

Tabled by
Bourke Shire
Council



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SUMMARY OF PRESENTATION

BY

BOURKE SHIRE COUNCIL

TO

**THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON STATE
DEVELOPMENT**

AT THE PUBLIC HEARING

RELATING TO

REGIONAL AVIATION SERVICES

HELD IN MOREE

23rd JULY 2014

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Standing Committee on State Development in relation to Regional Air Services.

My name is Andrew Lewis and I am currently the Mayor of Bourke Shire Council having held that position for the last six (6) years and I am accompanied at today's hearing by the General Manager of Bourke Shire Council, Ross Earl.

To be here today has involved a round trip for me of around 1,100 kilometres with my residence being located some 90 kilometres north of Bourke and that in essence sets much of the framework for today.

There are huge distances and this adds considerably to the cost of doing business and in the provision of services and facilities.

Bourke

Bourke is an iconic town located in Far Western New South Wales some 760 kilometres north west of Sydney.

Currently the nearest aerial regular passenger service is located at Dubbo which is 360 kilometres east.

Cobar which is 160 kilometres south did have a service but is currently without a provider, following the collapse of Brindabella Airlines.

The town of Bourke last had a Regular Passenger Transport (RPT) some six (6) years ago, however, the then operator, Airlink, ceased operations following the sale of its parent company.

The town of Bourke is serviced by a rail and bus service provided Countrylink four days a week which is a bus out of Dubbo and involves approximately five hours travel before linking with the XPT into Sydney.

Airport Facilities

Bourke has excellent facilities both in regard to the airstrips themselves and the terminal building together with refuelling facilities.

The airport facilities are extremely important to the community of Bourke with the service delivery via air transport particularly in relation to health, critical to the town and surrounding district.

Council currently expends some \$170,000.00 on the maintenance and operation of the airstrip and will shortly have to investigate ways it can fund a reseal of the airstrip, which will cost around \$300,000.00

Ideally, a major rebuild of the airstrip to allow for the landing of larger aircraft and jets would be a much better outcome but would be well outside the available resources.

In addition to the airport at Bourke itself, Bourke Shire Council operates lighted and sealed airstrips at both Louth and Wanaaring and has unsealed strips at Byrock, Enngonia and Ford's Bridge and whilst each of these places a strain on Councils finances they are considered to be an essential service for the residents in these disparate parts of the shire.

With much of the road network within the shire being unsealed the availability of good air strips becomes critical in times of emergency and heavy rain.

The absence of all-weather airstrips would place an increased risk for the health and well-being of residents in these areas.

Current Developments

The Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) is looking at the feasibility of re-establishing an air service to Bourke which would to some degree be underpinned by passengers from the various state agencies who visit Bourke together with a guarantee of seats from other regular users, such as Council.

A number of agencies visit Bourke but can only fly to Dubbo and then have to drive to Bourke and generally stay overnight and then do the reverse. This involves at least an additional five hours of unproductive time for both legs of the trip coupled with the inherent risk of road travel and associated wildlife.

Equally the time factor involved and resultant loss of productivity for locals when traveling to both Sydney and Dubbo is similar.

The proposal has been on the drawing board for some time and with the feasibility study almost complete, the DPC will shortly test the market.

The guarantee of seats is not a subsidy, per se, but rather a commitment by agencies to a certain number of seats based on established usage patterns.

If the market responds to the guarantee of patronage by the various Government Departments there is a strong indication that the additional patronage by the private sector and other commercial users will see a viable service re-established

The proposed service involves a triangular service with Bourke, Walgett and Dubbo being the stops with a connection at Dubbo to the scheduled services flying out of that larger centre.

Current Utilisation

In the absence of a RPT the current utilisation of Bourke Aerodrome is primarily a five day week parcel and bank document service, tourism traffic and some local owners. However by far the most important and primary users are those aircraft that assist in the provision of provide medical services.

Medical Services

The effective delivery of medical services in this part of the state is heavily influenced by the availability and operation of air transport.

In the case of Bourke it no longer has birthing facilities with the maternity unit having been closed for some four years and the nearest maternity unit now being located at Dubbo and in cases of emergency births the availability of air services and associated facilities are a matter of life or death.

The Royal Flying Doctor Service provides an invaluable service and also assists in the transport of specialists in and out of Bourke as the opportunity arises and whilst not their core operational function fills an important void.

Information supplied by the Royal Flying Doctor Services details the amount of flights in and out of Bourke over the past twelve months (2013/2014)

Evacuations/Inter Hospital Transfers:	82
Dental Clinics:	55
<u>Medical clinic flights</u>	<u>86</u>

Total flights to Bourke: 223

Visit by Medical Specialists

A number of Medical specialists visit Bourke and no doubt more would consider doing so if an RPT service was available and the "down time" in travelling was significantly decreased.

There are a number of people within the community of Bourke who would benefit enormously if additional specialists were able to visit Bourke and it would negate the need for so many to travel to Dubbo with associated costs for travel and accommodation which is difficult for residents from a lower socio-economic background.

Case Study

Locally based Sonography Practitioner, David Treacey and not only services Bourke, but also other western centres including Cobar, Cunnamulla and Broken Hill.

David is a pilot and owns and operates his own plane and this has resulted in his travel time being dramatically reduced and his ability to provide "on the ground" services significantly enhanced.

Without the ability to fly, the resultant increase in travel time would effectively mean a reduction in his time available to deliver these services or working longer hours and/or travelling of a weekend.

A normal week would see him travel around 1,300 kilometres.

The ability for David to service each of the towns not only provides a great service for patients but also reduces costs for the patients and in the case of hospital transfers, the Health Service.

Tyranny of Distance

Clearly when we talk of travel in this part of the State we talk of hours and hundreds of kilometres and the need for an air service extremely important and when we include the provision of medical services air transport and related facilities critical.

Options for Air Services

The option being pursued by the DPC seems to be the most logical as not only does it provide a linkage to the Sydney Services out of Dubbo but also provides the opportunity for Regional Department representatives based in Dubbo to be able to travel to Bourke for a day in a cost effective and productive manner

and at the same time allows access to Dubbo for Bourke based people. Dubbo is essential our regional commercial capital.

The option for travel direct to Sydney raises the issues of allocated time slots, passenger numbers and would negate the opportunity for the Dubbo to Bourke and return users to have access to a service.

The possibility of the spoke and hub services out of other centres such as Moree and Narrabri has also been mentioned but the community of interest with Dubbo would see it be the most practical option.

Combination of Passenger and Freight Services

If the ongoing feasibility of an RPT air services is contingent on this option it should be evaluated.

In the absence of any direct subsidy from the other tiers of Government the proposed service needs to be economically viable and if a multi-function service is the answer I am sure with the adequate safeguards in place in relation to types of freight carried it would be a viable option.

Summary

Bourke Shire Council appreciates the opportunity of being able to present to the State Committee on State Development and looks forward to a positive outcome for our residents in the not too distant future.