



PRIME MINISTER

132/95

**JOINT STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP,
AND THE MINISTER FOR DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION, THE
HON GORDON BILNEY MP**

VIETNAMESE BRIDGE PROJECT

The Governments of Australia and Vietnam today announced their decision to proceed with the construction of a bridge across the Mekong River at My Thuan in southern Vietnam.

The bridge, to be jointly funded by the two governments, is expected to cost approximately \$83 million, with Australian contributions over four years expected to be over \$55 million. It will be the Australian aid program's biggest ever infrastructure project.

The decision is another important milestone in the growing partnership between Australia and Vietnam.

The bridge will be the first across the Mekong in Vietnam and about 2,000 kilometres downstream from the Australian-built Friendship Bridge linking Thailand and Laos. It will replace an existing ferry service which each day transports up to 22,500 people, 4,000 tonnes of freight and 5,000 passenger vehicles.

The decision to proceed with the project follows the acceptance of a detailed feasibility study which covered a range of technical, economic, environmental, social and legal issues.

The study found the bridge to be technically feasible, economically viable and likely to make a significant contribution to improving the living standards of people throughout the delta region of southern Vietnam.

Construction of the bridge will boost the economic development of the whole Mekong delta region, which is constrained by the massive natural barrier to transport services of the various arms of the Mekong River.

For the 15 million people of the delta the bridge is intended to bring quicker, easier and cheaper transport and higher returns for produce. It will also enhance access to hospitals, schools and other social services.

The bridge will be built on Highway One, the main North-South road route in Vietnam and will facilitate transport of over half the rice grown in Vietnam to the major population centres around Ho Chi Minh City.

The overall length of the bridge will be 1,360 metres, comprising a main bridge length of 640 metres and total approaches of 720 metres.

The commitment to proceed with the bridge follows a statement of "in principle co-operation" signed during the visit of the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam, Mr Do Muoi, to Australia in July.

The Minister for Development Co-operation, Gordon Bilney, and the visiting Vietnamese Minister for Transport and Communications, Dr Bui Danh Luu, today signed a Memorandum of Understanding for the detailed design phase of the bridge.

The My Thuan bridge is part of a balanced development co-operation program with Vietnam, which targets four main sectors, as well as a range of NGO projects which focus directly on poverty. Apart from infrastructure the Australian aid program has substantial projects in health, natural resource development, and education.

Construction of the bridge is expected to begin in June 1997 and finish towards the end of 2000.

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15 NOVEMBER 1995