

TravelWatch- **ISLE OF MAN**

Representing and promoting the interests of Isle of Man Passengers.

Bulletin 23 - January 2012

Much has happened since our last Bulletin in September - there has been a General Election which has brought two new ministers into posts which interface with TravelWatch - David Cretney at Infrastructure and Tim Crookall at Community, Culture and Leisure. We were pleased to welcome them both at our Public Meeting on 15th November, when our speakers were David Sidebottom from Passenger Focus in the UK and Peter O'Mara from Aer Arann. A report on that meeting can be found on the Media & Publications section of our website via <http://tinyurl.com/7bk7utc>

Future meetings:

- Our next **Supporter Meeting** will be held at the Committee Room at the National Sports Centre, Groves Road, Douglas at 7.30pm on **Monday 30th January**. This is an informal meeting where you can come and share your views with Committee members and talk about some of the issues we are trying to progress. All are welcome.
- Our **Spring Public Meeting and AGM** are scheduled for **Saturday morning 17th March** at the Villa Marina – details to follow nearer the time, but please put the date in your diary.

Travel Disruption:

- The combination of high winds and technical problems led to considerable travel disruption in the weeks before Christmas. This affected both passengers and supplies to the Island. We, and others, were successful in persuading IOMSPC to considerably improve their information to passengers about actual and potential disruption.
- As a result of this we produced a brief for Members of Tynwald. This is on our website in the Published Report and Submissions section of the Media & Publications page - direct link via <http://tinyurl.com/7hr85jy>. This led to TWIOM representatives being invited to meet with the Department of Infrastructure Chief Executive and Operational Directors under the chairmanship of Minister Cretney and we have now been invited to develop some of the ideas put forward.
- One point we had made was the need for improved arrangements for passengers needing to switch from ferry to plane (or vice versa) at short notice. Thanks to the persuasion of the Airport Director both Manx2.com and flybe did put special offers in place whilst the *Ben-my-Chree* was in dry-dock in December. This appears to have had the knock-on effect that flybe franchisee Loganair has put extra flights and special offers in place for Shetland routes during their ferry refit period.

TravelWatch on-line guide for Visitors to the Isle of Man:

- This is the brain-child of Committee Member John Pennington and brings together comprehensive information about travelling to and on the Island, particularly for those who have never been before – but might still have a few tips to help those of us trying to escape! Do you need to bring a car – or hire one when you get here – or can you get where you want by public transport. This can be accessed from the front page of our website www.travelwatch-isleofman.org and we'd particularly ask for your help in drawing it to the attention of your friends and contacts in the adjacent isle.

Sail& Rail

- The problem to obtain Sail&Rail tickets on **weekend sailings via Birkenhead** seems to have been got round rather than solved but they can again be purchased in person from IOMSPC at the Sea Terminal. If purchasing on-line via a railway company website, the fact that the ship sails to/from Birkenhead is not displayed.
- Passengers TO the Island are required to make their own way from Lime Street to Birkenhead (Merseyrail from Lime Street to Hamilton Square, then a taxi to the 12 Quays berth). The free bus TO Birkenhead runs from the Pier Head, usually leaving at 12.30, but some "connecting" trains do not always allow time for passengers to use this facility. The coach FROM Birkenhead meeting the 08.00 arrival from Douglas does serve both Lime Street Station and the Pier Head.

- Please note that under certain wind and tide conditions sailing times to/from Birkenhead may be amended so check with www.steam-packet.com LATEST SAILINGS or phone 01624 645745 before setting out.
- We are still receiving reports that some railway ticket office staff are not familiar with arrangements for Sail&Rail tickets – via Heysham or Birkenhead - so we would suggest buying in advance whenever possible.

Credit Card Charges

- The pre-Christmas good news that the UK Government would take action by the end of 2012 to ban excessive charges on any form of payment across both the retail and transport sectors may not produce the hoped-for benefits for passengers as “payment charges” are now being designated as “administrative fees” by some airline operators. This is an issue which has further to run and will be resolved off-Island but we will be keeping in close touch those campaigning in UK.

Bus timetable changes

- We were given pre-advice of the timetable changes which came in on 9th January having attended the Road Transport Licensing Committee public hearing at which they were approved. Whilst not unhappy with the outcome, more effective public input into the timetable revision process would seem beneficial and we are keen to work with those involved to see how this can be best achieved in a less costly and time-consuming way than having a full official consultation under IOM Government guidelines.

Aer Arann

Following questions at our last Public Meeting Peter O'Mara has advised us that

- any comment and complaints about their service should be sent to customercare@aerarann.com
- lowest advertised fares are usually available 4 weeks before travel, with limited availability by 3 weeks, but this will vary according to the season and day of the week
- there are also promotional fares which are offered from time to time for bookings made on a particular day only. If passengers wish to be notified of these offers they need to sign up on www.aerarann.com using the “Exclusive Special Offers” section at the bottom left corner of their home page.

As we try and limit the frequency of Bulletins we send out, the most up to date information is posted on our **website** www.travelwatch-isleofman.org Most of the information on the website can be accessed by clicking on the links (which are all underlined - as the links are in this e-mail) or the symbols on the front page - e.g to access the on-line guide just click anywhere on the picture at the top of the right hand column. Apologies to those of you who know all this - but I mention it because it seems that not everyone is finding what they are looking for when they visit the site.

We hope to see some of you on Monday 30th - but do contact us if you have any ideas you'd like to share or issues you'd like us to look at.

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on behalf of TravelWatch Isle of Man

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