



## AUSTRALIAN RAIL TRACK CORPORATION LTD

### MEDIA RELEASE

#### **BRIDGES OFFICIALLY OPENED AS PART OF MINIMBAH BANK THIRD RAIL PROJECT**

A historic infrastructure milestone has been reached in the upgrade of the Hunter Valley rail network with the official opening today of bridges on the Golden Highway and at Range Road near Singleton as part of Australian Rail Track Corporation's (ARTC) Minimbah Bank Third Rail project.

The bridges were constructed as part of Stage 1 of the Australian Government funded \$134 million project to upgrade the 32km of line between Maitland to Whittingham, specifically designed to increase rail capacity by reducing the incline at the Minimbah bank.

As part of the overall aim of increasing rail capacity between the coalfields and the Port of Newcastle, the two bridges will also improve road safety through the elimination of level crossings and reduce fuel usage of trains due to the reduced incline.

Local Federal Member, Joel Fitzgibbon officially opened the bridges and explained that the Minimbah Bank Third Rail project will facilitate the more efficient movement of coal to the Port of Newcastle by improving the grade of the track.

"The Minimbah Bank Third Track project is primarily about boosting capacity on the rail corridor to allow more coal to be transported to the Port of Newcastle."

"Instead of a steep climb up Minimbah Bank, which slows down the trains, the new track will have a more gradual climb enabling trains to maintain better speeds, reducing journey times and increasing locomotive efficiency," Mr Fitzgibbon said.

"Importantly, this project has created local jobs. Local communities in the Hunter have benefitted from the generation of more than 150 fulltime jobs during construction."

ARTC CEO David Marchant said the Minimbah Bank Third Track project is a key part of ARTC's ongoing plan to keep rail capacity ahead of market demand for Hunter Valley coal.

"At present, the Hunter Valley rail network coal capacity averages around 107 million tonnes per annum (mtpa). Current industry forecasts indicate demand on the Hunter Valley rail network will increase to 165 mtpa in 2010.

"ARTC is well into the process of implementing a strategy of line improvements designed to keep system capacity ahead of industry demands. The design and construction of the Minimbah Bank Third Track is a key component in meeting the objectives of this strategy," Mr Marchant said.

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## **Background to Minimbah Bank Third Track project**

Specifically the Project would widen the existing rail formation to accommodate the third track.

Minimbah Bank is one of only three sections of track on the Main Northern Railway, which for reasons of rail safety requires trains to maintain safe spacing of greater than 10 minutes (known as headway).

The steep grade (1:80) results in trains being unable to maintain sufficient speeds to keep a safe distance, creating the current headways of 13 minutes.

The slower speeds can cause disruptions to service, reduce the line capacity and increase rail wear.

By improving the grade of the rail, speed and efficiency of the rail line will be increased.

Major infrastructure elements included in the Project are as follows:

- Approximately 10.8 km of track including turnouts, junctions and signalling;
- Approximately 10.8 km of earthworks including drainage and minor structures;
- A rail underbridge (major culvert) at the western end of the project route;
- Grade separation of Range Road level crossing;
- A new rail underbridge at Mudies Creek;
- A new rail overbridge and associated road works at the Golden Highway; and
- A retaining wall of approximately four metres in height and 540 metres in length to retain the third track fill batter from encroaching on the New England Highway road reserve.