

New runway ready for post-virus take-off



LYNDON MECHIELSEN

Gert-Jan de Graaff on the completed second Brisbane Airport runway, which he says is a sign of 'hope and confidence'

ROBYN IRONSDIE

As the aviation industry grapples with its greatest crisis, Brisbane Airport has unveiled its "symbol of hope" with the physical completion of the long-awaited second runway.

More than 20 years in the planning and eight years under construction, the runway lies parallel to the existing landing strip and will double capacity at the airport to 50 million passengers a year.

The final bill for the runway came in \$200m under budget at \$1.1bn, largely due to the fact there were zero lost-time injuries throughout the project by BMD

Constructions and CPB Contractors.

Brisbane Airport Corporation CEO Gert-Jan de Graaff said it was a "fantastic project" that employed 3740 workers, but the ending had been difficult.

"It's absolutely bittersweet. I feel sorry for all the people who've been working really hard to deliver this project on time," Mr de Graaff said.

He said 2020 "was always going to be our big year at Brisbane Airport and it is bittersweet that we're opening now without being able to have an opening event, without being able to invite the community over to celebrate the runway together with us."

Mr de Graaff said that, despite

the challenges being experienced, the runway should be seen as a sign of "hope and confidence" that the market would come back.

"We built that runway for the long haul and I'm 100 per cent certain that it might take some time, but traffic will come back and we will really need this runway in the future," he said.

"We'll need it not only for noise reasons and to make our flight path more efficient, but also because we need the capacity."

Like the rest of Australia's airports, Brisbane has been hit hard by the severe travel restrictions imposed by governments to try to stop the spread of COVID-19.

In April, passenger numbers were down by more than 1 million

on the same time last year, with 72,000 travellers passing through the international and domestic terminals.

In order to navigate the crisis, BAC recently secured \$840m in short-term bank loans, boosting its cash reserves to \$1.1bn.

Six lenders provided the loans, including the big four banks — ANZ, Commonwealth, NAB and Westpac — and one lender each from China and Japan.

Mr de Graaff said the airport was hopeful domestic operations would ramp up in the near future, followed by trans-Tasman flights.

"Now more than ever, it is crucial that we have the infrastructure and mechanisms in place to allow our great city and state to

recover from the COVID-19 global pandemic, and Brisbane Airport, and this new runway, will play a strong part in that," he said.

Scott McMillan, managing director of Brisbane-based Alliance Airlines, said the new runway was "a brilliant piece of infrastructure" and would in time be well used.

"No one could've seen the unfortunate timing of this (crisis) and Brisbane Airport deserves congratulations," he said.

The runway will officially become operational from Sunday, July 12, and Mr McMillan was hopeful an Alliance aircraft would be the first to take off.

"The schedule should be ordered alphabetically," he joked.