Australian Government

Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government
Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics

Air transport service trends in regional Australia (2009 update)

This information sheet provides key trends of air transport services in regional Australia from 1984 to 2008, updating figures previously published in *Air Transport Services in Regional Australia: Trends and Access*, Report 115 (BITRE 2008) with new data from 2006 to 2008.

Most of the key regional aviation trends observed in the recent years (until the end of 2008) display a continuation of general historical trends presented in Report 115. With economic growth over recent years, regional aviation exhibited higher growth rates than in the earlier period.

Regional airports

Overall, passenger movements at regional airports continued to rise from 17.5 million in 2005 to 22.3 million in 2008. The number of airports served in regional areas continued a decreasing trend, falling from 170 airports in 2005 to 138 airports in 2008 (Figure 1).

Figure 1   Passenger movements at regional airports and number of regional airport served, 1984 to 2008
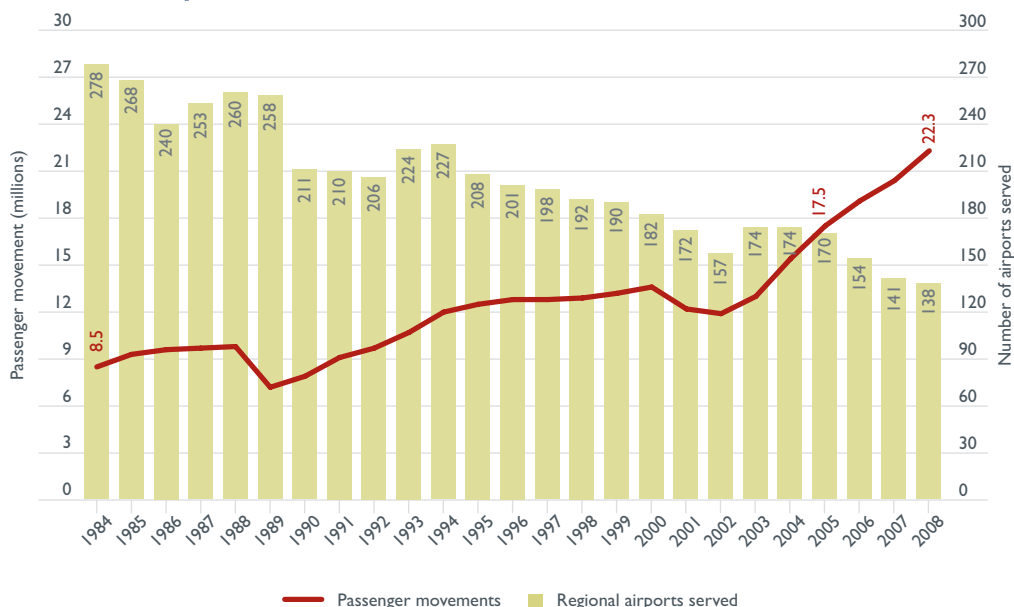
Source: BITRE time series estimates 2009.

Figure 2   Changes in distribution of regional airports between 2005 and 2008

Regional airport where RPT services commenced between 2005 and 2008

Regional airport where RPT services ceased between 2005 and 2008

Airport with RPT services recorded in 2008

The closest distance between an airport with RPT services recorded in 2008 and an airport with discontinued RPT services.
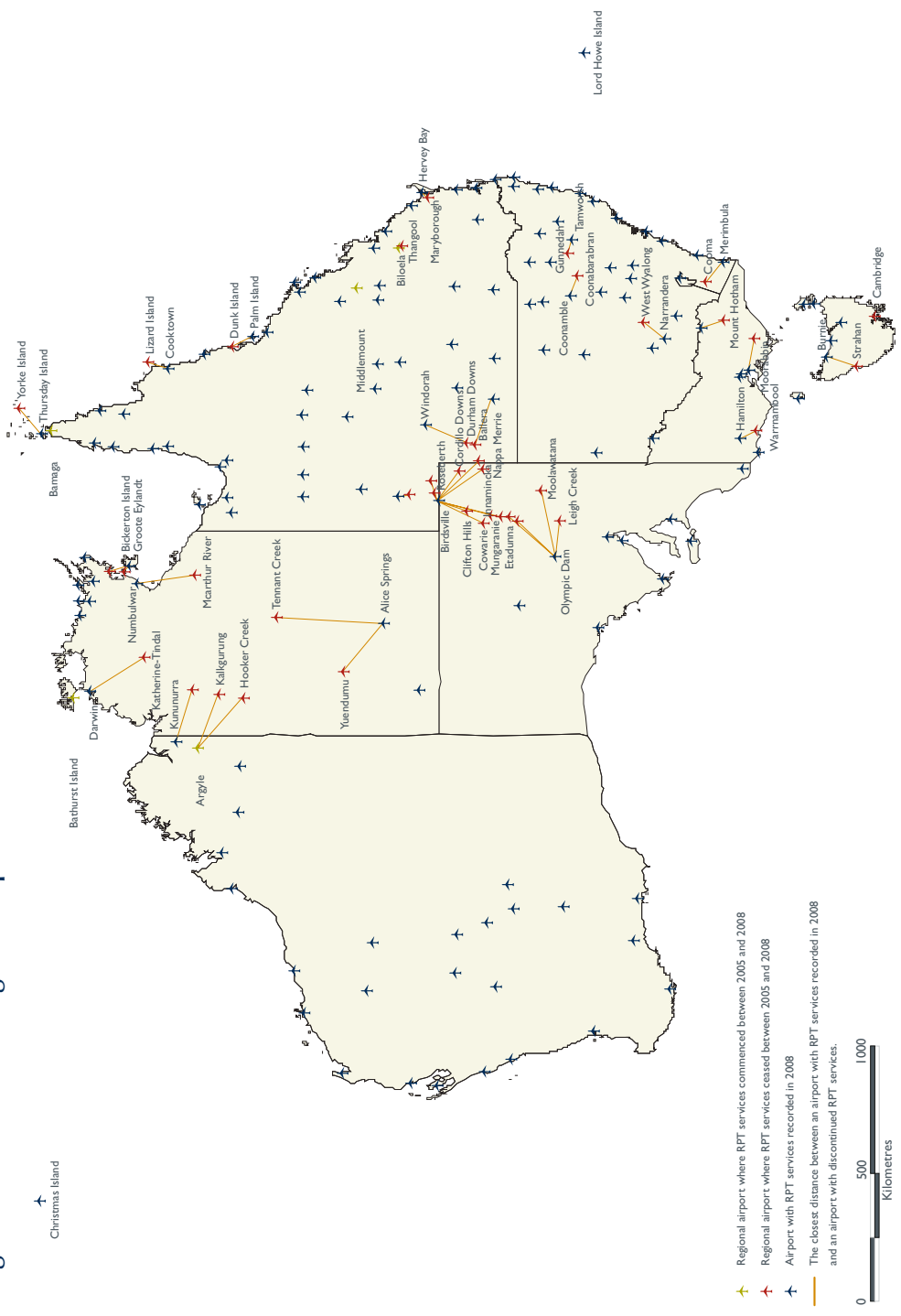
0   500   1000

