



# PRIME MINISTER

10 October 1997

## TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER

THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP

JOINT PRESS CONFERENCE WITH PREMIER BOB CARR

AND CHIEF MINISTER KATE CARNELL

PHILLIP STREET, SYDNEY

E&OE.....

### PRIME MINISTER:

Ladies and gentlemen. The Premier and the Chief Minister and I have had a very productive discussion this morning about the very fast train project. All three Governments are very strongly committed to the project on the basis already announced. It is to be a project funded by the private sector.

We have agreed that there should be a deadline for taking a final decision on the contractor and the terms of the contract, by the 15th of June next year. All of us are enthusiastic about the project. For its part, the Commonwealth, if necessary, will make available the facilitation of the compulsory acquisition powers under the Commonwealth Constitution, on the basis, of course, that any expense involved would be indemnified by the constructor.

It's a project that's already excited a great deal of interest. It will be very important to the economy of the Australian Capital Territory and the economy of regional areas of New South Wales, surrounding the Territory. And I believe that the expressions of private sector interest already indicate a very successful outcome and I look forward to the public calling for detailed submissions, which I think will take place next week and moving towards a final decision being taken on the 15th of June next year.

My colleagues may wish to add something to that, but it is a project that enjoys the very enthusiastic support of all three Governments.

### CHIEF MINISTER CARNELL:

Just very briefly, from an ACT perspective, this is a very important project. We are very pleased to see that the Prime Minister and the Premier are right behind it, as is the ACT Government. We are pleased that, as of next week, expressions of interest, or full expressions will go out. That's very important. Also, we will be requiring \$100,000 to be paid by interested tenderers by the 13th December this year. In other words, we will be requiring the tenderers to be very serious about their approach.

We understand that there are a number of consortia that are extremely serious in this area. And of course, by mid next year we will have a decision that will make a significant difference to the ACT, particularly after the recent announcement that the Canberra Airport will be upgraded to international standards.

**PREMIER CARR:**

Can I just say that New South Wales welcomes this decision. This is one of those big projects that really gets the pulse of the nation beating. And it means jobs in regional New South Wales and is very welcome for that reason.

We've said, no net cost to the taxpayer. This is going to be a private sector infrastructure project. We welcome the Prime Minister's assurance that the constructor, when selected, would be eligible to apply for infrastructure bonds. The project would meet the test there.

As you know there are about six consortia bidding to do this on the basis of how we handle the Olympics projects, we'd like to keep two in the race to the end. It's a procedure that works well in connection with the Olympic Village for obvious reasons.

**JOURNALIST:**

Prime Minister, if I can just get an idea of the potential exposure to the taxpayer in this?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

None. It's a no-cost-to-the-taxpayer project and that's been the basis all along. There is still great expressions of private sector interest and it is a pro-jobs, pro-development exercise which will have a galvanising effect on the economy of the Australian Capital Territory, in particular.

It's a very good news project for the people of the ACT and coming on top of some recent indications of the strengthening of private sector activity in the ACT, it's good news, all round, for the people of Canberra, as well as, of course, the people of regional New South Wales.

And, I think it will add to the diversity of the transport infrastructure of Australia. It will be seen in positive terms by the airlines of Australia and will certainly be a major boost to the tourist industry in Australia.

**JOURNALIST:**

Are you convinced that it can compete as a transport link?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Of course. We wouldn't be sponsoring it otherwise. But at the end of the day private sector hardheads will make judgements and the indications thus far are that there are lots of dollars wanting to be put into a project like this and we have had six consortia interested and I have very little doubt that it will be a very successful project.

**JOURNALIST:**

Is there any role for Victoria in all of this?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, there's always a role in complementary sense but in direct terms, of course, we're talking here about a discreet link between Sydney and Canberra. But I always believe, in relation to rail infrastructure, that the potential for further development and add ons is limitless. But at the moment we are talking about a discreet link between Sydney and Canberra.

**JOURNALIST:**

Prime Minister, you spoke this morning with the Premier about Newcastle (inaudible).

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, we had a very good discussion about Newcastle. We had the benefit of the attendance of the members of the Taskforce, the Co-Chairmen of the Taskforce, Mr Rudd and Mr Chenery and the Premier and I made a lot of progress and I think it's very much a question of watch-this-space about further statements. And I think I'd be right in saying Bob, wouldn't I, that there was a solemn point of view and it's been the desire of both Governments in relation to the Newcastle area to put aside political differences and work together to generate jobs with the sensible disposition of federal money and state money and we've been able to stick with that understanding. And that was repeated today and I'd just like to say again, watch-this-space.

**PREMIER CARR:**

It's the view in Newcastle that the State Government and Commonwealth Government shouldn't be competing to make announcements that when we come out with a piece of good news it ought to be a common statement and I think soon we will be able to have such a joint statement.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Yes, we will be sharing the wise decisions across the political divide as is appropriate in these matters.

**JOURNALIST:**

What would you say is the future of Mr Arbeit, the East German coach?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well that is a matter for Athletics Australia. (Tape Break) there will be a review of the matter and I'm sure that's the view of the overwhelming majority of the Australian community. I'm sure it's the view of most athletes. And I'm sure it will come well in the end.

**JOURNALIST:**

What about the prospect of a potential payout?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well the law must always observed in these matters and it's not for me to in any way undermine the

proper processes. But it's clear that the public interest requires a re-examination and that will now take place in appropriate circumstances and let's just see what comes out of it. And I have every confidence that Athletics Australia will meticulously respect the public interest and the interests of sportsmen and women all round Australia and the reputation of athletics -- the drug-free reputation that the Australian nation must always aspire to in all sports. Thank you.

[Ends]

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