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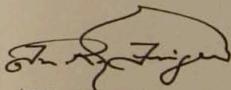
CABINET DECISION

NO. 2461

Submission No.: 2069

Title: ALICE SPRINGS TO DARWIN RAILWAY - PROGRESS REPORT

Cabinet noted the Report.



(M.R. FINGER),
Secretary to Cabinet.

10 August, 1982.

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FOR CABINET

SUBMISSION No:2069.....

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|---|---|
| Title: | ALICE SPRINGS TO DARWIN RAILWAY - PROGRESS REPORT |
| Minister | PAUL EVERINGHAM |
| Purpose: | TO PROVIDE CABINET WITH INFORMATION ON PROGRESS TO DATE |
| Relation to existing policy: | TO MAINTAIN CONTINUED PRESSURE ON THE COMMONWEALTH FOR EARLY COMPLETION OF THE RAILWAY IN 1988 |
| Timing/ legislative priority: | NO LEGISLATION REQUIRED |
| Announcement of decision, tabling, etc: | NOT APPROPRIATE AT THIS TIME |
| Action re- quired before announcement: | NIL |
| Staffing implications, numbers and costs, etc: | NIL |
| Total cost: | NOT APPLICABLE |

THE ISSUES

1. To provide Cabinet with an information paper on progress to date.

BACKGROUND

2. While the Commonwealth Government has given a commitment for construction of the railway line in 1990, the Northern Territory is continuing to press for completion in 1988 in time for the national bicentenary celebration. A joint Commonwealth - Northern Territory consultative committee of officials on the Alice Springs - Darwin railway has been established to progress work on the railway.

PRESENT POSITION

3. Outlined in the attachment.

COMMONWEALTH & LOCAL GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

4. Relations with Commonwealth officials has improved with a positive approach to the task.

CO-ORDINATION

5. Full departmental consultation is maintained through the Co-ordination Committee.

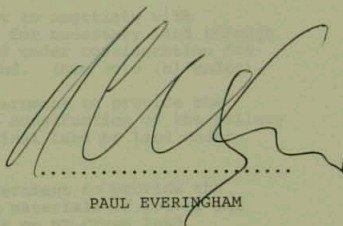
PUBLICITY

6. As the final terms of the draft agreement are yet to be endorsed as part of the Commonwealth's submission to the Federal Cabinet, a public statement would not be appropriate at this time. A recent statement has been made on the environmental impact statement.

RECOMMENDATION

7. That Cabinet note the information.

29.7.82



PAUL EVERINGHAM

ALICE SPRINGS TO DARWIN RAIL LINK - PROGRESS REPORT

INTRODUCTION

Meetings of the committee of Commonwealth - Northern Territory officials and one of the working groups relating to environmental assessment have considered the following matters.

- (a) Heads of Agreement
- (b) Joint environmental guideline and assessment
- (c) Progress in survey and investigation.

Heads of Agreement

Commonwealth and Northern Territory representatives have produced an officials' draft of the Agreement between the two Governments. In brief, the Agreement seeks to define the responsibilities and commitments of the two Governments, i.e;

- Commonwealth Government to build at its own expense a standard gauge railway between Alice Springs and Darwin, and use its best endeavours to complete line by 1988. (See note (a) under).
- Commonwealth Government to negotiate with Aboriginal communities for necessary land through Aboriginal land or land under consideration for grant as Aboriginal land. (See note (b) under).
- Northern Territory Government to provide the necessary land for the construction of the railway except existing Aboriginal land or land under claim.
- Northern Territory Government to provide the necessary construction materials of gravel and earth where those occur on NT Crown land.
- Various issues flowing from the above and the commitments made by either Government.

Notes

- (a) Commonwealth officials have now adopted a more positive attitude towards the project and in fact now readily accept that a commitment to complete the line by 1990 already exists. Notwithstanding this, Northern Territory officials are pressing for the line to be completed by 1988 - hence the 'best endeavours clause' referred to above. The

inclusion of this clause or an alternative form of words will be resolved at the legal drafting stage.

- (b) Commonwealth officials have finally accepted the difficulty of the Northern Territory having to provide Aboriginal land or land under claim for the railway. They are now recommending to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs that the Commonwealth negotiates with Aboriginal communities on such land.

A copy of the draft Agreement has been sent to relevant departments for comment and information.

Environmental Impact Assessment

The Consultative Committee agreed that the environmental impact statement be jointly assessed under Commonwealth and the proposed NT legislation; and that a single impact statement addressing a common set of guidelines be prepared. Following this, officials including a representative of the Conservation Commission, developed a set of guidelines specific to the railway project. Consultants terms of reference were also formulated. The guidelines have been endorsed by the Consultative Committee and Australian National have proceeded to invite proposals from several consultants to undertake the task. It is hoped to appoint a consultant in the first week of August.

