

THE FOOTSCRAY TRAMWAY TRUST

1917 - 1920

About 1885, when the Melbourne Cable tramway network was being introduced, there was a plan to link Footscray with Melbourne by a cable along a road to be constructed across the swamplands, but history records that the scheme never progressed beyond the talking stage.

The first recorded "permanent" street transport commenced in 1914 when four motor buses started running between Footscray and Yarraville.

The Footscray City Council soon took steps to follow the example of several eastern and northern suburbs by applying to Parliament for an Act to constitute the Footscray Tramway Trust.

This was duly passed on 30th December, 1915 and Councillors Johnson, Shilchbeer and Pearce were appointed as members of the Trust, with Mr. Johnson as Chairman.

The Governor, by an order in council dated 2nd October, 1916, authorised the construction of the following routes:-

- (1) Ballarat Road
- (2) Russell Street
- (3) Williamstown Road
- (4) Hyde Street
- (5) A tramway commencing at the intersection of Nicholson Street and Irving Street and proceeding northerly along Nicholson Street to the new bridge over the Maribyrnong River.

This last proposal is not shown on a plan dated 1917 and possibly never developed to the stage where working drawings were made.

The Trust set about its task with plenty of energy and enthusiasm, judging by the amount of meetings that were held, and soon called tenders for most of the required contracts.

It appears wartime conditions hampered progress and not a great deal was done before the expiration of the two year period allowed for the completion of the undertaking as required by the Act.

Meanwhile, Parliament finally decided to set up one authority to operate all the various tramway systems in Melbourne and surrounding suburbs; hence the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board came into being.

On 2nd February, 1920, the Footscray Tramways Trust ceased to exist and its undertakings were invested in the M&MTB. The Board continued the Trust's work, but found that it was hampered by the late Trust not having finalised arrangements for a supply of electricity.

The FTT had ordered seven single truck, open combination tramcars with bodies built by Messrs. Duncan and Fraser of Adelaide, and these cars were delivered and temporarily placed in service on the former Hawthorn Tramways Trust's route in August and September, 1920.

The transformers and switch gear eventually left England after a series of delays and were installed in August, 1921. The seven trams which had received numbers 33 - 39 in the "Hawthorn" system, were transferred to Footscray, and after sub-station and car trials had been successfully completed, the system was officially opened on Tuesday, 6th September, 1921.

The system quickly settled down to provide the area with a badly needed transport service. The staff at the depot consisted of a manager and 40 men of various classifications.

Six of the seven trams were used in traffic and provided a ten minute service at peak periods, and at twenty minutes off-peak. The first rolling stock exchange took place between September, 1923 and February, 1924. The seven tramcars which had inaugurated the service, were transferred to Essendon Depot where they received numbers 183 - 189 and designated the M class when the Board consolidated the numbering of all electric tramcars. Eight of the original P&MTT cars were substituted. These were 5, 6, 9, 11, 15, 18, 19 and 20. By about the same time, numbers 1 - 4, 7 and 14 were also operating at Footscray, making fourteen trams of the A class on the system.

Six trams of the X1 class were road freighted from the isolated main system. They were single truck, four door "safety" cars built by the M&MTB in 1926 and numbered 461 - 456. When these cars arrived, numbers 2, 4, 18 and 20 were scrapped. Four further X1 class trams subsequently received numbers 459, 460, 467 and 468. These had been built in 1927-28.

Five of the X2 class trams were transferred to Footscray in August and September, three months after they were commissioned. Accordingly, more A class trams were scrapped. 11 and 14 were scrapped in 1929 and 3, 7, 15 and 19 during 1930. The five new "safety" trams were 674, 676 - 679. In May, 1934, 674 was renumbered 680.

The War Years

The Footscray Tramways served industrial suburbs and were soon carrying additional loading generated by factories involved in the war effort.

The fifteen trams operated the 4.47 miles which comprised the three routes more or less unaltered until 1941 when it was decided to build a double track along Gordon Street for a distance of 3/4 of a mile. The official opening date is given as 9th November.

Additional rolling stock was required to meet the increasing traffic and work the Gordon Street line which served a number of munitions factories. Six S class; 154, 155, 157, 158, 165 and 166 arrived in September, 1941 and two more, 168 and 169 in January, 1942. With the addition of these eight large single truck combination cars, there were 23 trams at the depot and storage space was critical. The 23rd tram actually touched the footpath line over night.

On 14th July, 1943, tram 459 possibly made tramway history - it collided with an army truck! It was outward bound on the Russell Street route at Geelong Road. 459 was badly damaged and had to be sent to Preston Workshops for repairs. X2 675 was transferred from Glenhuntly Depot so that Footscray would still have a full compliment of cars.

Many points of the Footscray routes were known to have tight clearances for bogie tramcars. So it was decided to have a bogie tram run over all lines. W5 800 was transferred from Preston Workshops on 16th December, 1953 and tested the next day. It was then stored at the Depot returning to Preston on 5th May, 1954 via the new connecting line from the main system.

The Declining Years

Passengers were steadily declining in numbers by the late 1950's and peak period headways were reduced to ten minutes with off-peak at 12 to 15 minutes.

About twelve trams were kept at the Depot but only eight were required for traffic at any one time.

On 5th November, 1959, one man buses commenced running the three local routes and the cross-suburban service to Moonee Ponds on Sundays. This operation was extended to Saturday afternoons and evenings on 6th February, 1960.

Thus, on 3rd March, 1962, the Footscray local tramways passed into history after a life of forty years and six months. Not a great deal survives - a mile of track, a converted depot, an instruction car; 676, and two museum cars; 680 and 467, owned and operated by the Tramway Museum Society of Victoria Ltd.