

PRESS RELEASE

16 July 2016

Kangaroo Island Airport Upgrade Project

“Information currently being circulated suggesting that Kangaroo Island Council will shut the Airport down during February / March 2017 is false and mischievous” says Kangaroo Island Mayor Peter Clements. “To enable the main runway upgrade to be completed, there will be a need to restrict operations but there is no intention to cease services and any disruption will be of minor inconvenience.”

CEO of Kangaroo Island Council, Andrew Boardman makes the following points: “Since Project Design kick-off in February 2016, our Specialist Design Engineering Team have been evaluating the options for lengthening and strengthening the main runway (Runway Heading 01/19) as required for larger aircraft operations. One of these options would have resulted in the pavement upgrade being carried out at night with the runway open during the day such that there were no disruptions to services.

Geotechnical investigations have now demonstrated that the existing pavement does not have the inherent strength to support this approach and therefore we will need to proceed with a conventional build-up of the runway, taxiway and apron with a layer of crushed stone which is then sealed. While extensions to the north-south runway will be managed without disruption the middle section will require aircraft operations to cease whilst the works are completed.

During this time, possibly 6-8 weeks, an alternate unsealed runway at the airport, Runway Heading 15/33, is available for use. This runway is frequently used by RAAF Hercules aircraft and many other users.”

Criticism that regional airline REX has been ignored in the planned upgrade are also untrue. Discussions with REX Operations staff commenced with a request for information on their ability / willingness to land on an unsealed pavement in early December 2015. This query was only answered at the end of March 2016. Their answer is as follows:

Whilst SAAB 340 operations on unpaved runways are possible, there is a need to increase the inspections on the aircraft due to the high risk of aircraft damage during take-off or landing. Operations on unpaved taxiways are again possible but the aircraft must be placed onto a sealed area for start-up to avoid stone damage.

Through experience there is a very high likelihood that some aircraft stone damage will occur for regular operations on unpaved runways and on that basis the Company will not permit operations on unpaved runways or taxiways until we have a detailed understanding of the type of unsealed surface being proposed and the maintenance conditions associated with the surface i.e.: sweeping, rolling, etc.

Should the unpaved surface be subjected to rain it may render it unsuitable for us to operate on. In addition the airport owner would need to agree to cover the cost of any associated damage caused by operations on an unpaved surface.

It is clear that unpaved runway operations are possible and quite common in Australia for commercial use. Quite understandably, REX would need to satisfy themselves that the standard of unsealed runway is suitable for their aircraft as would any other airline contemplating use of such a runway.

Council is also looking into the opportunity of extending the second unpaved runway by up to 136m in total which will provide a total of 1300m – the equivalent of REX-advised Take of Distance Available (TODA) for their aircraft. They are also looking to technically assess and confirm the operating strength of the runway – the pavement classification – as this is also a contributory factor in runway suitability. These works are in hand as we write.

Appropriately Council is assessing other options available to the Community should REX be unable, or unwilling to, operate on this runway. These options will need to maintain the expected daily schedule with alternate airlines and / or aircraft types. Once all the facts are available Council will be able to engage with REX and offer a range of potential solutions to this issue for their consideration. Council, in conjunction with the South Australian Tourism Commission (SATC), Adelaide Airport Limited (AAL) and with specialist Aviation Consultancy, Ailevon Pacific Aviation Consulting (APAC), are in discussions with other airlines with the intent of seeking additional services to the east coast capital cities. A service package may also include alternative services to Adelaide as well. It is possible that an alternative airline service provider may be technically capable and willing to operate local Adelaide to Kangaroo Island services off an unpaved runway during the period of disruption and therefore be able to provide the requisite service level for our Community and visitors.

Council are hopeful that these matters will all be able to be brought to a decision point in the coming two months – we note that we are still potentially 7+ months from any possible changes impacting on the airlines able to support our services during construction. Our Community and any visitors contemplating travel at this time should book with confidence that there will be a suitable service operating throughout the upgrade period.

Council will continue to pursue the project systematically and effectively to ensure that we deliver fit for purpose infrastructure with minimal disruption to the Community and our visitors. When further facts are available, Council will publish them and until this time we ask that any queries or concerns be directly to the Council CEO so that we can ensure up to date information is provided.

Mayor Clements adds, “Much is being suggested by critics of the airport project of poor treatment of REX and clearly this is not the case. REX are recognized for providing a good, regular service for our Community. REX chose to take a public position in September 2015 of being very critical of the proposed airport upgrade which, whilst disappointing, is to be expected given that it will enable competition directly with their services which they have had a monopoly over providing since October 2009.”

Council’s CEO wrote to REX in March 2016 advising them of progress with the Upgrade proposal, acknowledging that there may be disruption and that we were investigating options with the aim “.....to partner with you to minimise cost / time / service issues during construction for either party”. The letter went on to explore the opportunities facing the island with the Airport Upgrade and the announcements of large developments such as the Golf Course and American River Resort Project and looked to encourage them “.....to engage with you / your team to explore how this investment can be leveraged to reverse the trend of declining air passenger numbers in the face of ever-increasing visitation to the Island.” We have not at this time received any acknowledgment of this invitation, however it is our intension to initiate further contact when design decisions are providing further guidance on options and implications.”



Mayor Clements concludes, “It is our hope that REX will continue with their excellent service to the Island working in conjunction and competition with other airlines to open up our Island to the many domestic and international visitors we know want to come and enjoy all we have to offer.”

For further information on this press release, please contact Mayor Peter Clements or CEO Andrew Boardman on 08 8553 4500 or kicouncil@kicouncil.sa.gov.au

