

At present, 94.6 percent of New Zealanders (or 4.01m people) live within 50 km of an airport with scheduled passenger services. The economic and social health of regional New Zealand depends on maintaining this excellent network.

Research conducted for the New Zealand Airports Association in 2013 highlighted the economic and social contribution of regional airports which enabled interregional and international travel and trade.

Nationally, airport environs are large business areas, with almost 80,000 people working in close proximity to the local airport and a further 131,000 jobs generated by the wider linkages of businesses at airports. Tourism, trade and business travel enabled by airports support an additional 490,000 jobs in the New Zealand economy.

Annually, regional airports (i.e. excluding Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch) and their related or co-located businesses generate NZ\$1.18 Billion in added value, and the wider linkages (facilitated effects) from these businesses generate a further NZ\$6 Billion. Regional airports are significant drivers and enablers of regional economies.

This importance is not always obvious; the full impact of the airport is often hidden and spread around the region. In general, the facilitated affects are around four times larger than the more obvious contribution of the airport and its immediate environs, but in some cases the regional facilitated effects are up to ten times the contribution of the airport and its neighbourhood.

The report's authors (Market Economics) concluded that by delivering high quality services, airports enhance the growth potential of their regions, in turn creating more demand for air travel. This means that future-proofing airports will be critically important, including protecting the land and airspace around them. For regional business communities the presence of an airport can be a critical factor in attracting inward investment, making efficient travel possible for all-important face-to-face business connections, and enabling tourism.

Nelson Airport, for example, is now home to 33 businesses. They include businesses you would expect to find at an airport but the clustering of companies has encouraged other aviation businesses to set up at the airport. Most importantly, these businesses have easy access to markets, have grown, are now employing more people and generating further economic wealth.

Nelson Airport is also part of a group 'Top of the South' a community of aviation professionals. This draws together the aviation capabilities in the Nelson Marlborough region, leverages off the presence of Nelson and Marlborough Airports, RNZAF Woodbourne, Picton Airport, Omaka Airfield and Takaka Aerodrome, and allows the region to promote a wide range of aviation competence. This includes air operations, defence, servicing, training, vintage aviation and the wide range of support functions these services require.

The Business Park at Hawkes Bay Airport in Napier is being developed to attract a variety of clients in disciplines ranging from research and development, education, high tech industrial, distribution and tourism to related services for airside businesses such as flight training, aircraft maintenance and freight facilities. The Business Park opened in 2013 with multinational ABB as the anchor tenant, with several other aviation and non-aviation prospects in hand.

Hawkes Bay Airport is about to undertake a survey of all existing customers at the airport, to identify future needs with a view to issuing a RFP for terminal development before the end of June 2014. The Eastern Institute of Technology is working with the airport.

These are just two examples of what many regional airports in New Zealand are doing to position themselves for the future.

Regional air links are also critical to social connectivity such as visiting family and friends, regional festivals, sports tournaments and cultural events. Changes in the distribution of

health services in New Zealand also mean that patient transfers to a smaller number of specialised hospitals are increasingly reliant on regional airports.

Airports Association chief executive Kevin Ward says 'of course an airport without regular airline services can't deliver these benefits'. He also points out that 'an additional challenge for smaller centres is to maintain their air connections in the face of changing airline patterns'. For example, in New Zealand, the Air New Zealand aircraft serving a number of towns is the 19 seat Beech 1900. Services have recently been cut from towns such as Whanganui and Masterton - with others on the airline 'watch list'.

Regional airports have also been important in helping New Zealand companies develop products and services for the world stage. Today, New Zealand companies provide products and services to over 80 countries around the World, and to all continents.

The future presents challenges. The regional airports in New Zealand though are up to the challenges and are looking to remain significant contributors to the economic and social health of their regions, and the country.

New Zealand Aviation: practical, innovative and professional