

11 February 2026

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
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Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
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Dear Committee Secretary

RE: Submission to the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee

Wagga Wagga City Council welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee inquiry into regional aviation services.

As a major regional centre servicing a broad catchment across southern New South Wales, Wagga Wagga is highly dependent on reliable, affordable and resilient aviation services. Air connectivity plays a critical role in supporting access to healthcare, education, emergency services, defence operations, business activity, workforce mobility and broader regional productivity.

Council's submission draws on its experience as the long-term operator of a regional airport and reflects the practical challenges faced by regional airports, airlines and communities. The submission is intended to support a balanced, forward-looking and evidence-based inquiry outcome.

1. Role of Regional Airports and Air Services

Regional airports serve functions that extend well beyond commercial passenger transport. In addition to scheduled airline services, regional airports support:

- aeromedical and emergency response operations;
- Defence and national security activities;
- general aviation, training and workforce development;
- business, tourism and freight connectivity; and
- disaster response and recovery.

For many regional communities, aviation is not a discretionary service but essential infrastructure that supports entire regional catchments, not just the communities in which airports are located.

2. Market Structure, Competition and Fare Outcomes

Council supports examination of the impacts of market concentration and limited competition on regional air routes. Many regional routes are effectively serviced by a single operator, resulting in higher fares, limited schedule flexibility and reduced service resilience.

The inquiry may wish to consider:

- the role of network pricing and price discrimination in regional fare structures;
- the transparency of fare-setting mechanisms; and
- whether current market settings adequately support affordability for regional passengers.

Improved competition is closely linked to infrastructure capability. In some cases, the absence of suitable runway, terminal or airfield infrastructure can limit the ability of new entrants or alternative aircraft types to operate regional routes.

3. Regional Aviation as Essential Infrastructure

Council submits that regional aviation should be recognised as essential national economic and social infrastructure, comparable to road, rail and telecommunications networks.

This recognition would:

- support more coherent long-term policy settings;
- acknowledge the role of aviation in workforce mobility and access to essential services; and
- strengthen the case for targeted investment and support mechanisms.

Most transport systems in Australia rely on some form of government investment or subsidy. Treating regional aviation solely as a commercial activity risks underestimating its broader public value.

4. Proportionate and Risk-Based Regulatory Settings

Council supports consideration of whether regulatory and aviation security requirements are appropriately scaled to the size, risk profile and passenger volumes of regional airports.

While safety and security outcomes must remain paramount, proportionate and risk-based approaches may:

- reduce cost pressures on regional airports;
- improve operational flexibility; and
- enhance long-term sustainability without compromising standards.

5. Passenger Affordability and Access

Affordability remains a key concern for regional residents. Increasingly, passengers are weighing long-distance road travel as an alternative to air travel due to fare costs.

Council supports exploration of targeted, demand-side measures that directly address passenger affordability, including:

- resident fare concessions;
- capped fares on monopoly routes; and
- other passenger-focused affordability mechanisms.

Such approaches could complement existing airline and airport support programs and more directly address cost pressures experienced by regional communities.

6. Health, Education and Emergency Access

Reliable and affordable air services are critical to regional access to:

- specialist healthcare and aeromedical transfers.
- higher education and training opportunities.
- emergency response and disaster recovery.

These social and service-delivery impacts warrant consideration alongside commercial performance metrics.

7. Workforce Sustainability in Regional Aviation

Workforce shortages across pilots, engineers, ground handling and related aviation roles present a growing risk to service reliability.

Council supports policy settings that:

- strengthen regional training pathways;
- support workforce retention in regional locations; and
- encourage decentralised skills development.

8. Decarbonisation and Regional Equity

Council supports aviation decarbonisation objectives but emphasises the need to avoid disproportionate cost impacts on regional communities.

Regional airports may offer opportunities to trial lower-emissions technologies and operational practices, provided:

- transitional costs are appropriately supported; and
- regional equity considerations are embedded in policy design.

9. Data Transparency and Ongoing Monitoring

Enhanced public reporting on regional aviation performance—including fares, cancellations and on-time performance—would support more informed policy development.

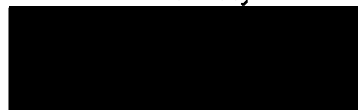
Consideration could also be given to establishing ongoing monitoring mechanisms beyond the life of the current inquiry to track long-term outcomes, regional connectivity and service reliability.

Conclusion

Regional aviation is fundamental to the social, economic and service-delivery fabric of regional Australia. Wagga Wagga City Council encourages the Committee to adopt a holistic approach that recognises aviation as essential infrastructure, balances commercial realities with community needs and supports long-term sustainability.

Council appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the inquiry and would welcome further engagement as the Committee progresses its work.

Yours sincerely



Peter Thompson
General Manager