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DUE to a shortage of pilots, such as first officer James Watson, Regional Express (Rex) has considered the suspension of flights between Griffith and Melbourne and has cancelled several other regional routes.

Lucky escape for Melbourne flights

By BRYDIE FLYNN

FOUR months into its operation, flights between Griffith and Melbourne have narrowly escaped the boardroom chopping block after Regional Express (Rex) conducted a network review of its flights, cancelling those with the lowest passenger loads.

Rex general manager for network

strategy and sales Warrick Lodge confirmed Griffith to Melbourne flights had been seriously considered for suspension, but said the positively trending passenger numbers and the efficiencies of being linked to the Sydney route meant they would continue for the time being.

He said the network's newest routes were often the first to be considered for suspension due to their

generally low profitability.

This was recently played out in Maryborough, where Rex flights were suspended only one month into operation.

The airline also recently suspended flights out of Cooma and West Wyalong and cancelled one-third of the flights between Wagga and Sydney. In the context of a serious skill shortage where Rex is strug-

gling to find enough pilots to fly its 1300 weekly flights, passenger numbers in and out of Griffith will need to remain high for the Victorian route to continue.

"The passenger numbers on the Griffith to Melbourne route over the last six weeks have been encouraging and show a good trend," Mr Lodge said.

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REGIONAL Express deputy chairman John Sharp says the major domestic flight companies, such as Virgin Blue and Jetstar, are 'poaching' skilled pilots from his company.

Rex says companies are 'poaching' pilots

Skills shortage causes flight cuts

By BRYDIE FLYNN

REGIONAL Express (Rex) has said a shortage of trained pilots is affecting its ability to continue operating all its routes.

At a press conference in Sydney on Wednesday, deputy chairman John Sharp spoke about the unprecedented number of pilot resignations the airline had received following "poaching" by the major domestic players.

In one month alone, 10 per cent of the airline's pilots had resigned.

"Twenty one pilots resigned in July alone and that had an immediate impact on our ability to operate," Mr Sharp said.

He said the nation's two biggest cut-price airlines, Virgin Blue and Jetstar, were "bludging off regional airlines" and raiding airlines such as Rex for staff instead of doing anything to help remedy the skill shortage.

"They are doing the easy thing by raiding Rex and other regional airlines," Mr Sharp said.

He said Rex was doing its bit to help remedy the situation by opening a cadet training school at Mangalore airport, near Melbourne.

Melbourne flights to continue – for now

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"Four of those weeks have actually had record numbers. However, even these record numbers are still insufficient to maintain commercial viability and residents must give it their full support if they want to ensure the survival of the service," he said.

While the airline is doing every-

thing it can to continue all flights, he said he could not make any guarantees.

"It's fair to say the reviews will continue but we don't expect any more changes at the moment," he said.

"We remain committed to providing services but in the current environment, we can't rule anything out."

The intensive training program will allow students to graduate with a Commercial Pilot Licence within 32 weeks.

"This initiative will enable Rex to have a guaranteed supply of highly trained pilots entering its ranks, helping to ensure sufficient pilot numbers for both current needs and future growth," Rex chief of staff Jim Davis said.

The shortage has also been raised by the NSW Minister for Regional Development and Rural Affairs, Tony Kelly, who has urged the federal government to help train more pilots.

"The federal government should be doing something about getting serious about addressing this skills shortage and assisting with the pilot shortage in Australia," he said.

Meanwhile, others say the airline is simply feeling the pinch of a tight labour market where those higher up in the food chain can afford to make more lucrative offers.

"It's a free labour market and there are huge, attractive opportunities for young professionals, not just pilots," Jetstar general manager of corporate relations Simon Westaway said.