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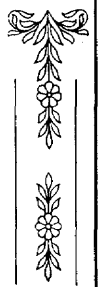
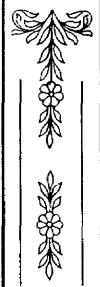
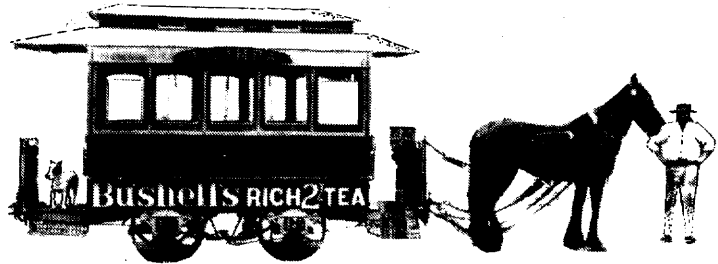
HISTORY

of the

Department

of

TRANSPORT



EARLY HISTORY

On August 10, 1985, Brisbane celebrated one hundred years of street public transport. Although in its first 40 years, several operations guided the introduction of tram and bus services, the Department of Transport can legitimately lay claim to direct kinship with these early innovators.

On April 18, 1885, the German sailing ship Von Moltke arrived in Moreton Bay carrying a cargo which was to change the face of an expanding city.

Deep within the holds of the Von Moltke were 18 horse-drawn tram cars — nine built by Stephenson & Co of New York and nine by Brill Co of Philadelphia. These carriages were to become the rolling stock of the recently-formed Brisbane Tramway and Investment Company which introduced Brisbane's first public transport service on August 10, 1885.

The arrival of these single and double decked trams created quite a commotion in the young city and the Brisbane Courier enthused: “. . . the cars are constructed of cedar and mahogany and are mounted on steel springs making motion almost imperceptible.”

However, the introduction of new ideas is rarely without incident and the Telegraph issued a stern warning to the drivers of the double deck trams “. . . not to raise their whips too high as this constitutes a danger to passengers travelling on the top.”

Until formation of the Brisbane Tramway and Investment Company in 1883, Brisbane faced the prospect of entering the 20th century without a system of street public transport, but in just two short years the foundations for future developments were firmly laid.

The directors of the Company sought the latest in transit technology from abroad and on the day of the inaugural trip the Telegraph was certain “. . . the adoption of this new system of traffic marks a new era in our history, and should go to prove that Queensland does not intend to be left behind in this very fast age.”

And indeed, the last quarter of the 1800s was a very fast age with changes in technology occurring almost daily. Not only did horse-drawn systems quickly become obsolete but financial problems beset the Company, as one employee of the time remembered: “The Company paid almost no dividends to its investors and at times looked as if they would have to close their doors. Most people were too poor to travel on trams anyway, and many walked from the suburbs to the city and back.”

Still, despite financial difficulties and industrial unrest caused by the formation of the Tramways and Omnibus Union in 1887, the Company managed to establish a public transport foundation upon which future expansion would be possible.

When the system was opened in 1885, barely 10 kilometres of track connected Woollongabba and Newstead and it was not until 1886 that track was laid across the Victoria Bridge allowing “through” trips.

Electrification

In 1895, the Brisbane Tramways Company was registered in London with the intention of acquiring the assets of the Investment Company and converting the system to electric traction.

General Electric of USA was awarded a contract to supply and install electrical equipment for the undertaking and the change-over was completed in September, 1897.

General Electric sent one of its best men, a Mr. J. S. Badger, to take charge of the installation work in Brisbane. He subsequently became General Manager and Managing Director of Brisbane's electrified tram system in 1897 and remained in Brisbane until 1923.

Mr. Badger presided over a period of remarkable growth and change and he quickly established himself as a very influential man in the city. During his tenure, the system grew from 24 kilometres to a massive 68 kilometres of double track by 1922 and the number of cars in the fleet increased from 20 to 181 in the same period.

The Brisbane Tramway Company retained the operation of the city's tram service until its eventual transfer to the semi-governmental Brisbane Tramway Trust in 1923. During this time, a number of initiatives and social events combined to ensure perhaps the most exciting 27 years of Brisbane's transport history.

In 1900, Mr. Badger, ever the innovator, established a Tramway Band which was to function for 11 years. Special trams were run from the city to Dutton Park where the band performed.

However, in 1912 the tune soured when one of the most heated disputes in Queensland industrial history erupted. On January 19, a serious strike broke out over the refusal of management to allow employees to wear Union badges while on duty.

As the dispute escalated, feelings ran high amongst the public and the strikers. The Police Department swore in hundreds of Special Constables and violence flared on a number of occasions. New drivers were quickly trained and the effects of the strike began to dissipate but none of the strikers were to be reinstated until the Tramways Trust commenced operations in 1923.

