

TravelWatch- *ISLE OF MAN*

Arrey Troaitt – Ellan Vannin

Representing and promoting the interests of Isle of Man Passengers

www.travelwatch-isleofman.org

Airport Security Queue Crisis - Yet more delays and Costs

The news that action was finally being taken to tackle the now notorious delays in passengers clearing Security checks at Ronaldsway Airport was initially wholeheartedly welcomed by TravelWatch, which has been trying, with little apparent success, to have the problem addressed. This swiftly changed to disappointment and shock both at the levels of expenditure being envisaged to tackle a fairly simple problem, and by the fact that the work, which we were advised only a few short weeks ago, would be completed in time for the Easter surge in traffic, will now not even start until after this time, condemning many thousands more passengers, including those travelling on our Patient transfer services to the North West, to yet more months of inconvenience and distress.

It seems inconceivable that the task of bringing the already installed second X-ray channel into operation, the lack of which is the root cause of all the problems, should incur a capital expenditure of £300,000 and further delays of several months

TravelWatch's main concern is that NO major costs, other than additional staffing and any necessary physical changes to the Search Area itself, should be incurred before the two channel X-ray system has been tried in practice, as we strongly believe that that much of the very considerable cost of knocking down offices and major building works simply to make better conditions for longer queues may prove to be quite unnecessary. Once this has been properly trialled - and we went along entirely with the Department's suggestion that the Easter rush would be an excellent time to do this, with any necessary works in the search area being carried out, even on a temporary basis, during the quiet periods of January, February and March - then it would be sensible to put together the final plan. But only in the light of REAL experience.

It is scarcely credible that this window has been allowed to be lost - although, even now, with real determination and leadership, the physical work necessary could probably be completed on a temporary basis, as long as the necessary additional Security staff can be made available. We

were advised that recruitment for these commenced some four months ago, so it is hoped that some arrangements could be made for at least a few of the Easter peaks to be covered, as this was the Department's own target date until just a few short weeks ago. After that, the need for more extensive building alterations could be sensibly considered in the light of real experience, and any additional expenditure which is not directly related to the cause of the current delays, such as the provision of automatic Boarding Pass readers (which may be 'nice to have' but will make no savings in staffing costs or in speeding up the security process) could be considered as one off proposals by a proper cost/benefit evaluation, which we understand has not yet been carried out.

TravelWatch wrote to the Director of Ports on 5th September 2017, followed by a letter to the Minister in early November, seeking urgent action to reduce the delays in the light of the highest ever levels of customer dissatisfaction in the Airport's long history. To now hear that the Department's Easter target for implementation has been abandoned, and that work will not even start until after the holiday period, is of the utmost concern. The Minister must move swiftly to give absolute priority to bringing the two X-ray system into operation by the end of March, which could still be done as long as the necessary staff have been recruited as planned. AFTER THIS the need to spend £300,000 of taxpayer's money can be re-considered; much of which may prove to be completely unnecessary. We are far from confident that any improvements at all will be in place in time, not only for Easter, but even for the start of the TT period.

This is simply not acceptable to our residents, our visitors, or to the Island. We saw the Minister step in with action, soon after his appointment, to overcome the interminable delays in even commencing the work on Douglas promenade, to general acclaim. Now similar determination is needed to overcome what is already a major cause of embarrassment to his Department and the Island. Simply throwing money at the problem without a real understanding of the root causes may not be the answer.

TravelWatch Isle of Man

February 25th 2018

Note to Editors

Inquiries to TravelWatch Air Spokesperson:-

Terry Liddiard 834200