



## AUSTRALIAN RAIL TRACK CORPORATION LTD

Media Release

### **LAST CONCRETE SLEEPER LAID ON NORTH COAST MARKS RESURGENCE IN RAIL**

Australian Rail Track Corporation along with its alliance partners Laing O'Rourke and Balfour Beatty, have unveiled the last concrete sleeper laid on the NSW North Coast as part of the Melbourne-Sydney-Brisbane concrete re-sleepering project in Grafton.

ARTC Acting Chief Executive Officer Wayne James said the unveiling of the last North Coast sleeper showcased the upgrade of the Melbourne-Sydney-Brisbane rail line, which included new passing lanes and loops and signal upgrades.

"It is appropriate that the last new concrete sleeper is unveiled at Grafton as this is where the NSW North Coast sleepers were produced."

Mr James said ARTC had allocated some \$400 million to replace wooden and steel sleepers on the Melbourne-Sydney-Brisbane rail corridor with around 2.2 million new concrete sleepers.

"Consistency in rail sleepers may not sound significant," Mr James said, "but it will mean a more reliable track and reduced transit times between the main eastern State demand centres."

"Along with the concrete re-sleepering project, the new passing loops, signal upgrades and track and bridge work on the NSW North Coast line ushers in a whole new rail era between Melbourne and Brisbane," Mr James said.

"Overall, this upgrade is perhaps the largest rail project since the rail corridor was originally laid," he said.

"For ARTC it marks rail's resurgence as a realistic freight option."

"Once the re-sleepering, additional passing lanes, loops and signalling upgrades are completed, ARTC will be able to offer the freight industry transit times as low as 10 hours 40 minutes between Sydney and Melbourne and 15 hours 35 minutes between Sydney and Brisbane."

"Rail will be more than competitive again and as each 1500 metre long train can replace 100 semi trailers we could see less trucks on our major roads," Mr James said.

Mr James said that, overall, nearly 1,500 kilometres of new concrete sleepers would be laid along the main rail line between Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane as well as

along the main coal export line up the Hunter Valley in New South Wales. The project was scheduled for completion in February 2009.

“This program has been an economic boost to regional and rural Australia not only with new employment opportunities that have been created along with ARTC local purchases and equipment hire but with the actual production of the concrete sleepers.”

“There have been real economic gains spread along the entire rail corridor.”

The projects, Mr James said, had also produced some technical innovations that would have positive impacts during the final stages leading to completion.

“Working with our alliance partners Laing O’Rourke and Balfour Beatty in the NSW North Coast projects, we developed enhancements to the technical equipment, which saw us achieve the world class installation rates with the ‘Pony Express’ machine laying 11 sleepers every minute.”

“We’re quite proud of what has been achieved so far, and there’s more to come,” Mr James said.

**Background statistics:**

- 1) Approx 515000 Sleepers installed on North Coast alone.
- 2) Approx 127000 tones of ballast
- 3) Approx tamping - 350km of track re-laid = 860km tamped (inc 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> & remedial tamp) average 0.6km/hr across all tamping
- 4) Approx Welding - 4100 (de-stressing on CSP 06 + 07 + 08 and PONY & distress welds at Grafton not included = approx 900 extra) - total 5000 welds
- 5) Approx De-Stressing - 350 kms of track de-stressed

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