

TravelWatch- **ISLE OF MAN**

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Representing and promoting the interests of Isle of Man Passengers

INFORMATION BULLETIN 16 – November 2009

TravelWatch Public Meeting 24th October:

- An air travel update was provided by Paul Moncaster (TravelWatch)
- Hon Steve Rodan SHK outlined the recommendations made by the Tynwald Select Committee on the Steam Packet Company and updated us on progress with implementing them. The TravelWatch evidence to the IOM Office of Fair Trading enquiry on Steam Packet fares was also outlined.
- An update on the Bus Review was provided by Head of Buses Dave Kinrade
- The meeting was reminded of improvements in services during the year: introduction of new buses, the fast craft *Manannan* and the re-opening of the air route to London City. Much remains to be done and it is important that recommendations are followed up. A report on the work of TravelWatch has appeared in the November 2009 edition of *Manx Tails*.

Air Travel:

- The departure of VLM from the London City route and the complete withdrawal of Eastern from IOM routes has led to a consolidation of most of the IOM traffic with Flybe (including Loganair), Aer Arann and Manx2 without any routes being lost, thanks to the speedy action by Manx2 in taking over the Newcastle route.
- Freedom Travel www.freedomtravel-iom.com (696501) are chartering Flybe aircraft for weekend services direct to Majorca and Minorca between May and August 2010. Flybe Geneva ski-flights will again operate on Saturdays between December and April.
- Regency Travel (694455) are offering flights direct to Paris with Aer Arann during February. Some of these flights can be booked direct with Aer Arann.
- TravelWatch has developed a good relationship with Manx2 but with Flybe and Aer Arann not having any island-based management there is more work to be done with them.
- The position over baggage allowances and extra charges, particularly when travelling on more than one airline, continues to cause concern. Two suggestions were made: (a) on occasion it may be cheaper to send (excess) luggage in advance to UK destinations via IOM Post (b) booking a multi-leg journey through an on-line agency such as Expedia www.expedia.com may (according to the journey and carriers involved) could result in zero card payment fees and no baggage charges. We would welcome feedback on this from travellers.
- Athol Garage (01624 820082) are now offering a car valet service for air travellers - from £35 including 8 days free parking. (*8 days parking at the airport costs £36*) Just drop your keys at the Athol Car Hire desk in the airport and avoid the airport parking charges. Full details on:<http://www.atholgarage.co.im/pdfdocuments/valet.pdf>
- The runway extension project has required the re-siting of approach lights. Until this stage of the work is complete bad weather may cause disruption of services operated by larger planes if a visual approach is not possible.

Sea Travel:

- The Tynwald Select Committee made 8 Recommendations, all of which were accepted and passed to the Department of Transport for action. Progress is reported in the **Tynwald Policy Decision Report – October 2008 to July 2009** on pages 38-40 under reference 21/08. See <http://www.gov.im/lib/docs/cso/tynwaldpolicydecisionsweb.pdf> or from the Tynwald Library. All except one of these recommendations is reported as being **Implemented**, the exception being the establishment of a Consultative Body which is reported as **Ongoing**.
- TravelWatch believe that it is premature, until the Consultative Body is established, and its remit and relationship with the Department of Transport and the Steam Packet Liaison Committee is determined, to regard most of these actions as **Implemented**. We are particularly concerned that the Select Committee recommendation that the Office of Fair Trading be involved when there is substantive discussion on fare increases has been limited, apparently without the authority of Tynwald, to such occasions if the Company requested an increase more than the User Agreement allows.

- It therefore appears that 2010 fares, timetables and brochure will have been scrutinised and agreed at the October meeting of the Steam Packet Liaison Committee, now chaired by the Minister of Transport, without any input being sought either from passengers or the Office of Fair Trading.
- The Office of Fair Trading advise they have received over 300 submissions and expect to report their findings to Tynwald early in 2010. The TravelWatch submission is available on our website at http://www.travelwatch-isleofman.org/OFT_IOMSPC_final_1_.pdf
- TravelWatch are particularly concerned about the availability of Special Offer fares and have suggested that stand-by and day return fares be investigated on a basis both to encourage travel and hopefully assist in solving the “distress travel” situation where people have to make bookings at short notice. Mr Rodan advised that the company were “sympathetic and would keep this under review”. TravelWatch will be taking this up with the Company.
- Standard Fares are based on 1995 levels adjusted by Manx RPI less 0.5%. Those fare levels were based on a good deal of subsidy from the freight business which has been perpetrated by the User Agreement. The Select Committee found it difficult to assess whether fares were competitive in 1995. There is still concern that the Manx RPI is distorted by the high cost of freight – allowing fares and charges to rise more than would otherwise be the case. There is also concern, confirmed by the Select Committee in their second report, that fares need to be higher than would otherwise be the case to enable profits to be made to satisfy the needs of the ownership structure of the Company.
- Those taking small vans for private use still report difficulty in obtaining private car rates – particularly if a single journey is involved.
- The treatment of passengers who miss sailings is giving cause for concern and there is still uncertainty over what provision/assistance passengers can expect the company to make if sailings are brought forward, delayed or cancelled. TWIOM will be taking this up with the Company. The EU is proposing to require ferry operators to compensate passengers for delays but agreement appears not to be imminent.

Bus Review:

- Draft proposals for new bus network have been drawn up and are being tested against the timetable. Political consultation will take place in November followed by further wide public consultation in January. Assuming approval is given implementation should start March/April 2010.
- It appears that the decision to site a new medical centre at Jurby has been taken without any discussion with Bus Vannin. Sometimes new road layouts can be built without considering their suitability for bus operations. The use of smaller/mini buses in congested areas could produce capacity problems.
- The needs of elderly people, particularly in rural areas need to be remembered – as well as the need for proper interchange facilities in Douglas (for all ages).
- Concern was expressed at the apparent cost of re-branding but the return of advertising was generally supported and suggestions were made from the floor for further revenue generation.
- The role of/need for Inspectors was queried. It was noted that early morning buses on some routes ran early – such cases should be reported to management – and that when special timetables were in operation not all drivers seemed aware of the changes. The re-introduction of 5 day Explorer tickets was suggested (particularly for visitors). It was noted that it was still hoped to introduce SmartCard technology.

Joined up transport:

- TravelWatch have recently asked transport operators, on and off the Island, to consider and consult with each other how they can improve their 2010 schedules so that passengers can connect from one means of transport to another without undue delay.
- Arriva have introduced a new coach link between **Liverpool South Parkway and Airport**. Service 501 runs non-stop every 20 minutes between 06.51 and 19.07 Monday – Saturday only
- A useful website for planning journeys worldwide (including IOM) avoiding planes can be found at <http://www.seat61.com/Isle-of-Man.htm>

Future TravelWatch Meetings:

- Our next Supporters' Meeting will be held on Monday 11 January 2010 at the Committee Room at the National Sports Centre starting at 7.30. Anyone wishing to come and raise passenger travel issues with is welcome at that informal meeting.
- Our next Public Meeting – which will also be our Annual General Meeting is planned for Saturday morning 6 March 2010.