

The Rages Rag

Newsletter of Rail Action Group, East of Scotland

www.rages.org.uk

Issue No. 19 - October 2003

Extra Sunday Trains for North Berwick

Up to and including November 2nd there are no Sunday trains between Edinburgh and North Berwick with buses operating instead. Services leave 13 minutes later than present from Edinburgh between 11:50 and 18:50 hrs, but the same times as at present from North Berwick – hourly 13:20 to 19:20 hrs. The replacement bus journey is scheduled to take 85 minutes, compared with 30 by train, which seems very generous and likely to discourage all but the most hardy of travellers.

However, this disruption will be worthwhile when, from November 9th, an enhanced Sunday rail service will be introduced. The summer trains, 10:37 and 11:37 hrs from Edinburgh returning at 11:20 and 12:20 hrs from North Berwick, will run all year round, whilst welcome extra evening services will be at 19:37, 20:37 and 21:37 hrs from Edinburgh returning at 20:20, 21:20 and 22:20 hrs from North Berwick. This actually makes the Sunday evening service more frequent than Monday to Saturday and RAGES will be contacting ScotRail to see if an additional evening service could be introduced during the week.

Last train on Saturday

On Saturday October 4th the 23:07 hrs ex-Edinburgh was cancelled and coaches provided instead. This may have been to allow an earlier start for engineering works - the Network Rail supervisor didn't know - but this may happen on subsequent Saturdays. Although the coaches served all stations their alighting points were "generally in the area" of the stations rather than car parks, so anyone boarding at intermediate stations really needs to stand on the road outside the station.

Refurbishment

On the subject of refurbishment ScotRail's class 322 trains presently working the North Berwick service are not receiving more than maintenance cover. They are due to return to London area duties upon the ScotRail franchise expiry at the end of March 2004 and therefore ScotRail cannot justify spending lots of money on them. However, as the Strategic Rail Authority has not yet identified replacement stock, the train operator is being left in limbo and it doesn't help the passenger much, but RAGES has been reliably informed that the SRA / Scottish Executive will announce the replacement stock by the end of December.

Operations

After a number of train failures in July which caused disruption over a few weeks, the service seems to have settled down again.

New format for station timetables

New timetables are being posted at the North Berwick service stations, as an initiative from the Rail Passenger Committee and ScotRail. They are designed to provide information to the passenger in an easier format. However, our initial view is that whilst they are simpler to understand in terms of departures they should only be used as an addition to the existing full route timetable, since many travellers need to know arrival and return times.

It was noted that the Drem timetable was originally placed at North Berwick in error, which emphasises the need to get the location correct!

Edinburgh Congestion Charging

An information leaflet is due to be distributed to many homes in South East Scotland to invite comments on the proposal, but if RAGES members want to order their own leaflet rather than wait, then please call Freephone 0800 328 3934. Full details of the scheme are also due to be positioned in Council Offices.

Comments are welcome and should be sent to Transport Initiatives Edinburgh, Freepost NATN466, Edinburgh EH1 0BR no later than **17:00 hrs on January 3rd 2004**.

RAGES has received the information leaflet. Our first reaction is that with the introduction of the charge expected to generate £900 million revenue over 20 years, the offer that some of this money 'will be spent on rail projects linking Edinburgh and surrounding areas' is unacceptably vague. We would expect a list of improvements to services and station re-openings that can be identified. A good start would be earlier trains into Edinburgh, since the first trains from North Berwick and Dunbar arrive at 0720 and 0810 respectively and congestion charging will start at 0700!

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

RAGES 4th Annual General Meeting

Welcome

The 4th Annual General Meeting was held on 3rd September 2003 in the West Barns Bowling Club, when the chairman, Tom Thorburn, welcomed 21 members. Apologies were received from 20 members. The minutes of the 3rd Annual General Meeting held in 2002 were approved.

Résumé of the past year

Tom Thorburn reported on the past year and admitted that it had been a frustrating one. The suspension of the Rail Passenger Partnership funding had delayed indefinitely the opportunity to undertake driver training of ScotRail staff on the Edinburgh to Dunbar service and the present franchising programme lead to a hiatus in development whilst the bids were being reviewed. Nevertheless there had been successes. RAGES had gained an undertaking from Christopher Garnett, the GNER Chief Executive, that he had no objection to ScotRail offering an infill service between Dunbar and Edinburgh whilst positive campaigning had resulted in reduction to the car parking fees at Dunbar station. RAGES had lobbied politicians and train operators so that improved rail transport remained on the agenda and had met with two of the three bidders for the ScotRail franchise - Arriva and National Express. A meeting with John Home Robertson MSP had been arranged to seek to ensure that the Dunbar local service was included in the bidding process for the new ScotRail franchise.