Kilometres

Figure 2 shows changes in the provision of Regular Public Transport (RPT) at regional airports between 2005 and 2008. During this period, 37 regional airports lost their RPT services and 5 regional airports gained new RPT services. All except one regional airport (Tennant Creek in the Northern Territory) where RPT services were discontinued within the past three years are located within 300 km from another airport with RPT services (see Statistical Annex, Table A3).

Tennant Creek is about 464 km from the nearest airport with RPT services, Alice Springs. The town with a total population of 3500 has been accessible by train since the completion of the Adelaide–Darwin railway north from Alice Springs in 2004. The Ghan, run by Great Southern Railway between Adelaide and Darwin, arrives twice weekly in each direction and picks up or sets down passengers on request. Outback Airlines currently service Tennant Creek, providing mining charters between Alice Springs and Tennant Creek with seats available to the general public. There are also daily bus services from Darwin, Alice Springs and Queensland to Tennant Creek.

Some of the RPT-discontinued airports such as West Wyalong Airport in New South Wales, Yorke Island in Queensland et cetera are now serviced by charter flights only.

Extending the historical pattern, most of the decline in the number of regional airports was from very remote Australia. Between 2005 and 2008, 20 regional airports in very remote Australia lost regular air services completely (Table 1).

Table 1 Number of regional airports served by ASGC Remoteness Classification

Airports by ASGC Remoteness Classification	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2006	2007	2008
Inner regional Australia	42	36	36	33	26	25	23	21
Outer regional Australia	50	46	41	41	34	33	31	29
Remote Australia	38	34	30	21	21	20	19	19
Very remote Australia	138	95	101	87	89	76	68	69
Total number of regional airports served	268	211	208	182	170	154	141	138

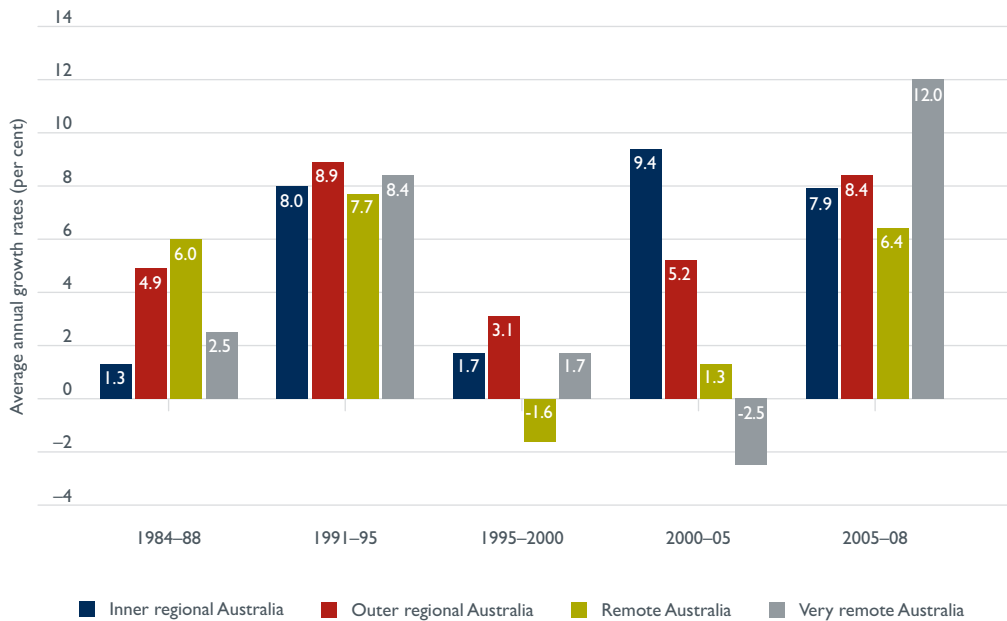Source: BITRE time series estimates 2009.

