

# **TravelWatch- *ISLE OF MAN***

**Arrey Troait – Ellan Vannin**

**Submission to the Bus Timetable Review**

**Summer 2008**

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#### **1. Introduction**

On 30<sup>th</sup> January 2007, The Minister for Tourism and Leisure gave the following answer to a question about reviewing bus services:-

“In our business plan for 2007-08, which will be published shortly, my department will be committing itself to undertake a comprehensive review of our whole bus network and timetable..... Our proposed review will, therefore, involve public consultation and the aim will be a new network and timetable which best meets the needs and wishes of the Manx community.”

TravelWatch, as the recently formed passenger watchdog, warmly welcomed the review and this submission has been developed in order to assist the review by identifying passenger concerns. We will also be ready to meet with those conducting the review formally or informally if that would be helpful. Further details about TravelWatch will be found at Appendix 1.

## 2. The Background

In his 30<sup>th</sup> January statement, the Minister described the present bus network as follows:-

“Current network has evolved over time and is basically the same as it has been for the last thirty years....we have added and tweaked services as new developments have come along.”

TravelWatch consider this is a very fair description of the current bus network.

There are many wider social and economic changes over the last thirty years to take account of during the Review. These include:-

- The growth of car ownership
- The increased prosperity of the Island, together with population increases, leading to increased travel across much of the Manx community
- The importance of “joined up” thinking about transport – leading to “integrated services” – to enable passengers to undertake journeys involving more than one mode of transport.
- The improvement achieved by modern buses in performance, comfort and convenience
- The importance of encouraging the greatest number of passengers to use public transport rather than cars to contribute to the need to combat climate change.
- The importance of providing services accessible by the more vulnerable members of the community.
- The development of improved travel information and ticketing including “real time” information on when the next service will arrive
- The growing expectations of the Manx community of higher standards and better services.
- Changing lifestyles and working hours

There are many interesting improvements around public transport in other jurisdictions. We consider that if any of these developments appear to be of benefit to the Island, those charged with managing the bus network should be ready to experiment with innovation. For example, the use of voluntary “Quality

Contracts” is being developed in the UK to drive up the standard of particular bus services. Flexible use of smaller vehicles such as mini buses; post buses and taxi buses are all ideas that might have value for passengers on the Island.

In some other larger jurisdictions, there is competition to provide bus services. We note that there are conflicting views as to the benefit to passengers from the introduction of bus competition, especially on lightly used routes. The test of any arrangements for the provision of bus services should be the benefit to passengers.

### **3. Passenger Priorities**

Although TravelWatch has not the resources to conduct a large consultation exercise with passengers, from surveys in other jurisdictions and from anecdotal evidence from our many on Island contacts, we know a good deal about passenger priorities. These include:-

- Reliability and punctuality of Service
- Affordability of fares
- Adequate Information about services
- Clean and comfortable buses
- Safety and security

Delivering these passenger priorities should be one of the tests of any proposals emerging from the review.

#### **4. Integrated Transport**

In the opinion of TravelWatch, part of the review should be to consider how the various forms of internal public transport – trains, trams and buses - can work together to provide an integrated service. The review should also consider the integration of internal public transport with ferry sailings and air services. There are plenty of examples at present of it being impossible to catch early ferry and air services using internal transport and the Sunday evening service from the airport is inadequate.

One curious element of the current network is that the Express buses do not stop at the airport.

If greater use of the buses were to be made by sea and air passengers then improved luggage facilities on buses would probably be required.

Because it will never be possible to provide a bus service that serves all parts of the Island at all times, consideration should be given to links between buses and taxis, especially facilitating bus users having easy access to information about taxis where taxis may be needed to complete a journey.

