

History of the Railway

On 17 July 2001 Prime Minister John Howard was joined by South Australian Premier John Olsen, Northern Territory Chief Minister Denis Burke and the CEO of the Asia Pacific Transport Consortium Franco Moretti to turn the first sod of a new railway.

For more than 100 years, a yawning gap in the nation's rail infrastructure had impeded progress in the Northern Territory, Chief Minister Burke said.

The first sod of the original 'North-South' railway was dug in Port Augusta in 1878, with a new less flood-prone 824 kilometre standard gauge route opening between Tarcoola and Alice Springs in 1980. The three Governments contributed \$550 million and the private sector \$800 million towards this \$1.3 billion build, own, operate and transfer back (BOOT) project.

The project involved:

- construction of a new 1,420 km stretch of standard gauge line between Alice Springs and Darwin;
- the lease and maintenance of the existing 830 km line between Tarcoola and Alice Springs;
- integration of the completed railway line with the Port of Darwin, including a railway embankment and intermodal container terminal;
- operation of the completed transcontinental railway line for 50 years;
- 153 million cubic metres of earthworks;
- 2 million concrete sleepers produced in Katherine and Tennant Creek;
- 146,000 tonnes of rail;
- 2.8 million tonnes of ballast;
- 90 bridges;
- culverts at 1500 locations;
- 95.3 per cent local industry participation (\$681 M spent in the Northern Territory and \$346 M spent in South Australia); and
- A Build, Own, Operate and Transfer Back (BOOT) scheme, with lease arrangements covering 50 years before the railway is handed back to the Northern Territory and South Australian Governments. This is part of a trend to transfer commercial risk for major infrastructure projects to the private sector.
- PPP model, government contributes to the cost of building infrastructure to reflect the broader social and economic benefits such infrastructure brings but passes commercial risk to the operator.

GPO Box 1449
DARWIN NT 0801
Australia

Telephone +61 8 8946 9590
Facsimile +61 8 89995210
Email: Australasia.Railway@nt.gov.au
Website www.aarail.com.au

Timeline:

1876

The South Australian Government, which then administered the Northern Territory authorised a railway line from Port Augusta to Government Gums.



ANNO TRICESIMO NONO ET QUADRAGESIMO

VICTORIÆ REGINÆ.

A.D. 1876.

No. 26.

An Act to provide for the formation of a Line of Railway from Port Augusta to Government Gums.

[Assented to, 27th July, 1876.]

WHEREAS it is expedient to provide for the construction of a ^{Preamble.} Line of Railway from Port Augusta to Government Gums: And, whereas plans of the proposed Railway, showing the line thereof, together with the book of reference thereto, have been duly prepared and deposited in the offices of the Surveyor-General, at Adelaide, and signed "H. C. Mais, Engineer-in-Chief"—Be it therefore Enacted by the Governor of the Province of South Australia, with the advice and consent of the Legislative Council and House of Assembly of the said Province, in this present Parliament assembled, as follows:

1. "The Lands Clauses Consolidation Act," and an Act, No. 26 ^{Incorporation.} of 1855-6, to amend "The Lands Clauses Consolidation Act," and "The Railways Clauses Consolidation Act," and an Act, No. 6 of 1858, to amend "The Railways Clauses Consolidation Act," so far as the same are severally applicable to this Act, shall be incorporated therewith, and the said Acts shall be read and construed together accordingly.
2. The Commissioner of Railways, hereinafter called "The said <sup>Power to make Rail-
way.</sup> Commissioner," may make and maintain a Line of Railway from Port Augusta to Government Gums; together with all proper works and conveniences connected therewith, as the same is delineated in the said plans so deposited at the offices of the Surveyor-General at Adelaide as aforesaid, or as may be delineated in ^{any}

1878

In South Australia Governor Sir William Jervois turned the first sod of the Port Augusta to Government Gums section of a new 'transcontinental line' to the north. The Governor's speech envisaged the line going through the desert to Port Darwin and on to link with Java, Siam and China and "who could tell the full benefits which would accrue from connecting all these colonies with the iron band of a railway".





1883

The South Australian Government introduced the Palmerston and Pine Creek Railway Bill to start the Northern Line. Thousands of Chinese and Indian workers did most of the back-breaking work for the Northern Line.



