

Work on airport extension set to begin

By Julian Lee

Hokitika Airport Ltd is set to begin work to lengthen the runway some time after mid-March, in order to allow larger aircraft, including international charter flights from Australia, to land in Hokitika.

New Zealand aviation regulations require an extra 240m of runway to allow larger planes to land at Hokitika.

Every runway requires 240m at the end, called the runway end safety area (or RESA), and at Hokitika the aviation authorities have allocated 240m at the end of the airport's existing 1320m sealed runway as RESA.

By extending the runway with gravel the extra distance required, the airport will be allowed to utilise the full length of the existing runway, thereby allowing for larger planes to land, without having to seal.

The airport company must also fill in the small gully at the start of the extension area with about 45,000 cubic metres of gravel, which will be compacted and prepared for the extension.

Hokitika Airport chairman Bruce Smith said the company would spend \$400,000 over the next few years to complete the work, the funds coming solely from the company's own operating surplus.

The car park extension would be completed before starting the new project.

"We're working on increasing our car park and we're just awaiting sealing. You can't put on seal in the height of summer or at the height of winter."

A simple runway extension would mean a much larger increase of incoming passengers to Hokitika, he said.

"If you haven't got the RESA they take an extra 240m off your existing runway and they call it RESA. But with the extension, one of our operators will be able to bring 115 passengers at a time rather than three."

Mr Smith was quick to allay fears that the airport company had lofty ambitions.

"We're not looking to be an international airport, we're looking at international charter flights."