

The Rages Rag

Newsletter of Rail Action Group, East of Scotland

www.rages.org.uk

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Haddington Open Meeting

There was a good attendance of 95 people at the meeting held on 7 November 2001.

Initial remarks were made by the panel of Tom Thorburn (Chairman of RAGES), Paul Ince (East Lothian Council), Bill Watson (Haddington and District Community Council) and John Home Robertson MSP, outlining the possibility of restoring trains between Haddington and Longniddry. This would use the existing track bed /cycleway or the more expensive option of creating a light rail line from Haddington to Edinburgh.

The meeting was advised that 5000 homes were required to be built in East Lothian over the next 15 years, and it was essential that developers were aware of the need to contribute towards developing the transport infrastructure.

Questions were then taken from the floor, with answers given by members of the panel.

Q Would the railway have any benefit to tourism?

A It was felt that if the station was some distance from the centre of Haddington then it was likely to have minimal impact.

Q If the line between Haddington and Longniddry was re-opened this would place more pressure on the Longniddry to Edinburgh section. Could a cost benefit analysis be carried out to see if the latter section could be quadrupled?

A This could be looked at, but somehow this will have to be paid for.

Q Why not put passing loops on to the existing two line track instead?

A This could be examined – certainly a less expensive option.

Q What will be the impact on households at Gateside?

A Detailed proposals would have to be drawn up and consultation take place.

Further comments on this aspect:

- Several houses are approximately 15 feet from the cycleway - conversion of

the cycleway to a railway will have a marked impact on environment and safety and will devalue the value of houses (comment from the floor)

- Present road arrangements have one entrance to Gateside houses and if a rail level crossing is created over this entrance this will cut off the community and cause problems for access to emergency vehicles.

Q Given the proximity of some homes to the rail line what provisions exist for compulsory purchase?

A Public authorities have the power - but it would be discouraged.

Q How about placing the station north of the A1 dual carriageway to avoid the problems at Gateside?

A The farther the rail station is from the town centre then the more dependant access is on car travel - otherwise a good connecting bus service is needed.

General comments were that a station site north of the A1 was unlikely to be seen as worse than Gateside since it was anticipated that many travellers would drive to catch the train anyway. As travellers would also come from the surrounding villages, a station in the centre of Haddington was also felt to be unnecessary and unworkable.

Q Do we really need a railway? If there will be insufficient capacity on the Longniddry to Edinburgh section and the option ends as a shuttle train between Haddington and Longniddry, would not a connecting bus to Longniddry be as good and a lot cheaper to run?

A Bus connections should be looked - but is not Wallyford or the new Kinnaird Park Station the better options?

Q Good market research would be needed. A train service may be well used at peak hours, but off peak is likely to attract very few. Is it not better to look at improved bus services instead?

A Again they should be considered.

The Aims of RAGES

- To improve the rail service between Edinburgh and Dunbar with extension to Berwick upon Tweed at a later stage.
- To have East Linton and Reston stations re-opened for active use.
- To improve the level of service to North Berwick.
- To re-open the branch line from Longniddry to Haddington.
- To consider the implications with regard to car parking and bicycle storage at stations between Waverley and Berwick upon Tweed.
- To keep under scrutiny the standards of passenger facilities at stations between Waverley and Berwick upon Tweed, including North Berwick, and to draw the attention of the relevant bodies to shortcomings which arise.
- The group, being environmentally minded, will actively strive to encourage rail travel within its geographical area.

Welcome to this issue of The Rages Rag, which we publish regularly. It is the main means of communication to our members.

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The editor invites contributions which should be sent to him at the "Published by" address at the foot of page 4.

A poll of those present was taken:

- 11 out of 95 travel by bus from Haddington to Edinburgh.
- 12 out of 95 by car
- 9 of the 12 would consider switching to the train if one were available.

It was agreed that a detailed study of the options and potential of restoring rail services to Haddington was needed and that this should be raised with the Scottish Executive.

The chair thanked those for attending.

A petition was circulated during the meeting and 70% were in favour of some form of rail transport coming to Haddington.

