

The Rages Rag

Newsletter of Rail Action Group, East of Scotland

www.rages.org.uk

Issue No. 24 - January 2005

Local Edinburgh to Berwick Service Progress towards re-instatement

RAGES is not becoming a heritage action group! The photograph is to illustrate a local service from Edinburgh to Berwick-upon-Tweed stopping at Dunbar in the early 1960s. It will have



Photo: Colour Rail

probably stopped at East Linton and will also stop at Reston before reaching Berwick, a situation not possible since 1964.

Last year in The Rages Rag Issue 22, we reported that a preliminary study was carried out by Scott Wilson which covered in great detail the various options for the re-instatement of the East Coast Main Line Local Service from Edinburgh to Berwick-upon-Tweed and the re-opening of East Linton and Reston Stations.

The study looked at:

- current population and travel patterns
- use of current rail services
- operational assessment
- engineering assessment
- business case evaluation

In addressing the operation of a local service to Dunbar, the report noted that it should interface with the existing North Berwick service and thus provide additional services to the common stations. It must not interfere with fast services and requires a robust turn-round

at Dunbar.

Journey times to Dunbar would be about 32 minutes, timed outward-bound at the opposite half-hour from the North Berwick service, e.g. 13 minutes past.

The return leg could be at 10 minutes past the hour.

The study looked at extending the service to Berwick with the same requirements as for Dunbar. Journey times to Reston and Berwick could be 42 and 52 minutes respectively. The return times could be such that they provide a good feed for GNER passengers

alighting at Berwick to transfer for Reston and Dunbar.

The study addressed the pathing situation between the Portobello East junction and Waverley and noted that the signalling system could adequately cater for the new services, but the junction has special rules affecting the line capacity. However, it suggested possible infrastructure enhancements for the junction to alleviate this problem.

In addressing new stations at East Linton and Reston, platform lengths should be sufficient for 8-car trains. Stations would be unmanned with shelters, CCTV and information points. Car parks would also be provided based on passenger forecasts.

Several sites were looked at for the two new stations. These are discussed in detail and the maps show the preferred sites for each. Station costs, including access roads, car parks and re-location of track-side equipment are around £2.7m to £2.9m each.

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 24:

- New Rail Finance - Page 2
- North Berwick News - Page 3
- Berwick News - Page 3
- GNER News - Page 4

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

Financial agreement sets railways on track

Details of the financial agreement that will see around £325 million transferred from the Department for Transport to the Executive were published this month.

The Railways Bill, once enacted, devolves to the Scottish Ministers powers to determine Scottish railway strategies; to let, monitor and manage the ScotRail franchise; and to specify rail infrastructure needs in Scotland. Ministers will also be able to set fares and fund improvements to the railway. Only some functions - principally safety and the licensing of railway operators - will remain reserved to UK Ministers.

The Bill is currently before the Westminster Parliament and the Scottish Parliament will shortly begin to debate the associated Sewel Motion.

Secretary of State for Transport Alistair Darling has agreed to provide the Executive with sufficient funding to cover all the responsibilities transferred to Scotland's Ministers. It will be approximately £325m - covering administration spend, the costs of operating, maintaining and renewing the network. It contains funding which will enable a range of enhancements to Scotland's railway.

This settlement will also ensure that improvements at Waverley Station can be taken forward.

Part of this figure will be made up of the Regulatory Asset Base for Scotland. This will be determined by the Office of the Rail Regulator. It is estimated that this will be a share close to 10 per cent of the RAB‡ for Great Britain, which is the basis on which the figures have been calculated.

First Minister Jack McConnell said: "This is the most significant devolution of new powers to Scottish Ministers since 1999. The substantial funding will allow progress on, amongst other things, the first phase of the Waverley redevelopment."

Scottish Transport Minister Nicol Stephen said: "This is a good deal for Scotland. These new powers and funding will allow our new transport agency to deliver our ambitious programme for improving the rail network. We want to work closely with the rail industry to provide a better deal for passengers."

Mr Darling, said: "As I set out in last year's Rail Review, the Scottish Executive is to be given more power in determining its railway strategies and managing rail franchises. It is clear that the Scottish Executive is best placed to decide what is right for Scotland's railways.

"The significant funding transfer I am announcing today will enable the Scottish Executive to carry out its new powers effectively and represents the Government's long term investment in and commitment to the railways."