1889

The Northern Line reached Pine Creek opening up the interior and replacing Charles Haines' weekly passenger and mail coach from Southport (at the bottom of what is now Middle Arm).

The Northern Line was built primarily to take freight but rarely made a profit. The Pine Creek gold rush died, cattle were not thriving and the Wet season caused constant derailments as embankments washed away, termites ate the wooden sleepers and the Territory's population declined.





1891

The Southern Line reached Oodnadatta, which remained the railhead until the line reached Alice Springs.



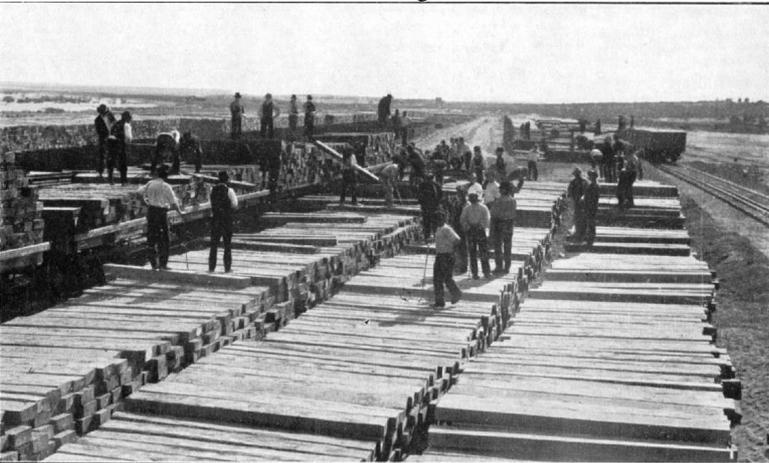
1911

The Commonwealth took over administration of the Northern Territory and the commonwealth commits to complete the railway between Adelaide and Darwin.





1912
Start of the transcontinental line to Kalgoorlie.





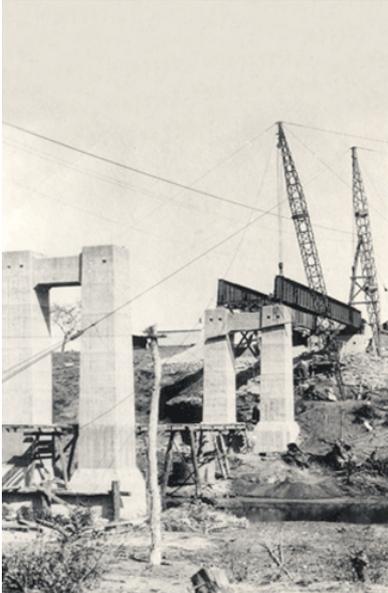
1924 to 1926

A bridge was built over the Katherine River, largely to relieve unemployment. The railway bridge saw Emungalen close and the growth of Katherine on the new site across the river.

The line was meant to continue on to Daly Waters but when funds ran out in the Depression, it terminated at Birdum, 509 kilometres from Darwin, where nothing except a buffer indicated the end of the line.

The issue of the unfinished line became topical during World War Two when Darwin was used as a strategic defence post, shipping became dangerous, and the only way to move troops across the continent was a long and uncomfortable trip by land. However, this led to the sealing of the Stuart Highway between Alice Springs and Darwin, rather than a new railway.

After the First World War, the line was extended to Emungalen, on the banks of the Katherine River, so Vestey's could get cattle to its Darwin meat works. The last sections of this line pioneered the use of tractors and early earth-moving equipment. The pressed steel sleepers were the first of their type in Australia.



1927

First sod turned at Oodnadatta by Lionel Hill, Commissioner of Roads and Railways, for the last leg of the line.



1929

The Southern Line reached Alice Springs, replacing camel trains and horses to move both people and freight.