## **5. Connections, Interchange and Bus Hubs**

The review also needs to consider the need for improvements to connections between bus services for those who require catching more than one bus in order to reach their destination. This is especially true around Douglas where the loss of the Bus Station has resulted in a number of unsatisfactory consequences, making journeys considerably more difficult for passengers. A new bus interchange in Douglas is needed as a priority. It should provide a high standard of services for passengers including:-

- Shelter
- Information
- Toilets
- Seating
- Refreshments

In addition to a main bus interchange at Douglas, consideration should be given to developing “Bus Hubs” at some locations around the Island. Bus Hubs would be aimed at improving service connections and at reducing traffic in the centre of Douglas and other towns. We understand that when the Sea Terminal was built, the intention was that it should be the bus interchange for Douglas. The Sea Terminal has many of the facilities that passengers would require already in place, although we do not underestimate the difficulties of relocating the existing car parking around the Sea Terminal if the main bus interchange was to be located there.

Bus Hubs could have mini bus services to housing estates and other locations, timed to connect with mainline services between towns. Hubs would require as many as possible of the facilities for interchange listed above and should have a staff presence to assist passenger with information. The mini bus services would offer opportunities to reduce the time taken on mainline services by allowing such services to follow a more direct route, one of the factors necessary to enable buses to compete more effectively with the private car.

## **6. Information**

Passengers require good information about services including information when services are disrupted. Improvements should include:-

- Easy to read Bus timetables with clear indications of connections
- Improved information at all Bus stops including Service Numbers of Buses serving the stop and destinations
- “Real time” information at key locations – for example at the airport
- Improved information at Terminuses, Bus Stations and Interchanges
- Improved Information at both the Sea Terminal and the Airport
- Greater use of local radio to inform passengers during service disruption
- Greater consideration is given to those with disabilities, including those with language difficulties, when providing bus information.

## **7. New Service Requirements**

The development of new facilities, new housing and the relocation of facilities can produce a considerable demand for new bus services. This has happened with the re-location of Nobles Hospital and has been compounded by the continuing use of the facilities at the former hospital site to provide medical services. We understand that inadequate planning and consultation with public transport providers resulted in the Island's bus service having to take on additional commitments – within existing resources - when the new Hospital opened.

We consider that the present bus service to the new hospital site is in urgent need of improvement. Some of those required to attend appointments find it very difficult or even impossible to reach the hospital using the existing services. The hospital bus service is a very important part of the total service and finding a solution to present difficulties should be a key objective of the Review. One possibility would be to develop a mini or midi-bus high frequency service from central Douglas wherever the new Douglas Bus Interchange Centre is sited. Such a service could continue throughout Race periods by using the Access Road. Further details about this issue will be found in Appendix 2.

It appears that a similar problem of providing a bus service to the new prison at Jurby is emerging at present.

Beyond that, we strongly advocate that the transport implications of significant new developments are fully considered before new developments are permitted.

## **8. Ticketing**

At the moment through ticketing is not possible unless you buy a 1, 7 or 14 day ticket, or a 12 journey ticket. The Introduction of a Travelcard or Smartcard, valid either weekly or monthly would help. The Island could be broken up into Zones and given numbers; the easiest way could perhaps be via the parishes as they are all ready understood by most people on the Island.

## **9. Fares**

The cost of travel is of considerable importance to passengers. Buses are in competition with the private car. Given the requirement to reduce the use of private cars, bus fares should be set at a level which makes bus travel attractive to motorists. Fare rises should, therefore, be kept to a minimum.

## **10. Reliability and Punctuality of Services**

Although we are largely dependent on anecdotal evidence, the performance of the existing service appears generally satisfactory with few cancellations and reasonable punctuality. The review should aim to achieve greater punctuality and reliability. In order to improve performance, consideration should be given to creating priority for buses where possible by bus lanes and similar devices. Providing improved journey times, especially on key routes, should be one of the objectives of the review.

## **11. Buses**

Passengers are generally not concerned about the size or make of bus. Their concerns are with the service delivered. However, modern buses generally provide greater comfort and are more passenger friendly. We hope, therefore, that a programme of acquiring new buses will be commenced shortly. Passengers also expect buses to be kept clean and tidy.

