

Report of the 36th Conference of the International Association of Transport and Communications Museums (IATM)

Dresden and Nuremberg, Germany, 15 to 19 June 2009

Delegates from 16 countries assembled in Dresden, Germany in mid June 2009 to attend the 36th Conference and Annual General Meeting of IATM.

The Conference was co-hosted by the Verkehrs Museum Dresden and its Director Dr. Michael Dünnebier - who also serves as our IATM President - and the DB Museum in Nuremberg led by its Director Dr. Juergen Franzke who is also a member of the IATM Board.

Our two colleagues organised a splendid program of presentations, working visits to museums and collections in eastern and southern Germany, excursions for accompanying persons and social events where delegates were able to interact on an informal basis. A separate report on the accompanying persons program is also attached.

The first part of the Conference took place in Dresden, commencing with two days of pre-Conference tours through this beautiful city and other cultural attractions in Saxony.



The Conference got underway in the evening of Sunday, 14 June with a reception and welcoming remarks by our host Dr. Michael Dünnebier. Delegates were able to explore the Verkehrs Museum Dresden at leisure. Many took the time during their tour to visit an exceptional temporary poster exhibition on loan from the London Transport Museum. Michael explained that this arrangement between the two museums was a direct consequence of their membership in IATM.



The Museum has been housed since 1956 in the centrally located and very impressive Johanneum dating from 1586. The building had originally been constructed as the stables for the Elector of Saxony. The Museum features extensive collections of all modes of transport and particularly demonstrates all of the important stages of railway history in Germany and Saxony.



Formal proceedings began on Monday morning with introductory comments by the President during which he thanked all of our sponsors and partners for their contributions followed by a brief address by the Lord Mayor of Dresden, Helma Orosz. Mayor Orosz spoke about the significance of culture and heritage in the life of Dresden and encouraged delegates to take advantage of their days in the city to explore its attractions. Her presence was a clear signal of the significance attached to culture, heritage, informal education and tourism by her administration.

The first part of the morning was then devoted to the two keynote addresses by Kilian Elsasser and Lieselotte Kugler whose papers will be published separately so are not discussed here in depth. Both speakers dealt with the issues of public programming in transport and communications museums, the need to focus on audiences in markets saturated with competing offers, to align offers with audience characteristics and the benefit of looking at paradigm changes as a means of differentiating our museums from their competitors.

Papers in part two of the morning dealt with branding museums (Harry Niemann), how museums can display the science behind the technology artifacts in their exhibitions (Alastair Dodds), how museums which display large artifacts can rejuvenate themselves with the artifacts “in situ” (Stephen Quick), and how museums can create and sustain effective networks using the example of the British Aviation Preservation Council (John King).

Monday afternoon was devoted to a visit to the Militarhistorisches Museum der Bundeswehr in Dresden (Military Museum of the German Army) followed by two separate working tours. The first group went to Dresden Airport. The second group moved to the narrow-gauge railway operating between Radebeul Ost railway station and nearby Moritzburg.

We were welcomed by Lt. Col. Ferdinand Feiherr von Richthofen who briefed us on the radical makeover the century old building is receiving under the direction of the well-known architect Daniel Libeskind. We were then given an extensive tour of the museum's exhibition areas and its extensive warehouse of military artifacts. Lt. Col. Von Richthofen graciously responded to queries about his family background from the aviation members of the group and confirmed that his great-uncle was Manfred von Richthofen, one of the greatest combat airmen of all time.



At Dresden Airport, the first excursion was given excellent presentations on the airport and its history and on the stress test work carried out by the IMA concern on aircraft structures. From there the group visited a most unusual and significant aeronautical artifact, the fuselage of the ill-fated B-152 commercial jet transport which was the high tide mark of the aviation industry in the former GDR. The failure of the design to attract orders led to the cancellation of the program and to the end of indigenous type development.



In an adjacent building the group was shown the EADS program for converting passenger transports into freighters. Several Airbus 300 series aircraft were in the process of having their interiors gutted, windows removed and floors strengthened for further service in this important sector of the global aerospace industry.



Meanwhile, the second group went on to visit the extensive network of narrow gauge railways around Dresden and the steam operation run by the Löbnitzgrundbahn on the Radebeul to Moritzburg line. Here they were joined by the accompanying persons who had enjoyed an afternoon visit to the Moritzburg Castle, originally built as a hunting lodge for the Electors. En route back into Dresden, the group visited the Saxon Narrow Gauge Railway Museum to see its collection.

