

TravelWatch - ISLE OF MAN

Representing and promoting the interests of Isle of Man Passengers

Bulletin 21 – March 2011

Over 50 people gathered at the Villa Marina on Saturday 19th March for the latest TravelWatch public meeting.

At the AGM Terry Liddiard was elected to the committee, and will take over the role of lead on air issues from Paul Moncaster, who remains as Treasurer (including membership subscriptions). The Officers and previous committee were all re-elected.

IOM Public Transport:

Ian Longworth (Director of Public Transport) advised that

- Some changes would be made to route 3 in response to public comment and recent experience – but that traffic levels did not support all the requested changes.
- Bus fare increases were about to be announced, effective from 27th March. This would be the usual annual increase set by Government but would also cover rising fuel costs.
- Special events on the railways aimed at tourists are proving very popular with residents.
- A batch of Mercedes single-decker buses had been ordered with delivery from May onwards.

TravelWatch comment: *We are concerned that many of the bus fares announced on 21st March show larger than anticipated increases - over 10% (with the range being between 5 and 22%). TravelWatch is not at present consulted over fare increases and consider that in future there should be some consultation with passengers before final decisions are made. Consultations would have to be confidential but would give passengers an opportunity to influence final decisions.*

Travel Consultative Group:

The Department of Infrastructure decision to move forward with representation from the Chamber of Commerce Transport Group and Travelwatch was welcomed. The group will be chaired by Graham Cregeen MHK, who served as a member of the Tynwald Select Committee on the Steam Packet Company. Further details are on the Government website - see:

<http://tinyurl.com/6z45dfv>

Sea Travel:

- The collapse of freight competition from Mezeron appears to have been achieved by the Steam Packet cutting freight charges on a long term basis. This has led to cost-cutting measures, particularly the withdrawal of the *Snaefell* and reduction of sailings to Liverpool and Ireland - which it appears will be permanent. The *Manannan* is more popular with passengers and overall capacity is not significantly reduced, but it remains to be seen whether passenger numbers are substantially affected by these changes.
- The freight market shows little prospect of short-term growth in volume or revenue, and with passenger fares restricted by the User Agreement, the company's most likely way to increase its turnover is to go for growth on the passenger side.
- The fuel cost for *Manannan* making a round trip to Liverpool is now £4,000 more than at the end of last season. Fares can be expected to rise to cover some of this from 1st April. Forward travel can be booked up to 31 March at current prices.

Air Travel

- Bus timetables are now on display inside the **Airport** Terminal lobby (adjacent to the cash dispenser).
- A proper bus shelter at the airport is promised for May.
- Passengers are particularly urged to sign up for the **Which?** Campaign against rip-off credit (and other) card charges via our website www.travelwatch-isleofman.org
- Visa Electron cards – which some airlines accept without charging for their use – are being progressively withdrawn and are no longer being issued to IOM residents. Those who use IOM Bank may wish to complain to them about this. Barclays only issue them to young people – possibly a case of age-discrimination?

Priority Issues for the IOM General Election.

Those present at the public meeting, and visitors to our website, were invited to indicate the passenger travel issues which concerned them most.

- The main concern expressed was the provision of a proper bus interchange facility in Douglas – which contrasts with the excellent facility provided in Jersey. David Cretney, the Minister responsible for Public Transport was present and, although he did not speak to the meeting, was interviewed immediately thereafter by Manx Radio. <http://www.manxradio.com/newsread.aspx?id=50904> admitting the totally unsatisfactory situation and advising that a working party was working on possible sites.
- The whole issue of fares, charges and extras when travelling off Island by either sea or air continues to be a matter of general concern. More work to pin-point the key issues in this area is needed.

Purchasing UK Rail Tickets

The UK Train Operating Companies all sell tickets on their own networks – as well as those of their competitors. The rules under which they operate do not allow them to charge for paying by credit card whether at the station or when selling tickets through their websites. Ticketing agencies, such as www.thetrainline.com usually do charge for their use.

Keeping our costs down

If you receive this by post and have an e-mail address, or change your address, can you please let us now either at web@travelwatch-isleofman.org or drop us a line at:

TWIOM mailing list
4 Eagle Mews
Marina Lane
Port Erin IM9 6LB

Date of next Meeting:

The next **Supporter meeting** will be held at the National Sports Centre Committee Room, Groves Road, Douglas at 7.30 on Monday 16th May.