In a major boost for the NT tourism industry - and for economic development in Central Australia - the Martin Government today announced that approximately $38 million dollars would be spent over the next three years sealing and upgrading the Mereenie and West MacDonnell Loop roads.

Chief Minister and Tourism Minister, Clare Martin, described the Budget announcement as a substantial investment and essential to the continued development of the tourism industry in the Territory.

“These roads take in some of the Territory’s most scenic country and, by upgrading them to a sealed standard, more tourists will visit and enjoy this region and without needing a 4-wheel drive,” she said.

“That greater tourism capacity will allow the development of new tourism opportunities and stimulate investment in infrastructure to grow tourism related businesses.”

The upgrade will involve completing the seal of Namatjira Drive through the West MacDonnell and sealing from Hermannsburg through to Kings Canyon along Larapinta Drive.

Ms Martin said that approximately $10 million has been allocated to the project in the 2004/05 budget which will seal approximately 60 kilometres of these roads, starting with the Morris Pass stretch.

“These roads take in currently underdeveloped tourism areas such as Gosses Bluff (Tnorala, a major comet site with huge tourism potential) the West MacDonnell Ranges (particularly around Glen Helen).

and the King’s Canyon resort in the beautiful Watarrka National Park.

“The upgrade will facilitate increased visitation to a number of tourist attractions along this route, which will be promoted as a major Territory Tourism Drive.”

Ms Martin said Government previously planned to undertake the sealing work over 10 years. She thanked the Central Land Council and traditional land owners for their support of the project.

“The new roads will inject millions of dollars into the economy and drive economic development by creating jobs and business opportunities including opportunities for communities in the region,” she said.

“It will also help reduce the number of accidents and open up access to those remote communities.
“We recently increased the tourism budget by $27.5 million - today we are backing this up with improved tourism infrastructure to create another truly great attraction for Central Australia and the Territory.”

The Chief Minister said that the 2004/05 budget has a number of important road funding announcements.