

The Rages Rag

Newsletter of Rail Action Group, East of Scotland

www.rages.org.uk

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Overcrowding at Dunbar

The situation at Dunbar is not getting any better regarding overcrowding. This could be alleviated by an earlier local service.

After discussion at our regular committee meetings, RAGES wrote to GNER making a few suggestions that would improve the service to and from Dunbar.

We acknowledged that the level of service provided at Dunbar is in excess of franchise requirements, but said that the Group felt that a considerable amount of potential traffic was being lost by not enhancing present provision. The suggestions were as follows:

- the 12:00 hrs train from Edinburgh on Mondays to Fridays should stop at Dunbar, as it does on Saturdays - at present there is a gap of 4½ hours between 09:50 and 14:20 at Dunbar, leaving no realistic opportunities for tourists to visit the town from Edinburgh or for anyone with a morning appointment in the capital to return home at a sensible time. Other options suggested for this were the 10:30, 11:00 or 11:30 trains.
- a train around 18:00 or 19:00 to stop at Dunbar on Mondays to Saturdays - there is no opportunity for anyone to travel into Edinburgh for an evening whilst returns from England are very restricted, the 15:00 ex-Kings Cross offering the most convenient option for Dunbar residents.
- a 23:00 (or thereabouts) southbound train to allow passengers to return from evening visits to Edinburgh.

RAGES again pointed out that staff are unable to check all tickets on the 20-minute Dunbar to Edinburgh journey. Some make more effort than others, whilst barrier checks are non-existent. It was thought that GNER would have been surprised by the number of single tickets sold each day from Dunbar to Edinburgh. The daily loss of revenue presently incurred must be considerable.

We noted that the recent reduction in car-parking charges was most welcome, but the group has noticed the generally unkempt condition of the approach road to the station in terms of cleanliness and, given the high quality image that GNER strives to provide and is largely succeeding in doing, we felt that it is unfortunate that first impressions may be clouded by this.

Jonathan Metcalfe, Chief Operating Officer of GNER, replied that they were continually being asked to provide more services across their route and find it difficult at the moment to see how this could be done. He pointed out that "one of their key objectives is to transport people as quickly as possible between Scotland, the North East and London."

He has undertaken to ask their timetable planners to see if it is feasible to stop one of the above mid-day trains at Dunbar in a future timetable.

Regarding the possibility of stopping the 15:00 ex-Kings Cross at Dunbar, his comment was that it already stops at Berwick to provide a train back to the Borders and an additional stop was out of the question.

The withdrawal of the 23:00 train from Edinburgh was mainly due to economics. On average 17 people boarded the train to Dunbar on Mondays to Thursdays, rising to 37 on Fridays. After Dunbar, there was an average of 8 and 19 respectively. RAGES has already pointed out that advertising of this service after its temporary withdrawal after Hatfield and Great Heck was virtually nil. Again he raised Network Rail's major renewal work at Waverley as being a reason for withdrawing the 23:00. RAGES has

Go to page 4

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 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.
- To re-open the branch line from Longniddry to Haddington.
- 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 with our members.

Inside Issue 18:

- North Berwick News - Page 2
- Reston News - Page 2
- RPC meeting - Page 3
- Membership statistics - Page 3
- Railnet to be axed - Page 4
- Berwick News - Page 4

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

North Berwick service news

by Charlie Marshall

The 322 units continue to operate well and, first thing in the morning at least, are clean although not so come the evening. However, this to be expected, I suppose. I do not have statistics for the next item, but it has happened to me several times over the last few weeks. There is an increasing tendency for evening trains from Waverley to be late and/or subject to last minute platform announcements. This is also true of Newcraighall. Of particular annoyance is the habit of announcing the train as "on time" up to and beyond the departure time, when the train is simply not there. I do not know if this apparently casual attitude is due to increasing uncertainty as to what will happen to jobs when the new franchise is eventually announced. Another source of annoyance is the failure to explain delays or cancellations.

On a more positive note, staff seem more at home with the new ticketing machines, although transaction times are still considerably longer than was the case with the old equipment. Naturally, as I have said before, more fares would be collected if staff were not required to open the doors by hand at each stop. The average passenger cares little about union requirements and would be far happier if staff collected fares rather than take part in a completely redundant exercise. That said, the attitude of on-train staff has improved noticeably.

Longniddry continues to be dirty and there are still no bins in place. Surely it would not tax staff too much to pick up the bagged rubbish from bins on the last service of the day and

replace the bin-liner.

Following on from Charlie's point about litter, Tom Thorburn makes the following observations.