It is hoped that based largely on existing information, a preliminary Draft EIS will be available by early or mid-October for assessment by Commonwealth and Northern Territory environment officers, and for this to be embodied in the Cabinet Submission later that month.

To meet this deadline, and as a large proportion of available information is held within the Territory, all Government departments and agencies concerned are being urged to assemble relevant information. A copy of the final joint Guidelines is attached for Cabinet members' information.

Progress in Survey and Investigation

- . A 200km route has been surveyed from Charles River (Alice Springs) to the Mt. Tops - Mt. Octy area. Over 60km has been pegged while pegging of the Alice Springs - Charles River section is still in abeyance pending resolution of a sacred site with Aboriginal owners.
- . Anthropological works are continuing northwards particularly in the Devils Marbles area which is likely to be affected by the rail route.
- . Between Tennant Creek and Katherine, it is becoming almost indisputably clear that a route

west of Lake Woods and northwards through the Hidden Valley area is both feasible and significantly superior in engineering and cost terms compared to a route along the Stuart Highway. The corridor should be finally selected in a few weeks time. Anthropological work is also progressing in this general corridor.

- . A final centre line has been pegged through Katherine, and survey work is continuing in various sections through to Noonamah. Particular emphasis is placed on surveying the new Adelaide River - Noonamah route with contracts being let for the Adelaide River - Coomallie Creek and Manton Dam - Howard Springs Road Sections. The alignment Katherine to Noonamah has received Aboriginal sacred sites clearance.
- . Planning for a station location south of Katherine is continuing; this will be close to the ADMA grain silos.
- . In Darwin area, Australian National has accepted the alternative corridor through Coonawarra - Winnellie and the entire route will be surveyed by the end of the year.

A submission will be made to Federal Cabinet in October next; this will allow for an Act of Parliament to be passed in early 1983 if Cabinet decides to proceed with the project. At this stage, it is anticipated that the submission will contain:

- . details of cost and timing of the project;
- . references to Commonwealth legal commitment, and recent public commitments to complete the line by 1990;
- . draft agreement between the two Governments; and
- . impacts on the environment and Aboriginal communities, particularly sacred sites and areas of significance.

Environmental and survey and investigation works are continuing and on current performance, enough information will be available in October for inclusion in the Cabinet Submission.

JULY 1982

GUIDELINES FOR ALICE SPRINGS - DARWIN RAILWAY
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

1. Title of Proposed Development
2. Name and Address of Proponent
3. Summary

A concise, self contained resume of the matters discussed in the main body of the text.

4. Objectives of the Proposed Development

A statement of the broad objectives of the proposal.

5. Background to the Proposed Development

To include the following information:

5.1 History of project formulation

5.2 Analysis of need for the project.

Briefly outline the history of the project, outlining the work of the Joint Commonwealth - Northern Territory Study which investigated the proposal that led to the decision by the Commonwealth Government to proceed with the survey and planning of a standard gauge railway between Alice Springs and Darwin. Matters which may be considered could include:

- Traffic patterns and growth of Central Australia Railway (CAR)
- Estimated patterns and volumes of freight/passengers for Alice Springs to Darwin sector
- long term benefits (including defence) of proposed development
- regional impacts such as employment opportunities.

5.3 Locational considerations for the project.
Include, as appropriate:

- land requirements (extent of land and other special requirements e.g. topography, seismic stability, engineering parameters)
- access to other transportation networks
- availability of existing infrastructure and public facilities required by project workforce

5.4 Scope of the project

- envisaged time scale for implementation and project life;
- anticipated establishment costs;
- actions already taken along project route.

6. Project Description

Describe the salient features of the proposed development and provide technical information and, where appropriate, maps, figures and diagrams. Technical information could include as appropriate

6.1 Description of Route and Facilities

- selection of route and reasons for choice
- description of halts, sidings, depots, etc
- description of terminals and freight yards
- description of rolling stock
- land use requirements in Darwin

6.2 Construction Details

- type and standard of road bed and method of forming earthworks (embankment/cuttings)
- extraction of material for earthworks and ballast, eg location and reasons for the choice of borrow pits, quarries, gravel deposits.
- tracklaying procedures
- construction camps

6.3 Resource and Infrastructure requirements

- details of major resource and infrastructure requirements associated with the project, including use of existing infrastructure.
- influence on route selection

7. Alternatives to the Proposed Action

Describe any prudent or feasible alternatives to the proposed development or its individual components,

particularly alternative routes considered and reasons for rejection. Include comments on any variation in environmental considerations from those of the selected option and make clear the reasons for discarding the alternative.

