

TravelWatch- *ISLE OF MAN*

Arrey Troailt – Ellan Vannin



Representing and promoting the interests of Isle of Man Passengers

BULLETIN 24

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Dear Members and Supporters

Our next meeting

will be in Ramsey Town Hall on Saturday 12th May from 10.00 to 11.30. This will be our first meeting outside Douglas and will be relatively informal - in the manner of the Supporter Meetings we hold from time to time on Monday evenings at the NSC. Everyone is welcome to come and talk about passenger issues on and to/from the Island.

March Public Meeting

This was well attended and we were pleased to welcome Niall Duffy from flybe as our main speaker. He explained the new Manchester hub arrangements which have improved connections to a number of destinations and told us the Southampton/Brussels route had been dropped because of inadequate passenger numbers. The hand baggage dimensions allowed by flybe are smaller than some other airlines because their planes have limited overhead locker capacity and hand luggage needs to fit under their (smaller) seats. An announcement is imminent about changes to their website which may address some matters of passenger concern.

Bus timetable changes.

Concern had been expressed at the lack of an agreed process for passenger views to be taken into account before the Road Transport Licensing Committee (RTLCL) approves timetable changes requested by Bus Vannin. As a result the following procedure has now been advised:

1. Bus Vannin to provide additional information to the RTLCL to improve clarity and explain the reasons for proposed changes to bus services, as part of the established application process.
2. Bus Vannin to inform TravelWatch of the proposed changes in conjunction with the application process.
3. The RTLCL to issue a "Public Notice" in local newspaper(s) to notify the public that details of Bus Vannin's application(s) to change bus services is (are) available to view on the RTLCL website, at the RTLCL Office, and at the DoI Reception at the Sea Terminal, and to invite the public to respond to Bus Vannin and copy such correspondence to the RTLCL.

TravelWatch chairman, Brendan O'Friel has now been appointed vice-chair of the RTLCL.

Air travel

We note with regret the withdrawal of Aer Arann from the London City route - and the difficulty in finding an alternative carrier to re-start the service. Their Dublin service continues, but under the Aer Lingus Regional franchise which only handles services to/from Ireland. This does provide new opportunities for through ticketing to Aer Lingus long-haul destinations via Dublin.

Manx2.com are starting a new daily route to Oxford in May - with the flight continuing to Jersey. We welcome the news that they have dropped their charges for using debit and credit cards (without substituting an "administrative charge") in response to the **which?** super-complaint and subsequent UK OFT action. We hope that proposed UK legislation will lead to other airlines following this example.

easyJet have announced a new London Gatwick - IOM service, starting in October, with 4-6 flights per week. Whilst lower fares will no doubt be welcomed by many passengers, the danger is that the viability of the existing service is under-mined, and overall frequencies reduced, which could be bad news both for business and leisure passengers whether travelling into London or connecting with onward flights. The increase in Gatwick route capacity may also make it more difficult to attract an operator to restore the London City route. We would be interested to hear your view on this.

Sea Travel

There are a number of issues now under debate which will affect the future of ferry services to the Island. Some of these were discussed at our March public meeting - see http://www.travelwatch-isleofman.org/uploads/5/6/8/7/5687674/ua_03-2012.ppt but this was before the publication of Centrica's revised Windfarm proposals which would require diversion of the ferry routes from Douglas to both Liverpool and Heysham, and would also restrict bad weather routing options. These plans are being opposed but this adds yet another angle to determining the best type of vessels needed for the future, improvements in Douglas Harbour, as well as deciding which off-Island ports should be served. We are also concerned at some of the statements/assumptions being made about passenger preferences which we believe need testing with independent market research. We are in contact both with the Department of Infrastructure and the Steam Packet Company on an on-going basis.

We note the current "Friends and Family Offer" from the Steam Packet which enables those booking by 11 May to travel with their cars at 50% of the applicable Standard Fare any time up to the end of the year. However we are advised: *The aim of the offer is to promote travel to the Island, both to benefit IOMSPC and tourism in general, and hence the focus on friends and family living across the water. However, as SPC didn't want to discriminate against IOM residents, the codes have been left open to work both ways. Therefore IOM residents are more than welcome to take advantage of the offer for bookings made by Friday 11th May.* This appears to provide significant savings over the usual "Special Offer Fares" for those who can plan ahead and book in the next couple of weeks.

For up to date information please visit our website regularly – www.travelwatch-isleofman.org

Issued by Dick Clague

j.r.clague@gmail.com

on behalf of TravelWatch ISLE OF MAN

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