

To: Western Australian Department of Transport

Re: Draft WA Aviation Strategy

12 May 2020

Introduction

The Association of Mining and Exploration Companies (AMEC) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Draft WA Aviation Strategy.

About AMEC

AMEC is a leading national industry body representing over 275 mining and mineral exploration companies across Australia. Our members are explorers, emerging miners, producers, and a wide range of businesses working in and for the minerals industry. The majority of AMEC members work in remote and regional Western Australia and rely on affordable air transport to sustain their operations.

The mining and mineral exploration industry make a critical contribution to the Western Australian economy, employing around 125,000 in 2018/19. These companies collectively paid over \$6 billion in royalties and generated more than \$107 billion in mineral exports.

In 2018/19, WA mining and mineral exploration companies invested \$2.3 billion in exploration to discover the mines of the future.

The vast majority of mining and mineral exploration in Western Australia occurs in the remote and regional areas of the State.

General comment on Strategy

The Strategy's clear objective of ensuring affordable airfares is supported by AMEC. As outlined in AMEC's submission to the WA Parliament's Economic and Industry Standing Committee Inquiry into Regional Airfares in Western Australia, affordable airfares underpin the Western Australian mining and mineral exploration industry.

Comment on Mining Air Strips

The draft WA Aviation Strategy considers the location of mining airstrips under the goal C7 on pages 35 and 40.

The Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage, in consultation with relevant State Government agencies, will investigate providing guidance to local government which aims to:

- *outline the development requirements for mining airstrips under the Mining Act 1978 and the Planning and Development Act 2005 and associated regulation; and*
- *identify the role of the local planning framework in the planning and development of mining airstrips.*

The purpose of this goal is outlined in the text, "*in instances where the Minister for Mines is the decision maker for a mining lease or general purpose lease application, and the approval of a lease application would authorise a mining airstrip contrary to the provisions of the local planning scheme, the local government or the WAPC can*

raise the issue for Ministerial consideration. Where this occurs, the Minister for Mines is required to seek the views of the Minister for Planning, prior to making a decision on a mine-site airstrip lease application.”

AMEC supports the community having a voice in the activities that occur in their region. Mining and mineral exploration create jobs, diversity, opportunities and economic stimulus in remote and regional parts of Australia. Mining is one of the major employers in regional Australia.

It must be noted the decision to build an air strip is not taken lightly by a company. The cost of transporting workers to site is a significant business input for mining which demands tight management to ensure that operational efficiency is not detrimentally affected. Without an affordable method of transporting workers to site many mines would not be feasible.

Remote mining operations in Western Australia need access to an air strip to transport their workforce affordably and reliably. Whether a new airstrip is constructed or whether a more distant airstrip owned by a third party is used is determined by commerciality, safety, reliability, accessibility and flexibility of service.

A mine site requires flexible flight departure times to meet the demands of an operating mine and family friendly workforce roster arrangements. An airstrip near a mine site reduces the costs of meeting fatigue and mental health requirements to ensure a healthy workforce. The proximity of an airstrip on site reduces the pressure on employees at the end of an already significant journey and lessens time away from family.

As discussed during the Parliamentary Inquiry into Regional Airfares, Industry has expressed concern that regional airports operated by local authorities charge an inward and outward passenger fee. There is limited transparency, accountability, governance principles, control measures or consultation requirements around these fees and charges.

These charges vary significantly between airports, with no clear justification or financial supporting data provided. Historically there has seemed to be a general lack of consultation with airport users, such as mining companies as opposed to the airlines. The lack of certainty and transparency around these costs, particularly over the medium to long term, can determine the decision to own and operate a separate airstrip where control over costs and flight schedules is clearer.

Future comment

If a review of regulatory settings as per Action A9 is undertaken AMEC request to be consulted upon behalf of industry.

The cost of air travel is a key consideration for Western Australia’s developing mining and mineral exploration industry. A company needs to be able to transport its workforce safely and economically to its site. Ultimately, employees have a right, and a reasonable expectation, to travel as little possible to their workplace.

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