

Inquiry into Regional Aviation Services Questions taken on notice on Thursday 24 July 2014

CHAIR: When you were talking to your constituent councils was there any discussion about whether they would be prepared to see a different type of aircraft used? I am talking about a single-engine turboprop aircraft. There are quite a number of 10- or 12-seaters available on the market. They may well be suitable given their lower operating costs and better reliability. Do you think people would be prepared to travel on single engine aircrafts?

Mr WALKOM: From the people I have spoken to I would hazard a guess that they would be. I could certainly take that question on notice and have that confirmed for you.

The Orana region is comprised of 13 Local Government Areas. For councils proximate to Dubbo, feedback focused on the improvements to air services in and out of the Dubbo airport.

For others, discussions mostly focused on how a lack on an RPT service in some areas has impacted health, community and government service provision. Because of this, what type of air service is provided is viewed as much less important; there is a sense that as long as there is a service it doesn't matter what form it takes (that being said there was strong opposition to the use of a second airport based on the current infrastructure in Western Sydney).

These communities are less interested in an RPT as a mode of leisure travel, and more as a means of equitable access to services. Therefore this question may be better directed to the government and community services sector who were viewed as the main potential passenger on these flights.

Mr MASON: We actually produce a business plan each year which feeds into our management plan process. That is adopted by council separately.

CHAIR: Is that a public document?

Mr MASON: Yes, it is.

CHAIR: Would you be able to furnish the Committee with a copy of that?

Mr MASON: Yes.

This question was directed toward Dubbo City Council. We trust they will respond as required.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Mr Walkom, I thank you for your eloquent statement "Connecting access to service for social equity". I note in the council's submission that six communities have lost their air services to Dubbo. Do you have any more examples of people losing their access to community services and so on?

Mr WALKOM: I know that there was an audit carried out by Premier and Cabinet just in terms of the access; one was about the cost of getting the service delivered back to the community and from that I would suggest that maybe some evidence about the reduction in the services because they did not have access to those communities.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Was that an actual study that was done?

Mr WALKOM: I could take that on notice and we could get some information in relation to that. But I certainly know that that is something that Premier and Cabinet carried out in terms of that.

In the submission from Regional Development Australia – Orana we referred to feedback received from the community about services lost, as did many of the submissions from LGAs in the region.

For example, with a loss of a flight Cobar lost access to specialists who travelled to their town for two days each week, and then on to Bourke for another two days.

We were advised through the submission from the Bourke Local Council that Department of Premier and Cabinet were undertaking a feasibility study of re-establishing an RPT service to Bourke. It is our understanding that the study was intended to uncover potential users; these would mostly be health and community service providers for Bourke and surrounding LGAs, as well as government representatives. Further questions would be best directed toward Department of Premier and Cabinet.

The Hon. CATHERINE CUSACK: Is it possible to get the reference for that?

Mr WALKOM: Yes, you certainly can.

This figure was directly referenced from the response submitted by Warwick Bennett, General Manager, Mid-Western Regional Council. They are happy to be contacted for further information.