In contrast to the decrease in airport numbers, there has been a substantial percentage increase in passenger movements at regional airports in very remote Australia in the same period. Air passengers travelling to and from very remote Australia increased from 1.6 million to 2.2 million between 2005 and 2008 (Figure 3), growing at an average annual growth rate of 12 per cent, reversing the negative average annual growth rate between 2000 and 2005 (Figure 4). Overall, there has been continuous growth of air passenger movements at varying rates in all other classes of regional areas during this period. Generally, growth rates for air passenger movements in regional areas have been stronger in the past three years (2005–2008) than in the period of 2000 to 2005.

Figure 3 **Passenger movements at regional airports by ASGC Remoteness Classification, 1984 to 2008**
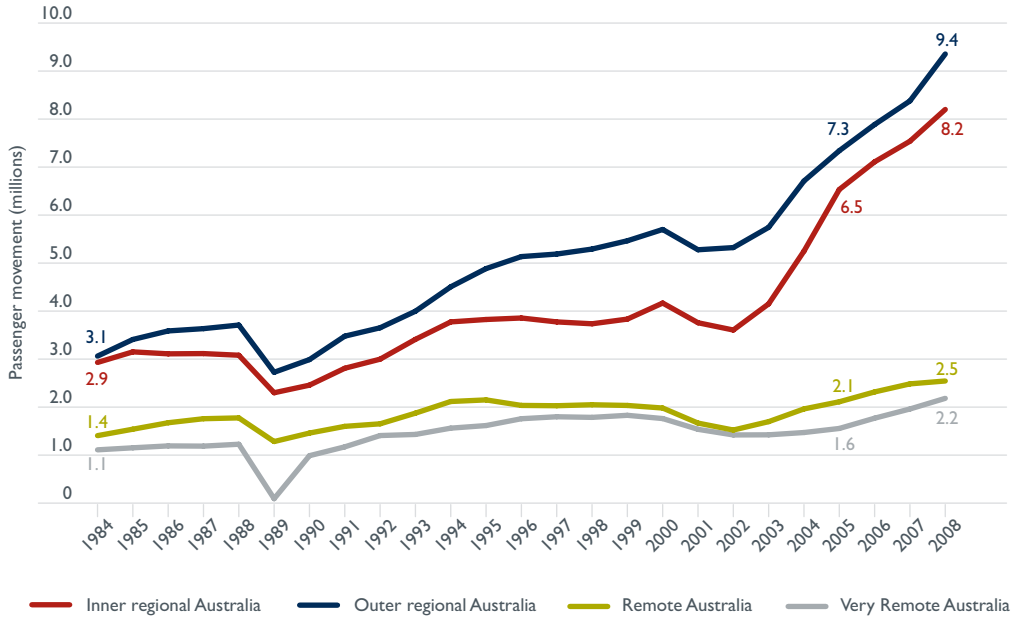
Source: BITRE time series estimates 2009.

Figure 4 **Annual average growth rates of passenger movements at regional airports by ASGC Remoteness Classification, 1984 to 2008**

Source: BITRE time series estimates 2009.

Figure 5 gives an overall picture of the changes in air services at regional airports in terms of the number of seats provided. Since 2005, 48 per cent of all regional airports have gained additional RPT available seats. In the same period, a quarter of all regional airports have lost all RPT services. Most of these regional airports were in very remote areas where there would have been insufficient population base and economic activity to support profitable RPT air services.

Figure 5   Change in RPT air services at regional airports since 2005
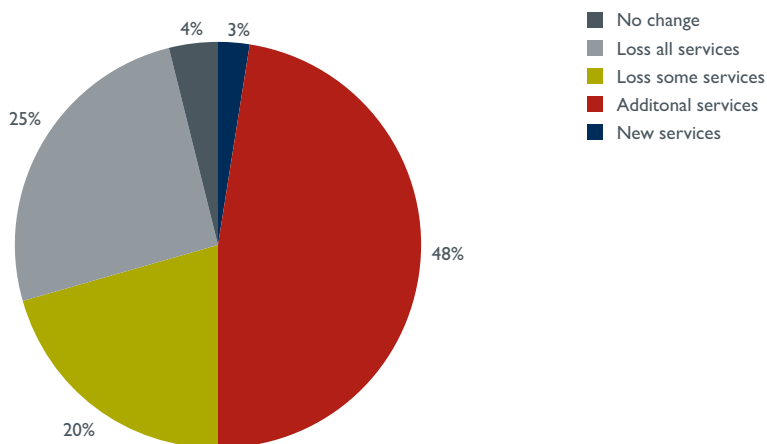
Note: RPT air services at regional airports are measured by the number of seats provided. Any percentage change in the number of seats that was within the range of +1 per cent was assumed to have no change in RPT air services during the reference period.

Source: BITRE time series estimates 2009.

