



Plans to paint planes promise profit

By GEOFF LEWIS

STATE-of-the-art paint and composite materials facilities for aircraft are among initiatives to establish the Waikato as the centre of the New Zealand aviation industry.

The Aviation Industry Cluster, previously Waikato Aviation Cluster, is considering two sites for a \$5 million paint facility, which could be followed by a plant for the latest in composite materials used in aviation, and a wind tunnel.

News of the developments has attracted the submission of plans for new aircraft from cutting-edge New Zealand-based designers, most of them using composite materials.

With a background of pioneering aircraft industries like James Aviation and later Pacific Aerospace Corporation, the Waikato is seen as the natural national hub for air-related industries.

The Aviation Industry Cluster is made up of 57 companies – 25 from the Waikato.

Cluster general manager Shaun

Mitchell, said creating an aircraft painting facility big enough to handle anything from light aircraft through to Boeing 737s and Airbus A320s, is part of a national strategy to develop the New Zealand aviation industry.

A new analysis of what the aviation industry is worth to New Zealand is under way.

Figures from 2006 put it at \$800 million to \$1 billion annually. The goal is \$5 billion in five years.

To do that, Mr Mitchell is tasked with bringing initiatives, expertise and facilities together in and around Hamilton to make that target achievable, and a specialised paint facility is part of it.

Painting aircraft is associated with the drive to make aircraft more efficient.

Paint is weight, and each unnecessary kilogram can add tens of thousands of dollars over the life of an aircraft.

“The business case is sound and has huge potential. Market research has shown there are 150 737-sized aircraft, including military models, in the Australasian

and near Asian area requiring repainting each year.”

Plans and drawings for the \$1.7 million first stage are ready to go, and site selection is expected in February.

As nationwide interest in the Aviation Industry Cluster has grown, so have the number of private aircraft designers to submit designs. So far 18 designs for new light aircraft have been submitted, with only two being constructed of traditional aluminium; the remainder use modern light-weight composite materials.

Also in the pipeline, and the subject of a recent pre-feasibility study, is the construction of a state-of-the-art wind tunnel.

“We believe we could do it cheaper than other parts of the world. A wind tunnel could be used for a variety of purposes from aircraft to studying the sails of high-performance sailing craft and the wind dynamics of buildings. The best international wind tunnels have a five-year waiting list.”



AVIATION LIFT-OFF: Aircraft designs submitted to the Aviation Industry Cluster. Graphics: SUPPLIED

