

MEDIA RELEASE

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Airports eager to work with government on new Aviation Recovery Framework

The new Aviation Recovery Framework announced by the Deputy Prime Minister today will open the door to a much-needed reset on the way the Australian Government assists airports in their post-COVID recovery.

Australian Airports Association (AAA) Chief Executive James Goodwin said he was pleased the government had committed to work with the sector on rebuilding after more than 18 months of stop-starts, border closures and record low passenger numbers.

“While domestic borders are beginning to reopen and international travel is back on the cards for Australians, airports are by no means out of the woods yet,” Mr Goodwin said.

“Our independent modelling has shown it will take several years for sector to return to pre-pandemic levels, particularly as new variants of the virus emerge with current rising case numbers making would-be travellers nervous.

“Airports are disappointed existing aviation support programs such as the Domestic Airports Security Costs Support (DASCS) program will be cut off at the end of December during what remains a difficult time for the sector with domestic passenger numbers still only at 25 per cent of pre-pandemic levels.

“Operators of rural and remote airstrips are pleased to see the government invest a further \$15 million in the Remote Airstrip Upgrade Program (RAUP) which will fund critical infrastructure upgrades to ensure our remote and indigenous communities remain connected to the rest of Australia.

“A third round of the Regional Airports Program (RAP) is also welcome however no further funds have been allocated. Maintaining existing and building new infrastructure assets remains the number one challenge for both large and small regional airports and we would encourage the government to consider a top up of the funds for this program as part of the Federal Budget in March.

“The government must also urgently consider supporting the major airports in upgrading security screening infrastructure so that it’s in line with international standards.

“Recent consumer research commissioned by the AAA found almost 80 per cent of travellers believe it’s the Australian Government’s job to pay for this new mandatory equipment. The impacts of the pandemic on Australia’s major airports has made an investment of this size and scope almost impossible.

“We’re pleased the government has turned its focus to the current skills shortage within the sector with airports having lost a range of skilled workers throughout the pandemic including security screeners, Aerodrome Reporting Officers, maintenance crew and those working in the on-airport retail and hospitality venues.

“While the six strategic priorities set out in the government’s new Framework are all important, support for airports with the transition to net zero should also be included.

“It’s also critical the government prioritises the Demand Management Arrangements at Sydney Airport. This is important to ensure a fair and efficient Sydney slot system which promotes competition, stimulates broader economic recovery and keeps regional communities connected.”

The Airport sector looks forward to working closely with the new Strategic Aviation Advisory Forum which is set to be formed early next year to ensure the Framework covers all industry issues and challenges arising throughout the recovery process.

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