Chairman's Report

Most had been included in the above but Tom expressed his appreciation for the efforts of other Committee members throughout the year.

Secretary's Report

Roy Mitchell outlined that the Group looked to undertake sensible developments in the rail network, realising that grandiose projects involving major engineering structures and costs were unlikely to gain acceptance, but instead looking for realistic extensions to present infrastructure. An improved local service between Edinburgh and Dunbar, with station at East Linton and then on to Berwick via Reston was achievable with limited capital outlay or additional rolling stock and the Group continued to press for its introduction.

With spare units available on Sundays ScotRail had announced, from November 9th 2003 that the summer Sunday morning trains would run all year round on the North Berwick line, and that three additional evening services would run. This would give a better Sunday mid-evening service than on Monday to Saturday and RAGES would now seek an extra Monday to Saturday evening train.

Treasurer's Report

Ian Bowman presented the report. Balance at bank was £862.35 at the year end (31st March) compared with £1002.49 last year, but it was considered that there was a suitable level of funding available to enable the Group to carry out its work in accordance with its constitution.

Membership Report

Russell Darling advised that present membership was 157 representing a 72% renewal rate for the year. Four magazines (Rags) had been circulated, with 72 members now receiving regular updates through e-mail. Russell planned to update the website shortly. [*Ed - that has now been done.*]

Election of Office Bearers

The following Committee members were re-elected unopposed.

Chair - Tom Thorburn
Vice Chair - Barrie Forrest
Minutes Secretary - Roy Mitchell
Treasurer - Ian Bowman
Membership and Newsletter Editor - Russell Darling
Berwick-upon-Tweed representative - Geoffrey Evison
Dunbar representative - Wilma Brennan
East Linton representative - Allison Cosgrove
North Berwick representative - Charlie Marshall
Reston representative - Barrie Forrest

Guest Speaker

Bill Ure, Director of the Rail Passenger Council for Scotland, gave a most illuminating account of his career, including the time in the 70's when he was Area Manager of the East Coast Main Line between St. Germans and the Scottish/English Border and lived in the Station House at Dunbar, and his management of ferry links and then to his present post.

His account generated a great deal of debate with key questions including:

- Q Jackie Bell - why was the SESTRAN one ticket offering bus and rail travel dearer than a GNER ticket plus one bus operator day ticket?
- A Because each bus operator has a cut of revenue one ticket offers much more flexibility between bus and rail operators, but at a price.
- Q John Denning - views on whether a passenger transport authority would be helpful?
- A SPT, the Strathclyde authority, had certainly developed rail services with new stations opened, although whether the cost of running trains between, for example, Motherwell and Cumbernauld could be justified was questionable and a Scotland wide transport authority would offer a fairer distribution of resources.
- Q Geoff Evison - Restoration of sleepers on East Coast Main Line?
- A Certainly some merit but outside RPC's scope to intervene.
- Q Barrie Forrest - Position re Reston?
- A RAGES needs to continue to press for introduction of

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Annual General Meeting

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facility and to work with rail operators to see if passing loops are required. Certainly Bill considered that it would be much easier to make progress if a Dunbar- Edinburgh local train service operated.

Q Glenn Moulding - was the North Berwick Sunday evening service a key RAGES aim?

A RAGES looked for sensible extension to the network. There were spare units which could be utilised at very low cost so required comparatively little revenue to operate.

Q Roy Mitchell - Increasing trend for diesels under wires and

noise pollution impact.

A Bill advised that diesels were becoming increasingly efficient and reliable and far quieter. The RPC had to accept that operators must be given freedom to run the most appropriate stock.

Q J Woodburn - concerned about lack of fare collection.

A This had been mentioned in a letter to GNER as requiring urgent attention.

Bill Ure was thanked for his most interesting contribution.

GNER Refurbishment

Regular travellers on the electric IC 225 units will know that to describe the interiors as 'tired' is probably being generous and GNER are embarking on a £30 million transformation programme to upgrade all their coaches.

Your editor was able to travel on the new Mallard coaches at their launch on 23rd October, courtesy of a complimentary ticket from GNER to RAGES. Six of us got on board at Dunbar - mostly local government people.

Breakfast was offered immediately on boarding! On-board entertainment consisted of a man and his accordion, a magician and an artist doing portraits.

After Berwick we were taken in small groups and shown around the train, when Christopher Garnett (below left) also spoke to us.



GNER claim that there are the same number of seats, despite the better leg room (plus 2") on the aircraft type of seats, apparently due to partitions being removed. Other points are:

- Wheel chairs have been well catered for with good access to the toilet facilities.
- Doors are coloured red, but other GNER trains are also starting to sport these.
- Bicycles, up to 5, are stored in the guard's van.
- There is good storage space for pushchairs and folded prams in all the coaches.
- A mobile ramp is kept at the stations.
- There are also seats near the doors which are labelled to suggest that able-bodied passengers give them up to disabled people.