1975

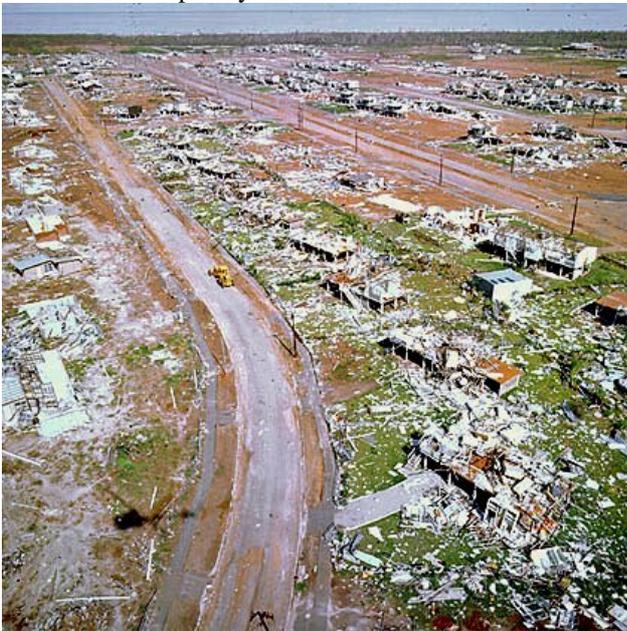
Prime Minister Gough Whitlam turned the first sod gauge line to Alice Springs that by 1980 was to replace the worn-out, flood-prone old standard gauge line through Finke. A blast of dynamite marked the start of a 830 kilometre line designed to provide a more reliable, all-weather service to Alice Springs.

It was this Tarcoola to Alice Springs stretch of rail that would ultimately link with the new 1420 kilometre Alice Springs to Darwin line to become the AustralAsia Railway.



1976

At this stage the Northern Line was in poor condition and making little money. Its death knell was sounded by damage from Cyclone Tracy in 1974, the crash of a Frances Creek ore train in 1972 and declining ore sales saw the Northern Line closed completely.



1978

The Northern Territory achieved Self-Government and the campaign began in earnest to get the Australian Government to honour its 1911 promise to build the line. Chief Minister Paul Everingham complained bitterly of 'the missing link', saying: "We see it as the greatest single need in the evolution of the Northern Territory. We see it as fundamental to the continued growth and development of the Northern Territory and to a great extent to continued progress of Australia as a whole."



1983

Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser announced that the rail would be built by 1988. He then lost the election and the new Hawke Government said the size of the deficit ruled out a railway. David Hill, then Chief Executive of NSW Rail, conducted a study on the costs and benefits of completing the line by 1992. He concluded that the investment could not be justified and 'would constitute a major misallocation of the nation's resources'.



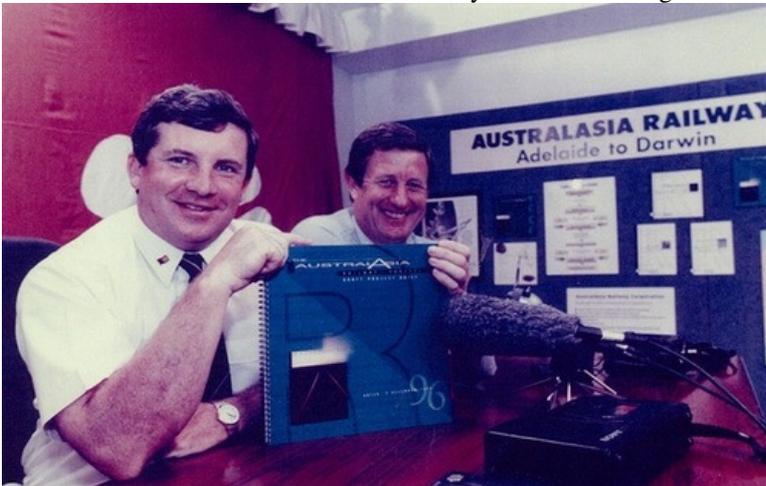
1994

The Wran Committee on Darwin determined that a railway would be viable by the turn of the century.



1995

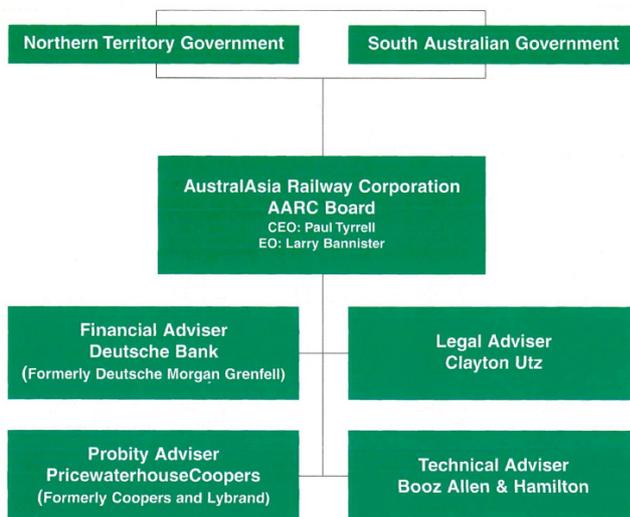
The South Australian and Northern Territory Governments signed a Memorandum of Understanding



