

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER,
THE HON. E.G. WHITLAM, Q.C., M.P.,
FOR THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE TARCOOLA TO ALICE SPRINGS RAILWAY,
PORT AUGUSTA, S.A., 11 APRIL 1975

THERE COULD BE NO BETTER PLACE TO PROPOSE A TOAST TO THE RAILWAYS OF AUSTRALIA THAN HERE IN PORT AUGUSTA. THIS IS ONE OF THE GREAT RAIL TOWNS IN AUSTRALIA, A GREAT RAIL JUNCTION, THE CENTRE OF A COMMUNITY WHOSE HISTORY AND PROSPERITY ARE CLOSELY LINKED WITH THE PROGRESS OF AUSTRALIA'S RAILWAYS. FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE POSTWAR IMMIGRATION PROGRAM, WORKERS FROM MANY COUNTRIES HAVE ENRICHED THIS DISTRICT AND MADE A MAJOR CONTRIBUTION NOT ONLY TO THE RAILWAYS OF THIS COUNTRY, BUT TO THE STEEL INDUSTRY WHICH HAS PROVIDED MUCH OF THE TRACK AND ROLLING STOCK ON WHICH THE RAILWAYS DEPEND.

THE OPENING OF A NEW RAILWAY IS A RARE EVENT IN AUSTRALIA. APART FROM THE STANDARD GAUGE LINK BETWEEN ALBURY AND MELBOURNE, OPENED IN 1962, THE TARCOOLA TO ALICE SPRINGS RAILWAY WILL BE THE FIRST MAJOR RAIL LINK TO BE ESTABLISHED ON THIS CONTINENT SINCE THE TRANSCONTINENTAL RAILWAY IN 1917. ALMOST HALF A CENTURY HAS PASSED SINCE WE LAST MADE A SIGNIFICANT EXTENSION TO THE RAILWAY SERVICES OF THIS COUNTRY. FOR A NATION OF SUCH VAST SIZE, WITH SUCH SCATTERED RESOURCES, WITH SUCH A WIDELY DISPERSED, THOUGH BY NO MEANS DECENTRALISED, POPULATION, IT IS CURIOUS THAT THE RAILWAYS HAVE BEEN NEGLECTED FOR SO LONG. CURIOUS, BUT NOT ALTOGETHER INEXPLICABLE. FEDERATION, FAR FROM DRAWING TOGETHER THE DIFFERENT CITIES AND REGIONS OF THE CONTINENT, TENDED TO ENFORCE THEIR SEPARATION.

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FOR GENERATIONS THE RAILWAYS HAVE LANGUISHED IN A MIASMA OF INTERSTATE RIVALRY, CONSTITUTIONAL DIFFICULTIES, IMPOVERISHED STATE BUDGETS AND SHEER INERTIA ON THE PART OF STATE AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENTS.

IN NO AREA OF GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITY IS THERE A GREATER NEED FOR MODERNISATION AND REFORM. IN NO AREA ARE THERE GREATER CONSTITUTIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE OBSTACLES TO SUCH REFORM. IN NO AREA IS THE COST TO THE PUBLIC OF OUR PRESENT ADMINISTRATIVE CONFUSION AND PHYSICAL DILAPIDATION GREATER AND MORE ENTRENCHED. OUR TRANSPORT SYSTEMS ARE OUTDATED, INEFFICIENT AND UNECONOMICAL. RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEM IS FRAGMENTED AND VAGUELY DEFINED. TRANSPORT IS THE CINDERELLA SERVICE OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR - AND THE RAILWAYS ARE THE CINDERELLA OF OUR TRANSPORT SERVICES.

IN RECENT YEARS THE IMPORTANCE OF MODERN RAILWAYS HAS BEEN INCREASINGLY RECOGNISED. THEY ARE EASILY THE MOST EFFICIENT METHOD OF TRANSPORTING BULK GOODS OVER LONG DISTANCES. BUT IT IS NOT SUFFICIENT TO HAVE ADEQUATE STATE SERVICES. AN EFFICIENT RAILWAY SYSTEM MUST BE AN EFFICIENT NATIONAL SYSTEM. IT MUST BE ORGANISED TO MEET NATIONAL NEEDS AND PRIORITIES. THAT IS THE APPROACH OF THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT. THE PROBLEMS OF INTERSTATE RAIL TRANSPORT ARE QUITE DIFFERENT FROM THOSE OF URBAN TRANSPORT.

URBAN TRANSPORT CAN PROPERLY BE LEFT TO THE STATES, THOUGH THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT IS ACTIVELY ASSISTING THEM IN THIS FIELD. INTERSTATE TRANSPORT, MUST BE TACKLED FROM A NATIONAL VIEWPOINT.

