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Consultation Response on Public Transport and Parking – July 2014

1. Introduction

This is the response of TravelWatch- ISLE OF MAN to the Public Consultation Document on “Proposed Changes to Public Transport and Parking Provision” dated June 2014. A note about TravelWatch is included at the end of this response.

2. General Approach of TravelWatch to the Consultation

TravelWatch welcome the decision to conduct a consultation on these issues and that the Department of Infrastructure has set out the problems it confronts in some detail. On the other hand, we are disappointed that it has not proved possible to provide “costed options”, i.e. more financial information about the revenue that might be generated by the options set out in the paper. In response to a request from TravelWatch, the Department provided some more detail about the possible costings arising from changes to the school bus service. They estimate that the product of a 50p fixed school fare would provide an income of between £325,000 and £350,000 a year. They also indicated that more detailed figures were not available because of the constraints of the current ticketing system.

TravelWatch recommend that the ability to obtain such information should be included in any upgrade of the ticketing system so that future public consultations may benefit from more information about the cost/benefits of options for change.

For example TravelWatch consider that some assumptions on a range of scenarios should have then been costed. If so, why keep such information secret? Transparency in Government should be the norm – and the Information we consider should have been available includes the income benefits from:-

- Charging £1 for all concessionary fares.
- Selling an annual concessionary travel card charged at - say £20 per year, with free travel or a minimum charge on top?
- Charging for street parking at a variety of levels throughout Douglas wherever there is currently free disc parking?

TravelWatch remain concerned that the public have not been provided with sufficient information about costs. For individuals who respond to the consultation there must be a strong temptation to reject any change that adversely affects them. Hopefully many respondents will take a wider view as some way has to be found to balance the Island’s finances.

TravelWatch recognises that the Island’s public finances are such that difficult decisions have to be taken.

TravelWatch welcomes the emphasis in the consultative document on the need to protect the vulnerable and endorse strongly this approach. Ensuring that the pain caused by difficult decisions is spread as widely as possible appears a sensible and necessary approach.

3. Public Transport on Island

Because of our links with the network of TravelWatch organisations in Great Britain, and our own observations of the state of public transport in other jurisdictions, TravelWatch consider that the current public transport provision on the Island, principally the bus network, is of a high standard and compares very favourably with comparable parts of the UK. The bus fleet is generally modern, comfortable and reliable, but there is always scope for improvements and for marginal efficiencies by minor changes.

TravelWatch's view is that for passengers it is very important **that the present network and frequency is largely preserved**. Our general approach is that **other options are preferable to cutting services**.

TravelWatch is also well aware that in neighbouring jurisdictions changes have already been introduced to School Transport and to Concessionary Fares. The arrangements on the Island are generally much more favourable and that even if the proposed changes are implemented, that is likely to leave the Island's Public Transport fare structure rather more favourable than in many other places.

4. School Bus Transport

Free School Bus Transport is a relatively recent innovation on the Island, introduced around 2000. We agree that some changes are needed to

- encourage walking for short distances to school
- to make a reasonable charge for providing the service
- and to reduce abuse of the current service which we understand has been common.

At the same time, a careful balance needs to be struck so that unintended consequences do not arise such as greater traffic congestion outside schools.

We also advocate that care is taken during implementation not to create difficulties for children out of area by introducing change gradually – for example by allowing those currently out of area to continue to pay the proposed “fixed” charge even if new “out of area” travel attracts a higher fare.

Care also needs to be taken to avoid creating sharp distinctions between different groups – for example if those on free school meals are eligible for free school transport, then provision should be included to avoid heaping excessive costs on those with more than one child whose income falls just above eligibility for free school meals.

5. Bus Concessionary Fares

TravelWatch appreciates that current concessionary fares for pensioners may require some modification.

- Any move to link free bus travel with the age at which the State Pension is payable seems logical.
- However, in making changes, full account needs to be taken of the value of free bus travel for pensioners of limited means. This includes the opportunity for pensioners to keep in touch with friends and relatives as well as facilitating essential tasks such as shopping and visits to doctors and to the hospital. “Joined Up” transport is important.
- Government should also ensure that medical staff take some account of public transport availability, including when concessionary fares are available to patients when making appointments.
- TravelWatch see no case for changes to the provision of concessionary fares for those with a significant disability. However, we recognise that all concessionary fares require monitoring to ensure that abuse of the system is prevented.

6. Parking issues

Although TravelWatch do not generally deal with parking issues, in the interest of “joined up” travel, we consider that in making any changes to parking arrangements and charges, special care should be taken about facilities at the **port and airport** so that those travelling off Island are not faced with excessive charges and that short-stay drop-off and pick-up facilities are maintained.

TravelWatch has been struck by the advantages the Island currently provides for visitors with cars by making very few charges for parking and providing considerable opportunities for free parking. This is a striking contrast with the position in many holiday areas in the UK for example the Lake District and the West Country. Those visiting such areas have to frequently pay for car parking and to accept considerable restrictions on where they can park. We wonder if the Island has adequately exploited the potential marketing advantage about parking for those coming to the Island with a vehicle – or indeed hiring a car on Island.

7. Other matters

- **TravelWatch accept** that public transport can be provided by public authorities, private companies or appropriate forms of Community Transport organisation. What matters to passengers is the **quality of service** provided so that it is reliable, punctual and affordable with good information provision, a transparent complaints system and proper supporting facilities.
- **TravelWatch considers** that any changes to public transport **fares** should be linked wherever possible to the introduction of smart cards to reduce the requirement for money handling and to ensure adequate revenue protection. Those who avoid paying their fares, in practice transfer the cost to honest fare paying passengers.

- **TravelWatch notes** that there is no current provision for passenger representatives to be consulted – in confidence – over proposed fare rises. These changes might be a sensible time to consider introducing such consultation, perhaps in line with the consultation required for changes to regulated train fares in Great Britain.
- Similarly there is still a need to develop an **adequate consultative process** when annual bus timetable changes are proposed. At a time when the public are being asked to pay more towards the cost of the bus service, improved public consultation should be introduced.
- Finally, we note that no progress appears to have been made towards creating an adequate **Bus interchange in Douglas**, although it is more than 5 years since TravelWatch started to highlight this deficiency. A commitment to move this forward would be welcome when decisions are announced about the results of this consultation.



Brendan O'Friel Chairman 28 July 2014

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

- meets regularly with Transport Operators and appropriate Government Departments
- has its own website www.travelwatch-isleofman.org which provides a range of information for travellers.
- has a Noticeboard in the Sea Terminal
- publishes an on-line guide for Visitors to the Island and a range of Passenger "Travel Tips" sheets which are available in the Welcome Centre or via our website.

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. We currently have over 60 paid up members and over 200 supporters.