Airlines serving regional airports

The number of airlines serving regional airports declined from 34 airlines in 2005 to 27 airlines in 2008 (Figure 6). The most recent airlines to cease serving regional airports were O'Connor Airlines and Inland Pacific Air. O'Connor Airlines ceased operations in December 2007. Inland Pacific Air operations between Townsville and Palm Island changed to Queensland Regional Airlines (QRA) in August 2006 as part of a merger. This route is now operated by sister company Skytrans Airlines.

Overall, the proportion of regional airports served by single operators continued to be high, at around 70 per cent or above for the past few years.

Figure 6   Number of airlines serving regional airports, 1984 to 2008
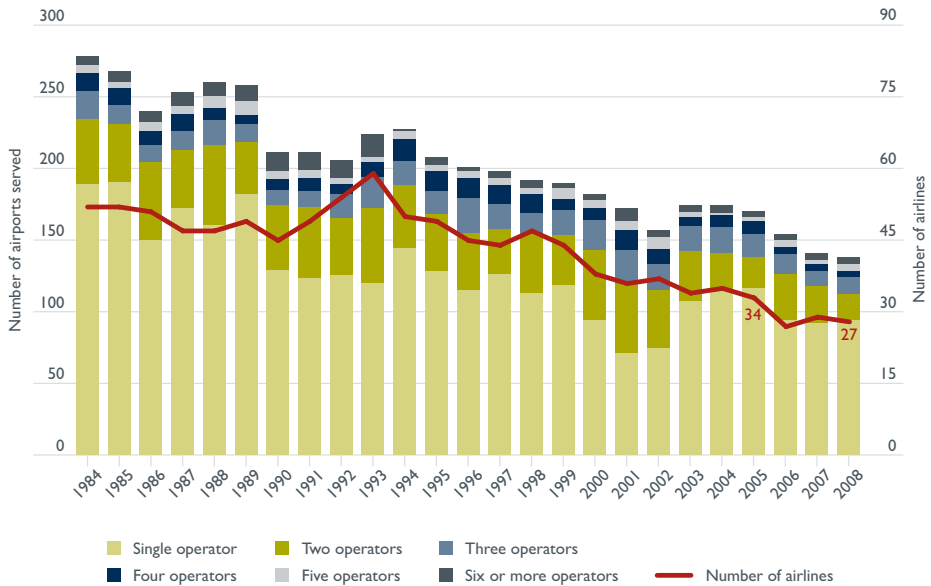
Source: BITRE time series estimates 2009.

Regional air routes

The number of regional air routes has continued to decline, falling from 415 to 380 routes between 2005 and 2008. As shown in Figure 7, the decrease is smaller for air routes between major cities and regional areas (nine routes) than air routes between regional areas (26 routes).

Figure 7   Regional air routes, 1984 to 2008
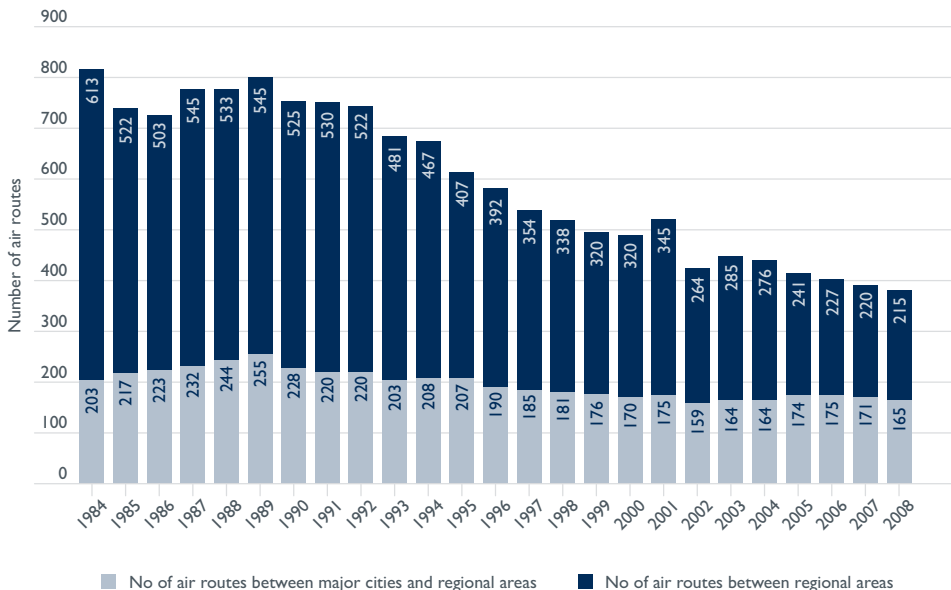
Source: BITRE time series estimates 2009.

Passengers carried on regional air routes continued to rise, growing from 16.0 million in 2005 to 20.1 million in 2008, for an average annual growth of 9.6 per cent between 2005 and 2008 (Figure 8).

Passenger growth on regional air routes was largely due to traffic on regional air routes between regional airports and airports at major cities. Passengers travelling between major cities and regional areas increased from 14.5 million in 2005 to 18.5 million in 2008, an annual average growth rate of 8.3 per cent (Figure 8). The number of passengers travelling between regional areas increased at a slower pace, from 1.5 million in 2005 to 1.6 million in 2008, an annual average growth rate of 2.1 per cent.

