

DEVONPORT CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY

Position & Background – Devonport Airport

Prepared February 2026

EXECUTIVE POSITION

Devonport Airport is the most strategically important aviation asset for the North West Coast. As the only regional airport in the area capable of accommodating larger aircraft, it must be positioned as the region's primary aviation gateway, for passengers, high-value freight and tourism. At present, it is underutilised, under promoted and constrained by its current ownership and operating model.

For our region to compete, grow, and diversify, Devonport requires more competitive air services, better scheduling and great route availability. Without these improvements, residents, and businesses, will continue redirecting to Launceston and Hobart, eroding the economic potential of the North West Coast.

WHY CHANGE IS NEEDED

1. Economic leakage and lost opportunity

Although Devonport's catchment area is comparable to the North East, an estimated 400,000 North West travellers bypass Devonport each year in favour of Launceston due to cheaper fares and better connections. As an island state heavily depending on aviation, these lost passengers equal lost economic growth, due to significant loss in:

- regional spending
- visitor nights
- local business productivity
- agricultural and export freight potential

2. Aviation settings no longer match community or business needs

Regional airports must offer reliability, competitiveness, and convenience. When the price or schedule mismatch becomes too great, residents simply choose another airport. Current constraints at Devonport, limited route options, fare volatility, and carrier uncertainty (including the future of Rex Airlines), now pose material risks to business continuity and regional competitiveness.

3. Inadequate promotion as Tasmania's North West gateway

Despite Devonport being named Australia's Top Tourism Town (2024), Tourism Tasmania does not promote Devonport Airport as the gateway to the North West or Cradle Mountain. This is a missed opportunity for both tourism dispersal and regional economic development. Furthermore, this is a missed opportunity to attract investment into Devonport airport and surrounding industrial land parcels.

NEED TO RECONSIDER THE OWNERSHIP AND OPERATING MODEL

Stakeholder discussions over many years highlight that the existing ownership structure may no longer be fit-for-purpose. A modernised model, potentially including privatisation or a hybrid public-private arrangement, could:

- unlock long-term capital investment
- improve service quality and scheduling
- introduce competitive tension between airlines
- accelerate freight precinct development
- reduce operating constraints that currently deter airline growth
- deliver more routes, including urgently needed direct services such as Devonport–Sydney

Other Tasmanian assets, such as Launceston Airport, demonstrate how private management can attract investment, expand services, and grow tourism and freight activity at scale. Without such change, Devonport Airport risks falling further behind its regional competitors.

AIRFREIGHT PRECINCT DEVELOPMENT - A CRITICAL OPPORTUNITY

DCCI recently participated in the Airfreight Industry Discovery Working Group led by Regional Development Australia Tasmania. Initial findings confirm strong potential for a dedicated freight precinct, particularly supporting:

- high-value agriculture
- premium fresh produce
- export-ready businesses seeking faster market access

An airfreight precinct would materially strengthen the North West's competitiveness in global markets, but this opportunity depends on improved airport capability, regulatory flexibility, and investment confidence.

CALL TO ACTION – WHAT WE NEED FROM GOVERNMENT

To realise Devonport's full economic potential, we call on the Tasmanian and Australian Governments to:

1. Undertake an independent review of Devonport Airport's ownership and operating model, including public–private partnership options.
2. Revise and activate the Devonport Airport Master Plan (2025) to align with current economic and tourism realities.
3. Support route development, including underwriting new services similarly to aviation programs in other states.
4. Ensure competitive neutrality so Devonport is not structurally disadvantaged relative to Launceston and Hobart.
5. Integrate the airport into state tourism marketing, positioning Devonport as the North West's gateway.
6. Support development of an airfreight precinct to unlock new export and agribusiness markets.

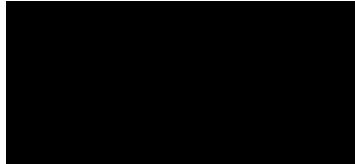
CONCLUSION

Devonport should be Tasmania's premier regional airport, a true gateway for business, tourism, and freight. But it will not reach that potential under its current settings. The Senate Inquiry presents a critical opportunity to reset the approach, modernise governance, and deliver aviation services that genuinely support the North West's economic future.