War effort

During World War I, the employees of the Company worked hard for the war effort and the sum of \$20,000 was raised by the Tramways Branch of the Red Cross. This money was painstakingly raised from the operation of two hour tram rides for 5¢. The motormen and conductors gave their services voluntarily and the Company donated all revenue to the fund.

In early 1921, the Company made public its intention to significantly increase fares for the first time in five years. The State Government of the day considered that no increase should take place and on April 29, took steps to prevent it by bringing the tramways under the "Profiteering Prevention Act."

While the Company believed that a Government take-over had been imminent for some time, the refusal to allow fares to increase after tickets had been printed and advertisements placed in the daily press, left the ball squarely in the Government's court.

In October, 1922, "The Brisbane Tramway Trust Act" received assent and street public transport in Brisbane was ready to get its first taste of Government administration.

The Trust was the immediate forerunner to Council administration and provided a very successful transition period from private to public control.

The question of compensation to BTC had not been decided at the time of transfer and, after a legal wrangle which led to an appeal being lodged with the Privy Council in London, a mutually acceptable sum of \$2,800,000 was finally negotiated.

The last few years of operation by the BTC had seen many rumours of imminent take-over by the Government and understandably the Company had been loathe to spend its limited resources on expensive maintenance, much less expansion.

Realistic expansion

The three year operation of Brisbane's trams by the Brisbane Tramway Trust can best be described as a period of house-keeping and realistic expansion. The Trust had inherited a network which was desperately in need of track replacement; more tramcars; double track on some routes to allow increased service frequencies and improved workshop and depot facilities.

One of the first acts of the Trust was to pension off the 15 horse-drawn track maintenance vehicles stationed at Countess Street and to replace them with an equal number of motor vehicles. The era of the horse was finally at the end.

Industrial relations also improved under the Trust. As well as reinstating some of the drivers fired in the 1912 strike, the Brisbane Tramway Trust Act gave the men the right to appeal against any punishments meted out by the General Manager.

During its tenure, the Trust completed almost 11 kilometres of additional track including the Exhibition loop (1923); Red Hill to Ashgrove (1924); and Camp Hill, Lutwyche, Cavendish Road, Balmoral, West End and Oriel Park (1925).

In its last months, the Trust let contracts for two buildings which were to become Brisbane landmarks — a workshop complex at Boomerang Street, Milton, and the Ipswich Road Tram Depot at Woolloongabba.

Council control

On the first day of October 1925, the new Brisbane City Council took control of an area which had previously been administered by 20 city, shire and town councils and the Greater Brisbane Act conferred responsibility for the city's trams on the Council. The transfer from Trust to Council was carried out some two months later.

So commenced local government involvement in urban public transport which, even today, is unique among Australian state capital cities. When Council took control of the system, there were only 80 kilometres of track and 225 tramcars in operation.

In 1926 the Council confirmed a previous decision made by the BTT to build a powerhouse which would not only supply the tramways, but would meet the needs of domestic and industrial consumers when the existing agreement with the City Electric Light Company expired. This decision would later play an important role in providing the Council with non-rate revenue and would ensure the economic success of Greater Brisbane.

The Council made available a site at New Farm and the Tramways Department was made responsible for erecting the plant and generating power.

The New Farm Power station began to deliver current on June 27, 1928.

The relationship between transport and electricity would remain, in one form or another, until the Council's Electricity Department was taken over by the South East Queensland Electricity Board on July 1, 1977.

Owing to increasing costs, fewer working hours and other factors, it became necessary for the Council to increase tram fares. Looking back on the event today is a sobering experience — fares for 2 sections were raised to the princely sum of 2 cents and a trip of about 6.4 kilometres cost a mere 4 cents!

In 1923, the BIT had decided to experiment with the operation of bus services and purchased a small fleet of Whites, Albions, and Fageols. However, the cost of petrol was high, spare parts rare and overloading during the peak hours meant the cost of maintenance was a heavy burden.

Loss on buses

The annual report of 1926 showed a loss of \$11,262 on the bus undertaking and explained “The expensive conditions under which the Council has to operate its buses, including evening and Sunday services . . . made a loss inevitable.”

In 1927, following the lead of Sydney and, after observing the heavy losses being incurred in Melbourne, Adelaide, Glasgow and other cities, the decision was made to abandon bus operation and leave the city’s thoroughfares to the trams.

It would be 13 years before buses rejoined the Council’s public transport fleet.

The Brisbane City Council brought two important assets to the city’s tram service when it assumed responsibilities for operations in 1925 — stability and a commitment to continue the expansion which had commenced under the Brisbane Tramways Trust.

One of the first tasks undertaken by the Trust had been to develop a new design for its trams which would provide a greater seating capacity, more efficient entrances and all-weather protection for the passengers. This resulted in the “Drop Centre” trams which were introduced in 1925 and remained in production until 1939.

A total of 191 Drop Centres entered service and the majority of these were produced in the Department of Transport’s own workshops at Boomerang Street, Milton.

