

The Rages Rag

Newsletter of Rail Action Group, East of Scotland

www.rages.org.uk

Issue No. 21 - April 2004

Working together to build a better railway

By Tom Thorburn

The Rail Passengers Committee (RPC) for Scotland invited RAGES to give a presentation on behalf of the group at their recent seminar - "Working Together to Build a Better Railway". Barrie Forrest and myself travelled on the GNER service from Dunbar to Glasgow Central and then onwards to Exhibition Centre station. I was most impressed with its covered walkway to within 100 yards of the SECC doors.

Armed with our presentation CD and additional bullet points we had added during our beautiful morning journey, we arrived at the Moat House Hotel. After meeting up with some of our friends from other groups and the Railway Industry and coffee, I saw from the Agenda that we were the first group up, so there was no chance of getting a measure of what the other groups were putting forward. The RPC had this meeting very well organised and they already had our presentation loaded on to the PC.

Mike Lunan, RPC Convenor, gave the Opening Address, followed by RPC Committee Member James King, who gave his Keynote address on the RPC Scotland's Priorities for 2004. Barrie and myself then gave our presentation, which was entitled 'A View From the East'. I was somewhat surprised to hear during our question time that the Group has achieved a lot during its short life as I had always thought that we were under achieving. A question we were asked, was how did we get to know all the relevant contacts in the industry and subsequently achieve our goals to date. We replied that this had been due to attending lots of meetings such as today's and also meeting with politicians at all levels.

Presentations then followed on from: Friends of The Far North Line; Capital

Rail Action Group (CRAG); Rail Future; The Role of the Strategic Rail Authority.

The afternoon concluded with a Panel Debate on 'How Can We Work Together To Build A Better Railway'.

All in all, we thoroughly enjoyed our day at the Moat House, albeit that I had to leave early due to other commitments. It has to be said that I very nearly didn't make these commitments due to the train being delayed in Haymarket Tunnel.

Fortunately luck was on my side as the final announcement for the 14:00 hrs to Dunbar was made as I alighted, resulting in a quick dash from Platform 12 to 11 to board the train just as the doors closed. Otherwise, being a Saturday, I would have had to wait three hours for the next train!

The Group has received from RPC Scotland, the Seminar Evaluation Summary for "Working Together to Build a Better Railway Seminar". The first paragraph of this summary states: "Overall the information we received from you was very positive and you enjoyed the day. The speakers were received very well and you gained the most value from the sessions by James King, Richard Arden and RAGES".

Speaking on behalf of the committee and the membership, the RAGES presentation was thanks to Russell Darling who compiled it. A further point which came out was the desire to share information and contact lists. The RPC Scotland included a form and this has duly been filled in and returned.

Anyone wishing to browse over this report or indeed any of the other reports that the committee receive, please get in touch with myself or any other committee member.

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 21:

- North Berwick News - Page 2
- Berwick News - Page 2
- Platform changes - Page 3
- Waverley Upgrade - Page 4
- Haddington - Page 4

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

Berwick-upon-Tweed News

By Geoffrey Evison

Apart from a few late running and cancelled trains, operations at Berwick have run well over the past couple of months. However on Wednesday 14 April the 06:30 hrs G.N.E.R. Doncaster to Glasgow Central train brought down the overhead wires in the Craigentenny area. Yours truly departed Berwick to travel to Edinburgh on the 09:27 hrs train to Aberdeen unaware of the situation until on approach to Dunbar, an announcement was made over the public address system that the train would be terminating at Dunbar. Passengers were then conveyed to Edinburgh by bus and the train formed the 09:50 hrs Dunbar to London Kings Cross service normally the 09:30 hrs ex-Edinburgh.

However, the 07:07 hrs Leeds to Edinburgh Virgin train was

reversed at Dunbar and passengers taken back to Berwick to complete their journey to Edinburgh by bus. Buses replaced trains between Berwick and Edinburgh and vice versa for the rest of the day until late evening. It is worth noting that as usual the Berwick station staff were very efficient in transferring passengers and their luggage to and from trains and buses.

