

Image: State Library Victoria



*RIGHT: W5 class 818 in Napier Street, Essendon (May 1966).*

*Photo: Mal Rowe*



Little is known about its operation, but it is likely that it was mostly used for a shuttle service connecting Moonee Ponds Railway Station with the Moonee Valley Racecourse, just east of the junction.

A passing loop was provided in Pascoe Vale Road just north of the junction and this appears to have had little purpose other than being a terminus for the shuttle. The tramway was removed in January 1924, soon after the M&MTB took control and may have been out of use for some years.

### **The Napier Street football siding**

The Essendon Football Ground, 'Windy Hill', is situated near Essendon Station and is bounded on the west by Napier Street. Suburban football matches generated crowds in the tens of thousands and in 1923 the M&MTB built a siding in Napier Street, branching off the Keilor Road line.

Trams would wait in the siding for the end of the game, then head off towards the city with the spectators. The siding was also used to store trams on race days at Moonee Valley Racecourse – with trams being sent into traffic to pick up the punters at Moonee Ponds Junction as the last race finished.

On days with both football at Essendon and races at Moonee Valley, something extra was required. Moonee Valley races generally finished just before the footy. So tramcars for the race traffic were parked in Pascoe Vale Road on the inbound track just north of Moonee Ponds Junction.

*RIGHT: W2 class 406 on a regular run to the city passes a line of trams waiting in Pascoe Vale Road for the end of the races at Moonee Valley (April 1966).*

*Photo: Mal Rowe*





ABOVE: Essendon Aerodrome line being dismantled (January 1977)

Photo: Dick Jones

Regular inbound service cars had to cross over to the outbound track and run 'bang road' (travel the wrong way) past the parked tramcars. The process was facilitated by a crossover near Wilson Street about 500 metres north of Moonee Ponds Junction and one immediately north of the junction. Inspectors used manually operated coloured lights and trackside telephones attached to the span poles to control the temporary single line section. It was a rare event – usually only once or twice a year.

In 1991, after Essendon Football Club ceased using Windy Hill as their home ground, the Napier Street siding was no longer needed and was cut back to a couple of trams length. It was available as a temporary refuge for failed trams. The tramway was finally removed in May 2007, although the tracks still lurk below the bitumen on the last 100 metres or so.

### The Essendon Aerodrome terminus

The Essendon tramway was extended to Essendon Aerodrome in March 1943. The extension ran along Keilor Road then turned into Matthews Avenue before turning across Lancefield Road and entering the Aerodrome. It ran beside Vaughan Street and terminated just to the east of Treadwell Street. It was one of the 'emergency tramways' described in the *June 2019* edition of *The Bellcord*.

By the late 1960s Essendon Airport, as it was then known, was proving too small for increasing air traffic and a new airport was built at Tullamarine – opening on 1 July 1970. The new airport was served by a new freeway which took over the old Lancefield Road, making a tramway crossing into Essendon Airport impossible. There was also less demand for trams into the old airport, which continued to operate for light commercial air traffic.

The tramway was extended northwards following Matthews Avenue, eventually reaching its current terminus at Airport West Shoppingtown. The tramway into the airport closed in October 1976 and the tracks were dismantled soon after.

### Acknowledgement

My thanks to Brian Weedon for his assistance with this article.

