

**REPORT ON SENIOR DRIVER WALDRON'S TRIP TO BIRMINGHAM,
LONDON, BRUSSELS, DUSSELDORF, HANNOVER, POTSDAM &
FREIBURG.**

July / August 2000

TO

**MR. BERNIE CAROLAN OPERATIONS DIRECTOR SWANSTON TRAMS
AND BAYSIDE TRAINS**

First of all, I would like to thank all concerned for the opportunity to represent Swanston Trams at Midland Metro for three weeks in late July / early August 2000.

The exchange was much appreciated by the staff of Midland Metro. I would especially like to thank General Manager Geoff Lusher, Corporate Affairs Manager Phil Bateman, Helen Golding who looked after me during the first week and was with me when I drove for the first time on Sunday 30th July, Terry Smith Driving Instructor who taught me all the speed limits on the line, Frank Smith who had me for my classroom lessons and who instructed me on the operations side, Malcolm Wilkinson, who took me on patrol and showed me other aspects that are required to operate a tramway successfully during the second week, Paul Bearfoot who was with me during my third week when I had the opportunity to drive each afternoon and evening with passengers, and the other staff, administration, control room and the other drivers who made my stay so enjoyable.

Although more could have been achieved with better publicity etc., I feel that Midland Metro did gain from my visit. Virtually all the staff indicated they would all like to spend some time in Melbourne, with a few drivers even considering moving Melbourne and working here. The staff at least now know that National Express has another tram company.

Future Exchanges of Personnel.

If a further exchange of drivers between Swanston Trams and Midland Metro is contemplated, then the following information should be considered before the exchange is finalised.

1. At least one week is required to learn the route and the numerous speed restrictions together with the radio procedures on the Midland Metro line.
2. As all trams are required to operate the basic service Monday to Saturday up to 2000 hours, the only time that training can be done is on Sundays and between 2000 and 0500 week nights. This means that any driver on temporary transfer must be prepared to work a few overnight shifts, in order to become familiar with the trams and track before being permitted to take passengers.
3. Drivers are required to follow strict timings as only 35 minutes is allowed for the journey between Wolverhampton and Birmingham.
4. Minimum time required to learn would be three weeks, therefore a minimum time of two months may need to be considered for any temporary transfer.
5. Because of the time required, no driver would be able to afford Hotel accommodation for that long. A way around it would be if a reciprocal transfer could take place with each driver exchanging homes for the duration of the transfer.

I observed the following from a tram driver's viewpoint. These observations may assist Swanston Trams in their planning as the drivers are the ones working with the trams on their eight hour shifts every day.

1 Passenger Information Display (PID)

These displays worked very well in all the places I visited, however our traffic delays may cause information to be inaccurate. An example was a way side accident that delayed a tram near Preistfield (the second stop from Wolverhampton) where the PID at the Preistfield stop, showed that the tram was only one minute away for over 15 minutes. I assume that the current technology is unable to update information where trams have been delayed for unspecified times such as a traffic accident or a tram becoming defective etc.

2 Doors

Front & back doors on the new trams are essential because of the problem with passengers staying close to the centre doors restricting the total number of passengers who can board trams during busy periods. Passengers feel they may become trapped if they move to the end of the tram during heavy loading, an example is our "Z1" & "Z2" class trams where passengers refuse to move to the back of the tram even when requested. It was for this reason that the "Z3" class were built with doors on both sides at each end. However due to costs the "A" and "B" class trams were not. I understand that a rear door on the Combino's may be ruled out due to costs, but I feel it should be investigated even at this late stage.

3 Disabled Access

Trams for the access of disabled passengers while desirable should not be advertised as available until there are sufficient new trams for a particular route. While in Hannover this was brought home to me when a wheelchair passenger inquired from our driver when a suitable tram with wheelchair access would be along. He had already been waiting for approx. 20 minutes. Our driver inquired with control and was told one would be along in about thirty minutes. The delay to our tram from finding out was three minutes, which resulted in another tram from another route getting in front of us thus delaying our tram, this resulted in me and other passengers missing our connection. (The long delay to the man in the wheelchair of course was also unacceptable). The reason for the lack of wheelchair access trams was due to World Expo 2000 as Routes 6, 14,16 & 18 serving Expo 2000 were using the new trams exclusively thus depriving the other routes of these trams. This means that although we may want to advertise our new trams, as accessible trams, until we can guarantee a Combino at regular intervals, we can not go ahead and declare that a particular route is available to our disabled passengers. When special events require them elsewhere we must advertise the fact so as not to inconvenience our disabled passengers. Remember it is not just wheelchair passengers, it can be a whole range of disabilities that may prevent a passenger from boarding a "W", "Z" or "B" class tram.

4 Combino 'Next Stop' Light

The 'next stop' light was hard to see during daylight and impossible with direct sunlight, OK at night. Needs to either repositioned or recessed in order to shade the light. This problem was pointed out by a driver in Freiburg.

