



WYNYARD AIRPORT – A BRIEF HISTORY

---

**Wynyard Airport – A Brief History**

*Author: W Dearing, December 2020*

The first aerodrome at Wynyard was built by volunteers on an old racecourse. However, within a year of completion in 1932, the aerodrome was found to be too small for larger passenger and mail aircraft. A larger aerodrome was developed on the southern outskirts of the town and was officially opened on 26 February 1934. A further opening ceremony on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1935 was attended by the Prime Minister of the time, Joseph Lyons.

This early development is described in this [article](#) on our website.

In the mid-1970s, Federal policy was adopted that would eventually see the ownership and maintenance of all airports outside of capital cities transferred from the Commonwealth to the respective local authorities. Under the new scheme, the future of the Wynyard Aerodrome was cast into doubt after Federal funding was secured for upgrading the Devonport Airport in August 1980; few if any areas of regional Australia had two major commuter and cargo airports only 60 km apart, would Wynyard also be upgraded? After much political controversy, it wasn't until March 1985 that Wynyard's future was assured when AU\$5.2 million was allocated by the State and Federal governments to upgrade the Wynyard aerodrome.

The upgraded aerodrome was officially opened on 15 February 1987, incorporating a sealed runway 1650 m long. Ownership had been transferred from the Commonwealth to the Burnie Port Authority and the Wynyard Aerodrome was renamed to Burnie Airport.

The Burnie Airport Corporation Unit Trust acquired the Burnie Airport from the Burnie Port Corporation in 2001. The Trust is 51% owned by the Burnie City Council and 49% owned by a private sector partner, the Australian Airports Association.

The airport is now the home of the Wynyard Aero Club that owns two large hangars whose space is rented out to members. The club provides flying training and active social activities for its members. Commercially the airport is serviced daily by REX Saabs to Melbourne and Sharp Airlines Metroliners from Launceston and Hobart to Wynyard, King and Flinders Island and Essendon.



**Sharp Airlines Metroliner**



## TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY Incorporated

### WYNYARD AIRPORT – A BREIF HISTORY

---

Until early 2000, Burnie airport had the distinction of having a railway line across the runway.

The railway, running along Tasmania's north coast, was extended to Smithton in 1921. The line, running through Wynyard, was extensively used for haulage by the timber industry and to transport farm produce.

When the aerodrome at Wynyard was constructed, it was built on the only flat land in the area - the flood plain of the Inglis River with, Runway 05/23 being built over the railway line. There was a precedent for this: Sydney's Mascot airport also had a railway line crossing a runway in the early post-War years.



#### **Wynyard Airport Railway Crossing**

Prior to 1991, the rail crossing was controlled from the Wynyard Flight Service Unit (FSU). Perhaps because of the rail crossing, the Wynyard FSU was not subject to the general edict that FSUs should not overlook the movement area, and the Flight Service Officers had a good view over the airport.

When the Wynyard FSU was closed on 14 December 1990 as part of the programme of consolidation of Flight Service functions to the major Centres, the railway signalling function was also transferred to Melbourne. However, new consoles due to be installed in the Melbourne FSC in December 1991 did not have the signalling functionality, so an alternative was sought.



## TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY Incorporated

### WYNYARD AIRPORT – A BREIF HISTORY

---

CAA Flying Operations Inspector Kevin Smith (himself formerly an Air Traffic Controller) suggested a system similar to that used in Gisborne, New Zealand, one of the few places in the world with a similar railway crossing. Such a system was designed and installed in 1992.

The signal system relied on banks of green 'vertical' (runway aligned) lights to indicate that the runway was clear for aircraft operations, and red horizontal lights to indicate that a train was approaching or on the runway.

The system detected approaching trains in sufficient time (approximately 50 seconds) for aircraft committed on approach to land safely or go around, or for aircraft taking off to continue the take-off safely. Trains approaching the detection zone faced a green signal until entering the detection zone when the signal changed momentarily to red. In the meantime, a signal was sent to the runway lights, changing the displayed array from green to red. When the system's internal checking confirmed that the runway signal lights had changed, the train signal would also change back to green.

Following a long decline in rail traffic, the north-west line through Wynyard was closed in early 2005 and the associated signal light system was decommissioned on 19 March that year, bringing to an end this unique air/rail crossing



**REX Airlines SAAB**



WYNYARD AIRPORT – A BREIF HISTORY

**The unique signalling and communication system to safely operate aircraft and trains using the same runway at Wynyard.**

Flashing red lights controlled the landings and takeoffs. The lights would begin flashing 5 minutes before the train was expected to cross the runway, and aircraft were prohibited to land during this time.

The three lights at top right of the railway signalling consolette, below, indicated, from left to right, that the runway was obstructed by a train, that the runway was clear of trains, and that a train was approaching. Flight Service could either warn approaching aircraft that a train was obstructing the runway, or stop the train by triggering a signal on the track. The two buttons either side of the brass ring at right bottom of the consolette are the emergency stop signal buttons for the railway and the runway.

