THE MISSING LINK

Bernard Salt at the recent TCCI seminar on Hobart Airport( Mercury editorial 13/6/16)l rightly raises the issue of an airlink between Hobart and New Zealand.

The Hobart-Christchurch airlink was withdrawn in 1996 despite Air New Zealand and Qantas as joint operators experiencing passenger loadings of 80% over the period of the service. On October 13 1995 I returned from Christchurch after a period as Erskine Fellow at the University of Canterbury on a full passenger flight. Passenger loadings during the period of the airlink’s operation were consistently at 80% capacity.

The Hobart-Christchurch services ended due to financial problems with Air New Zealand and not to a lack of patronage. Passenger loadings were consistently at 80% capacity.

New Zealand and Tasmania are both key destinations on the global map of ecotourism. New Zealand has regular air services joining its major cities, including Christchurch with the markets of North Asia and North America. These links enhance New Zealand as a tourist destination.

Both Tasmania and New Zealand market their tourism brands as clean and green. Co-marketing has the potential to boost tourism in both locations.

In 1995 Professor Kissling then Head of Transport Studies at Lincoln University and I discussed the potential for both Tasmania and South Island as transit points for a clockwise flow of passengers into Christchurch from North Asia and North America to Hobart and out via Melbourne/Sydney/Brisbane to Auckland/Wellington.

The viability of this “Great Southern Airlink” Christchurch-Hobart could be enhanced by consolidation of airfreight (particularly agricultural and aquaculture products) ex Christchurch through Hobart to North Asia markets.

To date Hobart International Airport have kept open the possibility of renewing the Hobart-New Zealand airlink .However the decision would be dependent on its commercial viability. Research I have carried out with Walter Glass of Corporate Logistics (Palmerston North) and interested aviation players in Christchurch indicate support for the airlink being reintroduced.

The replacement of the Missing Link has the potential to boost tourism in both locations, and make Hobart a transit point rather than a one way station.

The Tourism and Transport Forum (TTF) has welcomed the decision of the Infrastructure and Regional Development Department to review the bureaucracy around international operations. The Forum believes that as a result as many as 10 regional airports on Australia’s east coast could open up flights to New Zealand and add up to 100,000 new visitors a year(Australian 28’11/14)(Bringing our Neighbour Closer TTF 14/8/14)

Ms Osmond as TTF’s spokesperson noted that the Sunshine Coast had successfully conducted three trial years of seasonal flights from New Zealand, contributing $14.5M to the local economy. She stated “ New Zealand may already be Australia’s No 1 tourism source market, but we believe opening up airports for direct flights from Auckland and Christchurch is a key strategy in boosting visitation even further by offering new destinations”.

In the end it will be a commercial decision for the airlines and an outcome for Hobart International Airport to pursue. In 2008 I presented to an air and space law conference in Seoul a marketing promotion from Hobart International Airport. The projected improvement by Federal government funding of the airport apron gives more impetus to the whole issue being opened up once more and the Tasmanian government needs to back a feasibility study. Support for the renewal of flights from Hobart to New Zealand would also surely be a target for both the Tasmanian Tourism Council and the Hobart City Council.

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