PRESS RELEASE

Mr Bryan Nye
Chief Executive Officer
Mobile: 0400 007 951

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All Railway Level Crossing Accidents Can Be Prevented

“The collision between the Ghan and a road train on Tuesday 12 December in Darwin should not have happened. Once again, a railway level crossing accident has highlighted the need for solutions that effectively decrease the number of severe incidents and promote safety at crossings,” said Mr Bryan Nye, Chief Executive Officer of the Australasian Railway Association (ARA).

“Although railway level crossing accidents are of low frequency when compared to that of road accidents, they have extremely high consequences,” he continued.

“The Australian Rail Industry, through the ARA, is working with all Governments to address this issue. One important initiative is the Australian Railway Level Crossing Behavioural Strategy. The National Behavioural Strategy is aimed at modifying the behaviour of vehicle drivers and pedestrians via effective education, awareness and enforcement campaigns. The National Behavioural Strategy has been endorsed by the Australian Transport Council earlier this year,” said Mr Nye.

“In the past, engineering solutions have been seen to be the major means of improving safety at railway level crossings. However, the cost of upgrading all crossings would be between $1.2 billion and $1.8 billion,” he continued. “One may argue that upgrading a crossing from passive to active helps reduce the chance of a crash, however it does not remove the risk entirely. Behavioural programs provide an opportunity to improve safety at railway level crossings for a fraction of this cost.”

The Australian Transport Safety Bureau’s study into 87 fatal railway level crossing crashes between 1988 and 1998 shows that more than 51% of the crashes studied occurred at crossings with boom gates and/or other active control. Hence, behavioural programs targeted at educating road users about features of active and passive railway level crossings and safe behaviour around railways would significantly improve safety at crossings.

With Christmas holidays approaching, Mr Nye commented that “this accident is an unfortunate but timely reminder for all drivers to take great care when travelling. Whether you are familiar or unfamiliar with the layout of a crossing that you are approaching, it is essential that you take the time to assess the situation, follow sign
instructions and look out for trains. Remember they cannot stop quickly or get out of your way. These accidents are preventable.”

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**Media Enquiries**
Dora A Ugalde  
Communications Manager  
Ph (02) 6270 4506  
Email dugalde@ara.net.au