

TravelWatch- **ISLE OF MAN**

Arrey Troaitt – Ellan Vannin

Representing and promoting the interests of Isle of Man Passengers

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“Show us how you can improve!”

- TRAVELWATCH CHALLENGES THE STEAM PACKET COMPANY.

TravelWatch Isle of Man warmly welcomes the report of the Tynwald Select Committee and are pleased with the thoroughness with which passenger concerns have been investigated. We very much welcome Tynwald’s decision to approve all the recommendations made by the Committee.

TravelWatch chairman Brendan O’Friel comments: “We believe that much important information has very properly now come into the public arena.” Brendan has also challenged the Steam Packet Company to take on board the criticisms made in the debate – and act on them within 12 months. Some of these can be addressed without significant cost and could considerably improve the Company’s relations with its customers.

TravelWatch welcomes the decision to establish a Consultative Body for both Air and Sea Transport.

The Consultative Body needs to be proactive in addressing passenger interest issues, some of which were brought out in the Tynwald debate, some in the Select Committee report and others which have been drawn to our attention by the travelling public. Tynwald clearly indicated that the new body should deal with all matters of travel including unresolved complaints relating to both sea and air travel. Customer satisfaction requires more than compliance with the User Agreement – as was clear from the debate. Issues to be covered include:

- Punctuality, reliability and convenience of schedules (for on and off Island connections) are important issues for passengers which require consultation.
- Diversions and cancellations often have significant knock on implications for passengers. Consultation about the detail of handling service disruption should bring benefits for all parties.
- The Steam Packet Company has indicated a more sympathetic approach to “emergency travel” pricing. How this might work should be the subject of consultation.
- We welcome the Company being asked to look again at its pricing policy for small vans for private use.

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- Access is a substantial concern for the Consultative Body to address. Concerns range from the lack of disabled access on the *Snaefell*, late boarding of wheelchair users and uncertainty over pedestrian and disabled access arrangements to the new terminal at Liverpool. An early issue for the Consultative Body will be the access arrangements on the *Manannan* (Incat050).

We believe that this Consultative Body should work with the transport operators and the Department of Transport, to achieve improved levels of customer satisfaction.

We welcome the decision to renegotiate the Fuel Surcharge Agreement and to involve the Office of Fair Trading in negotiating any future increases.

Given the Minister of Transport's desire that any changes should be "in the best interests of the public" we recommend that

- wider consultation is required as to how such surcharges may equitably be applied, and the frequency with which reviews should take place. Whilst the current arrangement may have led to stability and simplicity of administration, the lack of transparency leads to public confusion and the infrequency of review is out of line with industry practice.
- surcharges are only acceptable on a short term basis and that the new agreement should only be for a limited period.

This is as well as making allowance for the different grades of fuel used by the *Benny-Chree* and the fast craft, and taking into account forecast future fuel costs.

We also welcome:

- **the decision to put the Department of Transport Liaison Group onto a more formal basis** and ask that issues such as the scrutiny of timetables should involve the new Consultative Body, so that customer as well as operational views are considered.
- **Tynwald's backing for our call that complete Fare and Timetable information should be provided in both brochure and electronic form.**
- **Discussion being opened over further fleet investment during the currency of the present user agreement.**

TravelWatch Isle of Man spokesman Dick Clague comments: "I believe that the proposals accepted by Tynwald will provide an opportunity, rather than a guarantee, for many important matters of passenger concern to be progressed. The challenge to all parties is to make sure that this opportunity is not missed." **TravelWatch Isle of Man** therefore looks forward to continue building on the existing constructive liaison with various Government Departments, and having the opportunity to work alongside the Steam Packet Company in future.

For further information or interviews please contact

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