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Airport upgrade could cost passengers - Ticket prices to rise if jets fly into city

By KEELY BELL

Plane ticket prices will go up if jets start coming to town, according to Regional Express (Rex).

A Rex senior manager claims upgrades on the airport will cost passengers more on ticket prices, than if nothing was done.

Dubbo City Council is currently upgrading the city airport to make it more accessible for large jets.

Yesterday council confirmed it expected larger airlines such as Virgin Blue to open routes to Dubbo once the \$1 million upgrade was completed.

Rex general manager for network strategy Warrick Lodge said jets required greater security and would cost the council airport significantly more in maintenance costs each year.

He said airport costs were passed on to airport operators who then passed the costs onto passengers.

“Jet services bring significant cost increases to the airport particularly security costs. If those costs are passed on to other airport users like us, it can only mean the ticket price will increase,” he said.

Mr Lodge said Dubbo airport patrons would not benefit from more cheap fares if airline giants such as Virgin Blue came to the city.

“They offer a lot of gimmicks like one cent fares. No one can give away fares for one cent. It is all well and good to look at the price of tickets but what is important is the number of those cheap seats available ... not many,” he said.

Mr Lodge said Virgin Blue may bring cheaper fares to Dubbo but they would only service a minority of passengers.

“At the end of the day we operate more simply than that. We offer good prices at large volumes ... those other airlines don't do that,” he said.

Mr Lodge said passengers currently flying with Rex and Qantas in and out of Dubbo were getting the cheapest flights possible.

“The turbo-prop services operated by Rex and Qantas at the moment are more frequent and keep airport costs down which in turn keeps ticket prices lower,” he said.



According to a Rex senior manager the upgrades to Dubbo's airport will increase the price of airfares if bigger jets fly into Dubbo because of the higher cost of maintenance and security.

“We don’t require all the extra security, space and maintenance that large jets do. Our services incur less airport costs.”

Since July 2007, 62 per cent of Rex passengers on the Sydney to Dubbo route have flown on the cheapest fare possible, according to Mr Lodge.

Those passengers were paying between \$89 and \$115 per flight.

Mr Lodge said Rex would be unable to offer flights at those prices if the council increased airport costs to accommodate jets.

“The Dubbo community doesn’t need to strive to get other air services over and above what is currently there. It will end up costing you more,” he said.