It was not all plain sailing in these first years however, and during the Depression, patronage declined steadily. By 1932, there were 13 million less trips annually than there had been six years earlier. This decline in demand also caused a hiccup in tram construction and the period 1931-32 saw one of only two occasions during the department’s history as a tram operator, when new vehicles were not being built in the workshops.

FM class

In 1936, the Council gave approval for a radical new departmental tram design which was larger than the Drop Centre, fully enclosed and fitted with four motors. The prototype, Number 400, went into service in 1937 and became known as the “400”, “Streamlined” or “FM” (Four Motor) series.

The FM class was to remain the “Classic” modern tram until production ceased in 1960.

An FM in full flight truly was a master of the road: it was 49 feet in length, weighed in at 15.5 tons empty and had a capacity for more than 110 passengers compared to the 16 persons who could be carried on the original horse drawn trams introduced scarcely 50 years earlier.

The increased size of the FMs would be put to the test in the near future.

When Australia entered World War II, the subsequent rationing of petrol; scarcity of materials and sudden influx of Australian and allied servicemen placed an almost unbearable burden on the tram system. In just four years, the combined patronage of trams and buses (which had been reintroduced in 1940) had risen from 100 million annually to 164 million in 1944-45.

As in World War I, many employees enlisted and it became necessary to employ more than 300 female conductors. The lack of available material resulted in another interruption to tram construction and the resources of the Milton workshops were pressed into action to produce dummy anti-aircraft placements for the war effort. These fakes were made of wood and were intended to fool Japanese reconnaissance pilots who got through to Brisbane.

New era

Following the war, two important developments in the history of Brisbane's public transport network were to take place.

Buses, which had been tentatively returned to service to cope with wartime patronage levels, proved to be an efficient and inexpensive means of serving outer areas of the city which were not served by the trams' overhead wiring.

The post war years saw the consolidation of many routes which, no doubt, had been seen as temporary and in 1948 Council was granted the licence for 20 bus services which had previously been private concerns. This development proved to be the embryonic start to today's "all bus" system.

From an historical viewpoint, the other important milestone to occur after the war was a flirtation with trolley buses. In 1949, 30 Sunbeam trolley bus chassis were purchased and fitted with locally made bodies.

These buses, which were basically a motor bus design powered by electric current supplied through a system of overhead wires, proved particularly successful on steep hills where they could draw huge amounts of power directly through the trolley wires.

Their advantages over conventional diesel buses were the use of cheap electric power (which the department was still generating); silent operation and the lack of exhaust fumes. But they were limited to those routes where the relatively complicated overhead wiring system had been installed.

Trams were to remain the lifeblood of Brisbane's public transport system for 84 years before they were finally withdrawn from service in 1969.

Since trams departed the stage, many explanations for withdrawal have gained currency — in particular, that the catastrophic fire at Paddington Depot in 1962, (which destroyed 20 percent of the fleet), had dealt a death blow to the system.

In reality, the decision to abandon tram services was the culmination of a number of influences. True, the Paddington fire was disastrous but, equally fatal was the Wilbur Smith Plan which recommended a series of freeways for Brisbane that would not be compatible with the slow moving trams.

Other influences included: the increasing predominance of the private motor car; urban sprawl which saw more and more families move to the outer suburbs that were not connected

to the costly system of tram tracks and overhead wires and finally, by the 1960s, little work had been carried out to make the trams technologically competitive with diesel buses.

Whatever the reasons though, Brisbanites were not pleased to see their “Iron Dukes” disappear.

Trams were to be withdrawn on Sunday, April 13, 1969, and on the Saturday evening before, many people rode the trams to avoid the capacity crowds that were expected the next day. Those who made such a decision were rewarded for their foresight. On Sunday, despite special excursions and additional trams being scheduled, timetables just could not be maintained.

At about 8.45 p.m. police cars and motor cycles converged on the inner city to quell a near riot involving 300 young people who were desperately trying to souvenir parts of the trams. Police officers were allocated to the trams which were still in service and no further vandalism took place.

Final journey

It was estimated that some trams carried up to 150 passengers. Along Queen Street, people congregated in front of darkened shops to farewell the last tram, (534 from Clayfield,) as it made its final journey to Ipswich Road Depot.

As FM tram Number 534 entered the sheds at the depot, the comforting sounds of the national anthem could be heard coming from a car radio. It was a moving moment as the music signalled the end of the day’s transmission for the radio station and the end of the line for Brisbane trams.

In 1967, in preparation for the withdrawal of the trams from Brisbane’s streets, the Council had placed an order for 317 Panther buses with British Leyland. The following year this order was increased to 340, or two more than would be necessary to convert Brisbane’s public transport system to total bus operation.

This purchase of 340 buses was no small feat even for an organisation the size of the Council and special arrangements had to be made for payment of the \$4.9 million contract to be spread over a five year period. No doubt, part of the reason that this arrangement was acceptable to the manufacturer was that the 340 buses represented some 25 percent of the total number of Leyland Panthers produced world-wide.