

TravelWatch- **ISLE OF MAN**

Arrey Troaitt – Ellan Vannin

Representing and promoting the interests of Isle of Man Passengers

INFORMATION BULLETIN 18 – July 2010

1 Air Travel

1.1 The volcanic ash saga in May impacted heavily on air travel providing a period of great uncertainty for both passengers and airlines. Most cancellations arose from the closure of air space, over which the airlines had no control, and often received little notice. Given the scale of the problem, passenger issues, refunds and re-booking arrangements were handled reasonably well by airlines. TravelWatch have made some suggestions over how information displayed on the airport website could be made more useful to passengers.

1.2 easyJet flights started as anticipated in May. The airline only provides one flight a day between Liverpool and the Island and it is a concern that if a flight is cancelled (as has happened) passengers are expected to wait until the next day to travel.

1.3 Manx2.com – the East Midlands route has closed due to falling passengers numbers, although Newcastle is reported to be doing well. The airline has started to expand off-Island with internal routes in Ireland and Wales but this has provided limited opportunities to fly from IOM to Anglesey (August/early Sept only) and to Galway via Belfast.

1.4 Air Passenger Duty – the UK Government has indicated a wish to collect duty on a per flight rather than a per passenger basis as currently. It is too early to assess the likely effects for IOM passengers and services. Under the current system passengers are able to reclaim tax on unused flights but administration fees are often charged by the airlines (Flybe charge £25 per person) which exceed the duty being re-claimed. This was investigated by **Which?** Magazine last year – see <http://www.which.co.uk/news/2009/03/claiming-tax-for-unused-flights-can-be-costly-172511/>

2 Sea Travel

2.1 The combination of the volcanic ash problem followed quickly by the TT races has brought higher levels of foot passenger demand than have been seen for some years and which most UK port facilities are able to handle. The facilities at Douglas have been far better able to accommodate the surge in traffic than most UK ports serving both Ireland and the Continent. The extra capacity available on the **Manannin** was put to good use and it was notable that even during the TT races the **Snaefell** was not used intensively.

2.2 Manannan developed engine problems at the end of June. This requires the replacement of a crankshaft but the vessel remains in service, running on three engines until the work is completed. Voyage time often seems to be over 3 hours but during the week reduced turn-round times are often achieved which prevents cumulative delays. Weekends are proving more problematic with the final arrival of the day in Douglas sometimes being after the last buses have left. On such occasions IOMSPC have indicated that, on request to the Passenger Service Officer on board the vessel, taxis can be booked ahead of the vessel arriving. Despite these difficulties passenger feedback on the vessel remains positive.

2.3 At Heysham foot passengers are still being bussed on and off the **Ben-my-Chree** following the partial collapse of the walkway between terminal and ship in March. This is causing delays as space has to be cleared on the car deck before buses can be positioned to collect passengers but IOMSPC are now looking at the feasibility of carrying a coach on the **Ben-my-Chree** to speed up this process. Responsibility for the provision of a replacement lies with Peel Ports but no time-scale has been indicated for this work. At **Liverpool** there has been no obvious improvement in facilities and it is disappointing that even low-cost suggestions have not been progressed.

2.4 Fuel surcharges (which are incorporated in quoted fares) were increased by 75 pence from 1 July without any announcement being made – but appear only to have been applied selectively. Although the current method of calculating surcharges seems to be working well, it still lacks the hoped for transparency, and TravelWatch continue to press for the publication of the formula being used.

2.5 Consultative Body – following delays due to Government re-organisation, it is expected that the draft Terms of Reference will be distributed for formal consultation in July. In line with Government guidelines the consultation period will last for at least six weeks and will be preceded by a Department News Release. TravelWatch members and supporters will be encouraged to contribute.

2.6 Steam Packet Timetables through to May 2011 are now available and on-line bookings can be made at current fares. This has been published much earlier than in previous years – which is welcome – but it highlights the absence of an agreed passenger consultation process. We are advised that **Manannan** will be scheduled for all Liverpool services during Spring 2011, thus facilitating bus connections to Lime Street station for passengers arriving at 18.00.

2.7 Delays and Cancellations - Ferry passengers seem likely to have more rights when faced with delays and cancellations from 2012 following a vote in the European Parliament – but subject to approval by member states. The new rights include amongst others:

- Guarantee of reimbursement or rerouting in situations of cancellation or of delay at departure of more than 90 minutes
- Adequate assistance (such as snacks, meals, refreshments and, where necessary, accommodation for up to three nights, up to €80 per night) in situations of cancellation or delay at departure of more than 90 minutes
- Compensation, between 25% and 50% of the ticket price, in situations of delay in arrival or cancellation of journeys
- Non-discriminatory treatment and specific assistance free of charge for disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility both at port terminals and on board ships, as well as financial compensation for loss or damage of their mobility equipment
- Minimum rules on information for all passengers before and during their journey, as well as general information about their rights in terminals and on board ships
- Establishment by carriers and terminal operators of complaint handling mechanisms available to passengers
- Establishment of independent national bodies for the enforcement of the regulations, through - where appropriate - the application of penalties

These rules will affect journeys to/from UK/EU ports and apply to vessels carrying more than 12 passengers.

2.8 Sail & Rail – tickets to destinations beyond London usually include the London Underground journey between main line terminals (but do not let you break your journey between). To confirm that the cost of travel across London is included look for the “+” symbol which is shown in the ticket's Route Information at the bottom of the ticket (possibly to the left of the words Steam Packet).

If travellers to the Island miss their connection at Lancaster due to the late running of their main line train, they should go to the station ticket office and request that alternative transport be arranged to Heysham Port at railway expense. Please note however that IOMSPC do not guarantee connections at Heysham in either direction.

3 Bus travel

3.1 Bus Timetable Review – it is understood that Bus Vannin hope to have the new timetables in operation before the start of the school autumn term. Little further detail has been published since the illustrative timetables were circulated as part of the Consultation.

3.2 New Buses – it is understood that a £1.4 million order is being placed with Wright Group for 12 single-decker “StreetLite” buses for delivery by March 2011.

4 TravelWatch news

4.1 Our **Autumn Public Meeting** will be held at the Villa Marina on **Saturday morning 6th November**. It is hoped the major topic will be “Open Skies v Restricted Harbour Access”

4.2 Our next **Supporters' Meeting** will be in the Committee Room at the National Sports Centre at 7.30 pm on **Monday 20th September**. This provides supporters with an opportunity to discuss passenger issues and provide feedback on an informal basis.

4.3 There are two ways in which **Members and Supporters can particularly help at this time:**

- If you receive information from TravelWatch through the post, but have an e-mail address that could be used, please advise web@travelwatch-isleofman.org
- Supporting TravelWatch financially either as a member (min £10) or by making a donation please download a membership application form from http://www.travelwatch-isleofman.org/membership_form_03-10.pdf or contact Paul Moncaster, our treasurer at Lorne House Lodge, Douglas Street, Castletown, IM9 1 AZ