

Wrexham Trams Restoration Options Consultation - Executive Summary

The History of the Wrexham Trams

Wrexham's first tramroad opened in 1876, as an interurban horse-drawn tramroad running between the New Inn in Johnstown and Wrexham town centre. It was later converted into a 3' 6" - gauge electric tramway, and on the 4th of April 1903 ten cars manufactured by Brush Electric Traction began their service.

However, by 1927 the tramcars were reaching the end of their useful lives and were replaced by motor buses. Due to their obsolescent form and probable mechanical condition they would not have been attractive to other tramway operators, and it is therefore likely that they were sold to members of the general public.

Of the ten cars, five are known to have been used as holiday accommodation, one as a summerhouse, one as a Girl Guide hut, and one as a watchman's hut at a closed colliery. It is possible that the two cars now in the museum's collection were used as holiday accommodation prior to being used as ground maintenance huts until 1970, when the cars were purchased by Mr. Strange. They were donated to Wrexham Museum in 2005, and have been unrestored and stored in the open air since then.

A Summary of Heritage Values

Value	Attributes
Evidential	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Evidence of early 20th century transport technology.• Evidence of mid-20th century holiday usage• Reveals evidence of early tram car construction.
Historic Value	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Connection with the growth of Wrexham• Demonstrates through early transport the past character of the town.• Connection with the 20th century patterns of recreation, especially cheap holidays.
Aesthetic Value	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Artefact displaying a vision of the past social history of the town.• Romantic view of bygone transport can be seen as an historical piece of art.
Communal Value	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Connections to Wrexham AFC• Connections to Wrexham Townsfolk• Cultural significance of a society at a particular point in time.• Part of the early public transport system of Wrexham

Condition Survey

The trams are stored externally on the Bersham Colliery site, and are deteriorating rapidly due to both the effects of exposure to the weather and of vandalism.

Whilst previously one car was described as being in better condition than the other, both cars are now in an equally poor condition. Currently only the lower saloons remain, and no trace was found of either the upper deck or chassis. Each car consists of a floor unit, two sides, two ends and a roof.

The primary structure is in reasonable condition, and it is likely that sufficient historic timber could be reclaimed from the two bodies to construct the frame of a static exhibit, together with some of the interior and exterior panelling.

One of the tramcars retains a significant amount of the internal timberwork. This shows that the sides were panelled with timber below the seat level and covered by oilcloth-covered timber laths above this level. It is probable that the interior was originally finished in mahogany. The second tramcar appears to retain traces of a residential conversion, including wallpaper.

Only one of the original main windows has survived: these were clear and plain. The clerestory windows were significantly more ornate, and examples of both coloured and patterned glass survive, although the latter may postdate the conversion into a holiday cottage. Unfortunately, these have suffered very badly from vandalism in the past few years, and almost all these historic windows have now been damaged beyond repair.

Both tram cars have reached the stage where the rate of deterioration will now start to increase rapidly due to the loss of paint and increased exposure to the elements. Their current situation is unlikely to last for more than a few years.

Options for Long Term Preservation

	Option	Advantages	Disadvantages
1	Do Nothing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lowest cost to Wrexham ratepayer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Museum Services breach of responsibility Loss of historic tram car Loss of public confidence in service Remains would need to be disposed of
2	Donate Tram Car to specialist museum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lowest cost to Wrexham ratepayer The tram would be "professionally restored" potentially to running condition. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loss of historic tram car to Wrexham Loss of much significant historic fabric. Tram never be restored
3	Consolidate and conserve existing structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medium to low cost Maximum amount of historic material would be retained No conjectural reconstruction would be required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only viable if suitable accommodation is available Such an approach may be perceived as disappointing by the public May not form a suitable key artefact around which future expansion or finding could be built
4	Cosmetically restore to original appearance as an operating tram for interior static display	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medium Cost Allows retention of majority of historic material Allows public to appreciate historic form and understand significance of artefact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some conjectural reconstruction required Possible public dissatisfaction that artefact has been "stuffed" rather than restored to running condition Only viable if publicly accessible interior accommodation is available

	Option	Advantages	Disadvantages
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimal conjectural reconstruction required which can be based on historic photographs Could form centerpiece of new gallery or museum expansion Great public appreciation of project Operating electrical system and chassis is not required Innovative solutions to reinstated elements which do not need to be built from traditional materials are possible Could potentially be carried out using voluntary labour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loss of authenticity
5	Cosmetically restore to original appearance as an operating tram, as an interactive experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As above, plus greater public interaction with artefact 	As above, but it may not be possible to make it fully assessable
6	Cosmetically restore either as an operating tram or as a holiday cottage, and use either as seating for the café, or display within the shop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As above 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As above, but additional fittings such as table or shop display fittings would compromise authenticity of interior.
7	Cosmetically restore as a holiday cottage for display	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low cost Show evolution of street tram in sustainable way. May be considered to exhibit greatest heritage value of artefact Could potentially be an exterior display Opportunity to exhibit different aspects of social history to those which would surround those of a working tramcar. Potential for interactive displays and public access to artefact Much less conjectural reconstruction required Operating electrical system and chassis is not required No chassis required Potential for fully inclusive level access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fragmentary evidence that these trams were ever used for this purpose, although others undoubtedly were Would not attract the same level of public engagement from the national rail enthusiast sector Funding may be more difficult to find Local engagement may not elicit the same level of enthusiasm. Project does not have the same level of Welsh national importance
8	Restore to running condition in Wrexham	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maximum public engagement Usable asset Able to generate income Restoration of historic asset for future generations to enjoy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highest cost Most complex intervention Much greater loss of historic fabric Significant additional infrastructure required Entirely new chassis and electrical equipment required High running and maintenance costs The majority of high value components would need to be bought in from outside Wrexham Specialist maintenance would need to be provided on a continuing basis Most restoration work would need to be carried out by professional craftsmen with minimal opportunity for volunteer engagement