Figure 9 shows the disaggregation of passenger numbers on regional air routes into high density regional routes and other regional routes. High density routes typically include routes which carried more than 250 000 revenue passengers a year, from and to regional airports that are located at major tourist destinations and offer direct air services to more than one major city airport. Between 2005 and 2008, the average annual growth rate for high density routes is 7.6 per cent. In the same period, air passenger numbers on regional–major cities that excluded high density routes grew more strongly than high density routes, increasing at an average annual growth rate of 9.5 per cent.

Figure 8   Passengers travelled on regional air routes and air routes between major cities, 1984 to 2008

Source: BITRE time series estimates 2009.

**Figure 9   Passengers travelled on high density regional routes and other
regional routes, 1984 to 2008**
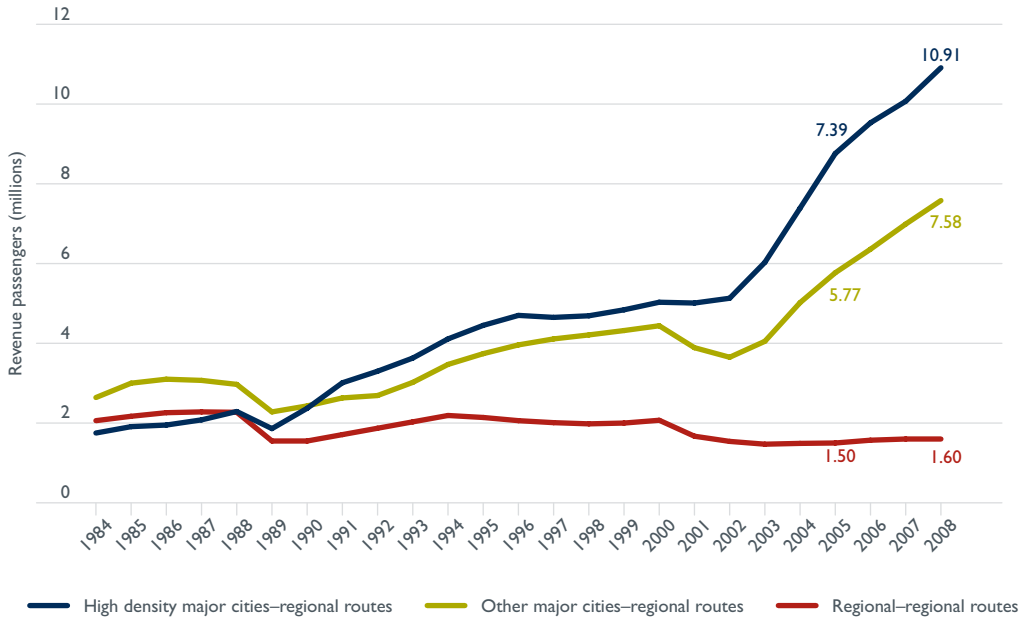
Source: BITRE time series estimates 2009.

Statistical annex

Table A1   Regional airports where RPT air services ceased between 2005 and 2008

Airport	RA Class	State	Revenue passengers at regional airports 2005	2006	2007	2008
Cooma	IR	NSW	■	■	■	
Mount Hotham	OR	VIC	■	■	■	
West Wyalong	OR	NSW	■	■	■	
Maryborough	IR	QLD	■	■	■	
Yorke Island	VR	QLD	■	■	■	
Katherine-Tindal	R	NT	■	■	■	
Gunnedah	OR	NSW	■	■		
Warrnambool	IR	VIC	■	■		
Thangool	OR	QLD	■	■		
Victoria River Downs	VR	NT	■	■		
Tennant Creek	VR	NT	■	■		
Kalkgurung	VR	NT	■	■		
Yuendumu	VR	NT	■	■		
Dunk Island	R	QLD	■	■		
Hooker Creek	VR	NT	■	■		
Lizard Island	VR	QLD	■	■		
Latrobe Valley	IR	VIC	■	■		
Mcarthur River	VR	NT	■	■		
Baniyala	VR	NT		■		
Bickerton Island	VR	NT		■		
Strahan	R	TAS	■			
Cambridge	IR	TAS	■			
Leigh Creek	VR	SA	■			
Coonabarabran	OR	NSW	■			
Innamincka	VR	SA	■			
Durham Downs	VR	QLD	■			
Etadunna	VR	SA	■			
Clifton Hills	VR	SA	■			
Mungaranie	VR	SA	■			
Cordillo Downs	VR	SA	■			
Nappa Merrie	VR	SA	■			
Cowarie	VR	SA	■			
Glengyle	VR	QLD	■			
Dulkaninna	VR	SA	■			
Moolawatana	VR	SA	■			
Ballera	VR	QLD	■			
Mulka	VR	SA	■			
Roseberth	VR	QLD	■			
Durrie	VR	QLD	■			

Key:

■ Regional airports with recorded passenger movements

☐ Regional airports with no recorded passenger movements

Note: IR = Inner regional Australia; OR = Outer regional Australia; R = Remote Australia;
VR = Very remote Australia

Source: BITRE time series estimates 2009.

Table A2   Regional airports where RPT air services commence between 2005 and 2008

Airport	RA Class	State	Revenue passengers at regional airports			
			2005	2006	2007	2008
Biloela	VR	QLD		▨	▨	▨
Bamaga	VR	QLD				▨
Bathurst Island	VR	NT				▨
Argyle	VR	WA			▨	▨
Middlemount	R	QLD				▨

Key:

▨ Regional airports with recorded passenger movements

☐ Regional airports with no recorded passenger movements

Note: IR = Inner regional Australia; OR = Outer regional Australia; R = Remote Australia;
           VR = Very remote Australia
Source: BITRE time series estimates 2009.