The Railways Bill implements all the aspects of the Rail

White paper that require legislative change. In relation to Scotland it will enable Scottish Ministers to:

- Specify and fund outputs required from Network Rail in Scotland
- Publish a Scottish Railway Strategy
- Designate, let, fund and manage Scottish franchises, and publish a Statement of Policy on franchising
- Enforce Scottish franchises in accordance with the Railways Act 1993 procedure
- Set fares, including penalty fares
- Publish a code of practice for disabled passengers
- Appoint a member of the Rail Passengers Council
- Give financial assistance to any person for the purpose of developing Scottish railways - passenger, freight, Network Rail
- Publish guidance on proposals for closures of Scottish railway services/facilities; and make any proposals to the Office Rail Regulation (ORR) for closures of services that the Scottish Ministers fund or that a Scottish operator wishes to withdraw
- Designate, where applicable, new Scottish services as experimental for a trial period of five years
- Approve railway operators' byelaws in respect of services and facilities within Scotland. Approve byelaws for cross-border operators jointly with the Secretary of State.
- Be the Operator of Last Resort if Scottish franchises are withdrawn or end and another franchisee is not appointed
- Be able to apply to the courts for railway administration orders in respect of Scottish franchises
- Have powers to make secondary legislation in Scotland in a number of circumstances where there is a power for the Secretary of State to do so in England and Wales - e.g. Penalty Fares Regulations

‡ Definition of RAB:

The 'Regulatory Asset Base' (RAB) is the Office of Rail Regulation's calculation of the value of Network Rail's assets. When establishing NR's income at Access Charge Reviews, ORR include an allowance for a return on the RAB to cover Network Rail's cost of capital and also an allowance for the 'amortisation', or depreciation, of the RAB.

[Ed - this article copied from the Scottish Executive's web site]

Printing

I hope that you have found the print quality of our newsletter greatly improved since the last issue as we have changed our printer company.

As the last issue had a photograph of the new ScotRail colours, I had hoped for a special colour edition as had been suggested from the floor at our recent AGM. However, a quote for this showed colour to be ten times the cost of black and white and the latter won.

Those who have requested *The Rages Rag* to be sent electronically receive it in colour. If you would like to convert from postal to electronic delivery of the newsletter, then please e-mail me at RAGES@btinternet.com. You will need Acrobat Reader for this. [The Editor]

Membership

We now have around 205 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.

North Berwick Service News

Christmas and New Year Woes

RAGES has contacted Mary Dickson, the Managing Director of First ScotRail, as a result of difficulties over the festive season and we will publish her reply in a future edition.

With engineering work scheduled between 24th and 27th December 2005 resulting in trains running between Edinburgh and Prestonpans only with connecting buses on to Longniddry, Drem and North Berwick, it was important for travellers that full details of any revised times was publicised; yet the special Christmas timetable booklet failed to mention that buses would leave North Berwick at different times to the trains (usually earlier). Workers arriving for the 06:45 train found that the bus had left at 06:37 on December 24th. On December 27th, however, bus times were given - but no indication that trains would leave Prestonpans 25 minutes later than normal. No doubt a number of connections were missed in consequence. First ScotRail still feel that 20 minutes running time is needed between North Berwick and Drem by bus, despite our earlier comments that 12 are enough.

Given that First ScotRail produced a separate timetable book for the Christmas and New Year period, here was an ideal opportunity missed to give full publicity for the change in order to minimise inconvenience to passengers.

Another point we have raised relates to the absence of service on January 2nd 2005. We were led to believe that First had been awarded the franchise based on the service levels provided by the previous franchisee, National Express. Since a Sunday service had operated on January 2nd for a number of years, RAGES are seeking clarification as to why the new operator failed to run trains on that day.

Are North Berwick trains still running?

On December 24th and 27th the monitors on the platforms at Waverley displayed PRESTONPANS for North Berwick trains and gave no indication that a connecting bus was being provided - this certainly was a talking point amongst users and caused some passengers to ask for lifts home from Prestonpans being unaware that all stations on the route were covered by the bus. RAGES will be seeking information on the rail industry policy on this since surely a comment such as "connecting buses provided" could have been added to the monitor.

Who is in charge?

With First Group providing rail replacement services, rail and bus staff could not be distinguished as their uniforms are identical and, given that some passengers may have found the necessity of changing at Prestonpans confusing, there is a clear need to ensure that distinctive clothing is worn so that correct advice is available from someone who has the answer. Asking a bus driver from Bannockburn about train times and then being shunted around other similarly attired First Group employees until a First ScotRail guard is located does not really help passenger confidence.

Service Performance

Whilst everyone can understand that in particularly bad weather disruption is inevitable, there is no evidence that overall performance is any better under First's franchise than with National Express. As examples the 07:28 ex-North Berwick service was cancelled on January 11th and the hired EWS units are still suffering lighting failures in isolated coaches.

First have of course inherited the use of these vehicles and have outlined their intention to replace them later in the year with diesel Turbostars, similar to trains on the Edinburgh - Glasgow Queen Street service, but RAGES are anxious to discover what seating capacity these replacement trains will have.

'Meet the Manager' Sessions

A welcome feature of the new franchise has been regular 'Meet the Manager' sessions where problems can be discussed with local managers. Details appear in the monthly on-train magazine, which has now been renamed First Insight. However, it has not been seen on the North Berwick trains and RAGES has asked that this be rectified. Sometimes it seems that the North Berwick route is well and truly forgotten; a view that is exacerbated by First's failure to provide any ticket issuing or checking staff on the normal platforms allocated for the 16:39 and 17:34 departures from Edinburgh.

