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Jetstar's Melbourne to Busselton flights due to take off in April

Geoffrey Thomas and Peter de Kruijff | The West Australian
Monday, 30 September 2019 2:00AM  Flights from Melbourne to Busselton are in the works. Credit: File

After almost two years of negotiations, Jetstar Airways has agreed to operate a heavily subsidised flight from Melbourne to Busselton.

The direct link connecting Victorians to the Margaret River region will start in April.

The 186-seat Airbus A320 flight will run year round, three times weekly and arrive in Busselton at 9.30am and depart for Melbourne at 10.10am.

It is unclear how much the flights will cost, although it is understood Jetstar will be offering discounted introductory fares.

The announcement will be made this Friday in Busselton.

The City of Busselton had wanted Qantas or Virgin Australia to operate the service but both airlines tuned down the opportunity.

According to Melbourne sources, the service had to be heavily subsidised to get Jetstar to agree.

Support from the City of Busselton, Tourism WA and a legacy contribution from Royalty for Regions amounts to a subsidy of between \$6 and \$8 million over three years.

It is understood most of the contribution is coming from the council. This is about three times the normal amount offered to an airline, according to industry experts.

Contrary to reports, this service will not be the catalyst to building a new terminal at Busselton as Jetstar has said it does not want a new facility.

Similarly, it is understood the State Government will not commit funds for a new terminal until the service proves itself.

In June 2015, funding was allocated from Royalty for Regions for the redevelopment of the airport and it was renamed Busselton Margaret River Airport.

A \$69.7 million redevelopment started in 2017, which included lengthening, widening and strengthening of the runway to facilitate Code E aircraft – large planes such as the 300-passenger A330.

The City of Busselton hopes to attract international airlines to the airport in the future.

City of Busselton Mayor Grant Henley said he could neither confirm nor deny flights to and from Melbourne had been secured.

He said getting an east coast route into Busselton would, however, add a lot of value to the South West region.

“Airports in reasonable proximity (to capital cities) work because of visitor demand,” he said. “For them (visitors) to fly directly to the region opens up another opportunity for the State.”

Vasse MP Libby Mettam said if flights were secured, it would be a fantastic development for the region.

“We know growing the Margaret River region is essential to growing tourism in this State,” she said.

“The region is the most popular tourism destination outside of Perth ... we have world-class events and our film festival has the richest film prize in the country. Regional aviation is a significant challenge ... trying to achieve those opportunities will always be very difficult but they are worth investing in.”

Established direct routes from Melbourne into WA include flights to Perth, Kalgoorlie and Broome.

A 73-seat service by Alliance Airlines between Kununurra and

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Melbourne, which will be sold through Virgin, is scheduled to start three times a week between May and August next year.

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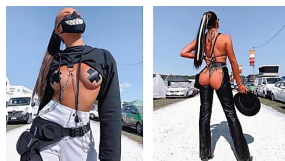
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