



Rail mega project just a 'matter of timing'

Shane Condon is man with a big vision. His infrastructure proposal, Project Iron Boomerang, would see a 3,370 kilometre heavy-haul railway cut across Australia.



By Jennifer Perry – www.railexpress.com.au

The railway would connect the Pilbara iron ore mines in Western Australia with coal mines in Queensland's Bowen Basin. It would see iron ore railed east and coal, west from blast furnaces located at both ends of the line. This means Condon's trains will never run empty; something he says is a major advantage of the project.

"We will be delivering from mine gate to smelter parks either in WA or Queensland across the continental line - our trains will have a full payload east and west which will make our trains as efficient as sea freight," Condon said.

His company East West Line Parks (EWLP) was formed in 2006 to progress Iron Boomerang. EWLP now has 20 of the world's biggest steel companies and 48 other interested participants and financial backers that have signed confidential undertakings, expressing interest to fund the project's \$150 million feasibility study and to "finance and own the project's consortium towards public company listing," Condon said.

"The international steel makers who are already Australia's biggest commercial customers, will provide the core funding of the \$12.4 billion that's needed for the smelter parks and rail line," Condon said.

"This is the first time in the world steel making business that we have major interested international steelmakers who have indicated they wish to cooperate with each other at first stage steel production to great scale efficiencies in this Australian-led global project," Condon said.

"Steel companies are traditionally and usually very careful and conservative in their long-term planning strategies – the companies involved know their business and are usually very confident of the outcome, they don't enter into it if they have any doubts.

"Most of these companies after three years of meetings have now clearly stated that they fully endorse our globally competitive PIB steelmaking economic efficiencies as presented, but have also said that early Australian Government and political support is necessary and essential."

The idea of a railway across the top end is not new. Former Queensland Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen and iron ore tycoon Lang Hancock reportedly envisioned a similar line in 1975. But Condon and EWLP supporters have already committed over \$30 million in "time and money" value on the recently completed pre-feasibility study for the railway that he says Governments both in Australia and overseas have taken "great interest in".

According to Condon, the study clearly demonstrated a compelling economic business case for the project to go forward to the next stage, and a feasibility study is now underway.

"This is one of the biggest bankable commercial feasibility studies ever conducted in the world. It

will cost \$150 million, take two and a quarter years to complete and employ around 1200-1500 people both directly and indirectly," he said.

Condon hopes to start construction as early as 2012 with the east west line taking three years to complete; trains are anticipated to run in 2015.

The line will be built to the standard of the Pilbara heavy-haul 40 tonne axle load system. It will require 473,000 tonnes, or 68 kilograms per metre of railway line and 5.8 million concrete sleepers to be built.

The railway will reportedly have a maximum grade of one in 200 and allow trains, each carrying 310 wagons stretching a distance of 3.2 kilometres. Crossing the continent will take 44 hours, trains will travel at 80 km/h and will take 66 hours to dump and reload.

Iron ore trains will have a gross weight of 44,000 tonnes, coal trains 32,000 tonnes, and will be able to carry a combined weight of 53 million tonnes in "phase one" of the line.

Condon said that his railway will be available to commercial open-access negotiations; however freight priority must be given to the steel companies that are paying for the line and located steel mills.

The drive behind Condon's vision is the need to improve steel making efficiencies.

Condon said the project will dramatically decrease the cost of delivering slab steel exports to Australia's major trading nations and their steelmaking partners.

"The railway will be profitable immediately because it will carry freight in both directions - most lines take 10-15 years for this to happen," Condon said.

"The line is an umbilical cord for future development - there's \$40 to \$50 billion worth of new mines out there that will branch off from this.

"This is careful, deliberate planning - the project is going to happen, it's just a matter of timing - it is too good an idea to ignore."

Source: Rail Express – www.railexpress.com.au