My only complaint was the inability to hear the tannoy properly if people around me were speaking.

After we left Newcastle, we were asked for our lunch order.

GNER have certainly improved their 225 stock and they will gradually appear in service as the winter progresses. Further photographs are on the RAGES web site.

Edinburgh Park Station

The opening of the new Edinburgh Park station is now likely to be delayed until November, but, when operational, there will be a 30 minute daytime service between Newcraighall and Edinburgh Park taking just 19 minutes. In conjunction with this, First Group are starting a new hourly Haddington-Newcraighall bus service with bus-to-rail through ticketing (the debut of such an arrangement in Scotland) on 27 October.

Fares through to Waverley, Haymarket, South Gyle or Edinburgh Park (when it opens) will be £5.50 for day ticket and £27.00 for a seven-day season.

The Haddington-Waverley journey time will be 49 minutes. The scheme will be marketed locally by First and ScotRail.

Transport Scotland Agency

The Scottish Executive has announced plans for a new Transport Agency. Transport Scotland is to be created to take responsibility for improving rail, road, air and water transport. It is likely to come into effect in April 2005. Consultation is now in hand and comments are welcome from RAGES members as to its likely effectiveness. RAGES will always remain non-political and has no views as to the administrative arrangements for transport improvements should be – as long as they get done!

Membership

We now have 165 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.

Dunbar News

Last month RAGES sent a memo to all South-East Scotland politicians urging them to lobby Nicol Steven, MSP, Minister for Transport to support restoration of local train services for Dunbar, by including them in the terms of the new ScotRail franchise. These politicians included: MPs; MSPs; MEPs; local councillors and community councils for East Lothian and Berwickshire.

The substance of the memo was:

The Rail Action Group, East of Scotland (RAGES) is a campaigning group that seeks to improve rail services and facilities in South-East Scotland, specifically along the route of the East Coast Main Line (ECML) in East Lothian and Berwickshire in the Scottish Borders. In this capacity, RAGES has already had a great deal of success in getting improvements to rail services at Dunbar and North Berwick.

- RAGES next aim is to get a regular local service re-introduced between Edinburgh and Dunbar. Dunbar is currently provided with only a limited service by express haulier GNER. Dunbar's population is growing and the majority of its new residents work in Edinburgh and they require a modern means of rapid transit between home and work, which GNER struggles to do at present with its

limited number of services.

- RAGES believe that a local service could be restored at minimal cost, using existing infrastructure and train units.
- Such a service would not only benefit the people of Dunbar and its surrounding area, but also the residents of other East Lothian communities, whose stations are currently served by trains on the North Berwick service, such as Musselburgh and Wallyford and where overcrowding currently exists.
- Such a service would also benefit the people of Berwickshire who currently use Dunbar for rail services to and from Edinburgh. It could also form the basis of a restored regular local service between Edinburgh and Berwick-upon-Tweed

The ScotRail franchise will be renewed next year. What is required is that a local Dunbar service is included within its terms. The Scottish Executive has already expressed its support for such a service and this would be its opportunity to deliver it at minimal cost.

RAGES also sent a press release highlighting our campaign to the East Lothian Courier, the East Lothian News, the Berwickshire News and the Evening News. This was well covered in all but the latter publication.

Berwick News

Apart from a few delays caused by speed restrictions being imposed during the hot weather and the recent derailment outside London King's Cross station, train services to and from Berwick-upon-Tweed have been continuing to run reasonably well to time. However, owing to engineering work, buses are replacing Sunday trains between Newcastle and Edinburgh up to 2 November.

The new luggage trolleys at Berwick, which mysteriously vanished, have now been replaced. Congratulations are due to Elaine McPhee, a member of the Berwick station staff who has left to take up her post as an on-train Customer Operations Leader.

Reston News

Scottish Borders Council had a productive meeting with East Lothian Council recently. East Lothian Council have intimated that they are willing to put forward a contribution similar to the Northumberland Council's offer towards a Feasibility Study into the re-opening of Reston station, providing Scottish Borders Council does likewise. So far, SBC has not put forward an offer.

RAGES are hoping to meet Gordon Edgar the Councillor responsible for transport before the executive meeting in mid-October. Euan Robson MSP is also discussing the local service to Berwick and the re-opening of Reston station with SBC and Transport Minister Nichol Stephen MSP.

It has been confirmed that the Scottish Borders Council have agreed that the scoping study should be started during this financial year. They would like to involve RAGES in their discussions.