

PILOT SCHOOL TO LAND IN WAGGGA



**Relocation will
pump millions
into economy**

By LAURA DAVIES
Reporting from Sydney

A PILOT training academy will be set up in Wagga by the end of this year, helping establish the city as an aviation hub.

Regional Express Airlines (Rex) plans to relocate its existing pilot training academy from Mangalore in Victoria to Wagga.

The development, expected to be taking cadets by the end of this year, will include accommodation and recreational facilities to cater for as many as 200

trainees each year. More than 100 new jobs will also be created.

The move was announced yesterday during Rex's half-yearly financial briefing at its head office in Sydney.

The airline has bought a new hangar and land next to the airport in preparation for the new academy, and will spend up to \$15 million establishing the facility.

Rex executive chairman Lim Kim Hai said the move was necessary to ensure Rex could continue to provide a high standard of training into the future.

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Rex flies in face of market trends

By LAURA DAVIES

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Wagga to benefit from new facility

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He said the Mangalore facility was established in a hurry to combat pilot shortages in 2007, but was not sufficient to meet future needs.

"We had to set up very quickly - Mangalore was viable and was ready, but it is not really suitable for a real full-blown academy of the size we would want," Mr Lim said.

"This is a record profit once again for Rex and demonstrates its strength as a company."

The number of passengers travelling on Rex dropped 9 per cent in the first half of this financial year, compared to the same period the year before, which Mr

He said Wagga was the logical choice for the academy, because it was also the airline's engineering centre.

The facility is expected to attract trainee pilots not only for Rex, but from airlines around the world.

New buildings will be constructed next to the airport's entrance, and new aircraft have already been purchased for training.

Wagga City Council and Rex have been working together to make the move a reality, and council's general manager Lyn Russell said it was an exciting time for the city.

"We're absolutely delighted," she said. "It really puts us on the map internationally."

Wagga mayor Kerry Pascoe said the academy would join the defence bases and uni-

versity as drawcards to the city. "It brings people to Wagga for the first time," he said.

"There are a lot of economic off-shoots of this for the city."

Councillor Pascoe said while the city would benefit from extra jobs and tourism, it also had a lot to offer new trainees.

Work is expected to start on the new facility in April.

Sharp said was linked to cuts in routes and flight frequency during pilot shortages.

The shortage forced Rex to completely cut some routes and reduce the frequency of flights on others, but steadier pilot numbers have allowed the airline to

increase some services.

The Mildura to Sydney route was scrapped in November 2008, but the resources were later transferred to the Griffith to Sydney route, increasing business-time travel between the cities.

REGIONAL Express Airlines (Rex) has struggled with pilot shortages and high fuel costs in the past, but its future is looking brighter.

At Rex's half-yearly financial briefing in Sydney yesterday, deputy chairman John Sharp revealed establishing a pilot training academy in 2007 and adjusting the fuel surcharge had helped the airline survive tough times.

He said Rex was unique in that it had still managed to post an increased profit after tax of \$10.5 million, despite unfavourable economic conditions.

That result, for the first half of this financial year, was an increase of 1.9 per cent on the same period the year before.

"It's not only an outstanding result in our current environment, it's an outstanding result in our industry," Mr Sharp said.