In addition to the timetabled services, the existing bus fleet has the important task of providing transport for students attending the Island's schools. Especially in the morning, this creates a peak of demand that influences the size and type of bus in the current fleet. If there are ways of smoothing this peak demand, they should be explored as part of the Review. This may include encouraging greater use of walking to school.

## **12. Safety and Security**

Safe passage on bus journeys is a high priority for passengers as is personal security. The present programme of installing close circuit TV on buses may prove a deterrent to antisocial behaviour, and we welcome this improvement.

## **13. Bus Shelters**

Bus shelters are an important part of the service for passengers given the variable weather on the Island. They are usually located on pavements or in other pedestrian areas and have to coexist with other uses. Thus maximising space for pedestrians and providing weather protection for bus passengers is often a compromise. Improving shelters with modern designs and materials should be a part of the Bus Review. Consideration should be given to increasing the number of shelters. There is also scope for improving the weather protection offered by existing structures. Some in exposed locations would benefit from greater weather proofing. The lack of an adequate bus shelter at the airport is a deficiency that should be addressed as a priority.

#### **14. Accessibility issues**

TravelWatch expect that taking account of those with disabilities will form an important strand of the Bus Review. Bus shelters, bus stops and the proposed Bus Hubs and Interchange should all be designed to take account of the needs of those with disabilities.

#### **15. Routes**

We understand that the Bus Review will draw on improved information about current bus use derived from new IT to be installed in 2008. We also understand that the Review will engage in local consultation with passengers in different parts of the Island. We welcome this dual approach but would welcome the opportunity to discuss with those conducting the review emerging findings from both the figures and the local consultations.

#### **16. Other Issues**

From time to time there will be service failures and passengers will complain. We consider that Isle of Man Transport should have an informal system of complaints handling for minor issues and a formal one for more serious complaints. Statistics about the number and type of complaint should be published each year. The complaints system should be publicised and easily accessible to passengers.

#### **17. Co-operation between Government Departments**

At present, responsibility for Transport to and from the Island and on the Island is split between two Government Departments. Whether this is the most effective way of providing the transport services that passenger require is an issue well beyond the current review of buses. However, TravelWatch recommends that both Departments work closely and effectively together in the interests of the travelling public.

#### **18. Short Term improvements**

TravelWatch consider that it is important that improvements that can be made without too much difficulty should be implemented as early as possible. Examples of improvements which fall into this category would be the provision of information and any temporary facilities that can be provided especially around the existing main bus stops in central Douglas.

## **19. The Longer Term**

The current Bus Review cannot be expected to meet all the needs of the Manx community. Moreover some developments which may be regarded as highly desirable will take a number of years to implement. For example if changes to the bus fleet are contemplated this is likely to require an investment plan implemented over a number of years. The Bus Review should not be regarded as a one off exercise but rather the first of periodic bus reviews – say every 5 years. TravelWatch would welcome a commitment to developing a long term plan for improving public transport on the Island. We suggest, therefore, that part of the outcome of the Bus Review should be a commitment to developing a long term plan which should lead to a programme of improvement for public transport across the Island.

## **20. Conclusions and Recommendations**

- A. TravelWatch warmly welcomes the Bus Review
- B. The Review should be open to considering the applicability of Bus improvements elsewhere if these might benefit the Manx community
- C. Passenger Priorities include Reliability and Punctuality of Service; Affordability of Fares; Adequate Information about Services; Clean and Comfortable Buses; Safety and Security.
- D. The Review should seek to improve the integration of public transport across the Island including integration of bus with Air and Sea services.
- E. The Review should recommend as a priority a Bus Interchange in Douglas, improved connections and consider developing Bus Hubs elsewhere.
- F. Substantial improvements in information for passengers are required
- G. New public transport Service Requirements such as to the new Hospital should be planned at the time new facilities are being approved. Improved services to the new hospital site are an urgent priority for the Bus Review
- H. Fares should be kept low to encourage greater use of public transport especially by motorists. Ticketing should be improved with the possible introduction of "Smart Cards".
- I. Although existing services are generally reliable and punctual, the Review should seek further improvements in performance. This should include giving Buses a degree of priority over other traffic.
- J. Buses should be comfortable and kept clean and tidy
- K. Safety and personal security remain high priorities for passengers
- L. The number and quality of bus shelters should be improved
- M. Improving accessibility to bus services should be an important part of the Review
- N. TravelWatch welcomes the decision to commission local consultation over routes.
- O. There should be a clear complaints system with statistics published each year.

