

Source: Australian Aviation, 27 May 2010

Rex pilot academy officially opened, ILS for Wagga Wagga

Transport Minister Anthony Albanese officially opened Regional Express (Rex)'s Australian Airline Pilot Academy (AAPA) at Wagga Wagga on May 27, at the same time announcing the federal government would provide just over \$1 million to help fund an instrument landing system (ILS) for the regional NSW centre's airport.

"Rex has shown a great deal of vision ... in being prepared to invest in infrastructure and a workforce in a way that is about ... long term planning and [that] deals with skills shortages," said Minister Albanese in officially opening the facility.

Rex is investing up to \$25 million in equipment and facilities for AAPA at Wagga Wagga, which will ultimately be able to train up to 200 pilots a year for Rex and other airlines and employ around 70 full time staff. Construction on AAPA's new facilities began only in July last year, with the campus now featuring accommodation, recreation and meals facilities, an 'Academic Centre' building featuring classrooms, simulators, a library and language laboratory, and a retired Saab 340 aircraft for use as a static training aid.

The AAPA facilities also include a pre-existing hangar on Wagga Wagga Airport which includes briefing rooms and flight operations support facilities, while the academy's aircraft fleet comprises 16 new Piper Warriors and four new Piper Seminoles.

"This is Rex's proudest day," AAPA chairman and Rex managing director Jim Davis said during the opening ceremony.

"This pilot academy is a critical part to finding the solutions to skills shortages, and I want to congratulate the council, Rex Airlines, Airservices Australia and all those individuals and groups who collectively have worked so hard to achieve this fantastic dream, it is a facility that is extraordinary in terms of its state-of-the-art nature," the Minister said.

The ILS will be a critical training tool for AAPA, whose students currently have to fly to Canberra to practice ILS approaches, as well as providing increased operational flexibility for Rex and QantasLink RPT flights into Wagga Wagga, and giving hands-on experience on the technology to students of Airservices Australia's technical school at Wagga Wagga's Riverina Institute of TAFE NSW.

"Installing the ILS at the airport will help the academy develop as a world class training facility, generating jobs and economic growth into the future," Minister Albanese said.

The Commonwealth will provide \$1.06 million towards the \$1.63 million cost of the ILS's purchase and installation under its Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program, with the balance of the funds provided by the Wagga Wagga City Council, Rex and Airservices. The ILS is due to become operational later this year.