

TravelWatch- **ISLE OF MAN**



Arrey Troait – Ellan Vannin

Representing and promoting the interests of Isle of Man Passengers

www.travelwatch-isleofman.org

BULLETIN No 22 – September 2011

PUBLIC MEETING - 12 November

Our next Public Meeting will be held at the Villa Marina on Saturday morning 12 November - when we shall be pleased to welcome David Sidebottom, Passenger Director of **Passenger Focus** in UK as our main speaker. We are also hoping to welcome a representative from Aer Arann.

Passenger Focus is an independent public body set up by the UK Government to protect the interests of Britain's rail passengers and England's bus passengers outside London, coach passengers on scheduled domestic services and tram passengers. Although funded by the (UK) Department for Transport, their operations and policy-making are independent of government. Their mission is to get the best deal for passengers. With a strong emphasis on evidence-based campaigning and research, they ensure that they know what is happening on the ground.

TRAVEL CONSULTATIVE GROUP

The Travel Consultative Group - originally proposed by the Tynwald Select Committee on the Steam Packet - held its first meeting under the chairmanship of Graham Cregeen MHK in July - although not reported in the media until 6 September (IOM Examiner - page 18). Participants included representatives of TWIOM and the transport committee of the Chamber of Commerce, together with the Airport and Harbours Directors. Chairman Graham Cregeen said "Our starting point has to be getting some feedback from the carriers regarding the level of comment and complaints originating from the Island". It is hoped that the Group will meet at least twice each year.

COMMENTS and COMPLAINTS

For some time we have had a Passenger Information sheet on this topic link It is important that comments and complaints are made initially to the transport provider. Unless this is done first, representative organisations or even the media can do very little to help. Travel disruption due to weather or mechanical/operational issues seems to cause more expressions of dissatisfaction than recorded comments and complaints would suggest. It is oft said that the quality of a company can be judged by the way it deals with things going wrong. We do receive reports of how well disruption is handled on some occasions - as well as the times when passengers feel quite the opposite. Do please make your views known to the carriers - and by all means copy us if you wish.

STEAM PACKET

- ⤴ We are very surprised and disappointed that the (IOM) OFT report is not to be published - see our attached media statement - and are calling for this to be re-considered.
- ⤴ We are very disappointed at the mechanical problems again suffered by the *Manannan* this summer, and the consequent extended journey times. We believe the company have underestimated the inconvenience this has caused to passengers, made worse by over-optimistic indications of revised journey times. Our discussions with the company on this matter are on-going – but it is hoped journey times should be back to normal by mid-September. Please give IOMSPC your feedback -
 - by email at passenger.services@steam-packet.com
 - or write to Passenger Services,
Isle of Man Steam Packet Company Limited, Imperial Buildings, Douglas, Isle of Man, IM1 2BY.
 - You can also complete a passenger feedback form, available on board.

AIRPORT and HARBOURS

- ✦ TravelWatch continues to develop a constructive relationship with the Airport Director and the Director of Harbours, both through face to face meetings and regular informal contact.
- ✦ The TravelWatch **Noticeboard** is now in position in the passenger meeting area in the Sea Terminal. We very much welcome the improved catering and retail provision provided by Costa Coffee and W H Smith.
- ✦ At the airport, the long awaited Bus Shelter is now in position with comprehensive time table information displayed both there and in the Entrance Lobby.

BUSES

- ✦ TravelWatch were pleased to be invited to inspect one of the new Mercedes Citaro single-decker buses before they were brought into service with Bus Vannin.
- ✦ Bus Vannin have now joined the PLUSBUS network which enables visitors to the Island to add an Island bus journey onto their Rail and Sail ticket purchased in UK. We have produced a Passenger Information sheet explaining the benefits of this scheme.
- ✦ We maintain a neutral stance over the possible closure of the Island's main coach operator, Protours. The only regular services they operate are for commuters and they appear to have lost some schools work so it appears there is not enough business for the company to maintain its current operation.

CREDIT and DEBIT CARD CHARGES

- ✦ Following the UK OFT investigation into these charges, instigated by the Which? super-complaint, and recommendation that there should be no charge for using any debit card, and that charges for using credit cards should not exceed the costs incurred by the merchant, there seems to be some public disappointment that immediate changes have not happened! Which? had warned that in some case legislation might be required which could take up to 2 years. However they now believe this process could be speeded up by a change in the Payment Services Regulations and are asking supporters to join in an appeal for this to be done - see <http://www.which.co.uk/campaigns/personal-finance/card-surcharges/email-mark-hoban>
- ✦ We are concerned that some airlines which make an administrative charge for any card payments are claiming that although this can be avoided by payment with one specified Debit Card of their nomination, they are not charging for use of debit cards. This is not compliant with the (UK) OFT recommendation that there should be no payment for the use of any debit card. We believe the written reply to a Tynwald question by the chairman of the (IOM) OFT that "neither Manx2.com or the Steam Packet charge for the use of debit cards" is therefore misleading in respect of charges made by the airline concerned. Our challenge to this statement has not been acknowledged.

GENERAL ELECTION

General Election Candidates are now actively canvassing for your votes. Whilst passenger issues may not be the most important ones of the election, there are some issues which we would encourage you to raise with them:

- ✦ A proper bus interchange in Douglas so that passengers changing buses can have some warmth and shelter which is completely lacking in the current Lord Street collection of bus shelters. This is not the same thing as a bus station where buses start and finish their journeys - which would be a much larger project requiring more land. We would advocate the use of the Sea Terminal on a trial basis - the passenger facilities are already there and all that would be needed would be max two bus stops on the frontage.
- ✦ The need for proper consultation over the structuring of bus fare increases
- ✦ Although it runs to 2020/2026 it seems highly probable that the User Agreement with the Steam Packet will require changes during the life of the new House of Keys. You may like to try and establish how far candidates are committed to proper public consultation before any changes are agreed.
- ✦ The high cost of last minute bookings to get off the Island at short notice - or amend existing bookings - is of concern to many - particularly by air. What are candidates views and are they likely to be able to influence change.
- ✦ Where does the candidate on your door step stand on Debit and Credit Card charges?