



FreightLink

Media Release

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Whistle stop to Darwin will mark first freight train in January

The historic first train trip between Alice Springs and Darwin on the newly laid 1,420-kilometre rail track will take place in January next year.

The inauguration of the railway will be marked by the official launch of the first FreightLink freight train to run from Adelaide on January 15, 2004 with community celebrations to take place in towns along the way, arriving in Darwin on January 17.

The first freight train to operate on the line will comprise two locomotives painted in indigenous colours and will coincide with the start of FreightLink's commercial services in which Australia's north will finally be linked to the south.

The inaugural train will be closely followed by the start of passenger services on the new rail line, with Great Southern Rail soon to announce their plans.

The completion of the track will link Darwin to the national rail network.

FreightLink CEO, Mr Bruce McGowan, said the first trains to operate on the line would be a historic occasion, and one that represented an important new chapter for Australia's transport system.

"Almost a century in the making, the construction of the railway has in the past been described as ambitious and 'having a touch of audacity to it' particularly given the rugged terrain inherent to the dead heart of Australia," Mr McGowan said.

"And here we are today; construction is more than 80 per cent complete and the line ready to be handed over to FreightLink by the end of 2003.

Completion of the \$1.3 billion rail link marks the completion of one of Australia's biggest infrastructure projects, which has contributed nearly \$1 billion to the Northern Territory and South Australian economies to date.

"Traversing Australia's interior, the transcontinental railway will create both a landbridge between north and south and open the gateway to Asia and beyond, which is sure to generate great trade and tourism benefits for the nation over time.

"The first major business for the new line is expected to be existing Darwin-bound freight, which currently goes to Alice Springs by rail and then by road. Up to 350,000 tonnes of fuel and general products are already carried by rail. There is potential to increase this to over 800,000 tonnes during the first few years of operations," he said

FreightLink's services are designed to be competitive and reliable on start-up, with the journey from Adelaide to Darwin covered in just two days.

Timetables and pricing proposals are complete and have been provided to FreightLink's main customers, freight forwarders, and discussions are continuing.

Mr McGowan said FreightLink was now in the process of finalising terminals, acquiring rolling stock, recruiting and engaging additional staff for Adelaide and Darwin, and working with government and industry customers on ways to maximise the railway's contribution to long-term economic development in and around the central corridor.

"Further detailed information about the line's inauguration and the series of celebrations planned will be made available in coming months," he said.

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