Western Sydney International (Nancy-Bird Walton) Airport

Reciprocal Runway Operations

Background

In May 2026, the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, Catherine King, issued a Ministerial Direction (Direction) requiring Airservices Australia to prioritise Reciprocal Runway Operations (RRO) at night at Western Sydney (Nancy-Bird Walton) International Airport (WSI). The Direction requires RRO to be used when conditions allow, to help reduce aircraft noise.

The Direction will take effect from late October 2026 when passenger operations commence. Under the Direction, RRO will be the priority runway mode overnight when weather and traffic conditions permit.

RRO is a runway operating mode that enables aircraft to arrive at and depart from WSI to the south-west, avoiding the more heavily populated areas to the north-east of the airport.

What is a runway mode?

A runway mode describes how the runway is being used at a particular time, including the direction aircraft arrive from and depart to.

WSI will operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week, allowing aircraft to arrive and depart at any time. It has one runway, oriented north-east / south-west. The runway is referred to as:

- Runway 05 when aircraft depart to the north-east / arrive from south-west, or
- Runway 23 when aircraft depart to the south-west/arrive from the north-east.

WSI has five modes:

- during the day–evening period (5.30am to 11pm), two runway modes are available.
- during the overnight period (11pm to 5.30am), three runway modes are available, with RRO being the preferred runway mode at night.

airservices australia

Figure 1 (below) shows the preferred order of runway modes at WSI during the day-evening and overnight periods. The plane images indicate the direction of arriving and departing aircraft in each mode.

Priority	Landing	Take-off
Day/Evening (5.30am to 11pm)		
1	Runway 23	Runway 23
2	Runway 05	Runway 05
Night (11pm to 5.30am)		
1	Runway 05 (RRO)	Runway 23 (RRO)
2	Runway 23	Runway 23
3	Runway 05	Runway 05

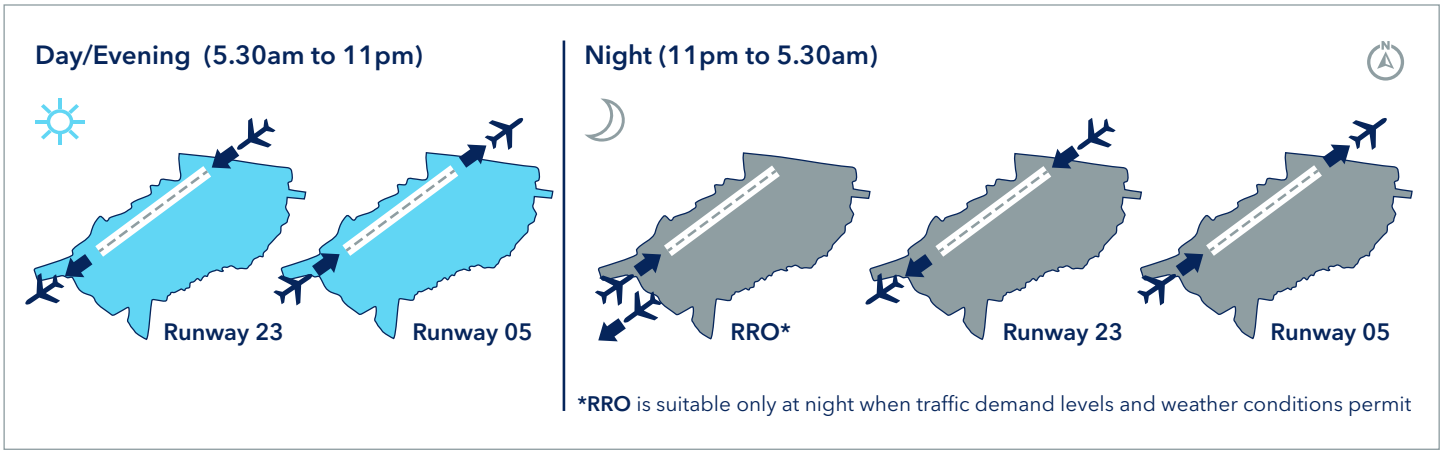

Figure 1: Runway modes of operation

Scan the QR code or click here to watch our runway mode explainer video

What is RRO?

RRO is a runway operating mode where arriving and departing aircraft use the same end of the runway in opposite directions. This keeps lower altitude noise over the same area.

At WSI, when RRO is in use aircraft depart to the south-west and aircraft arrive from the south-west.

Figure 2 shows the flight paths for RRO.