DCCI urges government and industry stakeholders to act now. The cost of inaction is continued economic leakage, reduced competitiveness, and missed opportunities for one of Tasmania's fastest-growing and most productive regions.

ATTACHMENTS

- 2023 Background Information prepared by expert aviation consultant and former DCCI President and Aviation professional, Dave Race
- Media Release: Qantas Plans A Disgrace (published 30 September)
- Media Release: Qantas Responds to Community Feedback (published 24 October)



Prepared by: Claire Connelly FCPA, President

Devonport Airport - Background Information prepared by Dave Race (Aviation Consultant and former DCCI President and Devonport Airport General Manager)

Devonport Airport is situated approx. 10km from Devonport at Pardoe. It was approved to be developed by the Commonwealth in 1947, with construction work commencing in 1949.

The airport was officially opened in November 1950 by Mr T W White, (the Minister for Air), who said the airport terminal would be better than any terminal in Australia and would become an alternative to Hobart and Launceston's airports. Whilst the airport was not yet officially opened, on the 5th June 1950, the first freighter aircraft, an Australian National Airways (ANA) Bristol Freighter landed. On board was Captain Ivan Holyman, his wife, Mrs Hazel Holyman (the wife of the late Captain Victor Holyman) and Dame Enid Lyons M.H.A. The aircraft had diverted from its Melbourne to Launceston route to unload ramps, steps and two trucks for use at the airport.

Further value of the new airport to the local community occurred shortly after with the transfer by air of a young eleven-year-old patient, who had been in Devonport's Hospital for seven-months, to Melbourne for specialised treatment thus eliminating a fifty-mile drive to Launceston Airport.

Inaugural passenger aircraft flights by both TAA and ANA followed and a direct air mail service from Devonport to Launceston commenced shortly after.

Devonport Airport, or Pardoe as it was originally called, is now owned and operated by TasPorts, and is one of the key regional airports in the north-west of the state. As the largest security-controlled airport on Tasmania's North West Coast, Devonport Airport offers 24-hour access, 365 days a year with all-weather facilities. Catering for passenger, air freight, flight training and general aviation, the airport also provides support for Air Ambulance, rescue helicopters, and the police air wing. During the bush fire-season the airport also provides critical resources for aerial fire spotters and bombers.

Devonport also has the ability to cope with A320's (max capacity 180pax) and B737-800 (max capacity 189pax). The airport has a sealed runway of 1838m x 45m with an elevation of 33 feet and is served by regular QantasLink Dash 8 aircraft.

Devonport Airport: is owned and operated by TasPorts through a Shareholder-appointed Board of five Directors, all of which are independent non-Executive. The Board provide overall strategic direction to TasPorts and Devonport Airport.

Launceston Airport: Australian Pacific Airports Corporation (APAC), in conjunction with the Launceston City Council, acquired the lease for Launceston Airport in May 1998. (APAC acquired the lease for Melbourne Airport in July 1997). Both Melbourne & Launceston airports are operated under a 50 year long-term lease from the Federal Government, with an option for a further 49 years.

Hobart Airport: A consortium comprising of Australian-based asset manager QIC and Dutch-based airport operator Royal Schiphol Group acquired a 70% equity interest in Hobart Airport in October 2019. National superannuation fund, Spirit Super, holds the remaining 30% equity interest.

Burnie Airport: The Burnie Airport Corporation Unit Trust acquired the Burnie Airport from the Burnie Port Corporation in 2001. The Trust is 51% owned by the Burnie City Council and 49% owned by a private sector partner, the Australian Airports Association.

In 2008 The Devonport Airport Consortium (DAC) was formed with the aim to purchase the Devonport Airport. **The bid had the full backing of Kentish, Latrobe, Devonport & Central Coast Councils.** Though thought to be offering a fair price to TasPorts, with further investment touted, unfortunately the sale process fell through after it was withdrawn from sale in June 2010.

