

Rex takes pride in massive turnaround

REGIONAL Express boasted the lowest number of flight cancellations of seven airlines during May, according to an aviation industry report.

The report from the the Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics marks a big turnaround for the airline which only a year ago was cancelling almost 60 flights per month, and battling to maintain public confidence in its ability to provide reliable services.

Yesterday, 18 new pilots who graduated from the Rex pilot training academy in Wagga were reminded of their role in helping Rex to re-build consumer confidence.

They were the second group of graduates from Rex's own pilot training scheme, introduced in 2007 at the height of the pilot shortage, and the first to graduate from Wagga.

"The common feeling among each of us today is pride ... if we look back two years, when Rex was hemorrhaging pilots, we had no solution but we knew cadets were going to be the answer," chief pilot and general manager of flying operations for Rex Chris Hine told the audience.

"As I stood in here earlier talking to friends and family of the graduates, I could



FLYING HIGH: Eighteen pilots graduated from the Regional Express training academy at Wagga airport yesterday. They were selected for the program from a pool of 3000 applicants Australia-wide. Picture: Brett Koschel

hear bulldozers reversing in the background. I couldn't help but think to 18 months ago when we could only dream of a Rex pilot training program."

The bulldozers Mr Hine referred to were at work on the construction site adjacent to Wagga airport, where accommodation and

classrooms are currently being built for the training academy.

Rex blamed 'pilot-pilfering' by other airlines when its cancellations and flight delays reached crisis point between 2007 and 2008.

"There are financial incentives for these (graduating) pilots to stay with

Rex, and they join us with less than 200 hours of flying experience so they won't be targeted by Qantas or Virgin or Jetstar," Rex managing director Jim Davis said yesterday.

Graduate pilot Julian Tyrrel received the Max Hazelton award for his flying achievements during

training.

Brassil Saker was awarded the Don Kendall award for achieving the highest score during his theory training.

The Chairman award for the highest assessment overall was awarded to Brett Morrison.

— Rebekah Holliday