

Source: Daily Liberal, 27 Feb 13

Council votes 'yes' to charges

By FAYE WHEELER

Dubbo councillors formed a wall of silence as they voted in unison for a policy that will add to the costs of flying.

The civic leaders endorsed recovering the costs of security screening all passengers, despite the law only applying to those who travel on bigger planes.

They had no word of explanation to offer the people they represented, who it is feared will pay more for airfares from next week.

Nor did the 10 councillors present acknowledge opposition from Regional Express (Rex), which flies smaller aircraft, and its passengers to the policy.

The objections - and the counterargument from Qantaslink - were raised once more at the Monday meeting of Dubbo City Council before the vote was taken.

Rex representatives and Dubbo mayor Mathew Dickerson had spent weeks in public dispute about the policy, at times trading accusations.

The airline, Australia's largest independent regional operator, had argued it would be forced to pay about \$9 per departing passenger, but Cr Dickerson put the figure at between \$4 and \$5.

The council's airport working party had met earlier on Monday and recommended a policy of screening passengers and checked baggage on full cost-recovery basis, payable by the two operators from March 4 - when Qantaslink's big planes begin to fly into Dubbo - until June 30.

Before the vote, Rex and Qantaslink both grabbed the chance to state their case in the public forum.

Rex representative Chris Hine said the company did not pay the charge at any other airport, it was willing to engage with the council and it would accept screening although not legally required, but not if it had to pay.

Qantaslink representative Elsa Delessio said it was sensible to keep the experience of passengers consistent, whichever carrier they flew with.

The argument raised by Rex was out-of-step with other airports, she said.

Shane Kellaway, who attended the meeting and identified himself as a user of both Qantaslink and Rex, urged the council to reconsider.

The customer said he tended to use Rex more because it offered cheaper flights, and while he was happy Qantaslink had introduced a new service, he would continue to shop around for the best deal.

Mr Kellaway said he objected to screening when it was not needed and particularly to paying for it.

There was anticipation in the chamber until the agenda item finally came up, but in the end it was a short, sharp affair.

Cr Ben Shields, the airport working party chairman, moved the recommendation to charge both carriers. The motion was carried unanimously.

During the meeting Cr Dickerson accepted an invitation from Rex to speak to the company's chairman tomorrow.