There were claims that the airport was not being developed by TasPorts, and therefore not realising its full potential, especially in attracting cheaper airlines for competition and already having the capacity to cater for jets. At that time TasPorts claimed that they would work with local councils and airport users to develop the airport. **Yet here we are December 2023, thirteen years on, with only a Devonport Airport Master Plan (published 2021) with nothing to show or happening.**

<https://dpoairport.au/volumes/documents/Devonport-Airport-MasterPlan-November-2022.pdf>

A vision to position the Devonport Airport as the key tourism and business gateway to Tasmania's North West and the Cradle Coast region.

KEY AIRPORT FEATURES

- States third largest airport
- Serviced by two airlines – Qantaslink & Rex
- Six return passenger flights daily
- Freight services
- Total area: 308 hectares
- Main runway: 1,838m long by 45m wide – contained within a 300m wide runway strip
- Secondary runway: Grassed, 880m long by 30m wide, contained within a 90m wide runway strip
- Taxiway network leading to Regular Public Transport and General Aviation (GA) apron areas, airline passenger and GA terminals
- Aircraft maintenance and storage hangars
- Refuelling for airline and GA aircraft
- Vehicle provisions such as car parking, rental cars and taxi services
- Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) certified aerodrome, compliant with the conditions in CASA Manual of Standards Part 139 (MOS Part 139)
- Designated security-controlled airport, compliant to conditions set out by Department of Home Affairs, Aviation Maritime Security
- The Latrobe Council Interim Planning Scheme 2013 is the instrument that controls use and development of the airport land.

Prior to Ansett collapse in 2001, **traffic across northern Tasmania FY 2001** – Source Bureau of Infrastructure and Transport Research Economics (BITRE)

Airport Passengers (Approx) Airlines

Wynyard (BWT) 100,000 Ansett/Kendall/TAA (Australian)

Devonport (DPO) 135,000 Ansett/Kendall/TAA (Australian)

Launceston (LST) 550,000 Ansett/TAA (Australian)

- Following the collapse of Ansett in 2001, Virgin Blue enters the market in Launceston to fill the gap as a Low Cost Carrier (LCC) and introduces low cost fares.

- 12 months later Jetstar enters the market and dumps the market with low cost fares, and new destinations and so the price warfare starts.
- Northwest Tasmanians travel flock to Launceston for the cheap fares

Pre Covid FY 19 Airport Passengers Airlines

Burnie (BWT) 72,500 Rex & Sharp

Devonport (DPO) 148,400 Qantas Link

Launceston (LST) 1,395,300 Qantas Link, Virgin, Jetstar & Sharp

Post Covid FY 22 Airport Passengers (Approx) Airlines

Burnie (BWT) 73,700 Rex, QantasLink & Sharp

Devonport (DPO) 97,700 QantasLink & Rex

Launceston (LST) 1,165,800 QantasLink, Virgin, Jetstar & Sharp

Catchment Area (2017)

North West 119,000 (80% DPO, 20% BWT catchment area)

North East 143,000

Southern Tasmania 261,000

It is estimated that 400,00 – 450,00 people per annum travel from the northwest region to Launceston for cheap flights. Airlines market Launceston as the northern gateway entry due to the low cost fares.

Passenger Profiles (2017)

Airport	Resident PAX	Visitor PAX	Business	Holidays	Visitor, Friends, Relatives	Other	Comments
Burnie	58%	42%	53%	6%	38%	3%	Bus & VFR
Devonport	62%	38%	44%	11%	40%	8%	Bus & VFR
Launceston	49%*	51%	15%	46%	33%	5%	Hols & VFR
TT Line	31%**	69%	11%	40%	15%	5%	Hols

Note: VFR = Visitor, Friends & Relations; PAX = passenger/s

* Will include pax from north west region

** Will include all Tasmanians

Devonport has only one destination – Melbourne. Urgently requires a Sydney route.

