

Rex takes on Townsville to Mackay



FLYING VISIT . . . Rex general manager of network strategy, Warrick Lodge, with flight attendant, Riana Dinsmore

Photo: SCOTT RADFORD-CHISHOLM

Regional airline pushes into Qld

By TONY RAGGATT

AUSTRALIA's largest regional airline, Regional Express (Rex) has announced Townsville as the launch pad for expansion into Queensland.

The airline is taking on Qantaslink for the Townsville-Mackay route.

Rex will start up to three flights a day between the centres on October 1 with a web fare of \$129 one-way, slicing about \$5 from Qantaslink's lowest current offer.

It will use 34-seat SAAB 340 turboprop aircraft.

"The Rex group of companies, particularly Regional Express, has always had a vision to grow and expand into Queensland," general manager of network strategy Warrick Lodge said yesterday.

"Hopefully we will use Townsville as a springboard for that growth."

The Rex group entered Townsville earlier this year, picking up a

contract to provide charter services to the Osborne mine in northwest Queensland from the previous operator, the failed MacAir.

Mr Lodge said they had employed 13 former MacAir staff and intended to take on more re-trenched staff as its operations grew.

On where that growth would occur, he said they would be cautious but indicated the coastal run was on its radar.

"We think there are possibilities such as Cairns and other existing routes but I think we are really wanting to test the water with the Townsville Mackay service and very much tread carefully," he said.

"We are attracted to areas south of Mackay such as Bundaberg which is calling out for a northern link."

Townsville Airport general manager Kevin Gill said Rex's arrival would add 60,000 seats a year to the region, helping to lift

business and tourism activity between the centres.

Mackay Mayor Colin Meng said it would also help people who needed to attend specialist health services at Townsville.

"I am sure the community will welcome the convenience of a short 45-minute flight in comparison to the usual four-hour drive," Cr Meng said.

Townsville deputy mayor David Crisafulli said Rex's decision to use the city as a base for its Queensland expansion was a great sign of faith in Townsville and the region.

Regional Express formed in 2002 out of a merger of former Ansett subsidiaries Kendell and Hazelton airlines.

Operating low-cost services, its passenger traffic has grown from 600,000 to more than 1.4 million.

It has a fleet of 40 Saab 340 aircraft operating to 29 destinations throughout New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia and now Queensland.

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