Table A3   Distance between the closest airport with RPT services in 2008 and the airport with discontinued RPT services

Origin	Destination	Distance (kilometres)
Cooma	Merimbula	106.8
Mount Hotham	Albury	114.0
West Wyalong	Narrandera	105.7
Maryborough	Hervey Bay	27.3
Yorke Island	Thursday Island	155.8
Katherine-Tindal	Darwin	285.0
Gunnedah	Tamworth	58.6
Warrnambool	Hamilton	79.2
Thangool	Biloela	13.5
Victoria River Downs	Kununurra	254.8
Tennant Creek	Alice Springs	464.8
Kalkgurung	Argyle	265.9
Yuendumu	Alice Springs	277.2
Dunk Island	Palm Island	101.0
Hooker Creek	Argyle	299.3
Lizard Island	Cooktown	90.9
Latrobe Valley	Moorabbin	122.4
Mcarthur River	Numbulwar	244.8
Baniyala	Groote Eylandt	89.6
Bickerton Island	Groote Eylandt	36.3
Strahan	Burnie	133.8
Cambridge	Hobart	3.1
Leigh Creek	Olympic Dam	149.5
Coonabarabran	Coonamble	92.8
Innamincka	Birdsville	242.9
Durham Downs	Windorah	199.9
Etadunna	Olympic Dam	260.5
Clifton Hills	Birdsville	132.1
Mungaranie	Birdsville	245.0
Cordillo Downs	Birdsville	159.5
Nappa Merrie	Birdsville	255.9
Cowarie	Birdsville	224.2

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Origin	Destination	Distance (kilometres)
Glengyle	Bedourie	50.0
Dulkaninna	Olympic Dam	224.8
Moolawatana	Olympic Dam	284.0
Ballera	Thargomindah	207.3
Mulka	Birdsville	281.2
Roseberth	Birdsville	31.0
Durrie	Birdsville	92.4

Source: BITRE time series estimates 2009.

Table A4   Number of airlines serving regional airports by state and territory, 2005 to 2008

Regional airports in New South Wales	RA Class	Number of airlines			
		2005	*2006*	*2007*	*2008*
Williamtown	IR	7	7	7	9
Coffs Harbour	IR	3	5	4	5
Albury	IR	3	3	3	4
Tamworth	IR	2	2	1	4
Ballina	IR	4	3	3	3
Dubbo	OR	3	3	3	3
Port Macquarie	IR	2	3	2	3
Wagga Wagga	IR	2	2	2	2
Lord Howe Island	VR	2	2	2	2
Cobar	VR	1	2	2	2
Bathurst	IR	1	1	2	2
Bourke	VR	1	1	2	2
Grafton	OR	1	2	2	1
Mudgee	OR	1	2	2	1
Armidale	IR	3	3	1	1
Taree	IR	1	2	1	1
Broken Hill	OR	1	2	1	1
Norfolk Island	VR	3	1	1	1
Lismore	IR	1	1	1	1
Merimbula	OR	1	1	1	1
Griffith	OR	1	1	1	1
Moree	OR	1	1	1	1
Inverell	OR	1	1	1	1
Orange	IR	1	1	1	1
Parkes	OR	1	1	1	1
Moruya	IR	1	1	1	1
Narrandera	OR	1	1	1	1
Coonamble	R	1	1	1	1
Narrabri	OR	1	1	1	1
Walgett	R	1	1	1	1
Lightning Ridge	R	1	1	1	1
Cooma	IR	1	1	1	
West Wyalong	OR	1	1	1	
Gunnedah	OR	1	1		
Coonabarabran	OR	1			

Table A4   Number of airlines serving regional airports, by state and territory, 2005 to 2008 (continued)

Regional airports in Northern Territory	RA Class	Number of airlines			
		2005	2006	2007	2008
Darwin	OR	7	7	7	8
Groote Eylandt	VR	3	3	3	3
Gove	VR	3	3	3	3
Alice Springs	R	5	5	1	3
Elcho Island	VR	2	2	2	2
Milingimbi	VR	1	2	2	2
Maningrida	VR	2	2	1	1
Ayers Rock	VR	1	2	1	1
Numbulwar	VR	1	1	1	1
Ramingining	VR	1	1	1	1
Lake Evella	VR	1	1	1	1
Bathurst Island	VR				1
Katherine-Tindal	R	3	2	1	
Tennant Creek	VR	3	2		
Hooker Creek	VR	1	1		
Kalkgurung	VR	1	1		
Mcarthur River	VR	1	1		
Victoria River Dow	VR	1	1		
Yuendumu	VR	1	1		
Bickerton Island	VR		1		
Baniyala	VR		1		

