The Ghan will transport up to 20,000 passengers to Darwin annually stopping in Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, and Katherine, Chief Minister Clare Martin said today.

“Ten-of-thousands of tourists will make their way through the Territory from Adelaide - experiencing some of the best we have to offer - finishing in our capital city,” she said.

“With The Ghan passenger train accommodating up to 500 people each way, this means thousands more tourists will soon be making their way to the NT.

“This will be a tremendous boost for the local tourism industry and help its recovery after September 11, Bali Bombings, SARS and the collapse of Ansett.”

Ms Martin said that many thousands of tourists would also fly into Darwin and Alice Springs annually to catch The Ghan.

“This will provide an important boost in numbers for international and domestic flights to and from Darwin and Alice Springs and will result in more people visiting the Territory’s tourist spots,” she said.

Passengers heading either way on The Ghan will spend time in Territory hotels, travelling, dining out, shopping and experiencing all that is on offer in the Territory.

“The influx of passengers on The Ghan - and the world-wide media attention created by hundreds of media invited by Great Southern Railway - will focus a huge amount of attention on the NT.

“The Northern Territory Tourist Commission will also hold a number of events for the visiting media to highlight the many wonders that the Territory holds.”

Ms Martin said that The Ghan would attract many tourists to the Territory that would otherwise have not have come to this part of the world.

“I would like to congratulate Great Southern Railway for their outstanding success in selling more that $15 million worth of tickets before the first train had even left the station.

“The Territory Government has shown its strong support for this passenger service spending almost $8 million in building or upgrading passenger terminals in the Territory’s major centres.”