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RAAA joins call for screening charges fairness

Doug Nancarrow.

A KEY aviation body has thrown its weight into the battle between airline Regional Express (Rex) and the Dubbo City Council over security screening costs.

Rex sent its second mass email late Monday night calling on all its customers to band together and campaign against the council-imposed passenger security charge.

The Regional Aviation Association of Australia (RAAA) yesterday backed Rex

"Dubbo City Council's decision to apply screening to all operators, whether they trigger passenger screening or not, is unjust and should be repealed immediately," the RAAA said in a statement.

"Dubbo's decision is clearly out of step with the majority of local councils with regular public transport airports."

The council's decision followed an announcement by QantasLink that it would introduce a larger 74-seat Q400 aircraft to service the Dubbo to Sydney route, alongside its existing Dash-8 aircraft.

Cr Dickerson said he would not be moved by the 70 petitions from Rex customers to change his mind.

"Rex said from the very beginning of our talks with them that they would mount a media campaign to create public pressure to change our mind if their passengers were screened," he said.

"I think it is a pretty disappointing response (the number of petitions) from Rex considering they have tens of thousands of emails on their databases.

"Rex is not worried about safety, it is worried about cost."

In the second mass email, Rex challenged the council to produce a report from a security expert supporting their position.

"Rex is in full agreement with the official government policy position that its Saab 340 aircraft do not represent a level of security risk that warrants screening at regional airports," the email said.

Cr Dickerson said it was "bleeding obvious" to have all passengers screened for security regardless of the airline they chose to fly.

He said if he drove a car on private property there was no requirement to put the seat belt on but common sense said he should use it.

"Why wouldn't you ensure everyone is safe including Rex passengers?" he said.

Rex said the cost of the security screening charge was an estimated \$9 per passenger for departing flights.

The mayor disagreed.

"I'm telling you the truth, the mathematics is simple, it's \$4.69 per passenger," Cr Dickerson said.

"What's the price of your life? I think its value is more than the cost of a cup of coffee."

Mayor defends plans

"I DON'T want to be the mayor when a Dubbo plane hits the Harbour Bridge because passengers were not screened."

Those are the words of Cr Mathew Dickerson who told the Daily Liberal a terrorist would target Dubbo Regional Airport and hop on a plane if security screening was not enforced for all departing passengers.

"It (his luggage) could have the word bomb written all over it and nothing would happen if he didn't have to go through security screening," he said.

Rex said its passengers were "outraged" and have petitioned councillors to demand an explanation of why they were forced to pay extra for security screening.

Some of the comments on Rex's website described the council's decision to force all passengers to go through security as "crazy and unnecessary" and strongly called on councillors to quickly scrap their plans.

As for the mayor's fear of a terrorist attack, Rex passenger, Ivan Truscott had this piece of advice for Cr Dickerson.

"Making the lives of thousands of people harder because of the actions of a few deranged idiots, I think, is giving in and ultimately telling them they have won," he said.

"I hope you think hard about this decision, not an easy one I know but one that could have dire consequences for all of us."