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### Council under attack over airport plans

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Regional Express (REX) has launched a scathing attack on Bega Valley Shire Council (BVSC) ahead of the general council meeting, which discussed Merimbula airport, yesterday, Tuesday, January 17.

In council's business paper, BVS general manager, Peter Tegart flagged council's intentions to resurface and extend the runway, increase landing fees, negotiate a short-term lease for the airport and collect data on passenger numbers.

In a letter to Mr Tegart, Rex's general manager, network strategy and sales, Warren Lodge, has called the recommendations for the airport "foolish, reckless and irresponsible" and claims that council has failed to consult or communicate with Rex over the matter.

Mr Warren said: "We wish to strongly warn council that the recommendations in the said report (Option 4 of the Aurecon report) are foolish, reckless and irresponsible. The notion that Merimbula airport needs longer runways to attract bigger aircraft is naive and completely out of touch with the economic realities of the regional aviation environment.

"For its extremely thin total annual passenger throughput of 50,000 (34,000 to Sydney and 16,000 to Melbourne), the Bega Valley Shire should already count itself extremely fortunate to have a reliable and frequent air service that links the region to two capital cities.

"The average load factor on the Melbourne route (which follows Rex's expansion of the route in March 2011) is only 54 per cent which is below the long-term sustainable level and in the absence of the Sydney service operating via Moruya to collect additional passengers, the average load factor between Merimbula and Sydney would be less than 50 per cent."