**MEDIA STATEMENT**

It is becoming increasingly clear the Darwin to Alice Springs railway is a viable project which is in the best interest of Australia.

More importantly we are likely to see a Darwin to Alice Springs railway, either constructed or nearing completion, before the end of this century.

The Northern Territory Government and the South Australian Government have both committed $100 million over 10 years to see this project built.

The Northern Territory has established a railway executive group and South Australia has set up its own railway executive group while Transport Minister Diana Laidlaw has been appointed the SA Minister responsible for the railway.

The two railway executive groups have pledged to work closely together. To that end, the first historic joint meeting of the two groups will happen in Darwin on August 31.

I hasten to add that we are not talking solely about a railway. We are talking about an integrated transport system using the very latest in technology.

This transport package would include:

- the development of the very fast freight vessel, the wave-piercing ships which will transform sea trade in the next century;
- the successful introduction of road-rail vehicles in Australia, involving higher speeds and faster transfer of freight between road and rail, which are already being used by Australian national on the Adelaide-Perth service;
- the completion of the standard gauge rail link between Adelaide and Melbourne;
- access to government rail track by private operators; and
- construction of Darwin’s new container port.
An integrated transport system would attract the following benefits:

- a one-company operation, ensuring a seamless integrated service;
- dedicated customers and guaranteed business;
- a single origin and destination for a very fast freight vessel;
- a large proportion of highly-rated refrigerated freight;
- a low southbound container weight bonus on a very fast freight vessel;
- a reduction in container leasing durations; and
- a rate premium for fast service.

There is also the related point that there would be a significant reduction in greenhouse gas emissions in excess of 100 000 tonnes annually resulting from a switch in transport from road to rail.

We would see a slashing of the transit time between ports. Nagoya in Japan to Adelaide would be reduced from 21 days to six, Nagoya to Melbourne from 19 days to seven, and between Nagoya and Sydney from 17 days to eight days.

The concept applies to any Asian country with a major modern port and obvious contenders are Korea, Hong Kong, Bangkok, Singapore and Malaysia.

With a project of this magnitude comes employment opportunities. During construction 2000 people will be employed while a further 250 people will be employed to operate and maintain the railway.

The Federal Government can no longer ignore the benefits of this proposal. Even the Wran Committee, which was established by the Commonwealth Government to look at making Darwin the gateway to Asia, decided that it was a case of "not if, but when" the railway will be built.

In fact, the Committee came to within a whisker of making the proposal stack up even though the Committee underestimated the domestic freight content by 20 per cent according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

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THE RAIL PROJECT

The rail project is:

- A standard gauge railway 1410 kilometres with a design speed of 110 kilometres per hour
- Estimated to cost around $947 million (1994 prices) spread over four years

Requiring the manufacture of:

- 155,000 tonnes of steel rails
- 9.2 million spring steel fasteners
- 2.3 million sleepers using
  - 170,000 tonnes of steel, or
  - 240,000 cubic metres of prestressed concrete
- 15 kilometres of concrete culvert pipe
- 2 million cubic metres of ballast
250 people to operate and maintain the railway

2,000 people during construction over a four-year period

It will employ

100,000 cubic meters of reinforced concrete

Approximately 350 tonnes of structural steel

Which will use:

costing $40 million

The construction of buildings and workshops

The construction of 80 new bridges

culverts

The upgrading of 160 existing bridges

Earthworks totaling 1.4 million cubic meters

The project will involve:

THE RAIL PROJECT