	Option	Advantages	Disadvantages
9	Restore to running condition and donate to another museum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximum public engagement • Usable asset • Able to generate income 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highest cost • Most complex intervention • Much greater loss of historic fabric • Entirely new chassis and electrical equipment required • High running and maintenance costs • The majority of high value components would need to be bought in from outside Wrexham • Specialist maintenance would need to be provided on a continuing basis • Artefact would leave Wales
10	Restore as a horse tram	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High levels of public engagement • Usable asset • Able to generate income • Simpler chassis than would be required than by motorized tram 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questionable historical authenticity • High cost • medium complex intervention • Much greater loss of historic fabric than static display • Entirely new chassis • Horses would need to be provided • High running and maintenance costs • The majority of high value components would need to be bought in from outside Wrexham • Specialist maintenance would need to be provided on a continuing basis
11	Restore as a holiday cottage for rental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medium to low cost • Potential income possible • Continuation of well-established historic use • High levels of public engagement • May be considered to exhibit greatest heritage value of artefact • Much less conjectural reconstruction required • Operating electrical system and chassis is not required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower level of public engagement than would be possible if the artefact were to be preserved as a tram • Suitable site would need to be found, ideally in open countryside • Regular on-going management would be required

Possible Means of Delivery

	Option	Advantages	Disadvantages
1	Minimal conservation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lowest cost • Minimum staff time required • Maximum retention of historic fabric • Artefact preserved for future conservation or restoration • Could be carried out by volunteers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artefact may not be suitable for display without extensive interpretation • Difficult to engage public enthusiasm • More difficult to justify expense • Fundraising more difficult • Artefact would still need to be stored within a controlled environment.
2	Professional restoration by external body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum risk • Minimum management by Wrexham Museum staff • External body to provide all relevant expertise and facilities • Maximises the possibility of a high-quality restoration • Attractive option for national funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highest cost • Maximum loss of historic material • Little control of key decisions • No local engagement • No benefit to local community or economy • More difficult to find local funding • Difficult to link with wider public engagement activities

	Option	Advantages	Disadvantages
3	Conservation or Restoration by Volunteers in a Friends Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medium cost • Create strong local community around tram • Museum retains overall control of project and individual decisions • Maximises funding opportunities • High levels of community engagement overall • Easy to link with wider public engagement activities • Volunteers could aid in fundraising • May be easier to attract grants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires a motivated cadre of volunteers • High level of management required by museum staff • Museum would need to provide facilities • Significant risk that project would not be completed • Possible conflict between volunteers and museum <p>Museum and volunteers have different aspirations for tram</p>
4	Conservation or restoration by Not-for-Profit Organization (NFPO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medium cost • Create strong local community around tram • Museum retains overall control of project and individual decisions • Maximises funding opportunities • High levels of community engagement overall • Easy to link with wider public engagement activities • Minimal management by museum staff • Can be used as a training vehicle for hard to reach groups • Easier to pay staff so not so dependent on volunteer ethos and hence widen the pool from which volunteers may be drawn • Could provide significant social benefits to wider community • Potential to create community organisation which can continue after tram has been restored 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires a motivated cadre of staff of the NFPO • High level of management required by museum staff • Museum may need to provide facilities • Significant risk that project would not be completed • Possible conflict between NFPO and museum • Museum and NFPO have different aspirations for tram

Display Options

	Option	Advantages	Disadvantages
1	Display within current museum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Controlled environment to preserve artefact • Maximum public access • Could form the main exhibit in a wider display of 20th century social history • Tram could provide seating space for interactive displays, cinema or café 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artefact is large and would occupy a significant amount of floorspace within museum • Artefact is difficult to move and would make surrounding space less flexible • Artefact is difficult to house within existing historic structure without altering that structure. • Artefact would need to be taken apart in order to be installed within the museum.
2	External display at current museum site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low cost • Could still form part of a major display • Could maximize use of exterior space at museum • Could form interactive display • Maximum public access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artefact would require regular maintenance to prevent further deterioration • Lack of available space to exterior of museum
3	Display within new extension to current museum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extension could be designed around tram • Controlled environment to preserve artefact • Maximum public access • Could form the main exhibit in a wider display of 20th century social history • Tram could provide seating space for interactive displays, cinema or café • Both trams could be exhibited 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artefact is large and would occupy a significant amount of floorspace within museum • Artefact is difficult to move and would make surrounding space less flexible • Artefact may be difficult to remove from extension. • The scope for extending the museum is limited.

	Option	Advantages	Disadvantages
4	Display within Bersham Colliery Grounds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low cost • It would be relatively easy to construct a completely new building specifically to house the tram • Good access • Tram could form part of a wider display • Natural synergy between existing artefacts and tram • Potential to host large public engagement events, such as open days etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site not open to the public on a daily basis • Site outside of Wrexham centre, dedicated building would need to be constructed.
5	Display on a third-party site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lowest cost • No additional staff time required • External body responsible for future maintenance • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of historic tram car to Wrexham, and possibly Wales • Loss of public confidence in service • Loss of control of quality of maintenance • Tram may be allowed to deteriorate or be kept in unsuitable conditions.
6	Retain in museum store	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lowest cost • No additional staff time required • May be kept in controlled conditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trams would occupy a significant amount of space • No public access • Limited availability of archive storage for future artifacts to be brought into the museum's collection.