

# TravelWatch- ISLE OF MAN

Representing and promoting the interests of Isle of Man Passengers

12 May 2018

Media Statement

## **Isle of Man Government and the Steam Packet Company**

TravelWatch believes that the proposed new relationship between the Isle of Man Government and the Steam Packet Company should provide a new opportunity to review and address the needs of passengers and of the wider Manx economy.

It is essential that any new agreement between the Government and the Steam Packet learns from the experience of the current User Agreement, which was introduced in 1995. This provided for a greatly increased frequency of sailings, and later supplements included the introduction of special offer fares. However, there are aspects of the agreement which require detailed scrutiny to determine how improvements, such as creative pricing to generate new business, can be introduced or at least trialled. To this end, there is a need for a formal structure so that ferry users' views can be expressed and considered. An appropriate role model would be Passenger Focus, an organisation whose views are respected by UK train operators and Highways England.

In considering future replacement of the Ben my Chree and the Manannan, TravelWatch suggests that further consideration needs to be given to the most appropriate types of vessels. Would reliability be improved by having two all-weather vessels, with the fastcraft replaced by a fast conventional vessel? Should the Ben's replacement have an increased passenger capacity, to cater for existing peaks and to allow for generation of additional traffic off-peak traffic?

To encourage growth, TravelWatch would like to see Steam Packet sailings being considered not merely as port-to-port journeys. There should also be increased emphasis on integrated services, with good connections and through bookings, and stronger marketing of inclusive short breaks and complete holiday packages.

There are still detailed legal and contractual matters to be finalised, and it is vital that the informed views of the island's business and passenger communities are taken into account. TravelWatch provided input as a member of the Government's Strategic Sea Services Working Group, where confidential matters were discussed, and is now ready and willing to contribute further. The Passenger Charter should be reviewed and updated, and the new contract should include standards for.....

- keeping passengers informed, especially during service disruptions,
- transparency, with periodic reporting of performance, including reliability and punctuality.

This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to address the island's sea-transport needs, and is too important to be kept solely behind closed doors.