Litter bins are provided at all South West Trains stations from Waterloo to Weymouth, which resulted in much tidier and appealing stations. These bins take the shape of a clear plastic bag mounted on a hoop and lid arrangement. Only at Bournemouth did he notice litter and this was on the track. When he questioned the station supervisor as to why this was, especially when there had been in excess of £1m spent on his station, he smiled wryly and replied "unfortunately we are not allowed down onto the track any longer and we now have to wait on Network Rail to come and pick it up". Another "good" example of our disjointed railway system?

The other side of the coin was observed at an ECML station in England, where again Tom questioned the GNER duty man regarding the lack of litter bins as the place was filthy. He replied that he and his colleagues were sick of requesting management for bins. Management gives the same answer each time that bins are prohibited on the ECML. Tom replied that he found this extremely odd as he had seen bins from Waterloo to Weymouth.

Tom concludes by asking GNER and ScotRail management - "When are you directly or indirectly going to have this policy of no bins reversed and let us have some tidy stations?"

Reston News

by Barrie Forrest

Tom Thorburn and Barrie Forrest met with Euan Robson, MSP for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, at his surgery in Duns in June. His press release is reproduced below.

RAGES attended the pre-meeting of the Berwickshire Area Committee arranged by Councillor John Elliott. John Rimmington of Arriva Trains had also been invited. Arriva Trains is one of the four bidders for the new ScotRail Franchise due to be let in 2004. Mr Rimmington gave the impression that only the existing services would be in the new franchise and that Reston and East Linton would have to wait until the next franchise.

Euan Robson explained that Reston could still re-open during the next franchise which is open to enhancements to the service, as yet uncostered.

East Lothian and Northumberland Council have written to the Scottish Borders Council supporting a local Edinburgh to Berwick service with a re-opened Reston.

RAGES will continue to attend further meetings with Scottish Borders Council.

In a recent press release, Euan Robson expressed his concern about confusion regarding the Scottish railway franchise and how it affects the possible re-opening of Reston station.

Speaking from his constituency office he said:

"I think that some train operators may have misunderstood the position. Advice from the Scottish Executive is that effectively Reston station could re-open during the period of the next rail franchise.

"There are basically four parts to the bidding process for the franchise. These are the base case of the present network and its operation.

"In addition there are the known enhancements to the service such as extensions to the rail network or services that are due to come into effect and for which costs are known.

"The Scottish Executive is also looking for bidder innovations to make their proposed operation of the franchise better with extra services or facilities.

"And finally, there are further developments that might be added to the franchise at a later date which are as yet uncostered. Reston falls into this category. I am thus perplexed by the comments at the recent Berwickshire Area Committee meeting."

Separately the MSP has written to Scottish Borders Council Convenor, Councillor David Parker to ask that the Council proceeds with the feasibility study for the station.

"This seemed to be on the cards during the last weeks of the old Council and I trust that it can now proceed. It is essential to progress the scheme."

Rail Passengers Committee Meeting

by Allison Cosgrove

RAGES Committee members attended the Rail Passengers Committee Meeting in Edinburgh on 3rd July 2003.

Christopher Garnett, Chief Executive of GNER, was asked about the Dunbar service and responded by saying that outside peak hours the service could be served by ScotRail. He also said that GNER had no plans to reinstate the late southbound service from Edinburgh. A plea for more stopping services at Haymarket was also not considered, with congestion given as the reason.

The amount of fare dodging between Unbar and Edinburgh was brought to his attention and this was taken note of to be addressed in the near future. Christopher Garnett was planning to meet ScotRail representatives at a later date.

There had been increased complaints relating to safety and a general increase in the number of complaints generally.

The report presented by GNER at the meeting referred to the refurbishment of the High Speed Train (HST) fleet. For the first time there would be a toilet large enough to accommodate a wheelchair in Standard Class and increased provision for bikes, as well as other improvements. This work would be completed by September. In response to a question, Christopher Garnett said that to provide a wheelchair accessible toilet, six seat spaces had to be taken out. He said there was little demand from wheelchair users for HST trains. This is not surprising if there are no toilet facilities for them!

£30m was being spent on a total re-design and re-build of the interiors of all 302 Mark 4 coaches in the electric 225 fleet, with an extra wheelchair space in Standard accommodation. They will also have red doors, which should assist users with visual impairments.

Station refurbishment was planned including extra car parking at Newark, Grantham and Peterborough. Improvements were suggested for Newcastle Station – this would be taken forward by the RPC. The idea of a subway was supported, as the existing ramp was not compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act. It was agreed that a meeting with GNER, Nexus and the RPC should be arranged. The new national control centre in York officially opened in February.

Some problems had been experienced with overhead lines coming down.

Best practice guidelines in first aid were being introduced with input from the RPC. 90% of staff have had some first aid training, with the aim to have one qualified first aider on duty at stations and one on each train. Defibrillators were available at some stations – however it was not clear who could access these and if staff accessing them knew how to use them. Christopher Garnett undertook to investigate this further.

