



THE RISE, DECLINE AND RISE OF AUSTRALIA'S RAILWAYS

Introduction

The history of Australia's railways is one of missed opportunities, confusion and myopia.

But one organisation - the Australian Rail Track Corporation (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, as a result of today's agreement between the Australian Government, NSW Government and ARTC. It has taken 150 years.

A Short History of Australia's Railways

1850-1900

- Australia's first railways were built independently from each other, over 150 years ago.
- Some were publicly provided, however most were built by private organisations with government underwriting.
- In developing the early railways, little consideration was given to how the various railways could operate together as a national network.
- The various railways were developed as disjointed networks that focused on linking the hinterland and areas of significant agricultural production with capital cities and major ports.
- In the pre-1900 era of rail development, railways developed different gauges, or width, between rails.
 - Railways in Queensland, Tasmania and Western Australia were built on the 3'6" (1,067 mm) narrow gauge;
 - Railways in NSW were built on the 4'8½" (1,435 mm) standard gauge; and
 - Railways in Victoria and South Australia were built on the 5'3" (1,600 mm) broad gauge.
- During the latter part of the 19th Century, the various colonial governments took over the ownership and operation of the nation's remaining privately owned railways.
- However, little progress was made towards standardisation, with each state continuing the development of its own railways without thinking about developing a national system.

1901-1950

- The 1910 *Northern Territory Acceptance Act* included the first of many promises to complete a transcontinental rail line to Darwin.
- During the period immediately following World War One, road transport began to emerge as a viable alternative to rail transport.
- The standard gauge Trans-Australian railway, between Kalgoorlie and Port Augusta was completed in 1917. It was later extended to Port Pirie in 1937.
- A standard gauge line finally connected Brisbane with the NSW system in 1930. The 156 kilometre link eliminated the previously existing break of gauge, cut 160 kilometres from the previous journey and over six hours from the passenger journey from Sydney.
- The loss of rail freight to the road sector continued following the Second World War, during which many railways were run down through the lack of maintenance, resulting in the need for substantial renewal.

1951 - 1996

- Over the last half of the 20th century, successive Australian Governments sought to connect the mainland state capital cities with a standard gauge railway system.
- Major milestones in achieving that outcome were:
 - Linking Melbourne to NSW by standard gauge line in 1962, which eliminated the famous break of gauge at Albury;
 - Completing the Perth to Kalgoorlie standard gauge line in 1968;
 - Completing the Broken Hill to Port Pirie standard gauge line in 1969;
 - Connecting Adelaide to the Trans-Australian line in 1982 with the conversion to standard gauge of the line from Crystal Brook; and
 - The completion of the standard gauge network linking mainland capital cities - except Darwin - was finally achieved in June 1995, with the conversion of the Adelaide to Melbourne broad gauge track to standard gauge.
- The first private sector interstate freight rail service commenced in 1995. By 1996, up to four rail operators were providing freight rail services between Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth.

1997 - 2002

The management of access and investment on the interstate rail network was the subject of an Intergovernmental Agreement made by the Federal and mainland State transport ministers at the September 1997 National Rail Summit. At the summit, transport ministers agreed on the need for

the interstate rail network to be operated as a single network for investment and access.

- The Australian Government subsequently established the ARTC in February 1998, to manage open access arrangements and infrastructure development on the interstate rail network.
- On 1 July 1998, the ARTC assumed management of the track from Kalgoorlie to Broken Hill and Albury and engaged in negotiations with other track managers for the rights to sell access to their networks by interstate freight and passenger train operators.
- Under the various arrangements already in place the ARTC:
 - owns and manages the track from Kalgoorlie (WA) to Broken Hill (NSW) and Wolsley (SA);
 - manages, under a 15 year lease, the interstate standard gauge rail network in Victoria; and
 - has rights to sell access between Kalgoorlie and Kwinana to interstate rail operators under a wholesale access agreement with the WA track owner and operator, WestNet Rail, a subsidiary of the Australian Railroad Group
- The construction of the Alice Springs to Darwin section of the AustralAsia Railway started in April 2001, with a \$191.4 million contribution from the Australian Government.

2003 - 2004

- The final section of track on the AustralAsia Railway, between Alice Springs and Darwin, was laid on 25 September 2003. The first freight train operated on the line in January 2004.
- The 60 year lease agreement with NSW for the management of the NSW interstate and Hunter Valley networks effectively ends 150 years of confusion over Australia's interstate rail system.