Mal Rowe

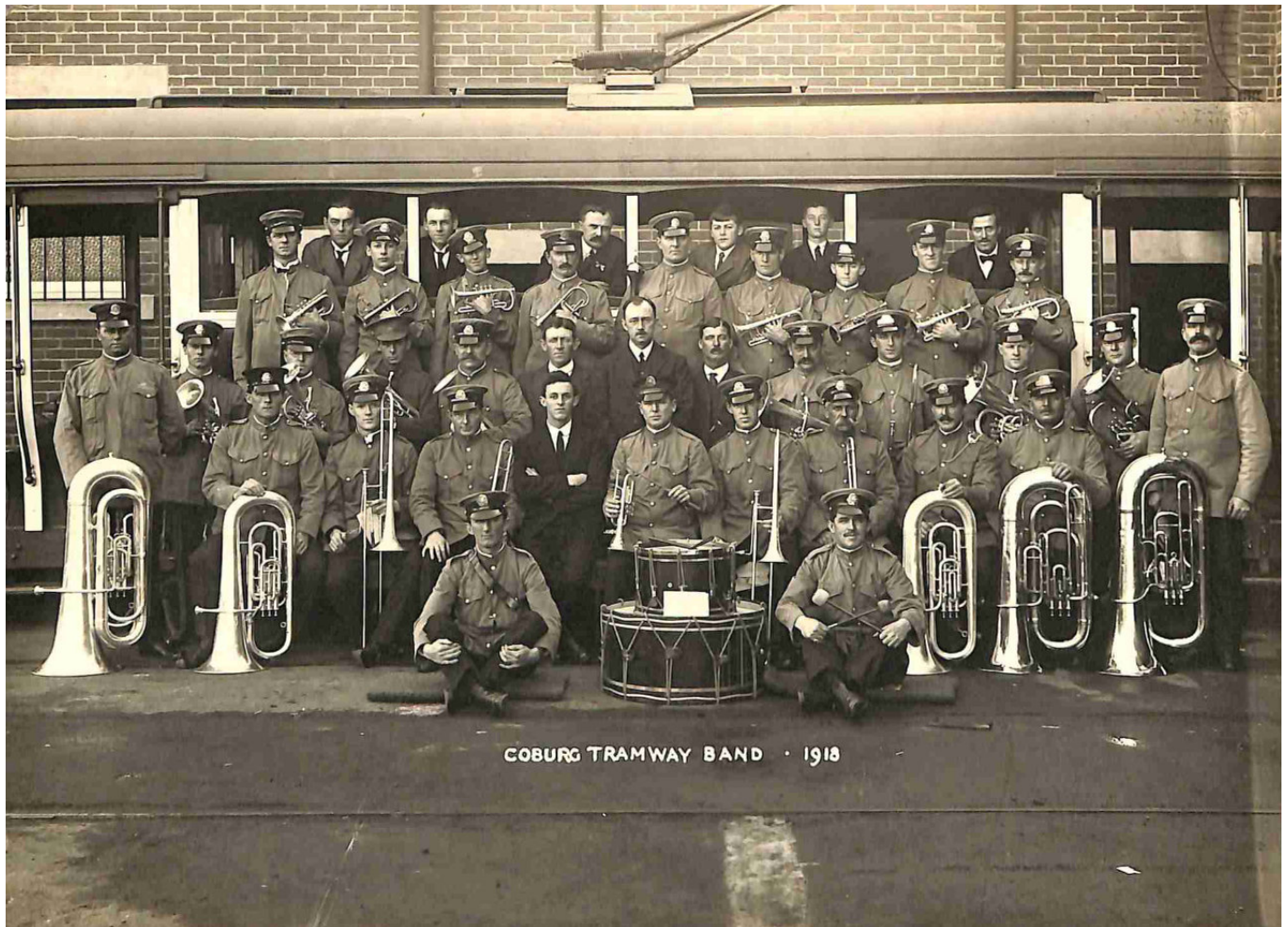
RIGHT: W5 class 788 at Essendon Aerodrome terminus (June 1967).

Photo: Mal Rowe





## Tramway Brass: the Coburg Tramway Band



*ABOVE: Coburg Tramway Band, 1918, possibly with their newly acquired instruments. Frank Wraith, wearing a suit, is seated in the middle of the front row.*

*Photo: Melbourne Tram Museum collection*

From the 1880s through to the 1940s, notable occasions or Sunday afternoons at the local park were incomplete without a band performance. There were military bands, municipal bands and community bands. Companies and other organisations were also keen to enjoy the prestige of their own band at official functions.

Melbourne tramway companies were no exception. The earliest tramway band – Melbourne Tramway & Omnibus Company's Melbourne Tramways Employees Band – was founded in 1888. The Malvern Tramways Band – now known as Stonnington City Brass – was formed in 1911 by employees of the Prahran and Malvern Tramway Trust (PMTT) and went on to become one of Australia's leading brass bands.

The Melbourne Tramways Band is still going strong, with regular performances at Wattle Park since the 1940s.

Over the years there have been several other, lesser known, tramway bands. There were harmonica bands, at Malvern and Coburg, and of course brass bands: Northcote Tramway Band (1895-1906), Malvern Tramways Junior Band (1930-39), Brunswick Tramways Jazz Band (1922-25) and Coburg Tramway Band (1917-33).

**Northern Tramway Company**

*The Northern Tramway Company operated a horse drawn service on Sydney Road, Coburg from 1889.*

*It ran between the Melbourne Tramway and Omnibus Company's Brunswick terminus at Moreland Road and Gaffney Street, Coburg.*

*Details are provided in an article of [the same name](#) on the museum website.*

**Getting the band together**

By 1917 a group of employees of the Melbourne, Brunswick and Coburg Tramway Trust (MBCTT) had formed a band and had played several performances, generally at the MBCTT's Bakers Road tram terminus.

Equipping a brass band is expensive, and in 1918 the band requested a £300 loan from the MBCTT to purchase a set of instruments. This was a considerable amount of money – equivalent to the MBCTT's entire wages bill for one week.

According to the loan agreement – which is in the collection of the Melbourne Tram Museum – the money was to be paid back in instalments, at a rate of at least 50 pounds per year. If the band became defunct and the full amount was not repaid, the instruments were to be returned to the MBCTT.

Fourteen silverplated brass instruments, from the well-known British manufacturer Besson, were purchased from Sykes & Co of Little Collins Street.

It was common practice to acquire instruments for the entire band at the same time – ensuring that all bandsmen were properly kitted out. And no doubt helped to negotiate good prices from music retailers.