8. Existing Environment

Describe the salient features of the existing physical and social environment along the proposed route and, where appropriate, provide maps, figures and diagrams. Any detailed technical information should be included in appendices. Outline existing problems affecting the natural and socio-economic environment taking into account the following, as appropriate:

8.1 Physical Environment

- details of (as appropriate) geomorphology (land use units) geology, soils and erosion hydrology (surface and subsurface), meteorology

8.2 Biotic Environment

- fauna, faunal habitats (rare or unique species)
- flora, vegetation associations (rare or unique associations)
- ecological relationships, including conservation status of species or associations to be disturbed by project
- areas of special significance

8.3 Socio-Economic Environment

- land use e.g. pastoral/grazing, tourism, mining, industry
- population distribution and settlements
- major infrastructure which may affect choice or route particularly in urban areas
- social facilities (health, education, recreation, welfare and commercial services)
- cultural, scientific and historical sites
- National Parks and reserves
- Aboriginal sacred sites/sites of significance

9. Environmental Impacts

This section should discuss the major predicted effects of the proposed project (Section 6) on the existing environment (Section 8) at the local, regional and, if

appropriate, at the Territorial levels. Impacts should be considered in relation to route selection and its implications. The impacts may be direct or indirect, adverse or beneficial, short or long term, and temporary or irreversible. Broader project implications for use of resources should also be included (See Appendix A for examples).

10. Environment Management

This section should outline the controls, safeguards and standards proposed to minimise or ameliorate adverse environmental impacts associated with the project referred to in Section 9. Reference should be made to Territorial and Federal environmental legislation and relevant standards. Measures proposed to protect the environment which are not the responsibility of the proponent should be indicated and the extent of any contribution by the proponent identified.

11. Monitoring and Review

Details of monitoring procedures should be described. These will include base line data collected as part of the description of the existing environment and proposed studies which may indicate changes as a result of the proposed development. The studies/monitoring procedures should also enable the effectiveness of the proposed standard and safeguards to be assessed. Details of any proposed studies should be listed in the Appendices.

12. Public Participation

Details should be given on the level and nature of public consultation which took place in the process of project formulation and the preparation of the EIS, and any proposals for further public participation in project implementation.

13. Sources of Information

Details on authorities consulted, reference documents etc. should be listed.

14. Appendices

This section should include all detailed technical information which provides the bases of relevant Sections of the EIS.

Appendix A

Assessment of Environmental Impacts of the Railway

(1) During Construction of Railway

(a) Materials for fill, Ballast and Concrete

Outline the impact associated with the removal of material from proposed quarry sites, borrow pits, gravel pits etc. Discuss alternative sites.

(b) Natural Features that could be Damaged

Discuss impacts on natural features of scientific or historical significance and aesthetic appeal in areas on or adjacent to the route, that could be subject to damage, either directly by earth moving machinery, or indirectly through vandalism by construction workers. Particular regard should be paid to the Devils Marbles area.

(c) Anthropological, Archaeological and Historical Features that could be damaged

Describe impacts of railway construction on Aboriginal and historical sites of significance.

(d) Erosion Hazard

Discuss erosion effect of construction of cuttings and embankments etc.

(e) Protected Plants and Wildlife

Discuss impact of railway construction on protected plants and wildlife.

(f) Effect on Local Inhabitants

Discuss the possible impact by construction workers on local inhabitants of the area and the possible short and long term impact on the local inhabitants in cases where some become employed as construction workers.

(g) Regeneration of Natural Vegetation

Outline measures that should be taken to regenerate growth on areas of abandoned construction camps, ballast sites, borrow pits, and temporary access roads.

(h) Alien Plants and Animals

Outline measures that should be taken to minimise the introduction of alien plants and animals.

(i) Restoration of Abandoned Narrow Gauge Railway Formation

Assess the need to restore the environment to its undisturbed state as a result of the abandonment of the narrow gauge railway formation and waterways, and if so, discuss desirable measures.

(j) Construction Camps

Outline the impact associated with the location and establishment of construction camp.

(2) During Operation and Maintenance of the Railway

(a) Socio-economic Impact

Discuss the socio-economic effect of providing a railway between Alice Springs and Darwin (i.e. impacts on community isolation, business confidence, economic development of the N.T., etc) particularly in areas which did not have a rail service before.

(b) Effect on Existing Towns

Discuss the effect of not providing a rail service to towns between Katherine and Larrimah which once had a narrow gauge railway and similarly towns between Larrimah and Tennant Creek.

(c) New Settlements

Discuss environmental and social impacts of sidings to be provided along the route.

(d) Impact on Existing Communication Patterns

Discuss the impact of change of transport patterns for pastoralists, freight forwarders, road hauliers, etc from the opening of the standard gauge line between Alice Springs and Darwin.

(e) Impact on Pastoral, Mining and Tourist Industry along the new Railway

Discuss the impact on the pastoral, mining and tourist industries as a result of the provision of rail transport facilities.