Tuesday 30 March saw the retirement of Denise Shell, a member of the booking office team. Her smiling face and cheerful attitude will no doubt be missed by both her colleagues and passengers alike. I would like to wish her a very long and happy retirement.

North Berwick Service News

During February the service reliability floundered, with an unacceptable level of train breakdown and delay. Whilst it was well known that the present Class 322 units were due to return to the South of England - and therefore ScotRail were not going to do much more than safety related maintenance - the situation became so bad that RAGES contacted Peter Cotton, ScotRail's Managing Director, to express their concerns at the very poor situation. To his credit, Mr Cotton replied promptly and advised that some new traction motors had been obtained and would be fitted immediately to the failing units in order to allow service performance to improve. This certainly seems to have done the trick as, and I know I am tempting fate here, the route operated much more reliably as spring arrived.

Rolling stock

The Class 322 units will now be with us until May 23rd, although services on May 22/23rd may be diesel worked. Class 322 units will then transfer to Ipswich and the following day, Monday May 24th, the ex-Virgin locomotive hauled units will enter service with their four former Inter City carriages and manually operated doors. Some minor interior adjustments will see a dedicated wheelchair space being provided. These units are due to work most Monday to Friday duties and, as a result the 07:58 hrs ex-North Berwick will no longer run through to Glasgow Central, although the 16:34 hrs ex-Haymarket will still come from Glasgow Central, probably using a SPT electric multiple unit.

On Saturdays, ScotRail will run the service with a mixture of electric units from Strathclyde and diesel multiple units - through Saturday services between North Berwick and Glasgow Central will run at 08:17 and 15:17 hrs, with journeys from Glasgow Central at 07:05 and 15:19 hrs. Sunday looks set to be exclusively a diesel day.

Because of anticipated increased loading times, and to offer consistent departure times all week, it is critical to note the following key timetable amendments:

Most journeys will leave North Berwick 3 minutes earlier than present, with the first Monday to Friday train at 06:45 hrs.

The 07:28 and 08:37 hrs to Edinburgh are unchanged.

The 07:58 hrs leaves at 07:57 hrs and then the main day service pattern is from North Berwick at 17 minutes past each hour.

Return trains from Edinburgh will be at 34 minutes past the hour during the main day with variations at peak and trains continuing to run from Haymarket.

The last two trains from Edinburgh remain at 21:25 and 23:07 hrs.

Saturday daytimes continue to be half hourly, leaving North Berwick at 17 and 47 minutes past the hour and Edinburgh at 07 and 34 minutes past the hour.

Sunday timetables leave Edinburgh 34 minutes past and North Berwick 17 minutes past the hour.

As ever, passengers should check nearer the start of the summer services on May 23rd 2004, but it seems a safe bet that the alarm clock, at least to catch the first train, will need to be set three minutes earlier!

ScotRail has invited some of the RAGES committee to a viewing of the new loco-hauled stock before they come into service.

Ticket machines and barriers

Ticket machines and automatic barriers are now in situ at Edinburgh Waverley, Haymarket and Glasgow Queen Street. ScotRail are apparently looking at whether it would be feasible to install ticket machines at other stations throughout East

Platform change at Waverley

RAGES noticed that in the middle of February, that the 08:08 hrs arrival in Edinburgh no longer stopped at Platform 11 but was being shunted out through platforms 20 or 21. Virgin's 06:40 hrs from Dundee is now given platform 11 instead, as it runs on to Penzance and has 20 minute dwell time in the station.

We asked those Dunbar travellers with e-mail addresses if they found Waverley platforms 20/21 particularly inconvenient, convenient or are not bothered.

Their replies are detailed below and you may relate to some of them.

