

## Civil Aviation and Rural Airstrips and Air Services Forum – Mt Hagen 7-8 March 2013



### Executive Summary

The Civil Aviation Forum was held from 7 – 8 March at Highlander Hotel, Mt. Hagen, Western Highlands Province. The forum was well attended by Members of Parliament, Leaders of Aviation Sector, Provincial Administrators, Government Representatives, Private Sector Representatives, Women and Community Leaders. A total of 115 participants attended. Minister for Civil Aviation, Honorable Davis Steven MP, on behalf of the Ministry for Civil Aviation and the Government accepted the recommendations of the forum presented by Governor of West New Britain, Hon. Sasindran Muthuvel MP, on behalf of the participants at the close of the forum.

The theme of the forum was **“Reviving and Servicing of Rural Airstrips and Air Services for Rural Development in Papua New Guinea”**. The theme of the forum was framed to restore the deteriorating state of rural airstrips and air services in the country. The need to address the rural airstrips and air services was raised in many of the past CIMC Regional and National Development Forums. It was again strongly echoed at the CIMC 2012 Momase Regional Development Forum in Madang on the theme “Improving the accessibility to quality health and education services” by participants who attended the forum. Hon. Sam Basil, then Minister for National

Planning and Chairman of CIMC agreed to the sentiments raised and supported the call to revamp rural airstrips for effective service delivery to rural Papua New Guinea, and requested CIMC and the Institute of National Affairs (INA) to commence dialogue on it. Similar call was echoed by Minister Don Polye at the University of Goroka, Eastern Highlands Province at the Transport Forum in 2010, and recently raised during the National Agriculture Conference held on 24<sup>th</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> May, 2012 in Lae.

A special meeting was subsequently organized and conducted by CIMC upon that request.

### **The Special Meeting – Sustainable Funding for Rural Airstrips**

The special meeting was conducted in June 2012 primarily discussing a range of issues on rural airstrips in the country including sustainable funding for maintenance, redevelopment, and overall operations of the airstrips throughout the country, sustainably.

The special meeting identified and discussed the following issue areas:

1. Responsibility and Ownership
2. Regulation
3. Liability of Operators
4. Engineering and Engineering equipment
5. Funding

#### Summary

- Declining standards of rural airstrips
- Little or no funding for maintenance
- Investment by government

Options to explore:

- Public Private Partnership
- Mandate a NGO to take full responsibility
- Establishment of Rural Airstrips Authority

Following on from these series of discussions, the proposed forum was agreed to be jointly conducted by the Ministry of Civil Aviation and the Consultative Implementation and Monitoring Council (CIMC) at the request of the Hon. Minister, Davies Steven MP

with a view to discuss a range of issues on Civil Aviation as an important sector that must be well poised to address the growing and emerging needs of business and communities in the rural areas.

## **Civil Aviation Forum**

The Forum focused on the following strategic areas of the Civil Aviation Sector:

1. Civil Aviation sector Policies, Regulations and Laws;
2. Ownership and Responsibility of airports and air services including accidents under current regulatory arrangements (aviation standards, safety and insurance);
3. Financing arrangements for the Civil Aviation Sector;
4. Maintaining an inventory of airports and airstrips as well as pilots and engineers;
5. Sustainable and recurrent funding for rural airstrips;
6. Experiences of provincial governments, challenges of airlines operators and domestic training for pilots and engineers; and
7. Recommendations and the way forward for the Civil Aviation Sector

Hon. Davies Steven MP envisaged that the outcome of this 2 day forum will highlight key recommendations for renewed directions and future roadmap for the rural airstrips for effective and affordable delivery of basic services to the majority of the people in rural Papua New Guinea.

## **Recommendations**

The following are priorities and steps for improving systems and processes of the Aviation Sector with a view to improving the conditions of the rural airstrips for effective service delivery, presented in thematic areas.

