

Source: Cooma Monaro Express, 8 May 2008

Flights cancelled

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THE Snowy Mountains has received a massive blow after the region's sole air service permanently suspended services.

On Tuesday Regional Express (Rex) announced the airline would no longer service the Snowy Mountains Airport due to a continued pilot shortfall, two months after receiving a Regional Passenger Transport (RPT) license to service the region until 2013 by the NSW Ministry of Transport.

The company's decision has been highly criticised by community representatives, who have heavily supported the airline's submission to service the Sydney-Snowy Mountains route.

"Rex has been advertising heavily since they got the RPT license and have received a huge amount of interest leading up to the snow season, so I am surprised and disappointed to find out Rex's new position," Cooma-Monaro Shire general manager John Vucic said.

Rex originally suspended its Snowy Mountains service in November and intended to resume services again on June 6 but now, with less than a month until the ski season, they have pulled out of Cooma.

Snowy River Shire mayor Richard Wallace believes the reason behind the pullout is circumspect.

"I've been hearing it has got nothing to do with the pilot shortage, so I'm calling on both sides, Rex and the airport owners, to come clean to exactly what has happened," he said.

Airline general manager Warrick Lodge said the decision had no bearing on the relationship between the two parties.

"We certainly have not enjoyed making this decision, especially after investing three years in the service, but at the end of the day we have seen a pilot attrition rate of in excess of 50 per cent."

"Even though the Snowy Mountains service is a good one, through winter we don't have enough pilots to resume those services in June," Mr Lodge said.

The NSW Ministry of Transport confirmed it would put the RPT license out to tender for expression of interest again shortly. The first time this occurred only one airline, Rex, responded to the call.

It is for this reason Cr Wallace has suggested the community look outside the square when it comes to transport between the Snowies and Cooma.

"We are so close to Canberra yet have no rail, bus, Countrylink or air services, which is why I think the community should look at starting up their own air service," he said.