Meeting with East Lothian Council

The following items were raised during a recent meeting with the Council.

Local Train Service to Dunbar

RAGES wants to progress the possibility of a local rail service between Edinburgh and Dunbar. To assist, we have asked East Lothian Council to pursue this. (*More detail on opposite page - Ed*)

Councillor Costello was agreeable to an application being lodged and would instigate its preparation in conjunction with RAGES.

Bus service from Poppyfields to Dunbar Station

We also pointed out the parking problem at Dunbar station where commuters from further afield could not get their cars parked there. RAGES proposed to ease this problem by approaching Eve Coaches to provide a bus link from the new housing development at Poppyfields to the west of the station to connect with the 07.47 Edinburgh train. This would allow the above development residents to leave their cars at home, thus easing the parking problem at the station. This in turn would allow Dunbar commuters who lived further afield from the station the opportunity to park their car(s). The return facility in the evening would be for the bus to connect with the 17.00 & 17.30 ex-Edinburgh trains.

The Council have no spare funds from its supported services budget and felt that a need for the service proposed would

Postscript

After the meeting, two of the committee did a field survey and looked at other options as well as that suggested for heavy rail.

- Divert the track to stay north of the new bypass and terminating at the Alderston Road - this would mean the station being well out of town.
- Swing round to the south and terminate nearer the town - two by-passes to get under and rivers to cross.

After discussion at committee, we have decided that our original option of using the existing track bed, as far as Roodlands Hospital, is best, this also being Scott Wilson's recommendation. However, Stewart Leslie's letter in this edition puts the site of the station back to its original position and very accessible.

have to be established. As far as the estate roads were concerned, he confirmed that they were un-adopted at present, but that the Council would take them over and that they had been constructed to accommodate the operation of buses.

Haddington

We were advised that whereas the Council was supportive of a rail connection to Haddington being restored, there were more urgent priorities in the short and medium term and that bringing East Lothian roads up to standard was the more pressing need. Rail strategy policy would be worked out in the New Year and he assured RAGES that Haddington would be part of that overall strategy. The branch track-bed would meantime be protected as a potential rail route.

East Lothian Rail Survey

RAGES pointed out that at the Haddington meeting, John Home Robertson said that if requested by Haddington Community Council, RAGES and East Lothian Council, he would make an approach to the Minister for Transport to request the commissioning of a rail study for East Lothian. Both RAGES and the Community Council had sent letters, but the Council had not yet done so.

If this survey were to be financed from the Public Transport Fund, then it would be by a Council-led bid, probably in partnership with other organisation(s). It was noted that the threshold figure was £500,000.

Membership

We now have over 240 members from around the counties.

Please encourage your neighbours or fellow passengers to join RAGES.

Membership forms can be obtained from committee members, whose names can be found on your membership card.

Changes at East Linton

Colin Stewart, who has been the RAGES representative since its inauguration, has sadly had to resign due to other commitments with the Dunpender Community Council.

We welcome Allison Cosgrove, a member of that council and of RAGES, who is his replacement.

RAGES thanks Colin for his tremendous efforts in promoting our aim of re-opening East Linton station.

Reston Report

By Barrie Forrest

As reported in our October 2001 newsletter, we said that we had forthcoming meetings with Eyemouth Town Council and Eyemouth & East Berwickshire Partnership. I am very pleased to inform you that we did get to these meetings which were very successful.

On November 26th, we met with Eyemouth Town Council at the Fishermens Mission. On conclusion of the Council's business, Tom and myself gave a talk on RAGES aims for the re-opening of Reston station and how far we had got with this to date. Council members raised a lot of very good points with us:

- what level of service did we foresee?
- who would provide the service?
- would there be integration of other public transport e.g. bus?
- in the meantime what were we doing about the acute shortage of parking at Dunbar as they, the Council, were aware that Eyemouth commuters had difficulty in getting their cars parked?
- what had we done about the consistently late arrival of the GNER 07.47 commuter train to Edinburgh?