- 1. Policy, Regulations & Legislations of Aviation Sector**
  - That Standards and Regulations be developed based on width, surface strength & gradient changes (not length) to reduce accidents by CASA.
  - Standards to be developed for all new and existing airstrips to be undertaken by CASA.
  - Government need to create a central database for all to use in the country, to be discussed further for developing arrangements.
  - Ministry of Civil Aviation to consider whether establishing a Civil Aviation Department (or reintegrate with transport Department).
- 2. Operational Ownership & Responsibility/Liability including maintaining of airstrips& air services.**

- Government to initiate a process to encourage landownership through incorporated Landownership Group (registration and licensing) especially those that house airstrips. This will assist in them clearly understanding their roles in maintaining and safekeeping of airstrips.
- Government to establish a central coordination authority to be in charge of information management.
- The proposed coordinating agency to coordinate airstrip restoration based on objective criteria linked to developmental issues and economic feasibility.
- Government to clarify ownership liability as to whether it should remain with owners (incorporated community groups) and not with those doing development work.

### **3. Training for Pilots and Engineers along with conditions to reduce high turnover**

- Government to increase flying schools in the country and reinforcing existing initiatives, along with providing financial incentives to encourage more training within country than overseas.
- Government to establish aviation training network.
- Engineering training – need to set up TAFE College within country, including facilitating licensing.
- Create mechanisms for ensuring pilots to remain with bush operations for long term period; eg, arrange affordable loans for training for 5 years.
- Government to facilitate reduction of training levy for air training organizations and the levy funds directed to rural air services training.
- Government to facilitate TAX/GST exemptions for Air Services Training Organizations.

### **4. Sustainable and effective funding Arrangements for the Aviation Sector.**

- Government to waiver or relief from regularity arrangements by providing more tax credits/relief for essential aviation services.
- Government to establish Rural Airstrips Authority (RAA) and ensure enabling legislative framework are instituted.
- Government to clearly make funding available and directed to the provinces and into the aviation sector.

### **5. Issues & Challenges for Rural services and the Way Forward.**

- That Government to facilitate an establishment of an administrative model (whether NGO or authority) for oversight of sustained operations of rural airstrips.
- Set standards for rural aerodromes.
- Provide educator, training and tools to allow local communities to maintain the airstrips to the standards that are set.

## **Way Forward**

CIMC Secretariat will collate the forum proceedings and present to Minister for Civil Aviation, Civil Aviation Agencies, Airline Operators, Provincial Administrators, Leaders of Private Sector, and Community Representatives.

Hon. Minister Davies Steven MP will present an Information Paper to Cabinet containing the key outcomes of the forum for approval and endorsement for implementation.

CIMC Secretariat will present the recommendations to the CIMC Council, chaired by Hon. Charles Able MP, Minister for National Planning in July at the Council Meeting

## **Conclusion**

The forum was well attended and the presentations and discussions during the two days was very constructive, in that collective views were exchanged, challenges and constraints were identified, and a positive and systematic approach towards addressing the plight of rural airstrips will now be pursued.

The participants appreciated and understood the issues and the challenges of rural airstrips, and the hardships and difficulties faced by people in remote parts of Papua New Guinea. This country is greatly indebted to the airline operators that continue to provide the most needed services to the rural population in the face of these challenging circumstances. Private sector organizations and churches must be also commended for striving tirelessly to ensure that people in the rural areas have access to basic services.

The way forward to as was generally endorsed was to set up a national coordinating agency to ensure issues concerning rural airstrips are addressed by a clearly mandated agency. However, while most agreed to establishing this national entity, some participants were concerned that it will be another white elephant which will consume significant administrative costs. There are provinces that have programs and strategies developed and implemented successfully to ensure their rural airstrips are maintained. These administrative models are also an option to explore before creating a new entity and perhaps increase the maintenance funding for them to continue. Successful models employed are Milne Bay, Sandaun, Simbu and others. Many participants therefore suggested that key stakeholders must be involved in the initial process in order to promote ownership and partnership whether it is to set up a new administrative model or to recognize an existing model.

CIMC wish to thank the Ministry of Civil Aviation for the determination and leadership, the Department of National Planning for providing the funding to host this forum, the

Western Highlands Provincial Government for their hospitality and the participants without whom, this forum would not be a success.

