



# **PRIME MINISTER**

**\*\*CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY\*\***

**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING, MP**

**LAUNCH OF ONE NATION TRAIN, MELBOURNE, 4 JUNE 1995**

I think we might all be forgiven a smile of satisfaction today. From Tom Hopkins who is 103 and first dreamt about this while driving locomotives before the rest of us were born; to Gough Whitlam who is younger than Tom but no less a dreamer of great things for Australia; to those of my own generation who came to believe in them too and find ourselves privileged to be the people who finally did it.

This is a great day for Australia - and nothing less.

A standard gauge rail highway from Brisbane to Perth is a century old Australian dream - today it's an Australian reality.

Three years ago when we delivered a statement called One Nation. We called it One Nation because we wanted to assert a simple idea - that we are stronger when we work as one.

One Nation imagined a stronger Australia - an Australia that worked more efficiently. The aim was to close the gaps between Australians - the physical gaps and the cultural ones.

To close them with railway lines and better road and airline systems; to close them by social undertakings to help Australians on margins; and to close them by reminding Australian men and women that for all the distance which divides a West Australian from a Victorian or a South Australian from a Queenslander, or a suburb of Sydney from a farm in Tasmania, we are all Australians and we share a great common interest.

One Nation aimed at making Australia stronger and fairer.

And I think in the past three years we have made a lot of progress in this direction - we've got extraordinary growth in jobs and national economic growth, we've got a new national training system, we've got nationwide labour market programs, we've got a national competition policy, we've got the kind of agreement on national goals we haven't had in a long time - and we've got a six and a half thousand kilometre standard gauge national rail highway from Brisbane to Perth via Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide.

There is nothing like a train.

There is no symbol of progress like it. No symbol of unity like it - no symbol of strength.

But of course this One Nation train is much more than a great symbol.

It brings all Australians much closer together in a *material* way.

It will produce material benefits.

It will give us in the next century what we have been denied in this - an efficient national rail system.

Over three years we have spent \$429 million to upgrade and invigorate Australia's rail infrastructure.

We erected new bridges which could support greater loads travelling at greater speeds.

We added crossing loops in key locations to eliminate delays.

We laid new low-maintenance sleepers, and constructed new track alignments with fewer tight curves and flatter grades for a better ride.

The centrepiece of the rail infrastructure investment program was the standardisation of the line between Melbourne and Adelaide - the missing link in a national standard-gauge rail network. And that's what we celebrate today.

Sixty kilometres of new track has been built, 30 kilometres converted to dual gauge, and 740 kilometres regauged by moving the rails 6.5 inches closer together.

We now have a great national asset.

With the National Rail Highway we can more fully harness the energy of Australia.

It will buttress economic development and make us more flexible and competitive. As our industry increasingly adopts a national dimension, so will it be serviced by a truly national rail freight system.

Trains will be longer and their travel time shorter. The One Nation train slices two hours off the Melbourne-Adelaide leg and eight hours off the Melbourne-Perth trip.

It untangles Australia's railway tracks.

And it enables us to put the interstate rail freight system on a much more efficient and competitive footing.

With the support of the States, we established the National Rail Corporation, so that interstate shippers need only deal with one organisation rather than four when moving goods around the country.

National Rail has set about renovating the institutional culture and work practices of the Australian rail industry. With a ground-breaking enterprise agreement and the introduction of best practices, the interstate rail freight industry has been turned around.

And it will shortly be acquiring a lot more horsepower in the form of \$400 million worth of new locomotives.

Locomotives which will be built and maintained in Australia: an investment which is expected to create in excess of one thousand jobs. And the new locos will be vastly more fuel efficient than the current fleet.

The Government is determined to press forward with efficiency gains. And the surest way to increase in the railways is to promote competition on the line.

That's why the Minister for Transport has proposed that all the interstate track be managed by a single organisation, Track Australia, ensuring competition between existing and new rail operators.

That leaves rail operators to concentrate on the customers.

We devised One Nation to get Australia moving. One element of that was to make the railways run more smoothly. But the commitment also required that we improve air, sea and road transport, and dovetail them all together.

Today, after three years of work, the Australian people have a far more integrated and cohesive transport system than ever before.

We have safer national roads, more efficient ports and a better aviation system. And all these modes of transport are linked to each other.

This Dynon Road Freight Terminal is a good illustration of the distance we've come in a very short time.

Before the One Nation investments the place was heavily under-capitalised and lacked both effective lifting equipment and long tracks for the efficient assembly of trains.

Now, the Terminal has new assembly tracks and highly effective mobile gantries. And the whole operation is safer and better lit.

Before One Nation, containers arriving at the docks and destined for the rail station had to be driven along a roundabout route of 2.5km, crossing Footscray Road, the busiest truck corridor in Victoria.

Now, goods are delivered straight to the tracks via the newly-built Dock Link Road. The Road cost \$5 million, and it paid for itself within weeks of opening. National Rail estimates a saving of \$20 per container.

So this is One Nation at work.

And it means we can transport people and freight across the continent - and get it onto ships or planes for export - faster, cheaper and more reliably.

The train I am about to board - the One Nation train - will be first to cross the continent, via all State capitals, without interruption from break of gauge.

Construction of the national rail highway began a long time ago, and as I said we are privileged to be part of the generation which completed it.

It has been a difficult journey. But then, the most worthwhile things are *very often* the most difficult.

Many people deserve our congratulations today.

I've mentioned Gough Whitlam, who has never let up in his pursuit of national gauge compatibility. Let me also pay tribute to Laurie Brereton, the Minister who got the work done on time and on budget.

And speaking of work, let me thank the men and women of National Rail who planned and co-ordinated the gauge standardisation.

And let me also thank everyone of those 3000 Australians who did the hard physical tasks of the project.

I hope today that their satisfactions matches that of their fellow railway worker from another age who is with us today - Tom Hopkins.

Today is special because we have all been a part of a very long chapter in Australia's story. And when we say that today we have ended the chapter, we recognise that before us came countless Australians who down the years worked towards the same goal and dreamt the same dream.

Our own and future generations of Australians will benefit from this One Nation train, but I think we should launch it in the name of all those who came before us.

As the train leaves Melbourne and moves on to Adelaide and Perth, Australia will move with it.

It **will** bring Australians closer together, it **will** make Australia stronger.

And I hope it will inspire us to believe that much more in what we can do when we think, plan and work as one nation.

Thank you.