- The 08.08 arrival at Platform 21 does not bother me too much except insofar as it makes it more difficult to catch the 08.15 to Queen Street, if one wishes to go there rather than to Central.
- Not particularly convenient, but I suppose if I worked in the Old Town it would be great!
- Platform 20 is not convenient - because of the large number of passengers leaving the train, it takes quite a few minutes to get up the stairs from the platform level. It is also difficult for the elderly, disabled, people with children - the lift is not particularly easy to find and is very slow. When alighting from the first class carriages (normally at the end of the platform) there is a very large gap between the platform and the train - difficult for elderly people, children, people with disabilities.
- I would consider that GNER trains should not be pushed out to these out of the way platforms - platform 11 and platform 19 are the usual ones and most convenient for passengers.
- Yes - very inconvenient. The train is so busy there is always a long queue to get up the stairs.
- I travel on this train and had wondered why it had changed from platform 11, it's certainly a nuisance, especially for those travelling every day. As this is a busy commuter train, there is often a congestion caused by there only being one exit up the steps. It must be really difficult for people with luggage. For someone in a hurry to catch the train to Glasgow it will be near impossible to get down the steps in a hurry. I appreciate there is a shortage of through platforms but if possible would like this train to continue to stop at 11 or 19.

- Platforms 20 and 21 are out of the way. It is a mad dash if you want to get a connection across the station, particularly with the steep stairs.
- I certainly find the use of platforms 20/21 inconvenient, because I am usually trying to get an Aberdeen connection, which generally is platformed as far away from 20/21 as can be. It certainly now makes it impossible to get the 8.10 Aberdeen with an 8.08 arrival from Dunbar.

And the exception!

- Only use that train occasionally but it doesn't bother me. I think 20/21 are actually quite nice, it has the feel of a smaller station. Often thought GNER should make more of them, perhaps making them exclusive for the London trains.

Nine replies out of 20 or so Dunbar RAGES members is quite a significant number.

We had thought that GNER might respond, but they did not. However, Nigel Wunsch of Network Rail did:

"As Train Planning Manager for Network Rail the platforming arrangements at Waverley come within my remit. The 0640 from Dundee has now been strengthened to a total of 9 coaches (a 4 car Voyager plus a 5 car Voyager) which splits in Edinburgh with one portion going forward to Penzance and the other remaining in Edinburgh to form a later train South.

"For this reason it has been necessary to review the platforming arrangements at Waverley to make best use of the limited number of platforms available at a period of peak demand resulting in the Newcastle to Glasgow train being scheduled to platform 20.

"I note the comments from your members. As all the trains arriving at Waverley at that time of the morning are very busy, many of the issues would apply to any trains using platforms 20/21."

RAGES replied to him asking that he re-considers the return of the early morning Newcastle to Glasgow to the main section of Waverley, i.e. Platforms 10/11 or 19/1.

Nigel replied that "We will bear your comments in mind when reviewing platforming arrangements at Waverley in the future"

Vacancy for a Treasurer

RAGES is looking for a member to become our Treasurer. Ian Bowman has served this post well for our first five years, but has now declared he wishes to stand down. He says the post is not onerous and the Treasurer would also attend committee meetings which we hold every 6/8 weeks. Applications can be made by replying to this newsletter!

GNER 8th Anniversary Reception

GNER have written to RAGES inviting us to their 8th Anniversary Reception to be held in the Scotch Whisky Heritage Centre on 12th May. The reception will be addressed by Chief Executive Christopher Garnett and GNER's senior management team in Scotland.

Membership

We now have around 190 members from around the counties.

Please encourage your neighbours or fellow passengers to join RAGES.

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

Waverley upgrade

The first phase of work to increase much needed capacity at Waverley Station in Edinburgh was announced recently.

Design work is about to start on improving access to the station and increasing platform capacity to deliver real benefits for passengers. The Executive is fully funding this first £3.7 million of design work for the redevelopment.

The first phase will provide:

- An increase in the number of trains which Waverley can accommodate from 24 to 28 by the end of 2007;
- Two new through platforms at Waverley by Spring 2007;
- Escalators, lifts and a protective canopy on Waverley Steps by 2007;
- A new platform at Haymarket Station by Autumn 2006.