Eyemouth Town Council thanked RAGES and a positive vote was taken to join and support us in our quest for Reston Station. *(It is very pleasing that Eyemouth Town Council have now joined us along with Coldingham and Reston & Auchencrow Community Councils, this further reinforces our commitment to Reston – Tom Thorburn).*

Tom and Ted Clemit met with Eyemouth and East

Berwickshire Partnership on December 13th to discuss an E&EBP grant for a Reston station feasibility study. Both Wendy Reid and Sandy Watson showed a great deal of interest in what we want to achieve. They were suitably impressed that we had the above Community Councils on board but wondered about others that would be within the catchment area. We should know shortly if we are to be successful in our request for the funding.

Concerned that we should really have the station site designated on some form of plan, I enquired from Council Convenor Tulley at a Berwickshire Area Committee meeting what would be the best way forward for this. Convenor Tulley stated that we should write to the Scottish Borders Council Planning Department and they would put it on the Local Plan. Tom and Reston & Auchencrow Community Council have subsequently written to SBC and they have acknowledged both of our requests. Throughout all of this, we have also kept in close liaison with Hugh Veitch, who is the landowner of the proposed site.

For some time now, we have tried to be part of the Borders Railways Forum. The Forum is a committee consisting of politicians and council employees etc. Bill Jamieson, a committee member of Campaign for Borders Rail and a member of RAGES, kindly had our request put on the Forum agenda for the meeting of 21st January. Tom received word that day from Euan Robson MSP that our request received a unanimous vote – great news! Once again, Tom would like to pass on his sincere thanks to all of those who assisted in bringing about our successful membership of the Forum.

End of the North Berwick Slam Doors - at last!

With no end in sight to the driver dispute the North Berwick service has thankfully escaped relatively lightly. On weekdays only one morning and one evening train have been cancelled but on the downside few are running through to Haymarket, which poses problems for those with connections to/from South Gyle and other destinations.

At the time of writing the last remaining 42 year old class 305 is still running but it is due to be withdrawn from service by 31st January. Until a year ago the North Berwick service was provided by five of these units - the last electric slam door stock in the country outside the London area.

It was originally intended that the 305s would be replaced by three car 318s (with peak services doubled to six car sets) but insufficient of these trains have been cascaded from Strathclyde because of problems getting new class 334s into service.

ScotRail has, however, managed to borrow five four coach class 322s from its National Express Group sister company West Anglia Great Northern (WAGN). Initially on loan for a year the 322s are starting to provide much needed additional seating capacity in peak hours. Formerly used on the London Liverpool Street to Stanstead Airport express service the five 322s have been released by WAGN with approval from the Strategic Rail Authority. The 322s will work Edinburgh-North Berwick services with the 318s continuing to work the through services to the Motherwell and Glasgow areas. (By coincidence the 322s maintain the North Berwick service link with Essex as the old 305s also came from there.)

If, however, the 322s need to be recalled in a year's time to cover for WAGN stock being refurbished then we will lose them but by then sufficient 318s should be available.

ScotRail to Dunbar?

The advent of the 322s creates the opportunity for a fill-in ScotRail service to Dunbar to supplement the GNER trains. RAGES has been pursuing this idea with East Lothian Council, who in turn are in discussions with the Strategic Rail Authority. If the conditions are right East Lothian Council will bid for cash from the SRA's Rail Partnership Fund to pay for driver

training. Provisionally, the Dunbar service might run at alternate half-hours to the North Berwick service in off peak hours. It should be emphasised that this idea is at the earliest stages of planning and depends on the 322s being available for more than one year and a host of other factors, not least capacity on the main line. RAGES will keep you up-to-date with progress.

Letter to the Editor

Dear Sir,

HADDINGTON RAIL LINK

May I express my appreciation of RAGES' efforts in organising the 9th November meeting in the Corn Exchange? Hopefully this, and our MSP's reopening of the study will put the issue higher up the relevant parties' agenda, as well as getting the public to think about the issue. I suspect that there are many residents in and around Haddington who are woefully ignorant of the fact that the county town once enjoyed a train service, and who, more importantly, don't realise the considerable benefits which would accrue from a relatively modest investment. I exclude certain residents of the Gateside area who swelled the numbers for the wrong reason!