A meeting was taking place on 25 July to discuss the fare structure and in particular the Business Saver Fare.

Membership

At the end of June any members who had not paid their subscriptions were put into a lapsed state. Currently 62 members are unpaid from last year. We now have 147 members from around the counties. It is not too late to be re-instated and all it takes is the £3 subscription. Unless you are receiving this issue as a complimentary one, you will be paid up to date. However, if you know of anyone who has not paid this year, please encourage them to renew. Also, please encourage your neighbours or fellow passengers to join RAGES as new members.

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

Members who use or would use, if re-opened, stations are as follows:

Berwick	5	Drem	2	Dunbar	26	East Linton	13
Edinburgh	1	Haddington	17	Longniddry	9	Musselburgh	4
North Berwick	24	Prestonpans	1	Reston	45	Wallyford	1
Outside area	2						
Total	150						

Annual General Meeting

Our 4th Annual General Meeting will be held on Wednesday 3rd September 2003 in the West Barns Bowling Club, West Barns, Dunbar.

We are pleased to announce that the speaker for the evening will be Mr Bill Ure. Bill has just retired from the post of Secretary for the Rail Passengers Committee in Scotland. He is a strong supporter of RAGES and its aims and he has spoken at several of our open meetings in the past four years.

As Bill is making the long trip from his home in Largs, we hope that there will be a good turnout of the membership at the AGM. More details of this are enclosed with this issue of *The Rages Rag*.

Dunbar News

From page 1

disputed this and still does. He does not see this service being re-introduced during the current franchise.

Ticket checking has been given a great deal of consideration over the past year. With all GNER stations being "Open", they rely on passengers purchasing tickets before travel. GNER no longer sells discounted tickets on board in order to encourage more people to buy tickets before boarding. This allows staff to concentrate on ticket checking. He noted that a permanent ticket barrier should be in place at Dunbar "before the end of the summer".

Jonathan concludes his reply by saying that he has asked the Station Business Manager to follow up the unkempt conditions of the approach road.

At a recent meeting of the Rail Passengers Committee in Edinburgh, GNER declared that they were of the opinion that ScotRail should run trains between Edinburgh and Dunbar to

supplement the limited GNER service.

Christopher Garnett, the chief executive of GNER, said: "I have always felt that outside the peaks, the service could be served by ScotRail.

"We are running inter-city trains but providing a local service here. We have raised this for some time, but it has not been picked up."

RAGES has, of course, been promoting this since its inauguration in 1999, but its progress has been hampered with the state of the infrastructure, ScotRail operational problems and the doubt about when the ScotRail franchise would be renewed.

John Home Robertson, MSP for East Lothian, is to arrange a meeting with Nicol Stephen, MSP and Minister of Transport, to ensure that a local service to Dunbar, with provision for a re-opened East Linton station, is written into the new ScotRail franchise.

Royal Mail to drop Railnet

No doubt you will have seen in the media that the Royal Mail is to cease sending postage by rail. Ask yourselves this question "By what means will this traffic then be moved about our country?" Undoubtedly most of it will land up on our already congested road network – producing even more filthy fumes for us to breathe in. The Royal Mail is Government owned and as tax payers we paid for the dedicated fleet of electric 325s and the modern rail mail depots throughout the country. Surely we cannot just sit back and allow the management at Royal Mail to carry out such an irresponsible action.

What can we do to change this? There are several lines we can take by writing to:

- your MP and ask them to support the Early Day Motion No. 1380
- your MSP and ask them to raise the issue in the Scottish Parliament
- the Rt Hon Alistair Darling, Secretary of State for Transport, to register your complaint
- the Royal Mail's Chief Executive, Adam Crozier, and similarly register your complaint.

Addresses for your letters are respectively:

- House of Commons, Westminster, London SW1A 0AA;
- Scottish Parliament, George IV Bridge, Edinburgh EH99 1SP;
- Great Minster House, 76 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DR;
- Royal Mail Group, 148 Old Street, London EC1V 9HQ.

Hopefully, many of you will write and support this cause and win it, the same way as we won the cause when our branch lines were threatened by Government.

Berwick News by Geoffrey Evison

I have to say "Thank you" to GNER for the provision of six luggage trolleys at Berwick-upon-Tweed station. We are well into the summer timetable and services seem to be performing quite well except for the occasional delays caused in some instances by the recent hot weather which appeared to affect the signalling apparatus. The staff at Berwick continue to provide an excellent service with a smile. It is good to see Michelle back, but it is unfortunate that Ian had an accident whilst positioning the wheel chair ramp. Whilst on the subject of personnel, the Scottish accent sometimes announcing the trains at Berwick belongs to Elaine, who also covers relief duties at Dunbar.