



**TONY WINDSOR MP**  
**INDEPENDENT**  
**FEDERAL MEMBER FOR NEW ENGLAND**

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## **PM agrees to meet Country delegation on regional airline issue**

The Prime Minister of Australia, the Hon John Howard has agreed to meet a delegation of country people to discuss the provision of air services and has further committed himself to assist country people where possible.

Mr Howard made this commitment in his answer to a question from the Independent Member for New England, Tony Windsor.

Mr Windsor said that he would now speak to various interest groups with concerns about the future of country aviation and organise the meeting with the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister's response to the establishment of an investment trust however, must be viewed as an attempt to hide behind the repayment of Government debt as, in the *Australian Financial Review* on 18 July 2000 the Deputy Prime Minister, John Anderson is quoted as saying "My view is the sale of Sydney airport could certainly help facilitate important projects high on the Government's priority list such as local roads, Western Sydney Orbital and Speedrail."

"The comments by the Deputy Prime Minister clearly indicate that the proceeds of the Sydney Airport sale have had other potential uses which have since been over ridden. Their use to help subsidise regional air routes could occur if the will of the Government was there to do so," Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor believes that there are at least two possibilities of establishing an investment trust that should be investigated.

"The first possibility is the obvious method of setting aside 2-3% of the sale proceeds and the second possibility is to make use of some of the reported \$250m per year that will be saved in interest payments through the repayment of \$4.2 billion of Government debt.

Either way, a significant amount could be made available to subsidise regional air services on unviable commercial routes that would ensure the continuation of this essential service and provide opportunities for communities on these routes to take steps to grow them and their towns through being able to provide such a service.

It comes back to commuter (in and out) confidence and affordability," Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor said he was disappointed that the Prime Minister and the Government did not recognise the 'essential service' nature of airline access to Sydney Airport.

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“Two days ago we were told by Transport Minister, John Anderson that there was an iron clad guarantee of access to Sydney Airport.

Today we read, Finance Minister Senator Nick Minchin comments “that a future Government would be open to try to change existing regulations (Fin Review 27/6/02 Pg 18)

Senator Minchin went on to say ‘..Obviously we can’t bind future Governments’.

If country communities don’t band together for the maintenance of air services and demand some government assistance, then air services will be lost,” Mr Windsor said.

### **Mr Windsor’s question to the Prime Minister was:-**

“Will you, Prime Minister, consider setting aside 2-3% of the sale proceeds of Sydney Airport to establish an investment trust, the interest from which to be used to subsidise the country air routes identified by commercial operators as unviable.

Would you meet a delegation of country people to discuss such a proposal with a view to maintaining this essential service to country Australians.”