In a show of confidence in the Territory’s economic future, Hong Kong-headquartered, Swire Shipping, today docked their first ship at the East Arm Wharf on their Darwin-Singapore shuttle service.

The vessel, which left Singapore on the 1st November, is a multi-purpose, twin-deck vessel (6,025 deadweight tonnes) with its own heavy lift cranes to handle container, breakbulk and project cargo. The ship has a capacity to carry 415 containers.

Chief Minister Clare Martin, who today officially named the vessel The NT Express, said that the company is the first shipping operator to set-up operations based on regional shipping opportunities and an expected increase in cargo from the new AustralAsia rail link.

"The new railway has firmly established Darwin as Australia’s gateway to Asia and companies, such as Swire, are now building transport links to capitalise on the economic benefits," she said.

"Swire Shipping believe that importers and exporters, currently using southern ports like Adelaide, will now have an alternative route to ship via the new rail line and then sail to and from Darwin.

"As of January 04 - when the freight train become operational – significant transit time savings from Singapore to Adelaide will be offered."

The 2,979km between Adelaide and Darwin takes 43 hours by rail with Swire’s new service then taking a further seven days to Singapore, via Dili in East Timor.

Today’s first arrival of The NT Express will deliver a mixture of containers plus breakbulk cargo and other project cargo for the oil & gas industry.

When it leaves it will be loading project cargo and export containers destined for global markets.

Swires are discussing opportunities with potential exporters in South Australia and will further discussions this week. They will join Ms Martin at Friday’s Exporters Club Lunch in Adelaide.

Ms Martin, who met with the company during her investment tour to Sydney, welcomed today’s arrival describing it as recognition of the Territory’s potential and that of the $1.3 billion rail link.

"To date Swire Shipping have used another carrier for its Singapore-Darwin shipments," she said.

The company already runs a fortnightly service between Australia’s East Coast and Singapore.