Great opportunity for cargo service to Toowoomba (Wellcamp Airport) for export market

Burnie has three Destinations – Melbourne, King Island and Launceston.

Burnie has a strong connection with King Island for education, medical & air freight.



MEDIA RELEASE – Saturday 28 September 2024

QANTAS PLANS A DISGRACE

Qantas plans to slash seven Devonport to Melbourne flights per week by March will hurt tourism and increase costs for local businesses, said DCCI president, Claire Connelly.

DCCI recently learned of Qantas plans to eliminate seven of its twenty seven weekly flights to and from Devonport. The new schedule is shown below, with discontinued flights shown in red:

OUTBOUND DEPARTURE TIME LEAVING DEVONPORT						
MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
630	630	630	630	630	630	630
1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000
1330	1330	1330	1330	1330	1330	1330
1700	1700	1700	1700	1700		1700
INBOUND DEPARTURE TIME LEAVING MELBOURNE						
MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
830	830	830	830	830	830	830
1200	1200	1200	1200	1200	1200	1200
1530	1530	1530	1530	1530	1530	1530
2030	2030	2030	2030	2030		2030

“We have so many concerns about this. Elimination of some of the 0630 flights out of Devonport, means that when our members travel for work, they will need to fly the day before, losing precious family time and incurring additional meal and accommodation costs in Melbourne. Similarly, returning Tasmanians and tourists will no longer be able to fly to Devonport late on Mondays or Sundays.” said Mrs Connelly.

“This impacts all north-west Tasmanians, and we’re being hit on several fronts. In addition to the impact on local businesses, this will affect locals travelling to Melbourne for leisure or medical treatment, and a less convenient flight schedule may also deter tourists. That’s without even considering the impact on connections through to other destinations.” Mrs Connelly said.

It is understood that the reduction in flights is associated with the introduction of larger aircraft.

“Unless larger planes delivers cheaper flights, there is no upside to this. We can only assume there will be no price reduction, because Qantas hasn’t spoken to our community about this. It’s very disappointing and Devonport deserves better from the so called ‘national ‘carrier’.” said Mrs Connelly.

Mrs Connelly heard about the change through an industry contact last week and raised her concerns with Devonport Mayor, Cr Allison Jarman and Senators Richard Colbeck, Anne Urquhart and Tammy Tyrell. The DCCI appreciates their advocacy on this issue.

The Chamber has written to Qantas CEO, Vanessa Hudson, seeking an opportunity to discuss the matter.

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MEDIA RELEASE – Thursday 24 October 2024

QANTAS RESPONDS TO COMMUNITY FEEDBACK WITH UPDATED SCHEDULE

Qantas has reconsidered plans to slash seven Devonport to Melbourne flights per week by March. The airline has advised the Devonport Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) in writing, that two of the flights initially flagged for elimination from its weekly schedule – the early morning 6.30am departure on Mondays and Tuesdays - will now be reinstated from 31 January 2025, to facilitate day trips from Devonport to Melbourne.

While the Chamber remains concerned about the overall reduction in flight frequency, we welcome the move.

“I thank Qantaslink CEO, Rachel Yangoyan and her team for meeting with me, and listening to the concerns we raised on behalf of our members and the wider community. I would also like to acknowledge the strong advocacy of Mayor Jarman, and Senators Colbeck, Lambie, Tyrell and Urquhart on this issue.” said DCCI President, Claire Connelly.

The reduction in flights comes as Qantas transitions to larger Q400 turbo-prop aircraft on the Devonport to Melbourne route, which the airline says will deliver increased capacity overall. A key concern of the DCCI was the impact that less frequent flights would have on business travellers, tourists and those needing to travel to Melbourne for medical treatment.

“We’re keen to continue working with Qantas, not only with a view towards more affordable, more frequent flights, but also to raise the profile of Devonport airport and our City more broadly, among those planning a visit to Tasmania”. said Mrs Connelly.

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