

## Airport sell-offs labelled a disaster

By Scott Rochfort

March 4, 2006

THE sell-off of Sydney's four main airports threatens the viability and safety of general aviation in the city and will create an urban planning disaster that will be "reviled for years", critics have warned.

In the wake of the controversy surrounding the development at Sydney Airport, the state Planning Minister, Frank Sartor, has criticised the Federal Government for allowing the redevelopment of a 100 hectare non-aviation zone at Bankstown Airport.

He joins a chorus of disapproval from small aviation businesses, who suspect the owners of Bankstown, Hoxton Park and Camden airports are secretly trying to drive them out in order to develop the land. Flying schools have also warned that the recent closure of a runway and taxiways at Bankstown could compromise safety there.

Developers will start work this month on turning one third of Bankstown Airport into a business, manufacturing and retail park. Approval was given last year by the federal Transport Minister, Warren Truss, who has jurisdiction over the development of federal airport sites.

Given Bankstown and Camden airports - like Sydney Airport - have been privatised on long-term leases, they remain Commonwealth land and are not subject to local or state planning laws.

Hoxton Park, part of the \$211 million privatisation of Sydney's three smaller airports, will be closed in 2008 when it reverts to freehold status, and becomes subject to local planning laws.

Yesterday, Mr Sartor said: "This just shows the continual reckless indifference by the Federal Government to state planning laws and state planning policies.

"Their legacy for cities like Sydney will be one that they will be reviled about for years."

The State Government claims the Bankstown development will put an extra 13,000 vehicles on roads around the airport during peak hour, which it claims will cost it an extra \$100 million in road upgrades.

"We just are amazed at how cavalier they are," Mr Sartor said. "It just is extraordinary that the Federal Government for a quick few dollars sells off public land without regard to local planning policies, without the needs of managing a metropolis like Sydney. The buck is all they care about."

The chief executive of Banks-town Airport, Kim Ellis, insists there will be an aviation presence there under the airport's 20-year masterplan.

"The runway and taxiway are preserved in the masterplan, and certainly are going to outlive you and me," he said.

Mr Truss added that Banks-town's owners had a "very clear obligation" to maintain aviation at the airport. "If there is evidence of a large-scale deliberate rundown of general aviation activity, the Government issues this warning we will intervene," his spokesman said.

However, the recent doubling of lease payments and non-renewal of leases at the airport has alarmed smaller aviation businesses. "They are trying to bankrupt the tenants," said Katrina Dukats, who is fighting the airport's attempts to nearly triple her lease charges.

Several flying schools have warned that inexperienced pilots risk running into serious trouble if they do

not have the use of the north-south runway, especially in poor weather.

But Mr Truss's spokesman said: "There are no real safety concerns. If there were safety concerns, we would not have allowed it. Neither CASA [Civil Aviation Safety Authority] or Air Services have any concerns about this issue."

The chief instructor at Schofields Flying Club, Rodney Hyde, said the upcoming closure of Hoxton Park would leave metropolitan Sydney with only one north-south runway.

"If you have enough fuel you can wade them out but if they are embedded you have no choice but to land," he said.

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