

LINKING OF EAST-WEST STANDARD GAUGE RAILWAY

Broken Hill, N. S. W.

29 NOVEMBER 1969

Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr. John Gorton

Mr. McCusker, Mr. Mayor, the Hon. the Premiers of New South Wales and South Australia and Parliamentary Colleagues both Federal and State and Ladies and Gentlemen:

Mr. Askin, Mr. Hall and I have each just driven a dog spike, suitably embellished with gold or silver plate, into the track at the back of us. It is not for me to say how skilfully we did the job! I think we were assisted by the fact that the hole was probably bored out beforehand for us to put the spikes into! But at least they went in, and that means that officially the East-West Standard Gauge Railway is just about complete.

On the 12 January, the first through train will journey across this country unimpeded by break of gauge, and travelling in 65 hours some 2,500 miles across a bridge of steel which spans this continent and which serves and will serve not only as a bridge but as a tie that binds.

Each of the Premiers and myself have, I think, some special right to be present and to meet you and to take part in this ceremony. Mr. Askin has a right because Broken Hill is a part of New South Wales and, theoretically at any rate, subject to the laws of New South Wales! Mr. Hall, because Broken Hill can really be regarded almost as a suburb of Adelaide, being only some nine hours away. And myself, I think, because the Coalition Government some time ago took the first steps in the work which came to fruition today and is providing something like half the financial cost of it.

For the first time in more than a hundred years, this bridge, this tie will be operating, and it will add a new dimension to the East-West traffic; it will open a new chapter in our history. It is not possible today to name all those who have played their part in the effort which came to fruition today, but inevitably the names of the late Sir Harold Clapp, the late Mr. Eddie Ward, the Minister for Transport in a previous Government, and I think above all, my own Ministerial colleague, Mr. Wentworth, come to mind. It was Mr. Ward who first started negotiating with the States in these matters, and it was Mr. Wentworth who chaired the Government's Parliamentary Committee on Standardisation - I am not sure that that Committee was ever appointed with the approval of the then Government but it went ahead anyway under Mr. Wentworth's guidance. And it was the work of that Committee and the response by the Commonwealth and State Railways Commissioners who joined so wholeheartedly in this co-operative effort which led to getting the same gauges on the main Australian trunk routes. It is very fitting indeed, I think, that Mr. Wentworth should be with us at this ceremony.

What I have been speaking of is something that has been done, and since it has been done it is virtually a part of the past, so we should turn our eyes to the future. And in this field of transport in the future, there are three more projects coming up, coming rapidly up.

The first is the construction of a new railway from Port Augusta to Whyalla which will give Whyalla its first rail link with the rest of Australia. The second is the construction of a standard gauge connection to Adelaide from this East-West line which will take three years and cost some \$50 million. The third is a study of proposals for a new standard gauge line to Alice Springs to eliminate the break of gauge at Marree and to avoid the disruptions to traffic which natural disasters from time to time have caused.

These are continuing steps in the development of our nation, and I would stress two things about them. One is that transport costs in Australia have been, and are, a major factor in the whole of our business and commercial activity and in the prices at which goods are finally sold. These costs represent a greater part of national expenditure than do the transport costs of most industrial and developed countries, and this must present a continuing challenge to all Governments - State and Federal - to all citizens, to all those engaged in the work of seeking to overcome this transport cost imposed upon us. If we can overcome it together, we will have taken one of the great steps forward towards reducing the costs, the final cost of things which people buy.

And the second thing I want to stress is that in the field of transport, whether it be by air or by sea, or by land - by rail - developments such as we are seeing today will continue and help to make us think as one nation. It is one thing to say that a people is indivisible, that the nation is indivisible, but it is another to know in practical terms that this in fact is so in the minds of all its citizens. And I think this work will help to knit us together.

I congratulate all those who have taken part in the planning and construction of this standard gauge right down to the fourth-last dog spike that has been hammered into the track. The job has been well planned, well done and will, for all the future of Australia, be a great contribution to the nation.

I wish all those who use this trans-continental railway safe, fast and comfortable travel, and I think that you all realise, you here today, that you are in fact, as you are, taking part in a really historic ceremony.
