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**All dressed up and ready to go
Prime Minister Tony Abbott officially opens Canberra Airport**

The Prime Minister of Australia, the Hon Tony Abbott, today officially opened the new terminal at Canberra Airport.

In opening the facility, the Prime Minister said: “It is great to be here today to officially open this splendid, splendid new terminal building.

“In the 19th-century it was the grandeur of railway terminals which spoke of the confidence and pride of the city or the country where you were. Today it is the grandeur of the airport terminals which speaks of the pride and confidence of the city or the country where you are and this is truly a proud and beautiful terminal.

“I can remember flying into Canberra back in the 1960s. It was a small airport with an almost non-existent terminal, and I can remember that white Meccano terminal that was built in the ‘80s and I thought that was the last word in opulence and luxury. Thank God it’s gone to be replaced by this truly magnificent building.

“I do want to say what a pleasure it is to be in this building – what a delight it is to arrive here, or to walk through here, because this is a building which is not just functional but truly beautiful. Whether it be the water sculptures outside, whether it be this splendid piece that we stand beside now, whether it be the sense of style and spaciousness that we have all around us, this is a credit to everyone associated with it and it is a monument not just to the great city of Canberra, our national capital, but it is a monument to the determination, the courage and the vision of the Snow family and in particular, you Terry.”

The Prime Minister said the terminal was part of an airport that was not just a place to board a plane but which had become an epicentre of the economy in the Australian Capital Territory.

“I do want to thank Terry Snow and the Snow family for what’s been done here. \$2 billion has been invested since the Snow family took over this site, including almost half a billion dollars on this particular terminal.

“The airport precinct is a vital and dynamic part of the entire ACT economy, adding some 12,000 jobs and contributing \$1.3 billion to the local economy and that’s now, but shortly it’s thought that the contribution to the economy and the contribution to employment will double.

“This is not just an airport, this is a precinct, this is an industrial park, this is a technology park, this is a very dynamic part of the local economy.”

Executive Chairman of Capital Airport Group, Terry Snow, said the enterprise started 16 years ago with the purchase of the airport and praised former Prime Minister John Howard for his foresight in taking the shackles off aviation and letting private enterprise join in providing some of the basic infrastructure.

“One of the conditions when the government was selling Canberra Airport, was that it had to have local participation. I don’t know how you get more local participation than my family. I am a third generation Canberran, born here, and I am delighted to have my wife and children here today. It is truly a proud moment for us all. We set out to build the best little airport in the world. I think we’ve done that.”

Mr Snow said in developing the airport the first mission was to make sure the cash flow was available to embark upon what would be a very cash hungry enterprise.

“It’s unusual to think of an airport with a business park but the business park provided us the financial lungs to go ahead and do this massive aeronautical infrastructure.

“We are now at a situation where we are all dressed up and ready to go.

“The infrastructure here is built for 50 years. We have ample capacity to participate in the aeronautical activities in Australia and we’d like to do more heavy lifting. We are servicing a catchment area of 900,000 people, we are serving the region and Australia, but not yet have we been able to crack the international nut.

“We think there is a wonderful opportunity to engage with Asia and we’ve been speaking to Singapore Airlines about having international flights here. We’ve spoken with Virgin Australia and we’ve spoken with Qantas. We’re very keen to engage with some carrier to bring international passengers here. This is very important for the region, but more importantly for the National Capital: for our visiting dignitaries that can fly in here directly.”

Mr Snow said Mr Abbott’s Government had been very keen on promoting new investment in infrastructure but called on him to relax regulatory barriers to fully utilising the capacity at Canberra Airport.

“I don’t need to sell the value of competition. But competition out of Canberra for flights all round the world would be good for the consumer, good for Canberra and good for Sydney Airport to give them some breathing space.

“We’ve invested in the infrastructure, but what’s required is for us to fully utilise this infrastructure. While there is some exemption in the bilateral agreements that permits us to fly to some foreign countries we can’t fly to all. We’d like to fly directly to the world: that is, Asia, Europe, continental America and the Pacific. We need changes to the bilateral agreements to permit Canberra to fully participate, to do our heavy lifting, to do our share of the workload,” Mr Snow said.

The Prime Minister responded: “If you can sort out the airlines who want to fly into Canberra from overseas, well I think you can be confident that we will give you the relevant permissions.”

Canberra Airport Managing Director, Stephen Byron described the official opening of the terminal as a “once in a lifetime event”.

“I thank our airline partners – Qantas and Virgin Australia – and their staff who have worked with us tirelessly, and have delivered the most wonderful lounge products for our mutual customers – who are ultimately what all this is for.

“Our thanks also go to the ACT Government, with whom we have been working hand in glove for many years, to the Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister, to ACT Roads and ACTEWAGL. This project has included rebuilding every electrical, sewer, stormwater, water and telecommunications service that existed and they have been integral to that.

“We are also grateful to the Australian Government and particularly the Department of Infrastructure: Mike Mrdak, Andrew Wilson and the team who have been strong and great partners following the privatization.”

Mr Byron acknowledged the creative design team including architects Hal Guida and Steve Moseley at GMB and the team of local engineers and technical consultants.

“You have pushed the planning and environmental sustainability envelope to make this a cutting edge and world leading terminal facility.

“I also want to congratulate John Gasson, Ian Bowyer, Ross Cleaver and their Construction Control team who started with us in building the first project at the newly privatized Canberra Airport 16 years ago and have been with us for many projects since. This building surpasses everything else and you were all very worthy winners of the Master Builders’ Association’s National Project of the Year.”

Mr Byron commended all ‘big four’ Australian banks for supporting the project, even through difficult financial circumstances.

“Led particularly by CBA who have been our lead bank for the past decade, you have stuck with us through tough times, not just the GFC which deferred the start of the project by five months in late 2007 while we waited to see if the financial system would collapse, but also through the tough times of the past three years of continual falling passenger numbers which began in January 2010 with the former Federal Government’s efficiency dividend, and has declined every month since that time. You have been true partners.

“I also want to thank all of our tenants at the Airport. We have a major security, aerospace, defence and professional services hub here at Canberra Airport as well as a significant retail centre servicing our wider region; we could not have financed this investment without you.

“Finally to our team at Canberra Airport, led superbly by our Head of Aviation, Matthew Brown and Project Director Richard Phillips, everyone from our receptionists, to our accounts team, to our property managers to our IT team – you have all played a critical part in making this happen. I especially want to acknowledge our operations team who have managed six years of on-airport construction around three million passengers a year, and 120 flights a day with safety and security always paramount and not a single flight delayed as a result. Thank you all of you,” Mr Byron said.

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