RRO is used at many major international airports but it cannot be used all hours of the day. Complex Air Traffic Control (ATC) procedures are required to manage this mode and it can only be used when very specific weather and traffic conditions are met.

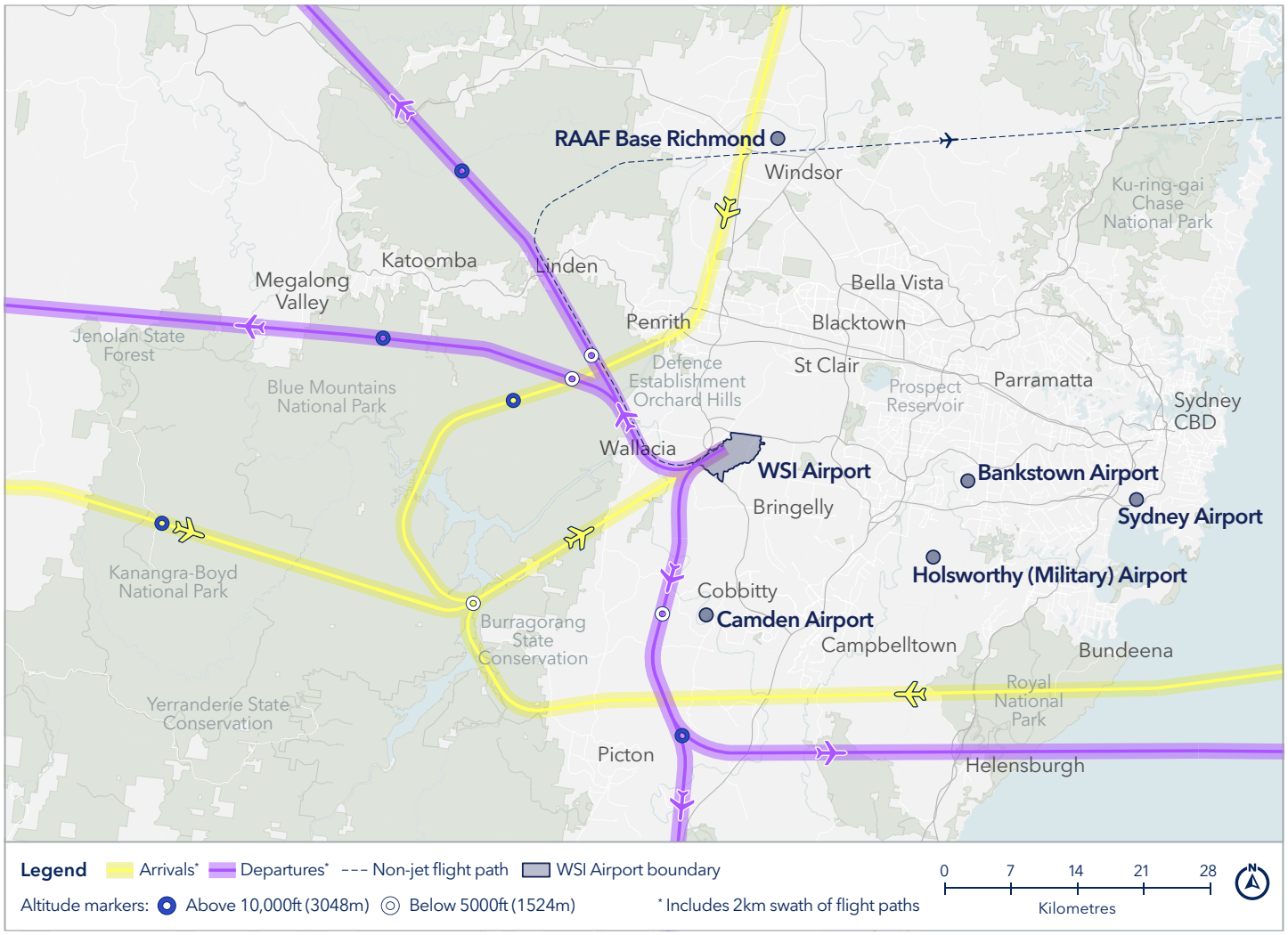

Figure 2: Reciprocal Runway Operations (RRO) at night, but can only be used when very specific weather and traffic conditions are met.

airservices australia

When can RRO be used and under which conditions?

RRO is only available overnight, between 11pm and 5.30am, and only when all operational, weather and traffic criteria are met.