To be as attractive to as many passengers as possible - including those who, dare I say it, actually might wish to walk from their houses - the station should be located as close to the town centre as possible. It should be either between Hospital Road and Alderston Road, as recommended in the Scott Wilson report, or better still, re-use the existing station site.

The Courier of 23rd November had an article describing the liquidation of the Finlay Guy haulage business, which is the biggest single occupant of the former trackbed between the recommended site and the original station. Could this be an opportunity for the Council to earmark the site once again for use by public transport? Would there be any mileage in RAGES sounding out the Council? Whichever of the two sites is used, the site of the Finlay Guy depot and yard would considerably enhance the availability of "park and ride" facilities, and possibly also allow the creation of a turning circle for road vehicles picking up/dropping off rail passengers.

Presumably the former East Lothian County Council acquired the entire branch soon after its 1968 abandonment by BR, but I am unaware whether the haulage depot site is now owned by the company in liquidation, or whether it is leased by them from the present Council. Either way, the site would give best value by being returned to public transport use.

If the warehouse building is to remain, I reckon that it would still be possible to re-introduce a single track to the original platform by shaving off the south-east corner of the building. The small SR Plant business would need to relocate, possibly to part of the Finlay Guy site or to Gateside, but none of the workshop units facing the platform would be required to move, as adequate clearance exists for both a single platform line and road vehicle access.

Yours etc,

Stewart Leslie
Burnside
Haddington

SESTRAN Regional Transport Strategy

RAGES were invited to attend a conference organised by the South East Scotland Transport Partnership on October 26th. Barrie Forrest and Russell Darling attended this informative day.

The day was introduced by Councillor John Scott, chair of SESTRAN, who said that £30m had just been announced for the SESTRAN area from the Public Transport Fund. Vision, determination and courage were required to see the aims of SESTRAN become a reality. He announced that the One Ticket Scheme would be re-launched shortly after its initial teething problems. Councillor Scott also commented on the need for the involvement of the private sector.

Sarah Boyack, MSP and the (then) Minister for Transport, addressed the conference. Some of her points raised were:

- social exclusion must be addressed
- plan transport policy to meet developments
- improvements to match regional priorities
- SESTRAN should rightly focus on the big picture with the details following later
- projects must be delivered on time and to budget
- her vision is a step change in public transport

The next speaker was Keith Rimmer, Head of Transport, Edinburgh, with his subject as "Regional Transport Strategy – achieving an integrated approach"

- the purpose is to identify, develop, implement and monitor matters of mutual interest through voluntary competition
- "a true citizen's network"
- dominant factor in the SESTRAN area is demand for travel to Edinburgh for work and other activities, therefore focusing on cross-regional/out of region/travel to and within Edinburgh.

- congestion charging scheme would be necessary
- priorities based on best value in appraisal and noted that rail schemes performed well in such appraisals.

Peter Fuller then talked about "Delivering the vision"

- heavy rail is the key factor in a transport strategy
- integration at both ends of a rail system
- priorities for appraisal to identify highest impact
- network solutions need to be looked at as individual projects should not have to justify infrastructure
- Strategic Rail Authority is looking at infrastructure upgrade cost and demand forecasting with a report by mid-2002
- cross-region transport system must encourage the public to leave the car behind

Other speakers talked about light rail (tram) solutions and it was hoped that Edinburgh would have such a scheme by 2008/9. The development and success of the Manchester tram system was also discussed.

The funding of a new transport initiative would be assisted by congestion charging. Several approaches to this were discussed, i.e. charging before the tram system was in place or after. The accounting was rather complicated to repeat here, but it seemed that introducing congestion charging sooner was of more benefit. We were directed to the web site www.edinburgh.gov.uk/traffic for more details on developments in this area.

When Councillor Scott closed the conference, the aims of SESTRAN were summarised as upbeat.