

Proposal for airport tax

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Shawnee Marcroft with \$5 for departure tax

Would you be happy to pay a \$5 airport tax?

A business leader wants a \$5 departure tax at Marlborough's airport.

Marlborough Chamber of Commerce general manager Brian Dawson is advocating the tax on passengers to pay for an expansion of the airport terminal at Woodbourne.

Mr Dawson said it was "fantastic news" the airport company was planning to double the size of the airport terminal and build a lounge and meeting room.

The issue was how to pay for the expansion and there needed to be a partnership between those who benefit from the expansion, including Air New Zealand, other airport tenants, and the travelling public, he said.

He suggested a \$5 tax, or improvement levy, would "go a long way" to funding the travelling public's share of the expansion costs.

If it was explained clearly and the benefits spelt out, people would accept it, he said.

It would only be in place till the upgrade was paid for.

Mr Dawson said Marlborough's airport terminal was handling more than twice the number of passengers it was designed for, and expansion was critical.

"It's a bit of a bottleneck now . . . the current terminal is 17 years old and was built to handle 100,000 passengers a year, but today, Marlborough Airport records over 230,000 passengers a year.

"An expansion and upgrade of its facilities would allow more people to move through the airport and provide a more attractive gateway to the region. A bigger airport will also allow for larger aircraft, encourage another major airline to add Marlborough to its destination list, and offer further leverage of the opportunities of a 24/7 operation.

"Finally, it would be a catalyst for another Marlborough requirement, the construction of more hotel accommodation."

He said the chamber was very keen to see expansion of the airport take place immediately.

It was "urging the council to view the improvement levy as the best option for meeting the travelling public's share of the costs".

Marlborough Airport is owned by MDC Holdings, a company wholly owned by the Marlborough District Council.

Airport manager Dean Heiford said no decision had been made on how to fund the expansion.

Potential earnings from licences and leases was being assessed but there were no discussions about a departure tax.

Domestic departure taxes are charged in other New Zealand airports including Hamilton, Rotorua and Palmerston North, though the latter's was to be absorbed into airline landing fees this month.