



HENGCHUN AIRPORT TO FACE POSSIBLE CLOSURE NEXT YEAR

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The Civil Aeronautics Administration (CAA) is to make a decision on whether to close Hengchun [Airport](#) in Pingtung County in the second half of next year, given the airport's extremely low passenger rate, CAA Director-General Lin Tyh-ming said yesterday.

Lin said the Pingtung County Government has commissioned a feasibility study to assess the possibility of using the airport for international charter flights, the results of which are to be released in the second half of next year.

By that time, the CAA will have made a decision on whether to close or maintain the airport, he said.

Hengchun Airport was opened in 2004 with the aim of boosting tourism to the southern resort town of Kenting.

However, because of its short runway, the airport can only be used by small aircraft, most of which have only 72 seats. Flights are also often canceled due to down drafts.

Because of this, the number of passengers using the airport has been in decline, especially since the launch of the high-speed rail service in 2007. The number of airline companies operating services to the airport has also decreased from three to one.

According to CAA statistics, while there were more than 23,000 passengers between Taipei and Hengchun -- the only flight route to Hengchun Airport -- in 2004, the number dropped to about 11,000 in 2006 and about 2,448 in 2011.

Last year there were 768 passengers. In August last year there were two flights with 21 passengers. The route has not seen a single flight or passenger since September last year.

Tourism industry insiders in Pingtung have proposed that the airport runway be lengthened to allow larger-sized aircraft to land and start flight services to and from China.

The Pingtung County Government said it is confident that it can attract more passengers to Hengchun Airport if the Ministry of Transportation and Communications were to expand the airport's facilities and change the direction of its runway to reduce risks posed by down drafts.

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