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### Rex offers return flights

BY ROSS TYSON  
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REGIONAL Express has announced it will roll the dice and offer return flights twice a week on its fledgling Griffith to Melbourne service.

The move comes after members of the local business community said they would be more likely to support the service if they could fly down and back in one day.

Flights to and from the Victorian capital have struggled for passengers since Rex recommenced the service in October 2009 after the pilot shortage.

In a bid to boost numbers, the airline has decided that as of May 2 it will cancel its Wednesday service and replace it with return flights on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Rex general manager of network strategy and sales Warrick Lodge said the service was averaging just 8500 passengers a year with a load factor of about 50 per cent.

He said this was a concern for the airline and it was time to see just how strong the demand for the service was when return flights were introduced.

"Overwhelmingly, the feedback from the business community is the lack of the day return ability is a fairly significant obstacle in terms of the service," Mr Lodge said.

"This is really a stepping stone in the evolution of the route to make sure we can build it up and have it standing on its own two feet covering costs."

Mr Lodge said also among the timetable's changes, which will see an additional 3500 seats available each year, was a new Monday morning flight into Griffith.

"The Monday morning service is also a fairly significant improvement itself in that previously if you wanted to be in Griffith to do business on a Monday morning you would have to travel Sunday evening," he said.

"The end game is to eventually fill those holes in the schedule and we would like to see the Wednesday service resume and, more importantly, get the day return flights in there on more days."

Griffith mayor Mike Neville praised Rex for the changes and called on all residents to support the service where possible.

"Griffith City Council has listened to the community and passed on to Rex the desire for day return services," Councillor Neville said.

"I strongly encourage the local community to continue to support this service as increased demand has resulted in Rex being able to provide the more frequent services that the community has sought."

Council general manager Peter Brooks said residents risked the frequency of flights being scaled back again if the service was not well supported.

"People have been saying to us that they would use it if there were better times," Mr Brooks said.

"So we're putting it out there that here are better times and now we hope people demonstrate that there is actually the demand there."