

## **Source: Whyalla News Online, 22 Feb 08**

### **No flight cuts yet for city**

Regional Express Airlines has assured travellers in Whyalla it would not cut back on services to the regional town, despite facing pilot shortages and cutting back on services in other parts of the country.

The airline has gradually transitioned the Whyalla services from the 19 seat Metro 23 to the 34 seat Saab 340 and the process of rationally increasing flight frequency, combined with providing affordable fares has continued in the past six months.

Since July 2007, Rex has increased the number of weekly Saab flights between Whyalla and Adelaide from 62 to 68, an increase of approximately 15,000 seats per year, which takes the annual number of seats to 115,000.

Some of these additional flights were a result of Rex meeting the local needs of the Whyalla community after O'Connor Airlines exited the route in September 2007.

"This has been a significant investment in an environment where we are severely challenged by the pilot shortage and difficult decisions have had to be made to reduce services and fully suspend services elsewhere in our network," Rex general manager strategy and sales Warrick Lodge said.

"The average ticket price paid by our customers between Whyalla and Adelaide remains 10 per cent below what it was five years ago and when you consider that today's average ticket price includes the \$27 fuel levy that did not exist five years ago it reflects considerable value to our customers.

"We have an entry level fare of \$97 and approximately 50 per cent of our passengers carried in the last four months have travelled on this fare.

"With Rex now operating up to six daily return services, we are continuing to grow the number of passengers travelling between Whyalla and Adelaide and this is evidenced by the Rex passenger numbers in the most recent four months (October 2007 to January 2008) exceeding what two airlines achieved in the prior year by approximately seven per cent.

"Unfortunately we cannot rule out having to make changes to the Whyalla schedule in order to cope with the pilot shortage, but we are doing everything possible to address the issue.

"This includes establishing our own flight training academy and pilot cadet scheme, in addition to the very difficult decisions that we have to make to reduce and suspend services elsewhere in our network.

"The first batch of 16 cadets handpicked from 1600 applicants will graduate in July.

"It is obviously in our best commercial interests to be giving guarantees, however in the current climate it is simply not possible.

"We fully understand the value of our services to regional communities and we hope that the regional communities can appreciate that we have experienced 60 per cent pilot attrition rates since July 2007 and this is a level that would cripple most businesses."

The airline will suspend services between Melbourne and Griffith from February 25 and will also postpone the announcement of the Maryborough to Brisbane route, which was suspended in November last year and was scheduled to recommence in mid March.

Passengers holding reservations on any suspended service should contact Rex Customer Contact Centre on 131 713 for a full refund.