The day ended at a dinner hosted by the Saxon Economic Association, represented by its president Mr. Bodo Finger and attended by Lord Mayor Orosz and the Prime Minister of the Federal State of Saxony, Stanislaw Tillich. Both Mr. Finger and the Prime Minister addressed us. Mr Finger recounted the major contributions of inventors and engineers from Saxony towards improvements in human mobility. Building on these comments, Prime Minister Tillich spoke of the current range of mobility-related innovations under development in Saxony, the quest to regain its central role in such work within Germany by strategic investments in infrastructure and his hopes for improvements in the integration of Dresden into Europe's fast rail network.



On Tuesday we split into two groups for morning excursions and reconvened at mid-day for an afternoon of presentations, visits and accompanying persons programs at the Saxon Museum of Industry in Chemnitz.

One group spent the morning at the Saxon Railway Museum where the development of the museum was explained in a presentation by Holger Drosdeck. This was followed by a visit to the Chemnitz Tramway Museum and then on to the Saxon Museum of Industry.





The second group visited the Augustusburg Castle in the Ore Mountains. The Electors of Saxony had also built this facility as a hunting lodge but it now houses a magnificent collection of motorcycles and carriages. Both collections are noteworthy. The motorcycles represent the full development of this mode of transport over more than a century and represent all of the famous German marques. Similarly, the carriages include those used by the Saxon Royal family in the 18th and 19th centuries as well as a representative collection of horse-drawn passenger vehicles from the same time period. Situating the carriage collection in the former stables provided a large degree of context for the exhibition.

Our rendezvous at the Saxon Museum of Industry permitted everyone to hear a welcome from Jörg Feldkamp, its Director and three excellent papers on the evolution of the automotive industry in Saxony from its earliest days (Dirk Schmerschneider), the impacts of the recent extension Christchurch, NZ tramway using museum cars and principles (John Radcliffe), and exhibit presentations in an era of modern media (Andreas Kaluza).

The balance of the afternoon was spent exploring the excellent Saxon Museum of Industry, located in a former industrial facility in what had been a busy industrial area suffering from the effects of economic transition. Noteworthy among the Museum's exhibits were working examples of industrial technology from the 19th century as used in Chemnitz during its industrial peak.





The day was capped off by a marvellous dinner cruise along the Elbe on one of the Sächsische Damfschiffahrt paddle steamboats still plying these waters complete with explanatory talk by the company owner Michael Lohnherr. Michael explained the storied history of the steam service along the Elbe since its inception in 1836 and the history of the restoration of the fleet of nine steam powered paddleboats, the oldest dating back to 1879. They are the survivors of a larger fleet but still constitute the largest such fleet in the world. They now carry some 750,000 passengers a year from their historic moorings in central Dresden.

This was a very successful conclusion to the first half of the Conference.



On Wednesday 17 June, participants travelled by bus to historic Nuremberg at which point Dr. Juergen Franzke assumed the role of host as the Director of the DB Museum (the Deutsche Bahn Group Museum).

Following a welcome from Juergen, we went on a guided tour of the splendid DB Museum with its extensive exhibitions on the full development of railway history and technology in Germany. In addition to the classic treatment of the subject through traditional exhibitions, we were also invited to enjoy a short ride on the Museum's reproduction of the first locomotive built in Germany, the "Adler" in the Museum's switching yard. It was an experience not to be missed and it provided a taste of what was involved in the operation of early steam locomotives. Fortunately the weather cooperated magnificently especially as there was no shelter from the elements for passengers or crew.



Those games over, we went on a fascinating walking tour through the medieval city, starting at its highest point, the Nürnberger Burg and then descending from the fortress, which was never taken by storm into the town that grew up around it. Much of the area had, of course been severely damaged by 1945 and was reconstructed in its “ante bellum” form using whatever historical and visual records existed. After a brief respite, we capped the evening with a memorable IATM Annual Dinner taking the form of a “Fränkisches Buffet” featuring Franconian specialities at the DB Museum.



Thursday was given over to a daylong visit to Munich to visit the new Verkehrszentrum of the Deutsches Museum with its focus on transport and mobility followed by separate tours to either the main Deutsches Museum site on the Museum Sinsel or the new BMW Museum. The ICE train service delivered us from Nuremberg to Munich in an hour and many in the group were thrilled to see that our coach transport supplied was that also used by the Bayern Munich Football Club!

Once at the Verkehrszentrum, we were greeted by Sylvia Hladky who spoke to us about the concept for the facility and Dr. Bettina Gundler who described the transportation collections of the Deutsches Museum. A guided tour through the magnificent collection on display completed the morning.





