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SLEEPER FACTORY

The Katherine Sleeper Factory operated by Austrak employs 40 people at the plant and associated activities. More than 883,000 sleepers will roll out of the Katherine Factory before railway construction is complete. More than 872,000 have been produced to date. Sleeper production is expected to be complete in September 03. Passenger and freight terminals will be located close to the existing sleeper factory.

RAIL WELDING & TRACKLAYING

Rail is loaded on to trains at OneSteel's Whyalla plant in South Australia for the trip to Roe Creek, about 20km south of Alice Springs. From there, it is loaded on to specially designed road trains operated by Katherine-based Sling Shot Haulage for the road trip north to both Tennant Creek and Katherine. Once in Katherine, the 27.5 metre lengths are welded into 357.5m lengths and stockpiled ready for tracklaying. The Flash Butt welding process involves fusing the ends of the rail together by heating electrically to over 1,500 degrees centigrade.

Once in track, each of these lengths is then welded together using the aluminothermic process. When complete there will essentially be a continuous rail from Alice Springs through to Darwin. Tracklaying initially headed south of Katherine, meeting up with the rail coming north from Tennant Creek on 13 December 2002, this completed the entire section between Katherine and Tennant Creek (633 km). In September 2002 the tracklayer temporarily headed north to lay 28 km of track to the ballast quarry to enable supplies to be taken to the Katherine Depot by train. In April tracklaying recommenced north from the ballast quarry towards Darwin, with 139 km track still to be laid.

BALLAST REQUIREMENTS

About 1.3 million tonnes of rock was crushed at the Katherine quarry to supply ballast for the railway. Ballast Production was completed in March 2003. More than 50 ballast wagons will be used to carry the rock out along the line for each day of tracklaying. During each shift, about 3000 tonnes of ballast is required.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

FreightLink will operate the AustralAsia Railway and has undertaken considerable work on structuring its service to help facilitate and promote regional development, international trade and tourism. A number of opportunities have been identified particularly large mineral projects that are set to generate economic development in and around the central railway corridor. The existence of the line will be a key factor in unlocking the development potential of the Northern Territory's largely untapped mineral reserves and FreightLink expects that a number of mining developments along the central corridor will be viable as a result.

OPERATION OF THE RAILWAY

Once the railway is complete, Katherine can expect to see one freight train per day in each direction through the town. In addition to the FreightLink service, The Ghan will extend its services to Darwin, with a significant boost to tourism expected. The Ghan has seen a significant increase in passenger numbers since being taken over by private operators; Great Southern Railways and travel packages will offer side trips in regional centres.

For Further Information contact the AustralAsia Railway Corporation Telephone 89469595 www.aarc.com.au