

Source: The Daily Examiner, 18 Mar 09

Let's show Rex we want them

Comment Peter Chapman | 18th March 2009

THERE is an old saying that reads 'sometimes you don't appreciate what you've got until it's gone'. It's something we could well think about in regard to the Rex Airline service which flies three times a day out of Grafton.

In yesterday's front page story the mayor went public to say that it was up to the people of the Clarence Valley to support Rex if we wanted them around in the future.

The history surrounding airlines servicing Grafton is not a good read. In fact it is a horror story.

Even Qantas threw up its hands and abandoned us.

Rex has made a strong commitment to the Valley since starting its service in February, 2007 and while its passenger numbers grew through the 18 months, those numbers are now stalling.

Rex has admitted that the route is not profitable and has been upfront in saying that the service has been under the microscope at recent company board meetings.

So how do we maintain an airline service on our doorstep?

We do exactly what the mayor advised us to do and that is stop driving up to Ballina or Coffs Harbour to catch a plane and instead support the one carrier we have.

When you factor in the cost of the drive to Ballina or Coffs Harbour and the inconvenience of having to leave that much earlier to make the flight, flying out of Grafton is in most cases the best option.

Last year we ran a story criticising Rex over flight cancellations and at the time they deserved the flak.

It admitted that it had a pilot shortage and to the airline's credit, did something about it by opening its own pilot academy.

Its service is now back on track and its performance is equal to any other carrier in the country.

It's now up to you. If you want an airline service out of Grafton think Rex first.

It's not just a service we will lose if they go. As the mayor said, the loss of Rex would be a body blow to the Clarence Valley economy at a time when we can least afford it.