Collins expects rail survey OK

ALP Senator Bob Collins says he should know within days when the $3 million survey of the proposed Alice Springs-to-Darwin railway can begin.

Senator Collins was sworn in as Federal Transport and Communications Minister by Governor-General Bill Hayden yesterday.

"I'll have a more precise answer next week," he said last night. "I'm keen to see the survey begin as soon as possible.

"But I need to know just how long it will be before the work can start."

It was impossible to say how much time would be needed for the work to be done.

The $3 million survey was pledged by Prime Minister Paul Keating in the last days of the federal election campaign.

"It will look at assisting its construction providing its viability can be established and providing institutional investors are prepared to put money into it," Senator Collins said.

But the proposed survey was important to encourage private investment.

Sought

Of his reappointment as Transport and Communications Minister, Senator Collins said he had been given what he had sought from the Prime Minister.

Paul Keating abolished the junior ministries of land transport and aviation support previously subordinate to the Transport Minister.

He named David Beddall as a junior Communications Minister to help Senator Collins.

"Previously — with the transport ministry split among three portfolios — it was very difficult to attack what are now the major tasks," Senator Collins said.

These were making the national rail network efficient and dealing with inefficiencies in the other transport links.

Senator Collins' NT colleague, Warren Snowdon, MHR, has been re-appointed Parliamentary Secretary to Education, Employment and Training Minister Kim Beazley.

The job is in keeping with Mr Snowdon's expertise as an educator.

He lost his chance for the ministry when Tasmanian Duncan Kerr won the nomination of his left faction.

Mr Snowdon is known to have scored more primary votes than Mr Kerr, but lost with the distribution of preferences.

Home rates to fall

*From FT

decision to cut all its official cash rates by half of one per cent.

Westpac's home mortgage fall will now come into effect on all loans after April 29.

NT Credit Society spokesman.

"Our rates have reflected the historical movement of the major banks, despite our rates generally being lower," she said.

Variable

"With every rate fall, there is more confidence in real estate and more people with more money to spend," he said.

Estate Institute president Murray Herrmann said the rate movement spelled good news for investor confidence locally.

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