

Upgrade for record-breaking Isa airport

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A COMPREHENSIVE redevelopment of the entrance road and car park at the Mount Isa Airport should begin within 8-12 months to cope with record passenger numbers, according to Queensland Airport Ltd managing director Dennis Chant.

He said some \$15 million had been spent on the airport over the past 18 months to upgrade vital airport runway lighting to allow for more services when required.

That could be sooner rather than later with the airport recording its highest passenger numbers ever during November with 22,186 coming through the terminal - an increase of 15.6% on the same month in 2010.

Those figures made the Mount Isa airport the shining star in the QAL stable, surpassing the growth rates of the much bigger Townsville (1.2%) and Gold Coast (-20.6%) airports - the latter dragged down by the significant downturn in the tourism industry in that period.

"Mount Isa is obviously the star performer and we're getting 20 per cent growth there," he said.

"The Gold Coast has been stable or even slightly under with tourism down.

"Townsville's had steady progress of about 2 or 3 per cent right throughout the international financial crisis."

The November statistics build on the October year on year increase for passenger numbers where Mount Isa airport recorded a rise of 8.8% - from 19,057 to 20,727.

Mr Chant said QAL will be "looking at the whole entrance road and expanding it", and work will start after 6-12 months of planning.

"We will be trying to source workers locally where possible, but given some of the skills may not be available there we may have to go outside the city.

"But our preference is to go local."

Recent upgrades to the Mount Isa Airport facility means it is well placed for predicted growth on the back of increased mining in the region.

"The upgraded Mount Isa facility is designed to handle that additional traffic with its current infrastructure."

Mr Chant said some of the increased passenger numbers were due to the work done by QAL to upgrade the runway which now allows Qantas to bring in the 737 800 Series aircraft which can carry more than 160 passengers.