

Light at the end of the big picture tunnel

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MASSIVE infrastructure projects take years of planning, with much of that time spent by politicians and bureaucrats wrangling in back rooms as our three tiers of government sort out who will pay for what and when the cash will be forthcoming.

Often moving at a seemingly glacial pace, the delivery of these big-ticket items is preceded by countless studies, displays of political posturing and brinkmanship, contract negotiations, funding applications ... the list of bureaucratic hurdles that need to be jumped seems endless.

And while the process is a drawn-out affair, and often frustrating for the key players - and for the ordinary citizens such massive projects will ultimately benefit - things do move ahead. Such is the case with the \$1.3 billion Port of Townsville expansion, which was last week announced as a "significant project" by the State Government, with the start date for the massive undertaking to possibly be brought forward following the new status announcement.

And yesterday, Ports Minister and Townsville-based Thuringowa MP Craig Wallace announced that a key component of the project - the eastern access rail corridor would be subject to preliminary business planning as a precursor to the seeking of Commonwealth funding for the project.

It is easy to be cynical of such staggered announcements, with politicians well known for making big announcements when it best suits their political agenda, and not necessarily with what would be considered the public interest squarely in front of mind. But, the reality is that these sorts of big-picture, long-term decisions need countless 'i's dotted and 't's crossed before we will see a railway sleeper laid. The next step is in train (so to speak), and when the actual breaking of ground on the corridor phase of the port project takes place, we will be able to see more clearly the benefits this will bring, with Mr Wallace pointing to the "easing of traffic gnarls in Townsville and the ability of the corridor to provide longer trains - from 790m up to 1.5km - and the increase in frequency of these vital transport providers. Combined with the \$190 million Townsville Port Access Rd, the planned rail corridor will allow the Port of Townsville to do more business, quicker, and that can only be a good thing for the North Queensland economy and for the people of Townsville.