1997

The two governments established the AustralAsia Railway Corporation to call for tenders to build the new railway

Organisational Structure



1999

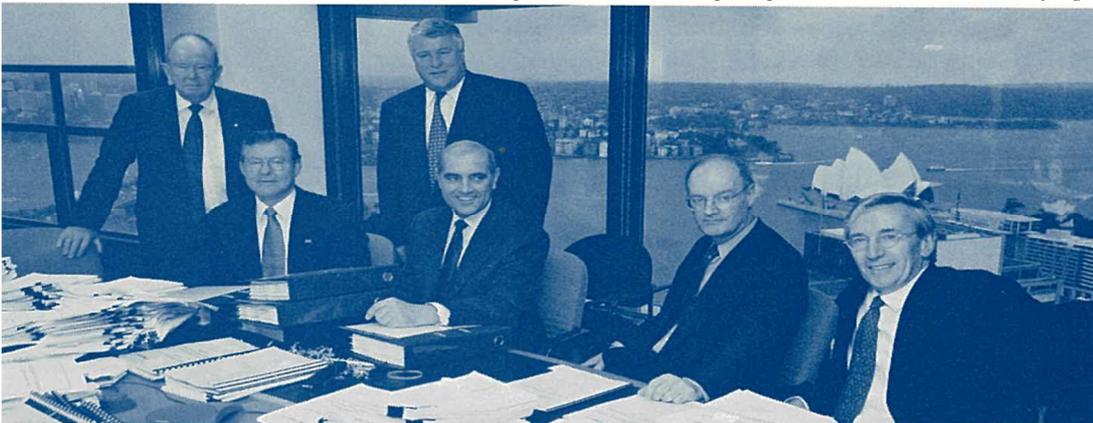
The Asia Pacific Transport consortium won the commercial tender to design, construct and operate the railway for a 50-year concession period.

- ADrail is the design and construction contractor; and
- Freightlink the operator.



20 April 2001

Financial settlement for the AustralAsia Railway was reached in Sydney to fund the \$1.4 billion project.





17 July 2001

First sod turned by Prime Minister John Howard.



September 2001

Work began on the Darwin Port Corporation contract for construction of Stage Two of East Arm Wharf.



October 2001

Production of ballast at the Warrego Quarry in Tennant Creek began in early October. Production of ballast began at the Witte Quarry north of Katherine in March 2002.



8 November 2001

First sleeper pour at Katherine Sleeper Factory. The first sleeper pour at Tennant Creek was on 25 January 2002.





15 November 2001

First 2,000 tonnes of the required 145,000 tonnes of steel rail was delivered to Roe Creek, north of Alice Springs.



8 April 2002
First track laid in Katherine.



15 April 2002
Track laying north from Tennant Creek began.



June 2002
Work commenced on the Elizabeth River Bridge.



July 2002
The Buchanan Highway and Adelaide River camps opened.



August 2002
Construction of the Katherine River Bridge is completed.



17 September 2002

Tracklayer crosses Katherine River Bridge.



30 September 2002

Employment peaked at over 1450 people working directly for ADrail and major contractors.



10 December 2002

The longest bridge on the project, the Elizabeth River Bridge, south of Darwin, was structurally completed three months ahead of schedule.



13 December 2002

The final Thermit weld, linking the two sections of the line between Katherine and Tennant Creek, was ignited.



7 February 2003

Rock cuttings blasted, north of Alice Springs.



