

# TravelWatch- **ISLE OF MAN**



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Representing and promoting the interests of Isle of Man Passengers

[www.travelwatch-isleofman.org](http://www.travelwatch-isleofman.org)

### **MEDIA RELEASE – 17 August 2011 – IOM OFT Report on IOM STEAM PACKET FARES**

TravelWatch Isle of Man is surprised and disappointed at the decision of the IOM OFT, after over two years work, not to complete and publish a report into prices charged by the Steam Packet Company for its passenger and freight services.

TravelWatch – the Island's Passenger Watchdog - submitted evidence to the OFT in September 2009, nearly a year after the Tynwald Select Committee had reported. This highlighted a number of issues which were still of concern to passengers:

1. the difficulty in obtaining special offer fares
2. the level of fares which many passengers find themselves paying
3. the high cost of travel booked at short notice
4. the cost of changing travel arrangements
5. the cost of extras

The full submission is available on the Media and Publications page of our website [www.travelwatch-isleofman.org](http://www.travelwatch-isleofman.org) .(direct link: <http://tinyurl.com/4x1hr8x>)

Almost two years has passed since our submission, and although there have been some changes in the meantime, soundings at our Public Meeting and via our on-line poll in March 2011, which were aimed at identifying the principal public concerns about transport issues ahead of the General Election, indicate that the cost of sea and air fares was the greatest concern - especially fares booked at short notice and at peak times.

We had hoped that the OFT investigation would shed more light on these concerns.

The investigation has cost a great deal of time and taxpayers' money, as well as diverting Steam Packet management resources away from their declared primary objective of “providing a reliable and cost-effective service to Manx residents and visitors”.

TravelWatch chairman Brendan O'Friel commented: “It is especially disappointing that there appears to be nothing to show for the effort expended. An interim report, outlining what had been established so far, would have been preferable to a decision not to complete the work”.

A challenge by Seaside Shipping to establish the legality of the User Agreement has been held over for almost two years, pending publication of the OFT report. We believe that resolution of this issue is vital to ensure the proper long-term security of shipping services to and from the Island.

TravelWatch has yet to be convinced that the OFT, as currently constituted, is able to adequately protect passenger interests. The present rules governing the operation of an OFT investigation seem very restrictive and should be reviewed to ensure that the interests of consumers are better taken into account. We welcomed the recent Government proposal to remove politicians from the OFT - the practice in other jurisdictions - and note that on this matter the chair and vice chair (both politicians) had to exclude themselves from involvement because of prior statements they had made in the House. We were therefore very surprised that this proposal was not supported by the current Tynwald and we believe that this is an issue that voters may wish to discuss with their election candidates.

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