Regional airports in Queensland	RA Class	Number of airlines			
		2005	2006	2007	2008
Cairns	OR	6	6	7	7
Townsville	OR	8	7	7	6
Maroochydore	IR	5	4	5	5
Mackay	OR	4	4	4	5
Rockhampton	IR	4	5	5	4
Hervey Bay	IR	4	4	4	3
Hamilton Island	R	4	4	3	3
Longreach	VR	2	3	3	2
Proserpine	R	2	2	2	2
Mount Isa	R	2	2	2	2
Charleville	VR	2	2	2	2
Emerald	OR	1	1	1	2
Thursday Island	VR	2	2	2	1
Palm Island	R	1	1	2	1
Iron Range	VR	1	2	1	1
Birdsville	VR	2	1	1	1
Bedourie	VR	2	1	1	1
Boulia	VR	2	1	1	1
Cloncurry	VR	1	1	1	1
Gladstone	IR	1	1	1	1
Roma	OR	1	1	1	1
Barcaldine	VR	1	1	1	1
Blackall	VR	1	1	1	1

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Regional airports in Queensland	RA Class	Number of airlines			
		2005	2006	2007	2008
Winton	VR	1	1	1	1
Bundaberg	IR	1	1	1	1
Weipa	VR	1	1	1	1
Cooktown	VR	1	1	1	1
Karumba	VR	1	1	1	1
Cunnamulla	VR	1	1	1	1
Saint George	R	1	1	1	1
Thargomindah	VR	1	1	1	1
Hughenden	VR	1	1	1	1
Julia Creek	VR	1	1	1	1
Quilpie	VR	1	1	1	1
Richmond	VR	1	1	1	1
Windorah	VR	1	1	1	1
Burketown	VR	1	1	1	1
Normanton	VR	1	1	1	1
Kowanyama	VR	1	1	1	1
Doomadgee	VR	1	1	1	1
Edward River	VR	1	1	1	1
Mornington Island	VR	1	1	1	1
Blackwater	OR	1	1	1	1
Coen	VR	1	1	1	1
Aurukun	VR	1	1	1	1
Oakey	IR	1	1	1	1
Moranbah	R	1	1	1	1
Biloela	VR		1	1	1
Middlemount	R				1
Bamaga (Cgd To NPE	VR				1
Maryborough	IR	1	1	1	
Yorke Island	VR	1	1	1	
Thangool	OR	1	1		
Lizard Island	VR	1	1		
Dunk Island	R	1	1		
Durham Downs	VR	1			
Durrie	VR	1			
Glengyle	VR	1			
Roseberth	VR	1			
Ballera	VR	1			

Regional airports in South Australia	RA Class	Number of airlines			
		2005	2006	2007	2008
Kingscote	R	4	2	2	2
Whyalla	OR	2	2	2	1
Mount Gambier	OR	2	2	2	1
Olympic Dam	R	1	1	2	1
Port Lincoln	R	4	2	1	1
Coober Pedy	VR	1	2	1	1
Ceduna	VR	1	1	1	1

(continued)

Table A4   Number of airlines serving regional airports, by state and territory, 2005 to 2008 (continued)

Regional airports in South Australia	RA Class	Number of airlines			
		2005	2006	2007	2008
Port Augusta	OR	1	1	1	1
Leigh Creek	VR	1			
Clifton Hills	VR	1			
Cordillo Downs	VR	1			
Etadunna	VR	1			
Innamincka	VR	1			
Moolawatana	VR	1			
Mulka	VR	1			
Mungaranie	VR	1			
Dulkaninna	VR	1			
Cowarie	VR	1			
Nappa Merrie	VR	1			

Regional airports in Tasmania	RA Class	Number of airlines			
		2005	2006	2007	2008
Launceston	IR	4	5	6	6
Hobart	IR	4	4	4	5
Devonport	OR	3	3	3	3
King Island	VR	3	3	3	3
Burnie	OR	3	3	3	2
Flinders Island	VR	1	1	1	1
Cape Barren Island	VR	1	1	1	1
Strahan	R	1			
Cambridge	IR	1			

Regional airports in Victoria	RA Class	Number of airlines			
		2005	2006	2007	2008
Mildura	OR	3	3	4	4
Portland	OR	2	2	2	1
Hamilton	OR	1	1	1	1
Mount Hotham	OR	1	1	1	
Warrnambool	IR	1	1		
Latrobe Valley	IR	1	1		

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Regional airports in Western Australia	RA Class	Number of airlines			
		2005	2006	2007	2008
Broome	R	5	5	5	5
Newman	VR	3	2	2	3
Karratha	VR	2	2	1	3
Port Hedland	R	3	3	2	2
Kununurra	VR	3	3	2	2
Kalgoorlie	OR	2	2	2	2
Argyle	VR			2	2
Derby-Curtin	VR	1	1	2	1
Geraldton	OR	2	2	1	1
Leinster	VR	2	2	1	1
Leonora	VR	1	2	1	1
Monkey Mia	VR	1	2	1	1
Halls Creek	VR	2	1	1	1
Learmonth	VR	1	1	1	1
Fitzroy Crossing	VR	1	1	1	1
Meekatharra	VR	1	1	1	1
Christmas Island	VR	1	1	1	1
Carnarvon	R	1	1	1	1
Mount Magnet	VR	1	1	1	1
Cocos Island	VR	1	1	1	1
Paraburdoo	VR	1	1	1	1
Esperance	R	1	1	1	1
Laverton	VR	1	1	1	1
Albany	OR	1	1	1	1
Wiluna	VR	1	1	1	1
Kalbarri	R	1	1	1	1
Ravensthorpe	VR	1	1	1	1

Note: IR = Inner regional Australia; OR = Outer regional Australia; R = Remote Australia;
VR = Very remote Australia
Source: BITRE time series estimates 2009.