**Bandsmen: the early days**

Twenty band members signed the loan agreement. According to MBCTT records, those bandsmen were conductors and motormen, clerks and car cleaners, track men and carpenters, family and single men.

Some bandsmen had only a brief time with the tramways. Others stayed on for the rest of their working lives, joining the Melbourne & Metropolitan Tramway Board (M&MTB) just two years later when the cable tramways and the various municipal tramway trusts – including MBCTT – were amalgamated in 1920.

The band's secretary, Frank Edward Keane, was an MBCTT motorman. He had previously been a driver for the Northern Tramway (NTC), and was one of the two drivers for NTC's last scheduled horse tram service on 5 December 1915. By the mid 1920s he had been promoted to traffic inspector with the M&MTB. He passed away in 1957, aged 67.

Blacksmith Stanley Claude Ashmore was employed by MBCTT as a conductor, however by 1920 MBCTT had promoted him to blacksmith, his original profession. He rose to the position of M&MTB depot foreman before passing away in 1931, aged 50.

After being discharged from the army in 1916 for medical reasons, Ernest William Hoare joined the MBCTT. A motorman, Hoare was involved in a fatal accident in Lygon Street on 7 June 1917, when a man was knocked down and killed by Hoare's tram. The coroner found that the victim died by his own act, being of unsound mind, and that the motorman was not to blame.

**Instruments purchased**

*Beeson Eb soprano cornet in leather case*

*Beeson Bb New Creation cornet in leather case*

*Beeson Bb New Star cornets in leather case x 2*

*Beeson Eb tenor horn*

*Beeson Bb baritone x 2*

*Beeson Bb tenor slides x 2*

*Beeson Eb bass (one new, one second hand) x 2*

*Beeson Bb euphonium*

*Beeson BBb bass*

*Beeson G slide trombone (second hand)*



MBCTT clerk James Aberdeen Walker had a long career with the tramways. By the early 1920s he was Chief Clerk of M&MTB Northern System. In 1960 he was appointed Treasurer and Accountant of the M&MTB, retiring in 1963 after 48 years' service.

The 20-year-old treasurer of the band, Frank Wraith, was a store clerk at MBCTT. A steady career progression through the tramways saw him appointed manager of the M&MTB in 1946 and Deputy Chairman in 1954, before passing away in February 1960. Wraith also had a keen interest in football – he was honorary secretary of the Collingwood Football Club from 1930 to 1950.

### Active years

Performances in the early years of the band were concentrated in the local area around Brunswick and Coburg: Bakers Road tram terminus, Brunswick Town Hall and regular recitals at Coburg Lake.

In 1924 the band was travelling further afield, with a season of Monday evening performances at Frankston Rotunda. By the late 1920s the band was performing regularly at the Rotunda at St Kilda Esplanade on Sunday afternoons – the St Kilda council even donated £10/10- towards the band's uniforms.

Throughout two summer seasons, 1930/1 and 1931/2, the band alternated with the Malvern Tramways Band for Sunday afternoon performances at Wattle Park.

During the band's lifetime, it was led by a series of professional bandmasters. A high turnover of bandmasters was not unusual – bands offered attractive inducements to engage good bandmasters. It was also common for bandmasters to look after multiple bands at the one time.

*RIGHT: Coburg Lake and gardens with the band rotunda behind the boatshed.*

*Photo: Coburg Historical Society collection*



**Tramway bands: Can you help?**

*Do you have any tramway band stories or memorabilia?*

*This story is just one part of a larger project researching the history of Melbourne tramway bands – we would love to hear from you!*

One of Coburg Tramway's earliest bandmasters was Henry T. Hellings. He had previously been band sergeant at the Northcote Tramway Band, which at that time (around 1904-6) was led by his father, the renowned bandmaster T.L. Hellings. By 1920 F.C. "Massa" Johnston (1880-1953), another well-known bandmaster, was leading the Coburg band.

**Merging with Coburg City**

There were close links between the Coburg Tramway Band and the Coburg City Band, even to the extent of sharing bandmasters. In 1932 Robert Dunn was bandmaster of both bands, as was his father – Robert Dunn senior – before him.

Both the Coburg Tramway Band and the Coburg City Band were affiliated with the newly formed Victorian Bands' League (VBL) in 1932, however we understand that the two bands did eventually merge.

The last known performance of the Coburg Tramway Band was the 1933 St Patrick's Day procession. The band did not renew its VBL membership in 1933.

*Acknowledgements*

Many thanks to Jeremy de Korte of the Victorian Bands' League, Helen Laffin from the Coburg Historical Society, Craig Tooke and Warren Doubleday of the Melbourne Tram Museum.

This research would not be possible without the resources of the National Library of Australia (Trove), Public Record Office Victoria and Darebin Heritage.

*Noelle Jones*

*RIGHT: Official opening of the MBCTT tramway at Queensberry Street and Madeline Street (later Swanston Street) on 31 October 1916.*

*Photo: Melbourne Tram Museum*

