

**Submission  
No 144**

**INQUIRY INTO GOVERNMENT'S MANAGEMENT OF THE  
POWERHOUSE MUSEUM AND OTHER MUSEUMS AND  
CULTURAL PROJECTS IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

**Organisation:** Sydney Tramway Museum

**Date Received:** 17 June 2020

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## SAVE THE POWERHOUSE MUSEUM

I am writing to express my strong objection to the State Government's plan to dismantle and remove the history of transport exhibitions at the Powerhouse Museum in Ultimo.

The STM was established in 1950 by a band of enthusiastic volunteers to preserve and record for the public's enjoyment the history of Sydney's extensive tramway system for the years between 1861 and 1961, and since 1997, to record the re-introduction of trams to the city with what is now a growing light rail network. The STM has become a Sydney institution, with over a million local, interstate and international visitors having enjoyed its extensive grounds and exhibits at Loftus.

In my lifetime of involvement with the STM since the 1950s, there has always been a very productive working relationship with the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, now popularly known as the Powerhouse Museum. This has included the exchange of museological advice and information and mutual loan of exhibits.

Since the Powerhouse Museum opened in 1988, the STM has recognised the vital and pre-eminent role the Powerhouse plays in presenting the broader history of Sydney's transport and industrial development, chiefly through its superb exhibitions of engineering and transportation and related education programs. The setting of the exhibits in the cavernous halls of the old power house at Ultimo is a wonderful adjunct to these displays and to adjacent Darling Harbour. This setting could hardly be more fitting than in the marvellously preserved interior of the first tramway power house in Sydney, a vital part of the city's urbanisation at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The Powerhouse Museum's exhibits include a c.1900 C Class electric tram, one of those that first operated from the Ultimo Tram Depot in 1899, and a 12 class steam locomotive like those that served the sprawling goods yards in Darling Harbour from the 1880s until the 1970s. There is *no better place* for such historical transport technology than their current location.

Information currently available through the media and on-line indicates that the Museum's proposed new premises at Parramatta will only offer a small fraction of the exhibition space currently occupied at Ultimo for historical technology and transport exhibits and that there are no plans to recreate the extremely popular exhibitions now in the Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo. This amplifies my concern, because it suggests an outcome of not only losing the excellent displays at Ultimo – and the serious risk of damage to many of the large but fragile exhibits – but of not even having a nominal replacement for them. This would represent *an unnecessary and tragic loss to the State's record of its industrial and transport heritage*.

I strongly urge you to reconsider the plan to dismantle the Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo and its current exhibitions, especially those described above. The people of Western Sydney – deserve their own museum, possibly based on the unique colonial and indigenous history of the region. But *not* at the needless loss of the Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo.

Yours sincerely

Howard R Clark OAM  
Chairman