

Suggested Guidelines for Liquidation Management of Railway Museum Collection(s) Canadian Council for Railway Heritage

Perhaps the greatest challenge facing the railway heritage preservation movement in the 21st Century is making railway heritage and heritage preservation relevant to a broad public in the “aerospace and Internet age”. As time passes, and interest and commitment declines, preservation group memberships will likely decrease in size for various reasons (but particularly “Baby Boomers” reaching the end of their post-retirement “volunteer years”). As a result, some museums or preservation societies are inevitably going to fail or seek a voluntary winding-up of their activities and orderly dispersal of their collection(s). The following is intended to provide a set of guidelines for Members of the Canadian Council for Railway Heritage to manage the dispersal of their collection(s) in the event of organizational failure (e.g., receivership) or voluntary winding-up and liquidation.

As a matter of good governance practice and collection planning, a Member’s Board of Directors might include, as an integral part of its Collection Policy and Plan, a “contingency provision” which specifically addresses, designates and directs specific disposition objectives for individual pieces of equipment or artifacts (collectively “objects”) where an object (1) is considered to be “of outstanding significance and national importance to Canada”, and thus qualifies for certification (or has been certified) as Canadian Cultural Property, (2) has been designated or could be critical as a designated component of a Decentralized “N” National Railway Heritage Collection, (3a) would be integral either to an alternate preservation group’s collection(s) policy and plan or (b) complementary to an alternate group’s existing collection, or (4) is perhaps the final survivor of its type or kind.

In the event of a collection’s pending liquidation, a review of the contingency provision would be the first step and timely contact made with proposed recipients. Given the passage of time, the existing disposition directive(s) therein may no longer be valid or applicable to the proposed alternate collection or recipient. (Indeed, THAT recipient may have previously failed or wound-up!) Regardless, it is unlikely that the contingency provision will be inclusive of all objects in the Collection. For that reason, following an assessment of the condition and significance of the remaining objects not included in the foregoing, and upon further consideration of which other collections the objects might complement, it is suggested that the following steps might be taken:

1. Where an object is believed to be significant and complementary, synergistic or symbiotic to another museum’s or preservation society’s collection or individual objects, contact be made with the subject group for its timely consideration, assessment and response regarding suitability, desirability and interest in receipt of the individual object(s) identified;
2. Where a commitment hasn’t been made for an object from the foregoing initiative(s) within the time specified, invitations will be issued for requests and proposals from other Canadian museums and railway heritage interests where remaining individual objects are or may be both compatible with the institutions’ respective collections policies and critical to their collection plans;

3. Where objects remain unclaimed or unallocated, invitations will be issued for requests and proposals from other Canadian museums and railway heritage interests which wish to acquire and are prepared to responsibly preserve remaining collection pieces or artifacts, whether or not the objects are compatible with their respective collection policies or appropriate to their collection plan(s);
4. After all formal preservation interests' objectives and requests have been considered, a broadly-advertised public auction will be organized for disposal of the remaining objects, and if any objects still remain;
5. Public tenders will be called for disposal by scrapping of the remaining objects.

Approved, May 1, 2004