MEDIA RELEASE

Chief Minister
The Hon Marshall Perron MLA

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The Darwin to Alice Springs railway was put on the national agenda today with the Chief Minister offering the Federal Government $10 million a year for ten years towards the construction and operating costs of the project.

In a letter to the Prime Minister, Mr Hawke, Mr Perron called on the Federal Government to add to the Territory offer in order to meet a shortfall between the total cost of the project and a viable level of private sector investment.

Mr Perron told the Prime Minister that a proportion of public sector financing would be necessary because many of the benefits of the project would accrue outside the Territory or in non-commercial form.

He said public investment in the project is thoroughly justified, as it would:

* offer economic benefits through the completion of the national network and creation of an efficient additional port;
* significantly complement the proposal to reconstruct the Adelaide to Melbourne rail link;
* ease the pressure on the ports of Sydney and Melbourne;
* contribute greatly to national microeconomic reform;
* create jobs in a wide range of industries, such as steel production in Whyalla; and
* offer significant environmental and fuel efficiency benefits.

Mr Perron said Federal Government support in the form of either equity or taxation measures could see the project underway soon, given the advanced stage of planning and documentation already existing, and he sought an early decision from Mr Hawke.

"All Australians, not just Territorians, would benefit from such a decision," Mr Perron wrote.

"I know you will treat our commitment seriously, and look forward to discussing it with you when we next meet."
In other news on the railway, the Chief Minister has written to Opposition leader Brian Ede to welcome his bipartisan approach to the project.

Mr Perron also suggested to Mr Ede that he may consider it worthwhile to be in Perth at the time of the next Special Premiers' Conference in order to lobby his Labor colleagues on the importance of the project.

"I will arrange for you to be briefed on progress as and when it occurs, and would like to feel able to enlist your aid as needed," Mr Perron told Mr Ede.

"I look forward to working with you on this vital project for the future of the Northern Territory and Australia."

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