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Committee: Environment
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Paraparaumu Airport – Strategic Emergency Capability

1. Purpose

To inform the Committee about the future of smaller airports in civil defence emergency management planning, with specific reference to the Paraparaumu Airport during and after a major emergency event in the Greater Wellington Region.

2. Background

New Zealand is due for a major earthquake and two of the major faults that could have a severe impact on the Wellington Region are already well within their return periods. The Wellington fault has a 10% chance of moving in the next 50 years, while the Alpine fault has an 80% chance over the same period.

The Wellington Region is suspect because of its very diverse and separate hazard scape areas, its difficult topography and its high-risk geology. It is now well known that, during a major earthquake, the cities and districts in the Region will be isolated and in desperate need for outside help.

Project Phoenix and the Phoenix Exercise that took place in July 2002, revealed that the movement of the injured and critical resources within the Region would be extremely difficult due to:

- the loss of road access (slips, landslides, collapsed bridges)
- loss of rail (collapse of infrastructure and tunnels)
- loss of the harbour (deformation of the sea floor, seiching)
- loss of the Wellington International Airport (liquefaction and ground deformation)

The only way to move the injured and critical resources around in the first few days will be by air (helicopters). To effectively manage an event like this will also require proper reconnaissance and this will also be done by air (smaller fixed wing aircraft and available helicopters). Apart from the Wellington International Airport, the only other airports available that could be used are

Paraparaumu, Masterton, Palmerston North and the Ohakea Air Force base. Needless to say, the closer the airport, the easier it will be to manage the event. If the Paraparaumu Airport is not severely damaged, it could play a vital role in setting up the required airbridge.

The Paraparaumu Airport is privately owned and is therefore not listed as a Lifeline utility according to Schedule 1 (Part A) of the Civil Defence Emergency Management Act 2002. As a result of this, we actually have no influence on any of the Paraparaumu Airport Company's decisions to change the design or structure of its runways.

However, through the interaction of Councillor Turver and the continuous involvement of the Emergency Management Department, both Councillor Turver and the Manager, Emergency Management, engaged in deliberations with the Managing Director and the Airport Manager of Paraparaumu Airport. We have conveyed to them the importance and the strategic value of the airport during a major emergency event in the region. Both have realised and accepted the strategic value of the airport and have emphasised that they will collaborate with the emergency management agencies in this regard. The Managing Director made it clear that the only change in question is that the secondary runway will be shortened to 850 metres. This will in effect free up some land that will make the Paraparaumu Airport more commercially viable. The main runway will stay unchanged.

From a Civil Defence Emergency Management point of view, the proposed changes will not have a big influence on our response planning. The main runway is suitable to handle the bigger aircraft (like Hercules C130 transporters) while the shortened secondary runway will still be useable by the smaller fixed wing aircraft, especially for reconnaissance purposes.

It maybe that the Civil Defence Emergency Management Group, when formed, could consider negotiating a Memorandum of Understanding for using the Paraparaumu Airport in a major emergency event with the Paraparaumu Airport Company. This could be included in the Civil Defence Emergency Management Group Plan.

3. Communications

The Committee's decision will be made known to the Paraparaumu Airport Company and the emergency management agencies in the region.

4. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee:

1. *receive the report; and*
2. *note the contents*

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