Territory tourism in 2004 is set to receive an unexpected and significant boost with ticket sales on The Ghan continuing to surpass all expectations Chief Minister, Clare Martin, said today.

Great Southern Railway (GSR) today announced that ticket sales for The Ghan had already passed the $15 million mark in advance bookings.

"The massive response to The Ghan is very exciting for the company, the NT tourism industry and many other local businesses," Ms Martin said.

"Great Southern Rail must be congratulated on their marketing efforts with the Territory being the major benefactor from their success."

Ms Martin said that while the tickets sales were impressive the physical size of The Ghan was also attracting attention.

"At more than a kilometre in length The Ghan is the longest passenger train in Australian history and will add an exciting new transcontinental aspect to Territory and Australian tourism.

"It will deliver approximately 500 passengers a week to Darwin and Adelaide, through the Territory, many of whom will disembark at Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and Katherine.

"This will provide an important economic boost to local business and will help create jobs and lift the tourism industry.

"After a number of tough years, The Ghan will provide a timely boost to the economy and tourism industry with many people taking the passenger train to the NT that wouldn’t normally have visited our part of the world."

Ms Martin said that the NT Government’s $27.7 million boost to the tourism budget would also help ensure that 2004 would be an improved year.

"The Territory Government has increased the tourism budget by approximately a third and we will be working as hard to make sure we get as many tourists as possible to the Territory."

The Ghan will leave Adelaide on Sunday 1 January and arrive in Darwin on Tuesday 3 February.