

City of Ballarat Submission
to Productivity Commission Inquiry into Determinants of Regional Airfares
March 2026

Despite being Australia's 17th largest city by population, Ballarat is one of few localities in the top 50 by population **without** an airline service. The Ballarat Airport's passenger catchment area is currently estimated to be 300,000 people and is expected to grow to 450,000 people by 2051. Currently, there are up to 1,600 residents in the region who travel daily to Melbourne Airport, with around 300 of these travellers flying to Sydney.

Ballarat Airport will not be in a position to attract a scheduled commercial air service (RPT) until such time as the airport's runway is upgraded and strengthened, at a projected cost of \$11.7 million.

The ageing runway infrastructure is no longer fit for purpose, is demonstrably unsafe, and acts as a limiter on economic growth. It puts the region at risk of missing out on the opportunity of creating a multimodal transport precinct for Ballarat and western Victoria.

City of Ballarat acknowledges the support we have received in the past from the Commonwealth's Regional Airports Program - for an extension to the Airport runway (Round 1) and a patient transfer facility (Round 4); however, with this competitive grant round being capped at \$40 million for a 4-year period for the entire country, we cannot expect to receive the funding necessary to upgrade the runway. **We advocate for a larger government grant pool, with increased funding allocations available for significant infrastructure upgrades / projects to support regional aviation growth.**

- Our local businesses tell us they are losing a day's productivity sending their employees to and from Melbourne Airport to travel to locations such as Sydney.
- We are unable to accommodate requests from significant Ballarat businesses to bring in private jets.
- We cannot allow our aircraft maintenance businesses to bring in large aircraft for servicing.
- We risk losing the existing Royal Flying Doctor Service due to the poor state of the runway.
- We cannot accommodate large fire-fighting aircraft, despite being ideally located for fighting fires in Western Victoria.

The common theme emerging from our 2024 community consultation process to develop our Ballarat Airport Strategic and Master Plan was that - despite the region's significant and growing population base - there was a lack of air transport connectivity, when compared to other major centres around Australia. This was identified as a serious limiter on economic growth, social mobility and business productivity.

The ageing runway infrastructure at the Ballarat Airport needs to be upgraded so residents and businesses in Western Victoria can realise the full benefits of a regional airport – business and tourism growth; emergency services capability; and improved transport connectivity. Despite benefiting Victorians from across the state, the financial burden of maintaining the Airport to a standard sufficient to safely conduct essential aviation services has unfairly rested with the City of Ballarat. Investment in the Precinct's foundational infrastructure is required to attract airline services, new businesses and see the uplift in land values translate into increased commercial activity.