

TravelWatch- *ISLE OF MAN*

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Representing and promoting the interests of Isle of Man Passengers

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Lively Discussions for Easyjet at TravelWatch Meeting

1. In spite of the counter-attraction of the Switching on of the Douglas Christmas lights, some seventy people attended TravelWatch's first Evening Public Meeting in Douglas on Thursday 26th November 2015.
2. **John Pennington**, TravelWatch's lead on Sea Issues, briefed the meeting on:-
 - The recent Government consultation on the future of ferry Services
 - TravelWatch's nominee to represent passenger interests on new Tynwald Strategic Services Working Group
 - This Group was to assess the results of ferry public consultation and consider next steps re the future of ferry services
 - The future of the ferry berth at Liverpool's Pierhead where the Steam Packet's contract for use of the landing stage terminates at the end of 2016
 - Possible future alternative berths on the Mersey
 - Our concerns over future developments around Douglas Harbour vehicle marshalling areas which could adversely affect future efficient operations of the port.
3. **Terry Liddiard**, TravelWatch's lead on Air Services briefed the meeting on air issues:-
 - Encouraging year for air carryings as a result of increased seats being available on London services
 - Successful launch by Easyjet of new Bristol Service – but consequent reductions in carryings on Gloucester service
 - Disappointment of recent Flybe decision to withdraw from Stansted
 - Concern at summer reductions to Gatwick by Easyjet midweek and on peak Saturdays
 - Encouraging response by BA to increase London City services next summer with some lower fares and some use of larger aircraft
 - Introducing Jenny Groves, he emphasised the need for any monopoly operator on a main Isle of Man route – such as Gatwick - to recognise their responsibilities to the community in maintaining such a "lifeline" service
 - His disappointment that – with the withdrawal of Flybe from Stansted – that Easyjet were not increasing their services from Gatwick. Next summer there will be a substantial shortage of seats against demand to the London area – something we had experienced in 2014 – which leads to passengers suffering less choice and higher fares.

4 Jenny Groves, UK Route Manager of Easyjet gave the first ever Easyjet presentation to an Isle of Man Public Meeting:-

- Easyjet second largest operator in Europe carrying some 68million passengers with 87% of flights operating on schedule.
- Set out future plans for keeping their Fleet of over 200 aircraft constantly improving and modernised
- Announced that Easyjet planned to operate all their flights from North Terminal at Gatwick
- Gave a firm commitment to Easyjet's long term intention of flying to the Island

In response to questions, Jenny Groves included the following comments:-

- She acknowledged that the poor punctuality on the Gatwick service needed improvement and explained that action was being taken to achieve a more punctual performance
- On connecting services and through ticketing, she set out the Easyjet policy of being a "point to point" airline because of cost of operating connecting services.
- On "overnighting" a plane at Ronaldsway to operate an early service to Gatwick, she emphasised the additional costs of such an operation but added that it was an issue they would keep under review.
- On the reduction of Gatwick midweek services and the absence of Saturday services in the summer peak, she indicated Easyjet would keep this under review but said the earliest improvement - if any - would be next autumn. She explained that the reason for the reduction of service in the summer was that Easyjet needed the aircraft for more lucrative routes in the summer peak.
- She asserted – when asked about Flybe being driven off the Gatwick route – that Easyjet were not predatory.
- She confirmed that Easyjet were considering a new service from Belfast to the Island
- When asked about the Patient transfer service, she indicated that- if asked - Easyjet would look at the possibilities. She was not briefed on the issue, but – after prompting from a questioner - acknowledged there were many practical difficulties such as the number of wheelchairs Easyjet aircraft could carry.
- She emphasised that because Easyjet operated planes with a carrying capacity of 150, this limited the number and frequency of flights services they could operate to the Island economically

TravelWatch Chairman Brendan O'Friel summed up:-

- Thanked Jenny Groves for being with us and for taking many questions
- Emphasised that passenger priorities included reliable, punctual and affordable services, good information and an effective complaints procedure
- Expressed passengers concern at the reduction of Gatwick services planned for summer 2016

Reflecting after the Meeting, **Brendan O'Friel** concluded:-

"This was a valuable bringing together of a major Airlines with passengers. We are sure Easyjet has gained from listening to passenger concerns. In our view Easyjet has plenty to do to improve

- Punctuality to Gatwick
- Better Information about time to allow for connecting flights
- Increased services to Gatwick
- More action to convince passengers of Easyjet's commitment to the special needs of the Island"

Note to Editors

- TravelWatch Chairman Brendan O'Friel and Terry Liddiard (Travelwatch Lead on Air issues) will be available for further information or interviews :-
- Brendan O'Friel 833636
- Terry Liddiard 834200 and Mobile 07624 460334