

Pilot training centre touted as Asia-Pacific leader

(ABC News: Kathleen Dyett, 27 May 2010)

A multi-million-dollar academy in the New South Wales Riverina is being touted as the potential leader of pilot training for the Asia-Pacific region.

Federal Transport Minister Anthony Albanese officially opened the Australian Airline Pilot Academy (AAPA) at Wagga Wagga's airport on Thursday.

The Regional Express campus includes an academic centre, on-campus accommodation, recreational facilities and a flight simulator.

It will require a \$25 million investment over five years and will train about 200 pilots a year.

The academy relocated from Mangalore Airport in Victoria last year and operated out of temporary facilities until the building's completion.

Mr Albanese says the academy will fill a void in Australia's aviation industry. "This state-of-the-art facility will train Australians but also have the ability to train overseas pilots as an export industry in the long term," he said.

"This is a facility without peer in Australia. The fact it's in a regional city will bring a great deal of economic activity."

NSW Parliamentary Secretary for State and Regional Development Noreen Hay says Wagga Wagga is the ideal home for the academy.

"These facilities will allow the academy to offer a range of programs including private air transport and commercial pilot licences, command instrument rating and even a cadet pilot program," she said.

"The training will not only impart basic flying skills required by the Civil Aviation Safety Authority but also prepare pilots specifically for the complex and demanding multi-crew requirement required in effective airline operations."

Ms Hay says it is reassuring future pilots will be provided with state-of-the-art training at the facility.

"I am confident these factors will cement this new academy's place in the Asia-Pacific's leading pilot training centre," she said.

"The AAPA is a fantastic addition for NSW and especially the Riverina region." Chairman of the academy and managing director of REX Airlines, Jim Davis, says the facility will train pilots from airlines around the world.

"It's hard to believe that only 10 months ago this was just a bare paddock," he said.

"It was a dream borne out of the pilot shortage in 2007 which threatened the very existence of REX."

Mr Albanese has also announced \$1.1 million will be spent on an instrument landing system at Wagga Wagga's airport.

The system provides extra guidance to pilots allowing for less disruption of flights due to weather conditions such as fog and low cloud.

The system will also be used as part of pilot training at the academy.

Mr Albanese says the funding is conditional on Wagga Wagga City Council formalising a contract with the Government and meeting conditions.