WE ALL KNOW THE NOTORIOUS BURDEN THAT OUR RAILWAYS HAVE INHERITED FROM A COLONIAL PAST. THE NATION IS STILL PAYING A HEAVY PRICE FOR RAILWAY SYSTEMS CENTRALISED ON STATE CAPITALS AND CONSTRUCTED ON INCOMPATIBLE GAUGES. THE POWER OF THE AUSTRALIAN PARLIAMENT TO LEGISLATE ON TRANSPORT IS ILL-DEFINED. APART FROM A GENERAL POWER TO LEGISLATE IN RESPECT OF THE TERRITORIES, THERE IS NO SPECIFIC PROVISION IN THE CONSTITUTION GIVING THE AUSTRALIAN PARLIAMENT POWER IN RELATION TO ROADS OR ROAD TRANSPORT. FORTUNATELY THE CONSTITUTION IS MORE SPECIFIC IN RELATION TO RAILWAYS. THE PROSPECT OF A NATIONAL RAILWAY SYSTEM WAS FIRMLY IN MIND WHEN THE CONSTITUTION WAS DRAFTED. SECTION 51 ALLOWS THE PARLIAMENT TO MAKE LAWS, WITH THE CONSENT OF A STATE, FOR THE ACQUISITION OF ANY STATE RAILWAYS ON TERMS ARRANGED BETWEEN THE COMMONWEALTH AND THE STATE. FOR MANY YEARS THE STATE RAILWAYS HAVE BEEN AN INSUPPORTABLE BURDEN ON STATE GOVERNMENTS; DISTORTING THEIR BUDGETS AND DEPLETING THEIR RESOURCES AT THE EXPENSE OF OTHER ESSENTIAL PUBLIC SERVICES.

ALL FORMS OF TRANSPORT - URBAN, RURAL AND INTERSTATE - HAVE FALLEN DEEPER INTO DEBT AND OBSOLESCENCE. WHILE THE STATES HAVE LACKED THE FUNDS TO PROVIDE MODERN TRANSPORT, THE COMMONWEALTH IN GENERAL HAS LACKED THE POWERS. ON TOP OF THAT WE HAVE A MULTIPLICITY OF TRANSPORT UNIONS, ORGANISED ON A FRAGMENTED FEDERAL BASIS, TENDING TO REINFORCE THE INEFFICIENCIES ENGENDERED BY INTERSTATE RIVALRY.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA IS LEADING THE WAY IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF MORE ECONOMIC AND EFFICIENT RAILWAY SERVICES. IN 1972 - IN ONE OF THE FIRST ACTS OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT - I OFFERED TO ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE RAILWAYS OF ANY STATE PREPARED TO OFFER THEM. VICTORIA AND QUEENSLAND REFUSED EVEN TO DISCUSS THE OFFER. A WEEK AGO MR DUNSTAN AND I ANNOUNCED THE AGREEMENT OF OUR GOVERNMENTS TO TRANSFER THE NON-METROPOLITAN RAILWAY SYSTEM OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA TO THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT. THIS MEANS THAT THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT WILL BE RELIEVED OF THE BURDEN OF MUCH OF THE RAILWAYS' DEFICIT. DISCUSSIONS WITH THE OTHER STATES HAVE BEEN GOING ON FOR SOME TIME. IN ADDITION TO THE NEW LINE FROM TARCOOLA TO ALICE SPRINGS, AN AGREEMENT HAS BEEN SIGNED WITH SOUTH AUSTRALIA TO CONNECT ADELAIDE TO THE EAST-WEST STANDARD GAUGE LINE AT CRYSTAL BROOK. THE COMPLETION OF THIS PROJECT WILL MEAN THAT ALL MAINLAND CAPITAL CITIES WILL BE CONNECTED TO STANDARD GAUGE.

IN RECENT WEEKS WE HAVE TAKEN TWO OTHER MAJOR INITIATIVES TO IMPROVE AUSTRALIA'S RAILWAYS. ONE OF OUR GREAT INSTRUMENTS FOR THE REFORM AND COORDINATION OF NATIONAL TRANSPORT WILL BE THE INTER-STATE COMMISSION. LAST MONDAY I ANNOUNCED THE GOVERNMENT'S INTENTION TO INTRODUCE LEGISLATION TO ESTABLISH THE COMMISSION. IN MY 1972 POLICY SPEECH I SAID:

"THE INTER-STATE COMMISSION WAS INTENDED TO END THE CENTRALISM FOSTERED BY ALL THE STATE GOVERNMENTS THROUGH THEIR RAILWAY SYSTEMS. IT SHOULD NOW PROVIDE NOT ONLY FOR THE COORDINATION OF OUR SIX MAINLAND RAILWAY SYSTEMS AND OUR MAJOR PORTS IN THE PERIOD BEFORE THE COMMONWEALTH, LIKE OTHER FEDERAL GOVERNMENTS, INEVITABLY TAKES RESPONSIBILITY FOR RAILWAYS AND PORTS; IT IS ALSO THE IDEAL INSTRUMENT FOR COORDINATING OUR MAJOR ROADS AND SHIPPING LINES AND AIRLINES AND PIPELINES...

"A FEDERAL LABOR GOVERNMENT WILL PROMPTLY RESTORE THE MACHINERY THE CONSTITUTION INTENDED AND VEST IT WITH THE COMMONWEALTH'S FULL MODERN MEANS OF COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN THE STATES."