Faults and Repairs

A concerned Longniddry passenger informed the RAGES that the northbound shelter window was flapping and was only held by one of its fixings. We have reported this potentially dangerous item to Network Rail and they will have it looked investigated. If any member wishes to report items such as

Berwick-upon-Tweed News

Work continues apace on improvements to the car park and a new public address system has recently been installed on the station. Rail services have been affected over the past month by the bad weather which in some cases caused severe speed restrictions to the GNER 225 trains, resulting in late running and a few cancellations.

As usual there were no trains on Christmas Day and Boxing Day. On 24th and 27th December, the line was blocked between Berwick and Edinburgh owing to engineering work. This resulted in replacement bus services between the two destinations with train services between Newcastle and Edinburgh being diverted via Carlisle.

GNER News

Complaints were received regarding: non-sale of tickets at Berwick on Saturday 8th January with no replacement buses either; not able to book return leg tickets from London Kings Cross to Berwick for Sunday 6th February; and again non-sale of tickets at Waverley on Sunday 16th with the passenger/complainant being told there would be no trains that day until 17.30 and no replacement buses either.

I found it very difficult to understand why no buses should be laid on and in both instances the complainant was told to find their own means of transport. Fortunately the young person did know where the bus station in Edinburgh was - all in all not a good advert for rail.

On seeking clarification from GNER on the above matters, I was informed that in the first instance Network Rail had suspended all services on the ECML due to the weather. On the second issue, again Network Rail were to blame due to their

Planning Department not releasing Sunday services until four weeks prior to that date - quite sad that they can not plan longer periods in advance. GNER apologised for the non-issue of tickets on the 16th January and assured me that action would be taken to see that there would be no repeat of this.

While I was discussing all of the above with Andy Naylor and Tim Armour, I took advantage to enquire what was GNER (and for that matter, all other TOCs) doing about the disgraceful saga in the run up to Christmas and New Year with passengers not being able to book tickets in advance for this period. I enquired if they had taken issue with Network Rail about their inability to plan and also had they complained to ATOC as at the end of the day the poor old passenger (and in the longer term Rail) has to suffer.

I was assured that GNER had taken these points up and Network Rail are now working to a 12 week plan.

Local service

From page 1

The business case was evaluated for different options:

- service to Dunbar
- service to Dunbar with a new station at East Linton
- extension of service to Berwick
- service to Berwick with a new station at Reston
- all with various combinations of new station sites

These were put through a discounted cash flow exercise, assuming the following implementation timetable:

- Year 0 Implement Dunbar service
- Year 2 Add East Linton station
- Year 4 Implement Berwick service
- Year 6 Add Reston station

(However, RAGES has subsequently been told that the implementation of the Berwick service and the addition of Reston station could be in place by year 2, i.e. 2007.)

It concluded that the most viable option is the introduction of a local service between Edinburgh and Dunbar with a new station at East Linton on a site north-west of its previous site in the village and noted that the revenue obtained from operating a local service will not meet the operating costs, but adds that this is not atypical of regional rail services in the UK.

The analysis of demand for an extension of the service to Berwick-upon-Tweed is not so positive with only nominal revenue generation, but notes that park and ride facilities at Reston would draw from a much wider catchment area, but does not include non-economic factors that would be considered in the next stage of the project.

The study was presented to the Scottish Executive and in mid-December they agreed to fund 50% of the next stage of the process - a Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance 1 (STAG 1). This was agreed at a meeting between Transport Minister Nicol Stephen MSP, Euan Robson MSP and Councillor John Elliot. Scott Wilson will undertake this appraisal.

A very important meeting, as far as we are concerned at RAGES, then took place on January 20th between East Lothian and Scottish Borders Council regarding the STAG 1 funding †. Councillor John Elliot has informed RAGES that the two Councils have agreed to fund the remaining 50% of the costs of

this study between them.

This is great news for all of us and now means that the next stage in the progress of re-opening of East Linton and Reston stations can move swiftly forward. The study will be undertaken again by consultants Scott Wilson and is due to start in February. Councillor Elliot has also informed RAGES that representatives of the Group are to be invited to an Inception Meeting hosted by the two Councils and Scott Wilson.

It now seems that all our hard work since 1999 is now bearing fruit and we sincerely pass on our thanks to politicians at all levels who have recognised and contributed so much to getting to this juncture in our quest for the local service and station re-openings.

We, members and public alike, can all play an important part in getting our service back by: hopefully being positive if we are given the chance to be included in the study; continuing to take an active interest in our environment i.e. the storms and flooding that wreaked havoc at the close of 2004 and beginning of 2005 show just how much we are responsible and we must bring this up with our politicians to make the point that multi millions are being spent on flood defences. Let us tackle the initial primary issue which is CO₂ emissions and give us the alternative to the car i.e. a good local rail and other integrated public transport service at a fraction of the aforesaid costs.

† Definition of STAG

Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) is a document to aid transport planners and decision-makers in the development of transport policies, plans, programmes and projects.

There are five appraisal objectives: environment; safety; economy; integration; and accessibility and social inclusion. These are to be used to gauge the potential value of proposals to improve transport at a local or national level.