



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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# **Ardglen Rail Tunnel upgrade on track**

The upgrade of the rail tunnel at Ardglen that has long been a bottleneck in getting grain and coal from the New England North West to the Port of Newcastle is on track for construction according to an answer given by the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government Anthony Albanese to a question asked by the Independent Member for New England, Tony Windsor.

Mr Windsor was seeking an update to the Minister's announcement of a \$580m Federal Government contribution towards the Ardglen Tunnel upgrade and associated passing loops and works made in December 2008 as part of the Government's stimulus package.

Mr Windsor was very pleased with the Minister's response to his question.

"The Ardglen Tunnel realignment works will no doubt herald in a new era of growth for a number of industries in the New England North West of NSW.

"It has long been an inhibitor for bulk freight adding cost to moving grain and coal to the Port of Newcastle.

"Minister Albanese indicated that only last week a meeting was held by the Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC) at which the feasibility evaluation was submitted to the effected industry for their approval and support and that meeting agreed in principle to move on to the next stage.

"This is indeed good news for the project and for the region.

"I was particularly pleased to learn from the Minister that the ARTC is developing a feasibility program to evaluate the best option for the Liverpool Range.

"I have had contact from a number of residents in the area seeking to find out which of the options is the final chosen route and I would encourage the Minister to have the ARTC make this decision as quickly as possible so these people can have some certainty about their future.

"The Minister's commitment to keep me informed of further discussions and the work that WILL take place is also very promising," Mr Windsor said.

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**Mr WINDSOR** (2.48 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government.

The minister would recall announcing on 12 December 2008 a \$290 million infrastructure stimulus payment to go towards the funding of a new rail alignment through the Liverpool Range on the boundary of the New England and Hunter electorates.

Could the minister update the House and those groups that will benefit from the removal of this infrastructure bottleneck to the Port of Newcastle on the current status of this project?

**Mr ALBANESE**—I thank the member for New England for his question and for his ongoing engagement with the infrastructure agenda. I do recall making that announcement. That was part of the \$1.2 billion that the government committed to the Australian Rail Track Corporation as part of our economic stimulus package.

It was for a range of projects right across the country, from the Kalgoorlie line to work in South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales, and last week we announced the engagement of some work up to the Acacia Ridge from the New South Wales border.

Indeed, \$290 million of it was for the Liverpool Range project, connecting, as part of the work we are doing in addition to that, \$580 million of rail infrastructure in the Hunter. We are getting on with the job. The entire work of the ARTC will more than double the capacity on the Hunter Valley rail network.

Two projects have already been completed since they were announced as part of the package—the Maitland to Branxton line, with the bidirectional signalling project being commissioned into operation in May; and the St Helier and Muswellbrook duplication, completed in August. Announced, commenced, completed. Other projects are under way, including the Ulan line, passing loops and duplication, and the Minimbah Bank third rail line.

**In relation to the new rail alignment over the Liverpool Range, I can advise the member that the ARTC is currently working with industry to agree on the scope and the commencement date of the project. The ARTC is developing a feasibility program to evaluate the best option for the Liverpool Range.**

**The feasibility evaluation has already been submitted to the effected industry for their approval and support. This is a project about the ARTC cooperating with the private sector industry, working hand in hand. Indeed, the last meeting with industry was just one week ago. At that meeting they agreed in principle to move on to the next stage.**

**This is an important new infrastructure project for raising productivity and that is why the ARTC's capital works program is planned in conjunction with the industry to meet their future capacity demands.**

**I will keep the member informed on an ongoing basis about these discussions and about the important work which will take place.**