

TravelWatch - *ISLE OF MAN*

Representing and promoting the interests of Isle of Man Passengers

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Response from TravelWatch to the Bus Network Review 2010

1. Introduction. TravelWatch warmly welcomes the Bus Network Review (BNR). We welcomed the decision to set up the Review and we submitted substantial written evidence to the Review. This is our response to the Consultation launched in January 2010.
2. TravelWatch Public Meeting March 6th. We were pleased to assist the consultation process through our public meeting on March 6th at which members of the public were able to raise issues with Bus Management.
3. Consultation Process. We particularly welcome the opportunity for a wide range of bodies to comment on the review. Of particular importance will be the comments of Local Authorities and Commissioners reflecting local opinion and detailed local concerns about proposed changes. Some individuals have also copied to us their submissions to the review. We urge Bus Management to carefully consider all these representations.

The BNR did not give quite as much detail as we would have liked. For example, it is difficult to comment on the proposed service to the Sound without knowing the routes and the timetable. Similarly the phrase “lower Douglas” leaves open a number of possibilities of how buses will run through lower Douglas. Changes to Express Services are also not completely clear from the draft timetable. We suggest further opportunities are given to comment on these details as they are clarified.

4. Implementation and Evaluation. Inevitably, whatever decisions are taken, some passengers will either suffer reduced service or believe they have a worse service. Either way, it would be sensible to build into the implementation process an evaluation of how the changes are working after a reasonable period. This would enable Bus Management to consider if further small modifications of the bus timetable are possible to reduce any problems arising from the changes.
5. Resources. TravelWatch appreciate that the Island has a good bus service; better than many parts of neighbouring jurisdictions. The cost of providing the service is around £6 million. While Bus Management are responsible for providing the best possible service to passengers within the agreed budget, it is important that passengers who seek additional services beyond the present budget recognise that this is a matter for political debate and decision rather than being within the gift of Bus Management. In the present economic climate additional resources for buses may be difficult to justify and achieve; but politicians should not rule out the provision of some extra resource as public transport is such a vital service for many people on the Island.

6. Reduction in Service. The BNR makes it clear that there will be areas where” the level of demand no longer warrants the continued provision of bus services”. The BNR encourages comments about alternate forms of transport provision. TravelWatch considers that the development of “Taxi Buses” may offer one solution and suggest this and other options are well worth exploring. It is especially important that vulnerable people are not left stranded. We would be happy to contribute to any consultation on this issue.
7. Improvements between Sea, Air and Buses. We welcome the changes that improve the connections between the buses and sea and air links – for example the improved Sunday evening service to the airport. However, we consider that further improvements to connections between bus air and sea are needed and regard what is proposed as only a first step towards more integrated transport. Adequate connections with winter weekend boat services need to be provided.
8. Improvements to Hospital Service. We welcome the improvements to the Service to the Hospital. However, some of those travelling to the hospital – for example from the south will have to change buses and this requirement underlines the urgent need for a plan to provide a proper bus interchange in Douglas as we identified in our submission to the Bus Review.
9. Late Night Services. We welcome the proposal to provide late night services on Friday and Saturday nights and agree that a premium fare is appropriate – but any premium should be fair, reflecting journey’s length.
10. School Services. We recognise the impact that the provision of school services has on the total bus operation. Passengers should not be adversely affected by the need to provide services to schools.
11. Beyond the Bus Network Review. In our evidence to the BNR, we concluded that :-
“following this review there should be an ongoing commitment to periodic reviews and to developing a long term plan for improving public transport on the Island”
We re-emphasise this proposal as we believe public transport requires a long term commitment to improvement and development for the benefit of passengers.

Brendan O’Friel
on behalf of TravelWatch Isle of Man

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