P. The two Government Departments with responsibility for Transport should work closely and effectively together.

R. Short term improvements such as better information should be introduced as soon as possible.

S. TravelWatch consider 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.

## **APPENDIX 1: TravelWatch *ISLE OF MAN***

TravelWatch *ISLE OF MAN* was founded in January 2007 in order:

**"To represent and promote the interests of Isle of Man passengers"**

**Our key objectives are:**

- To provide opportunities for passengers to express their concerns and needs
- To influence Public Transport Authorities and Operators to improve services for passengers
- To provide Public Transport Authorities and Operators with a passenger organisation to consult
- To encourage integrated public transport provision both on and off the Island
- To co-operate with other bodies in the interests of passengers.

In pursuit of these objectives TravelWatch *ISLE OF MAN* has had meetings with the Minister for Tourism & Leisure, the Airport Director, the Director of Harbours and the Director of Properties at the Department for Transport as well as the Director of Service Delivery and the Head of Buses at the Department of Tourism & Leisure. We have had meetings with Directors or Management of Flight Support, EuroManx, Manx2, Flybe and the Steam Packet Company.

Regular meetings of our steering group are held, to which all supporters are invited. We have held two public meetings in November 2007 and March 2008. At these meetings presentations were given by operators and members of the public were able to raise questions direct with operators. TravelWatch *ISLE OF MAN* has established its own website [www.travelwatch-isleofman.org](http://www.travelwatch-isleofman.org) which provides a range of information for travellers. We have also provided Passenger Information sheets which are currently available in the Welcome Centre at the Sea Terminal.

The 1998 Select Committee of Tynwald charged with examining the performance of the Steam Packet proposed the formation of a Manx Transport Users' Consultative Committee. Their proposal was summarised in section 6.5 ff (pp 30-32) of their June 1999 report. Although this proposal was accepted in principle by Tynwald it was never acted on.

TravelWatch *ISLE OF MAN* is chaired by Manx-born Brendan O'Friel who in 1998 was appointed by the (UK) Minister for Transport to head the North West Rail Passenger Committee. This was later superseded by TravelWatch North West which he also chaired before returning to live full time on the Island.

This submission was jointly prepared by Brendan O'Friel and Brian Carr assisted by other TravelWatch members. Before moving to the Island, Brian Carr worked for Tyne and Wear Passenger Transport Executive for 15 years in the Research and Development Department carrying out surveys on services provided by local bus train and ferry operators.

TravelWatch ISLE OF MAN is part of a network of organisations representing passengers in the UK. This gives us access to a wider network of information and advice on issues of concern to passengers.

## **Appendix 2**

### **Bus Service to Nobles Hospital and other facilities at Strang**

By reason of its size and relative numerical importance to patients, Nobles Hospital has given its name to the area of Strang where it is located. However there are other health related facilities in the same vicinity and more to be opened. We have identified The Hospice, The Children's Hospice, Newlands, Ballamona and the Palatine surgery (about to relocate from Murray's Road, Douglas). Public transport is necessary for a proportion of patients and their visitors as well as staff for these facilities.

The case for an improved bus service to serve these facilities is, in our opinion, a strong one requiring urgent attention. We do not have figures for the public transport requirement around Nobles, but we do know that in a recent 12 month period more than 67,000 out patient treatments were carried out at Nobles alone. Given the known rise in the Island's population, it is not unreasonable to expect the numbers travelling to Nobles to increase.

TravelWatch are continuing to research the numbers of potential bus passengers in the Strang area and may make a further submission to the Review on this subject.