Those wishing to see the new BMW Museum went off for a private visit and tour while the rest of the group made for the main facility of the Deutsches Museum in central Munich. This is a huge institution that merits several visits over a period of time. It is easy to develop museum fatigue by trying to see it all at once. Suffice it to say, a gallant attempt was made to see just the aviation, maritime and communications departments at the end of which strong sustenance and sugar in the form of pastries was required to revive most people. It is a truly impressive Museum richly deserving its reputation as one of the greatest in the world.



The trip back to Nuremberg on the ICE train was notable in that for most people it was the fastest they had ever travelled on the surface of the Earth. At times, based on electronic read-outs in each passenger car, our speed exceeded 300 km per hour. For those whose country's rail systems are less sophisticated it was a moment to enjoy – and perhaps to envy.



Such speed prepared us for the evening's main event – a memorable dinner of traditional Nuremberg Bratwurst at the notable “Bratwurst Röslein” in the city centre. Juergen emerged as an authority on this Nuremberg delicacy, even having written a book on the subject. He was obviously well known to the proprietor who made sure we were well looked after.

Friday morning began with the Annual General Meeting of IATM, the formal results of which will be published separately. Suffice it to say, the meeting was well attended and featured some positive suggestions on how the work of the Association could be furthered.

Those formalities over, we moved on to two sets of presentations. The first included papers on the new permanent exhibition for the Nuremberg Communication Museum, co-located with the DB Museum (Stefan Kley), an asset management strategy for the development of a Rail heritage Centre in New South Wales, Australia (Sarah Jane Brazil) and an examination of the way in which aviation changed the pattern of holidays when cheaper transportation to southern climes became available (Karl Lorentz Kleve).

The second group of papers focussed on the concepts, planning and experiences to date of the three new company automotive museums in southern Germany, those of BMW which was visited in Munich (Ralf Rodepeter), Porsche (Achim Stejskal) and Mercedes (Stefan Glaser), both of which were visited by those taking the post Conference tour.

Juergen brought proceedings to a close with the introduction of the Lord Mayor of Nuremberg Ulrich Maly who spoke passionately and convincingly not only about the significance of science and technology in the continued development of the city but also the need to respect its past. It was a fitting note on which to finish the Conference.

Both Michael and Juergen were warmly congratulated for the quality of the program they had put together and the fine logistics arrangements made to ensure it all happened as planned. As is normally the case, delegates were very appreciative of the hospitality they had been shown by the staff of the host museums and all those they had visited as part of the study tours.

Those attending agreed that the Conference had improved their knowledge of the management of museums and that they had made or renewed many valuable contacts. Everyone enjoyed the social occasions and Victoria Terry offered thanks on behalf of those who participated in the program for accompanying persons. After two years of serious planning and a week of non-stop activity it was all over for most.

A hard core of travellers spent Friday afternoon en route by rail to Stuttgart and on Saturday morning reconvened for a remarkable day at two fabulous automobile museums. First, however, we enjoyed a walking tour through central Stuttgart that prepared us for what was to come. Our first stop was the very new dramatic Porsche Museum with its magnificent collection of vehicles dating back to the start of Ferdinand Porsche's career. This was a place to worship style, design, grace, power, and the sheer exhilaration of speed and joie de vivre. It was particularly notable not only for the family groups by the score but also for the groups of teen aged boys taking photographs of every small detail of the cars on display and the young adult couples contemplating what might be. Open for only half a year when we visited, it was a sheer delight.



And then on to the Mercedes Museum. What a treat. What an amazing place. Again, we experienced crowds of people of all ages, an absolutely incomparable collection from all facets of this storied company's past, all set in a beautiful stylish building with its innovative intersecting double helix interior. Explored from top to bottom, one side of the helix tells a chronological story, the other a thematic one. This museum should be on everyone's "go to" list.



On Sunday the tour continued to the popular Auto and Technik Museum Sinsheim. This provides a fascinating museum experience with collections of automobiles dating back to 1896, aircraft, locomotives, agricultural machinery and mechanical entertainment devices from the industrial age plus armoured fighting vehicles from the Cold War. There are many interactive devices, the two massive exhibition halls are alive with sound, and it is possible to visit the interiors of many of the aircraft on display on pylons. The example of a Concorde adjacent to a Soviet Tu-144 supersonic transport makes for an indelible impression, as does an examination of both of their cockpits and interiors. Exhibitions in the traditional sense of the word are not a feature of this institution. But a display of technology artifacts in all of their glory is. Accepting it for what it is, I had a thoroughly enjoyable time on my visit.



This concludes the account of the 2009 IATM Conference. The next, in 2011, will take place in London, hosted by Sam Mullins and the newly re-opened London Transport Museum in Covent Garden. Needless to say, we look forward to seeing you there.

Christopher Terry
Ottawa