Table A5 Number of regional airports served, by airlines, 2005 to 2008

Australia Level	Number of regional airport served			
Airlines	2005	2006	2007	2008
Macair	28	29	26	30
Regional Express	28	30	33	28
Sunstate Airlines	20	23	22	23
Virgin Blue	16	15	15	20
Qantas Airways	24	23	21	18
Skywest Airlines Pty Ltd	14	16	14	15
Eastern Australia Airlines	18	20	17	14
Jetstar	12	14	13	14
Air North Regional	10	11	9	9
Skytrans Airlines	9	9	10	8
Air Link Pty Ltd	7	8	8	8
Mission Aviation Fellowship	8	10	7	8
Tiger Airways Australia			5	8
Skippers Aviation	6	8	6	6
Brindabella Airlines	3	5	4	4
Tasair	4	4	4	4
Vincent Aviation	4	4	3	4
Sharp Aviation	3	3	2	4
Regional Pacific				4
Golden Eagle Aviation	5	5	4	3
National Jet Systems Pty Ltd	5	3	3	3
Airlines Of Tasmania	5	3	3	3
Aeropelican Air Services	1	1	2	3
Norfolk Air			2	2
King Island Airlines	1	1	1	1
Alliance Airlines	2		1	1
Air South Regional			1	1
Ozjet			1	1
O Connors Air Services	3	4	4	
Inland Pacific Air	2	2	2	
Aboriginal Air Services	8	10		
Sunshine Express	8	7		
Big Sky Express	5	4		
Airlines Of South Australia	21			
Great Western Airlines	4			
Emu Air Charter Pty Ltd	1			
Maroomba Airlines	1			
Norfolk Jet Express Pty Ltd	1			

Source: BITRE time series estimates 2009.

Table A6 Number of regional air routes served, by airlines, 2005 to 2008

Airlines	Number of regional air routes served			
	2005	2006	2007	2008
Regional Express	59	71	77	76
Macair	34	53	60	72
Qantas Airways	96	82	65	68
Sunstate Airlines	38	43	51	50
Jetstar	46	46	44	42
Virgin Blue	32	31	31	37
Eastern Australia Airlines	44	47	39	29
Skywest Airlines Pty Ltd	27	30	28	27
Air North Regional	13	22	15	16
Air Link Pty Ltd	12	16	15	13
Mission Aviation Fellowship	16	20	12	13
Skippers Aviation	9	14	12	11
Tiger Airways Australia			5	9
Skytrans Airlines	8	8	9	8
Brindabella Airlines	3	6	6	5
Norfolk Air			4	5
National Jet Systems Pty Ltd	5	4	4	4
Sharp Aviation	4	4	3	4
Regional Pacific				4
Tasair	4	3	4	3
Airlines Of Tasmania	4	4	3	3
Vincent Aviation	3	3	2	3
Aeropelican Air Services	1	1	2	3
Golden Eagle Aviation	4	4	3	2
King Island Airlines	1	1	1	1
Alliance Airlines	3		1	1
Air South Regional			1	1
Ozjet			1	1
O Connors Air Services	4	5	5	
Inland Pacific Air	1	1	1	
Sunshine Express	13	10		
Aboriginal Air Services	6	8		
Big Sky Express	8	5		
Airlines Of South Australia	32			
Australian Air Express	17			
Great Western Airlines	4			
Norfolk Jet Express Pty Ltd	3			
Emu Air Charter Pty Ltd	1			
Maroomba Airlines	1			

Source: BITRE time series estimates 2009.

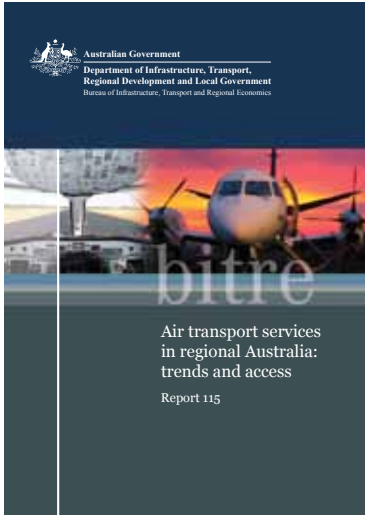## Table A7   Selected high density regional air routes in 2008

Airport	RA Class	Airport	RA Class
Hobart	IR	Melbourne	MC
Cairns	OR	Brisbane	MC
Townsville	OR	Brisbane	MC
Launceston	IR	Melbourne	MC
Cairns	OR	Sydney	MC
Mackay	OR	Brisbane	MC
Rockhampton	IR	Brisbane	MC
Williamtown	IR	Brisbane	MC
Cairns	OR	Melbourne	MC
Maroochydore	IR	Sydney	MC
Hobart	IR	Sydney	MC
Maroochydore	IR	Melbourne	MC
Karratha	VR	Perth	MC
Williamtown	IR	Melbourne	MC
Darwin	OR	Brisbane	MC
Coffs Harbour	IR	Sydney	MC
Broome	R	Perth	MC
Ballina	IR	Sydney	MC

Note: IR = Inner regional Australia; OR = Outer regional Australia; R = Remote Australia;
            VR = Very remote Australia
Source: BITRE time series estimates 2009.

Reference:

Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics [BITRE], 2008, *Air transport services in regional Australia: trends and access*, Report 115, BITRE, Canberra ACT.