5 Combino Traction / Brake Controller

Traction / Brake controller (TBC) requires to be low down so that drivers can rest their arm while driving. Freiburg has retrofitted all of their Combino's with the new low controller. Birmingham's new trams (not Combino's) have already had two cases of RSI after only 15 months of operation due to the arm requiring to be in a high position to operate the Traction / Brake controller and having to hold down the Drivers Safety Device (DSD), on top of the TBC, at all time while moving.

6 'Door Closing' Chimes

Passengers have complained in both Potsdam and Freiburg regarding the loud chimes that ring indicating the door closing. With the additional stops per kilometer in Melbourne I can visualise numerous complaints from our passengers if the chimes are as loud as in Potsdam and Freiburg. After an eight hour shift the drivers would also be very much affected. I found the noise most irritating even on short trips.

7 Fold-down Seats

Fold down seats in the area reserved for wheelchairs etc. had to be removed in Potsdam due to passengers refusing to get up when a wheelchair, pram, shopping trolley etc. entered the tram.

8 Seating

Because of the longer trip times on Melbourne routes consideration should be made for two /two seating rather than two/one seating in the new trams.

9 Vandalism

a) Scratching of Windows

Due to scratching of windows (very bad in Potsdam but not seen in Freiburg) I was told while in Germany of a development of a special plastic covering that when scratched sets off an alarm at the window concerned thus focusing all passengers and driver to that window. If perfected this is expected to reduce scratching of windows by up to 98%.

b) Surveillance Cameras

Due to vandalism it is essential that surveillance cameras are positioned to cover all of the tram not just part of the tram. Potsdam regrets not having fitted them, while Freiburg so far has not needed them, due to the good behavior of their passengers even for football games.

c) External Surveillance Cameras

If possible have external video surveillance to assist in reducing graffiti attacks and assisting in the prosecution of drivers passing stationary trams and overtaking trams on the wrong side.

10 Naming of New Trams

In Potsdam all Combinos are named after cities with Combinos thus 408 is named 'Melbourne'. This may be an idea for Swanston Trams to adopt and name our new trams after other cities with tramway systems. In Potsdam, a photo and brief history of that City are placed in the front of each tram.

11 Video Screens

Potsdam have single ended Combino trams, while Freiburg are double ended. Potsdam has the video screens while Freiburg does not. The video screens were at regular intervals along the trams and displayed the next stop, advertisements together with today's and tomorrow's weather forecasts (which as a tourist I found very informative). Although these video screens will add to the cost of the tram initially, I would envisage that advertising revenue would pay for them over a period.

12 Spare Trams after Delivery of Combino Contract

While I was in Dusseldorf 38 trams all of one class were withdrawn from service due to constant derailment of the class. The trams were not to be returned to service until the fault was found. As we are suffering from the present withdrawal of the "W" class trams, may I suggest that after the delivery of the full compliment of Combinos that consideration be made of keeping approximately 25 of our best "Z1" & "Z2" class trams in storage for big events and for replacement of trams requiring temporary removal from service. Some of these trams could be stored at National Bus North Fitzroy Depot where some space currently exists and with continual access to our system via Yarra's Route 96 East Brunswick line.

Combino's on Route 69 - A Suggestion

- Finally I would like to suggest that consideration be given to operating Combino's on Route 69 for the following reasons:-
 - a) If the five section Combino was used, the service could be reduced to an eight minute service during school days. This would reduce the number of trams required for the service without the worry of overcrowding. These trams could be linked on to route 16 after 1600 hours thus providing additional capacity on St. Kilda Road during the PM peak.
 - b) With the security cameras onboard, there should be a reduction in vandalism that this route experiences thus reducing the cost of operating this route.
 - c) The addition of Combino's at Malvern for the 69 route, would assist, in allowing, Malvern Depot to operate higher capacity tramcars for special events, such as the Grand Prix etc.

In addition to working in Birmingham I had the privilege of inspecting the following tramway systems in the following order, Sheffield, Manchester, London (including a meeting with senior management and a full depot visit, with a full-system inspection with the Senior Driving Instructor), Brussels, Dusseldorf (including depot visit), Hannover (including a depot visit). Potsdam (including a meeting with a senior manager and visits to two depots with detailed inspection of two Combino trams plus an inspection of a new depot under construction), Freiburg (including a meeting with a senior manager and a full depot visit with a senior driver and Engineer inspecting their Combino's), Basel, Karlsruhe and Trossingen.

Unfortunately, while going through the security barrier at Frankfurt Airport, my wallet and camera were stolen. As a result the business cards of the people who kindly helped me during my eight weeks away are now lost forever.

I would appreciate being able to further discuss with you or other management details of this report.

Hugh Waldron
Senior Driver, Malvern Depot.

2nd October 2000