



Media Release

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FINALLY, AFTER 150 YEARS, ADELAIDE AND DARWIN ARE LINKED BY RAIL

More than a century after it was first mooted, a rail line linking Adelaide to Darwin through Australia's red heart became reality today when the final thermit weld was performed in Alice Springs.

Two-and-a-half years after construction began, the Alice-Darwin rail line was joined to the existing Adelaide-Alice line, creating an unbroken standard gauge rail link to greater Darwin.

Bruce McGowan, CEO of Asia Pacific Transport, the consortium awarded the Build Own Operate & Transfer contract for the Alice-Darwin rail line said the track's construction was a landmark achievement.

"It required an enormous team effort over the years, from the 3000 Chinese immigrants who first laboured on the line in the 1880s, to the men and women who walked along the new corridor just a few years ago, pacing out the future of Australian freight," Mr McGowan said.

"It is one of the greatest transcontinental railway lines, requiring 15 million cubic metres earthworks, 1,500 culverts, 100 bridges, 2.9 million tonnes ballast, 2 million sleepers, 8 million sleeper fastenings and 145,000 tonnes of rail. And its construction has certainly been one of the fastest and most efficient.

"Construction has brought great benefit to South Australia and the Territory particularly Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs, the location of construction bases and in the case of Alice Springs, a transhipment point for materials.

Mr McGowan said today's track joining was just the beginning of a venture that will grow and last well beyond our lifetimes.

"FreightLink will provide significant benefits for remote towns along the route. In fact, this rail line will be the catalyst for flourishing regional industry development, including new agriculture, mining, aquaculture and tourism ventures," he said.

As the region's largest town, Alice Springs will continue to be an important service centre to the railway, surrounding mining projects and agriculture. It will also be a major fuel depot for central Australia.

The railway will also boost tourism in the region - the Ghan passenger train service is to be extended to Darwin and is already proving very popular. In February 2004, the Ghan will launch its first passenger service to Darwin and demand for tickets on the first train is running hot. Operators are working with tourism authorities to package visits to tourist icons, such as Yulara and Ularu, Katherine Gorge, Kakadu and Litchfield National Parks.

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