The reason it is restricted to night-time hours is that this is when the traffic conditions in the broader Sydney airspace will generally be low enough to enable its use. It cannot be used during busy daytime or evening hours when there are a lot of planes in the air.

Sydney Airport is subject to a curfew that commences at 11pm. Aircraft from Sydney and other nearby airports must clear the airspace before WSI can transition into RRO operations. As a result, it is unlikely that RRO will commence exactly at 11pm and WSI may need to use another runway mode until this traffic clears. Similarly, it is unlikely that the mode will continue all the way through to 5.30am as traffic starts to build in the early hours of the morning.

For RRO to be used, all the following conditions must be met:

Wind limits

Tailwinds (including gusts) must not exceed 5 knots (approximately 9km/h).

Aircraft normally take-off and land into the wind (headwind), which improves lift and braking performance. Low tailwinds allow aircraft to safely land and depart in the same direction. If wind strength or direction changes, ATC may need to change the runway mode.

Dry runway surface

The runway surface must be dry, including free of dew or fog.

Similar to a car on a wet road, aircraft require more distance to brake on a wet runway. RRO relies on arriving aircraft being able to clear the runway quickly, because a departing aircraft may already be positioned for take off. If the runway is wet, arrivals may take longer to vacate the runway, which could create delays and safety risks.

Low air traffic levels

RRO can only be used when traffic levels are low due to the opposing-direction movements of aircraft.

For safety reasons, a departing aircraft cannot take off if an arriving aircraft is within 20 nautical miles (approximately 37km) of the airport. If traffic levels increase, ATC will switch to a runway mode that can move aircraft more efficiently and reduce delays.

Meeting all these conditions ensures aircraft can operate safely during RRO.

What happens if weather and traffic conditions are unsuitable?

If conditions are not suitable for RRO, ATC will change modes. The first preference after RRO is to have aircraft arriving from the north and departing to the south (which will be done when winds are blowing from the south) and the second preference is to have aircraft arriving from the south and departing to the north (which will be done when winds are blowing from the north). Refer to **Figure 1 (see page 2)** for the preferred order of runway modes at night.

The ability to use RRO will vary day to day and will change over the longer term as air traffic levels change. As air traffic at WSI grows over future years, RRO may be used less often.

Why can RRO mode only be used during the night and not during the day-evening period?

The Sydney basin is one of the busiest airspaces in the world, particularly during the day.

During the day, multiple airports operate simultaneously, including Sydney Airport, Bankstown, Camden, and RAAF Base Richmond.

RRO requires significant airspace to safely manage aircraft arriving and departing in opposite directions. At night, when airspace activity is much lower and Sydney Airport is subject to curfew restrictions, these conditions can be met.

What is the Noise Abatement Procedure (NAP) that can be applied to RRO?

When RRO is in use, if arriving aircraft are more than 30 nautical miles (approximately 56km) from WSI, a Noise Abatement Procedure (NAP) may be applied for departing aircraft flying to northern and western destinations.

This NAP reduces overflight of populated areas to the south-west of the airport and the Blue Mountains. Under this NAP, instead of turning immediately after take-off, which is done in normal RRO to move departing aircraft out of the path of those arriving to the airport, the aircraft continues straight ahead. ATC then tactically guide the aircraft west over the less populated areas of the Blue Mountains, and the aircraft joins its standard flight path to its destination west of Blackheath.

The blue area in **Figure 3 (see next page)** shows the area that the aircraft will be tactically directed through after take-off.