This first phase of redevelopment must be carried out before work could start on any further upgrade. Proposals for Waverley station have been considered by a steering group led by the Strategic Rail Authority, with the Scottish Executive, Network Rail and Edinburgh City Council. All parties are committed to taking this first phase forward for the benefit of the thousands of passengers who use Waverley station every day.

Transport Minister Nicol Stephen said:

“The redevelopment of Waverley is the key to unlocking the potential of Scotland’s railways and beginning detailed design work is a significant step forward to delivering better services for passengers and business.

“We want to introduce new services that allow more people to travel by train and extra track capacity and platforms at Waverley Station are vital to these plans. They will handle the new, longer trains we are bringing in between Glasgow and Edinburgh, additional services from Fife and the new services that will use the reopened Airdrie to Bathgate line.

“Our plans for Scotland’s railways are ambitious, long-term and focussed on promoting Scotland’s future economic prosperity. The first phase of improvements at Waverley are important. But we are also looking to its full-scale redevelopment and the design work will keep this on track too.

“The estimated cost of Phase One development is £150 million. This is a priority project for the Executive and the Strategic Rail Authority, and we are working closely with them, Network Rail and Edinburgh City Council to take this forward. Decisions on future funding will be taken following the UK and Scottish Spending Reviews.”

The number of trains using Waverley has increased by 50

per cent over the past 15 years to 576 per day and the station has effectively reached capacity for trains from the West End. Passenger numbers will continue to grow beyond the 14.4 million passengers per year currently using the station.

Ron McAulay, Regional Director of Network Rail said:

“I welcome the Minister’s announcement to fund the final design and development works for the first phase of Waverley Station’s redevelopment.

“The future of so many other railway projects is dependent on arriving at the right solution for Waverley Station. It is the key to new services and expansion of existing services. This is one of many Scottish Executive supported projects that Network Rail is delighted to be helping to develop.”

Richard Bowker, Chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority, said:

“The SRA is pleased to have chaired the Project Steering Group and we look forward to our continued involvement in the project. We are satisfied that all members of the Steering Group have agreed on the way forward - moving on to the development of the design stage of Phase One. Once funding is secured to enable the construction of Phase One we are confident that this will result in a real improvement for passengers and users of the station.”

Councillor Donald Anderson, Leader of the City of Edinburgh Council said:

“I very much welcome this investment from the Scottish Executive as Waverley Station is the gateway to Edinburgh, and indeed to Scotland, for many people.

“We all share high aspirations to make Waverley one of the best and most modern railway stations in Europe. We will continue to press for the comprehensive redevelopment of one of Scotland’s most important transport hubs. The design work and first £150m phase of work is a major first step in achieving this.”

The Executive provided £2 million to support preparatory work at Waverley, including site investigations and modelling work required to help inform the design and layout of a re-developed station.

The first phase of redevelopment would include work to increase the capacity of the station’s ‘West Throat’ and the number of through platforms from 4 to 6. The new platforms would be located on the north side of the Klondyke Wall and the south side of the Balmoral Wall. It is estimated that this work would cost £150 million.

[Ed - This text has been copied from the Scottish Executive’s web site]

Haddington “rail” service

Whilst Newcraighall is not technically within the RAGES area, Haddington is. You may be aware that East Lothian’s county town, without a passenger rail link since 1949, has had for the last six months a First Bus X7 service, run in conjunction with ScotRail, to Newcraighall. The original concept was to tie in with the new Edinburgh Park station.

However, this initiative does not seem to have been taken up by the travelling public as the hourly bus from 07:13 to 19:13 hrs usually travels empty. Space here does not allow publication of the various reasons that RAGES offered ScotRail for this lack of support, but, as we go to print, a leaflet appeared with the free paper extolling the virtues of rail travel in East Lothian. No mention is made of the X7 service - an opportunity lost?