

Rail Action Group, East of Scotland (RAGES)

Meeting with the Minister for Transport

RAGES committee members Tom Thorburn and Russell Darling met on 1st November with the Minister of Transport, Tavish Scott, MSP, along with John Home Robertson, MSP for East Lothian, Euan Robson, MSP for Roxburghshire and Berwickshire, Norman Hampshire, East Lothian Councillor responsible for transport and two members of the Strategy and Investment Department of Transport Scotland.

New Dunbar Services

RAGES are delighted to announce the introduction of a Dunbar to Edinburgh early morning service and a late Fridays only Edinburgh to Dunbar service, which will be provided by Virgin CrossCountry.

The Monday to Friday morning service from Dunbar will leave at 06:29 hrs arriving at Waverley at 06:56 hrs. This will give passengers connections to Glasgow to arrive in time for the start of the working day.

The late Edinburgh to Dunbar train will leave Waverley at 22:54 hrs arriving in Dunbar at 23:23 hrs on Fridays only. These two new services are to start from the new timetable due on 11 December 2006 and run for a trial period of 12 months.

More from a press release from Transport Scotland, who are funding this initiative, is printed below.

Local Rail Service Edinburgh and Berwick STAG 1

To remind readers of the torturous route to achieving better services, a quote from somewhere deep within the Scottish Executive web site: 'As a precondition to securing funding from the Scottish Executive, transport schemes must be appraised in accordance with "Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance" (STAG) in two stages, an initial stage (STAG 1) and a detailed stage (STAG 2).'

We reminded the Minister that this particular STAG 1 had been produced a year ago and we were awaiting its recommendations to be implemented which we believed would involve a STAG 2 detailed study into certain aspects of the areas looked at in the initial study.

The Minister noted that there were several National Transport Strategies being undertaken and that the Scottish Railways document is to be published later this month.

The re-opening of Reston station is looked at in the STAG 1 and Euan Robson pointed out that Reston was an ideal collection point in that area of the Scottish Borders, saving many commuters the need to drive to Dunbar for a train or even staying in their cars for the complete journey.

John Home Robertson also supported the re-opening of East Linton station which is also in the STAG 1.

Euan Robson noted that there were many more Edinburgh commuters living further out and now they have reached beyond East Lothian and into the Scottish Borders.

Norman Hampshire said that 4,500 new houses were to be built in East Lothian and would be in areas associated with railway stations.

Both local authorities had ground for the new stations safeguarded in their local plans and it was agreed that there would be no Bill required to be raised through the Parliament to build the new stations.

The Minister promised that our STAG 1 study would be looked at after the Scottish Railways document was published.

Later Trains for North Berwick

RAGES noted that there was a gap in evening services after the 19:37 hrs from Edinburgh. We suggested that the hourly service should be continued at these times up to 23:37 hrs. The Minister asked why nothing had been done to implement this. For First

ScotRail to supply this service would require extra funding. He agreed that passenger figures would be looked at to gain an impression of the feasibility of adding these extra services. RAGES commented on the difficulties in fare collection on the North Berwick service, due to lack of door controls in each carriage, and suggested that any figures gained may be 10 to 15% lower than actual.

GNER Franchise Difficulties

The Minister said that this was for Westminster to resolve although he had been in talks with Douglas Alexander. He gave us the assurance that the continuation of the service was paramount and that the Scottish Executive and the Department for Transport had contingency plans. Newspaper business sections have reported that both First Group and Virgin Trains would be interested in operating the franchise if it were to become available.

RAGES was concerned that Grand Central who were operating additional services over the same lines as GNER were doing so at reduced path costs and were not improving the infrastructure as GNER have done. Although Grand Central were not in our area, any problems there might have repercussions further north, by for example reduced services.



Tavish Scott (right) with Tom Thorburn. Photo: RAGES

Haddington re-opening campaign

RAGES reported that this campaign is in conjunction with the Haddington and District Community Council and outlined the strategy to date. The Minister agreed that our next step to involve the East Lothian Councillors was the correct one and that it was up to them to apply for funding for a STAG 1 study. He also suggested that SESTRAN (South East of Scotland Transport Partnership) should be involved.

OneTicket

Norman Hampshire raised the need for financial help in marketing the OneTicket scheme currently limited to bus travel, but was to be extended to trains.

After the meeting Tom Thorburn said: "We were very pleased with the outcome of this meeting at Holyrood with the Minister, where a sound constructive dialogue was established between ourselves and the parliamentarians."

Quotes from the press release by Transport Scotland on 1 November 2006

Tavish Scott, Minister for Transport said:

"This devolved government is committed to encouraging more Scots to use public transport. That is why by the end of 2006, 70 per cent of the 1.5 billion pounds we spend on transport will go towards improving public transport.

"If we are to convince people to leave their cars at home, then we need to give them real travel alternatives. This new service gives commuters that choice, providing a direct link from East Lothian to stations across the country.

"That has got to be great news for passengers, great news for Scotland's roads, and great news for our environment."

Chris Gibb, Managing Director of Virgin CrossCountry, said:

"Virgin Trains are delighted to be able to work with Transport Scotland to meet the wishes of the people of Dunbar, both for an early morning commuter train to Edinburgh, with Glasgow connections, and a late evening train from Edinburgh on Fridays allowing a night out in the capital.

"Virgin Trains started serving Dunbar in June 2005, and since then journeys from and to the growing town have increased significantly. The extra trains from December complement the existing services provided by ourselves and GNER, and meet a stated social need."