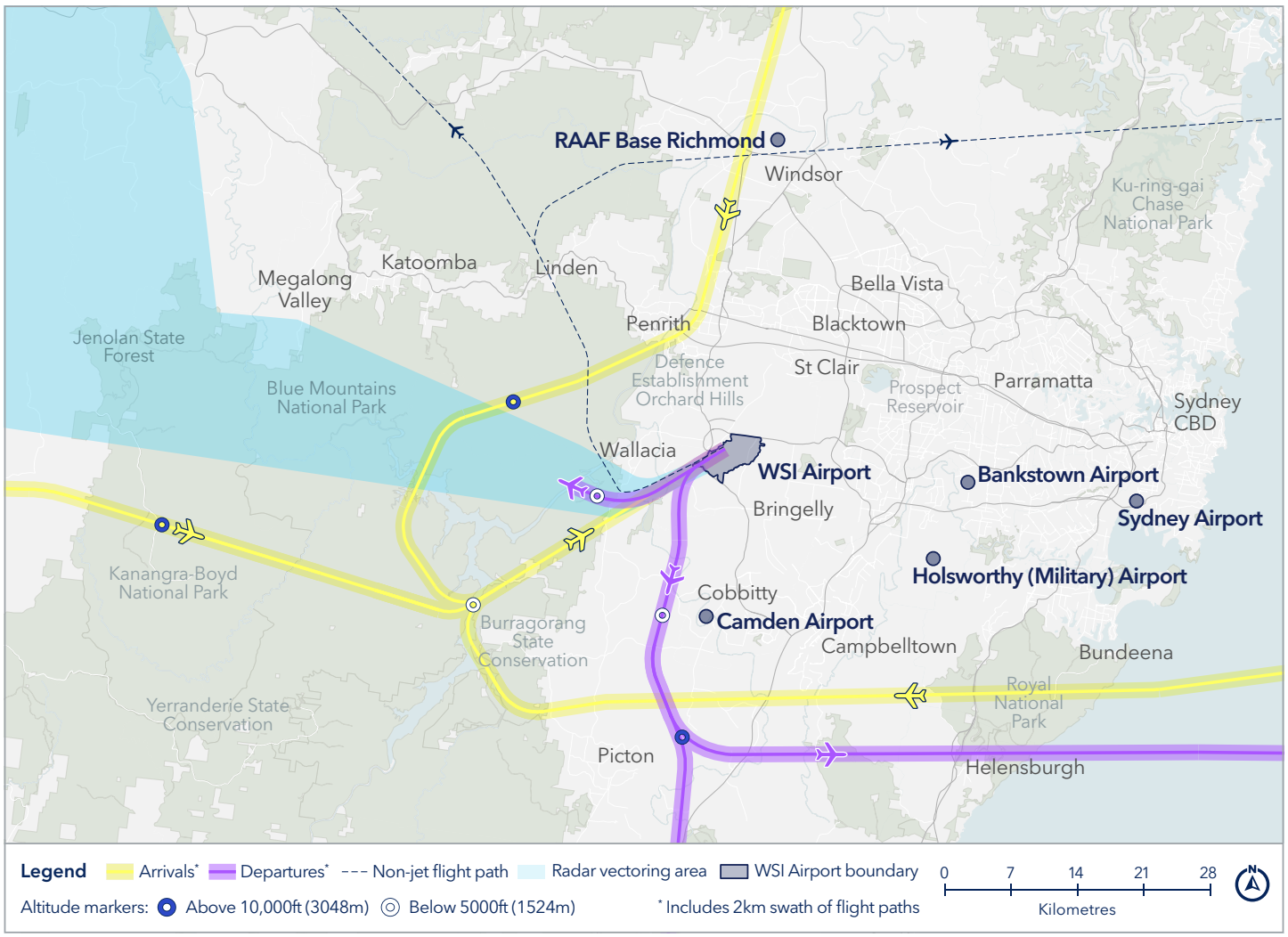

Figure 3: Reciprocal Runway Operations (RRO) – a Noise Abatement Procedure (NAP) may be applied for departing aircraft flying to northern and western destinations.

Where can I find more information on how often RRO was used?

Airservices Australia will publish monthly runway use reports on our **Aircraft in Your Neighbourhood** website once passenger flights are operating from WSI (expected from late October 2026).

The reporting will include information about the conditions and any other reasons that prevented RRO or the RRO NAP being applied.

Further details on how to access this reporting will be provided on our **Engage Airservices WSI** project page when the reporting is released.

Engage Airservices

Visit our Engage Airservices project page to stay informed about the Western Sydney International (Nancy-Bird Walton) Airport airspace and flight path changes. Engage Airservices will be the central source for project information.

You can also subscribe to receive emails on project updates and engagement opportunities. Scan the QR code to stay informed and enter your email address to subscribe.

Contact us

Visit us online at:
engage.airservicesaustralia.com/WSI

Send your feedback or questions to:
WSI Flight Paths, PO Box 211, Mascot NSW 1460

Email us at:
communityengagement@airservicesaustralia.com

If you require translation services, you can contact the free Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National) on 131 450 and ask them to call Airservices on 1300 301 120

About Airservices

Airservices Australia is a government-owned organisation responsible for safely and efficiently managing air traffic in 11 per cent of the world's airspace, as well as the provision of aviation rescue fire fighting services at Australia's busiest airports. We are regulated by the Civil Aviation Safety Authority and work closely with our customers and industry to support the long-term growth of the aviation industry.

airservices australia