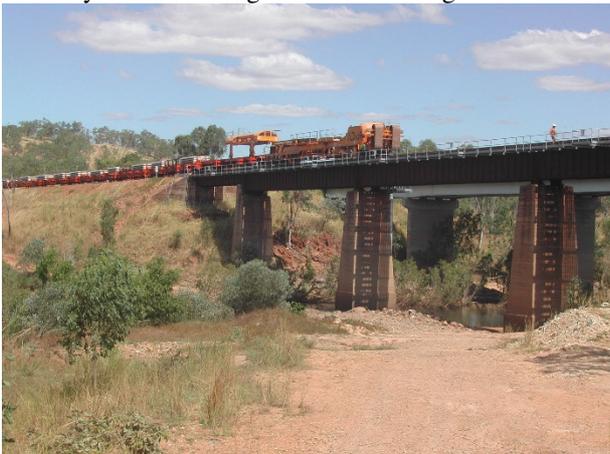
7 April 2003

Tracklaying north from Katherine towards Darwin resumed after the wet season.



29 April 2003

Tracklayer crossed Fergusson River Bridge.



22 May 2003

ADrail reached 1,000 kilometres of tracklaying and Adelaide River overpass was opened to traffic.



June 2003

Alice Springs overpass was opened to traffic.



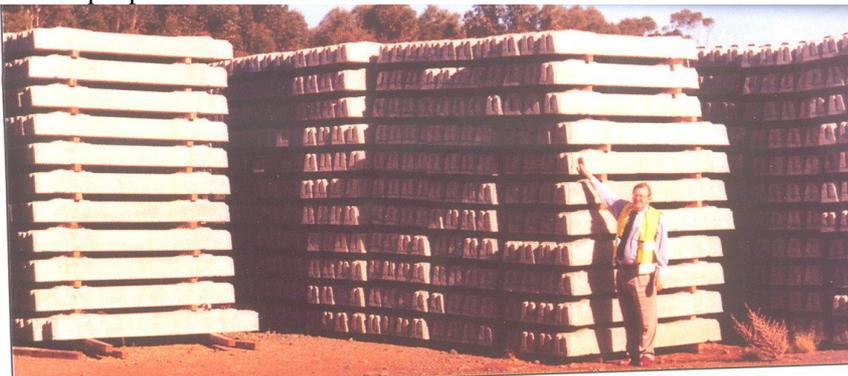
July 2003

Tracklaying crossed Adelaide River.



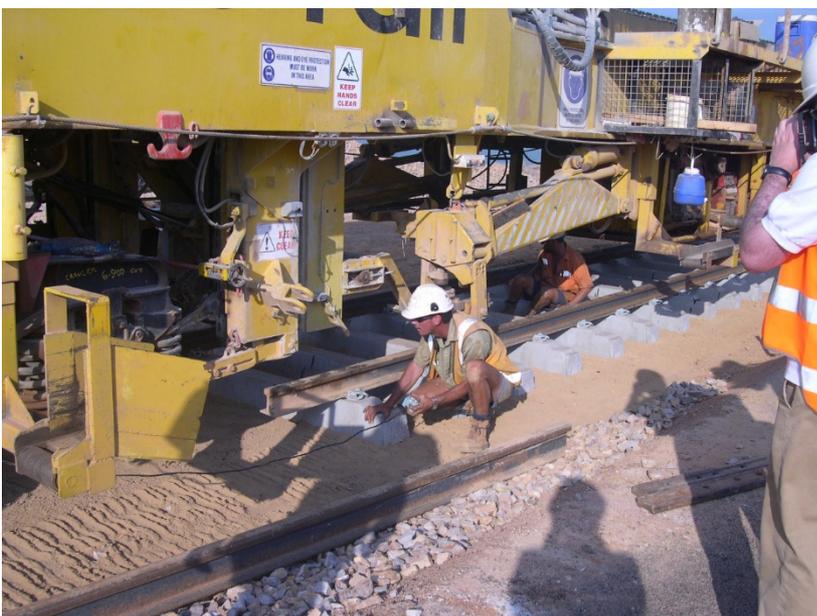
August 2003

Last sleeper pour at Katherine and Tennant Creek factories.



September 2003

Final track laid at the Port of Darwin. Joining of Tarcoola and AustralAsia Railway in Alice Springs.





October 2003

Completion of construction of Berrimah freight yards. Construction of passenger terminals in Tennant Creek, Katherine and Darwin.



January 2004

The inaugural freight train left Adelaide on 15 January 2004 and arrived in Darwin on 17 January 2004.



