Bidders set to line up for railway work

By CAMDEN SMITH

Prime Minister John Howard's announcement that the Alice Springs to Darwin railway would go ahead has sparked a flurry of bidding for work on the project.

The railway project will require:
- Construction of 120 bridges.
- About 2.3 million tonnes of steel.
- More than 150 000 tonnes of concrete sleepers.
- Earthworks totalling 17 million cubic m.
- Ballast totalling two million cubic m.
- An estimated nine million rail clips.

Signed

A spokesman for the Australia Asia Railway Corporation said yesterday it was unlikely contracts for the project would be signed until Christmas.

The spokesman said one of the key documents to be signed was the project's concession period, which is expected to be 30 years.

Otherwise known as the build, own, operate and transfer back (BOOT) period, at the end of the concession period the railway will be handed back to the Territory. Commonwealth and South Australian governments.

The spokesman said this means the public will get a concern from the project not just in the context of economic activity, but also in that the railway will come back to the public at the end of the concession period.

Former Territory MLA and railway driving-force Barry Coulter said the Prime Minister's announcement had finally silenced many of the project's knockers.

He said: "The Chief Minister rang me in Townsville from Canberra after the decision had been made.

"When I left politics earlier this year it really was simply just a matter of obtaining the money for the railway."

Mr Coulter said he had worked 13-and-a-half years on the railway project.