



THE END OF THE LINE FOR AN AGED SIGNALLING SYSTEM

The Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC) will invest \$119 million over the next five years to upgrade the 684 kilometres of track and signalling on the North Coast Line from Maitland to the Queensland border. The Australian and NSW Governments have agreed that ARTC will lease the state's interstate and Hunter Valley rail networks for the next 60 years. The \$119 million investment is part of the \$872 million that ARTC will invest over the next five years as part of the lease arrangements.

The corporation is owned by the Australian Government and the lease means that ARTC will now have the authority to sell track access to train operators over the full length of the interstate mainline from Perth to the Queensland border.

The North Coast Line is single track with tight curves on an alignment that is more than 100 years old for much of its length. The average speed of trains between Sydney and Brisbane is just 47 km/h, and the track has a poor reliability record.

The ARTC investment will assist in reducing travel times for intermodal freight trains between Sydney and Brisbane by 3.5 hours, from 21 hours to 17.5 hours by the end of the initial five year investment programme.



The north coast investment programme will involve:

- The installation of resilient track fastenings to extend asset life and reduce future maintenance costs;
- Extending the length of 9 passing loops to allow 1,500 metre trains to operate between Melbourne and Brisbane;
- Upgrading entry/exit configurations for the passing loops to increase train speeds;
- An accelerated catch-up programme of re-sleeping to correct deferred maintenance;
- Strengthening and upgrading of steel bridges;
- Rail grinding and straightening of welds to extend asset efficiency and reduce maintenance costs;
- A major emphasis on drainage works to extend asset efficiency and reduce maintenance costs; and

- Improvements to the route alignment to increase track speed and reduce transit times on the corridor.

There will be investment in signalling and communications on this corridor totalling \$9.8 million including a \$4.6 million upgrade of the signalling system between Casino and the Queensland border, to replace the electric staff signalling system that has been in place since the 1920s and that requires drivers to stop and reset signals.

By 2010, interstate intermodal rail freight volume on the Sydney to Brisbane corridor is expected to be around 4.8 million tonnes - 30 percent of the intermodal freight market between Sydney and Brisbane. This is the equivalent of 120,000 semi trailers a year, and is an essential part of the Government's plan to address the rapid growth in freight traffic that is forecast over the next twenty years.

Specific Works

Maitland to Craven

- Bridge strengthening to increase axle loads (\$5 million).
- Crossing loops at Telarah, Dungog and Craven will be extended to 1,500 metres (\$6.8 million).
- Upgrading of communications, mainly in years 1 and 2 of the lease (\$0.8 million).

Craven to Grafton

- Upgrading of communications, mainly in years 1 and 2 of the lease (\$2.4 million).
- Crossing loops will be extended to 1500 metres at Berrico, Kerewong, Grafton, Coramba and Melinga (\$11.8 million).
- A major curve-easing between Johns River and Ross Glen to provide improved route alignment, increased track speed and reduced transit times (\$5.1 million).
- Bridge strengthening (\$6.0 million) and re-sleepering and fastenings replacement (\$9.8 million) to increase track strength.
- Re-railing of curves, rail grinding and rail rectification to increase track speeds on curves, and rail grinding to prolong the life of the existing asset and improve the wheel/rail interface, which will reduce maintenance costs. (\$5.9 million).
- Raising entry and exit speeds to crossing loops to 50 km/h (\$1.7 million)

Grafton to Casino

- Bridge refurbishment (\$1.5 million).

- Improving curve alignments, re-railing curves and rail grinding and rectification to improve reliability, increase track speeds and reduce transit times (\$2.5 million).
- Re-railing, straightening and grinding (\$0.9 million).
- Installing resilient fasteners and re-sleepering for increased track strength (\$3.8 million).

Casino to Border Loop

- The priority on this section will be the replacement of the electric staff safe working system between Casino and the Queensland border. This outmoded system - which dates back to the 1920s - requires all trains to stop and retrieve an electric staff as an authority to proceed, and, if crossing another train, restore the switches to their normal position. This imposes a cost on train operators in crew time, fuel consumption and braking. The removal of the requirement to stop at every location will greatly reduce transit times over this section and improve its efficiency and reliability. (\$4.6 million).
- Extending the crossing loop at Loadstone to 1,500 metres (\$1.5 million).
- Installation of resilient fasteners and re-sleepering for increased track strength (\$2.1 million).