OUR OTHER IMPORTANT MEASURE HAS BEEN TO INTRODUCE LEGISLATION TO CREATE THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS COMMISSION. THIS WILL PROVIDE FOR THE INCREASINGLY WIDER FUNCTIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PRESENT COMMONWEALTH RAILWAYS. THE COMMISSION WILL HAVE THE ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE AND OPERATIONAL POWERS NECESSARY TO CONSOLIDATE THE STATE AND AUSTRALIAN RAILWAYS INTO THE SINGLE SYSTEM ENVISAGED UNDER THE GOVERNMENT'S RAIL TRANSFER PROGRAM.

MY COLLEAGUE THE MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT GAVE A VIVID INDICATION OF THE SCALE OF THE TASK BEFORE US WHEN HE INTRODUCED THE LEGISLATION FOR THE COMMISSION ON 20 FEBRUARY. HE POINTED OUT THAT AUSTRALIA'S RAILWAYS ON THE WHOLE ARE IN A PITIFUL CONDITION. FOR YEARS THEY HAVE BEEN STARVED OF THE CAPITAL FUNDS NECESSARY FOR THEM TO KEEP ABREAST OF ADVANCES IN RAILWAY TECHNOLOGY AND MEET THE TRANSPORT DEMANDS PLACED UPON THEM BY A GROWING ECONOMY. FOR EXAMPLE, WE HAVE THE RIDICULOUS SITUATION WHERE STATE RAILWAY DEFICITS ARE INCREASING AT AN ALARMING RATE, YET THE RAILWAYS HAVE HAD TO TURN AWAY BUSINESS. RAILWAYS AT PRESENT NEED OVER 3200 EXTRA WAGONS FOR INTER-SYSTEM TRAFFIC ALONE. IT HAS BEEN ESTIMATED THAT THE VICTORIAN, SOUTH AUSTRALIAN, NEW SOUTH WALES AND COMMONWEALTH RAILWAYS LOST OVER \$66 MILLION IN POSSIBLE REVENUE IN 1972-73 BECAUSE THEY WERE NOT ABLE TO MEET THE DEMANDS OF INTER-SYSTEM TRAFFIC.

THIS GOVERNMENT WAS QUICK TO REACT TO THE PROBLEM AND IN THE 1974 BUDGET ANNOUNCED A CONTINUING ROLLING STOCK PURCHASING PROGRAM WHICH OVER THE NEXT 2 YEARS WILL PROVIDE SOME 1300 MODERN BOGIE WAGONS FOR INTER-SYSTEM USE. THESE WAGONS WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR LEASE TO THE STATES.

TOMORROW I SHALL HAVE GREAT PLEASURE IN INAUGURATING THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE NEW LINE FROM TARCOOLA TO ALICE SPRINGS. I HOPE THE LINE WILL COME TO SYMBOLISE OUR COMMITMENT TO BETTER RAILWAYS IN AUSTRALIA. IT WILL BE THE LONGEST RAILWAY BUILT IN AUSTRALIA SINCE THE TRANSCONTINENTAL LINK BETWEEN THIS CITY AND KALGOORLIE. IT WILL BE APPROXIMATELY 830 KILOMETRES LONG. IT WILL BE BUILT THROUGH SOME OF THE MOST INHOSPITABLE DESERT COUNTRY IN AUSTRALIA. WHEN COMPLETED IT WILL PROVIDE CENTRAL AND NORTHERN AUSTRALIA WITH A RAILWAY OF WORLD CLASS AND FREE FROM THE RISK OF FLOODING. IT WILL GIVE THE PEOPLE OF CENTRAL AUSTRALIA A FAST AND RELIABLE SERVICE, OF IMMEASURABLE BENEFIT TO THE CATTLE AND MINING INDUSTRIES AND TO TOURISM.

A NEW RAILWAY HAS ALWAYS CARRIED WITH IT AN AURA OF ROMANCE, A SPIRIT OF PIONEERING. NOTHING SUGGESTS MORE VIVIDLY THE DETERMINATION OF A VIGOROUS SOCIETY TO DEVELOP ITS RESOURCES AND IMPROVE ITS COMMUNICATIONS. SOMETHING WAS MISSING FROM OUR NATIONAL LIFE DURING THE LONG YEARS WHEN THE RAILWAYS WERE ALLOWED TO DECLINE. MEN AND FAMILIES WHO HAD GIVEN A LIFETIME OF SERVICE TO THE RAILWAYS WERE ENCOURAGED TO LOSE FAITH IN THE IMPORTANCE AND FUTURE OF A GREAT INDUSTRY. I HOPE AND BELIEVE THAT WE ARE SEEING TONIGHT THE REBIRTH OF THE RAILWAYS IN THIS COUNTRY, THE BEGINNING OF A NEW ERA OF GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT. YOU CAN BE SURE THAT MY GOVERNMENT WILL DO ITS UTMOST TO SEE THE RAILWAYS PROSPER AND RESUME THEIR RIGHTFUL, THEIR HISTORIC ROLE AS THE BASIS OF AN EFFICIENT, MODERN AND ECONOMICAL TRANSPORT SYSTEM. PROSPEROUS AND EFFICIENT RAILWAYS ARE AN ESSENTIAL CONDITION OF A PROSPEROUS AND EFFICIENT NATION.
