

The Rages Rag

Newsletter of Rail Action Group, East of Scotland

www.rages.org.uk

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Hurdles we face

What inhibits women from travelling by train? There are three main factors: safety concerns, access and facilities – or lack of them. But these issues also concern men. Why are they more important for women?

Perhaps I should mention the first time I visited King's Cross station on my own, many years ago, arriving on a dark winter's evening.

I climbed up the steps from the Underground to be faced with a large drunk man urinating on the steps in front of me.

This was a frightening and intimidating experience, and did not make me think that the standards of passenger safety at King's Cross were high.

I had no idea where I could find any staff or police presence to have this person removed, and felt very unsafe for the period of time I had to wait within the station.

I am glad to say that passenger facilities at King's Cross have improved since then, and there is now a reasonably secure waiting area.

Fortunately I have not had a repeat of this experience, although I have been forced to sit in open waiting areas at stations with drunk men – a particular problem when travelling at night – and been approached or even threatened at stations when on my own if I refused to enter into conversation with passing drunks.

A secure well-lit waiting area is a priority for women, and one where a staff presence is nearby in case of any difficulty.

Lighting outwith the immediate station is important too, in taxi waiting areas and car parks, as is clear signage to these areas.

The increase in help points at more isolated unmanned rural stations is welcome. Even though the operator may be many miles away, the existence of the

help point can give a sense of security to lone women travellers.

The other security issue concerns trains themselves, especially overnight carriages on sleeper trains, where women-only carriages would be greatly welcomed.

Women can feel threatened and uncomfortable when surrounded by men while sleeping, and not everyone can afford the cost of a sleeper berth where separate areas for women do exist.

Access, or the lack of it, is a major consideration for parents and carers of young children.

Every time I am in Waverley station I see parents – men as well as women – struggling up and down stairs with prams and buggies.

Although there are lifts, they are not particularly easy to find or use, and some platforms require the use of two lifts. Older main line stations are frequently at fault in not having easy access. I appreciate that stations were built in the Victorian era when access was not considered, but nowadays surely this is of prime importance in encouraging parents to use rail travel.

It's encouraging to see the easy access provided to new stations.

Access to trains themselves can be difficult, with main line trains having very high steps making it hard to get a pram, buggy or wheelchair on board.

I would like to see each train having a particular door with an easy access ramp. All passengers requiring easier access would then know which carriage to go to.

Access to stations is also a consideration for those parents – mainly women – who are at home with children and are less likely to have the use of a family car.

Stations are not always in convenient places, and there may be no link to a town or village centre.

If using a train means a long or

inconvenient walk with a toddler and a pushchair to a station, and there is an alternative bus service which is easier to access, any parent is going to choose the easier option.

If we want families to use the railway, we have to provide the means to get there.

Last, facilities both on trains and in stations are of vital importance to women with children. It is astonishing that major stations only have one set of public toilets, and the chances of getting a small child from a faraway platform to these toilets without an accident occurring en route cannot be high.

Other stations have toilets up or down stairs and through turnstiles – an impossible task with a pushchair. Two or three toilet areas at each large station would make such a difference.

I would also like to see trains with on-board catering including baby food in their menu, and also selling disposable nappies.

Points to warm up bottles would also be appreciated, both on trains and in stations, and baby changing areas should be at every toilet facility. Larger toilet cubicles to allow babies in prams should
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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.

North Berwick Service News

With the electric trains now restored to the service, reliability has been very impressive over the past few months. None of the Class 322 units has as yet been refurbished, but this really isn't critical with services performing well, although some strong clips to hold the seat cushions in place would be helpful to prevent them being inadvertently moved by unwary passengers when alighting.

Restoration of a full service of electric trains allowed the timetable to revert to a general 37 minutes past the hour from Edinburgh and 20 minutes past the hour from North Berwick, with peak hour variations including the welcome restoration of the 0649 ex-North Berwick through to Haymarket; Sunday trains remain at 34 minutes past the hour from Edinburgh though to clear paths for Virgin Trains.

Occasional glitches will continue to occur though – the writer recalls one night in November the display board advising that the 16:39 train would depart at 16:53 when in fact the train had actually left at 16:51. Fortunately Gordon's Gin had a promotion at the station and a free G and T was adequate enough compensation for a further 15 minutes delay!

Christmas Services

First ScotRail were rather late with publicity which was not available until December 12th – far too tardy to allow people to firm up work arrangements. The timetable booklet again concentrated on declaring journeys cancelled when on some days a list of what actually ran would have been easier to follow. This would also remove the requirement for a traveller to have a Christmas timetable plus a normal timetable to cross

reference to. The booklet didn't realistically offer any marketing opportunity: for example, no fares or details of cheap day ticket availability. But on the plus side a Sunday service ran on January 2nd and an hourly all day facility on Dec 27th and Jan 3rd was available on the North Berwick line.

Barcodes on season tickets

Although First ScotRail produce an excellent information magazine, First Insight, each month offering updates on services, engineering works etc. it is rarely distributed on the North Berwick trains and RAGES will be asking that the magazine is available on this route. Presumably refurbishment of the trains should allow magazine holders to be attached to place this information in. One feature of the January edition is to advise that barcodes are to be added to season ticket photocards which will help renewal to be quicker as at present. When buying, say, a monthly ticket at Waverley the clerk has to wander into the back office to drag out a written record card before issuing the ticket which is a time consuming process.

Extra trains for the evening

Although the service is running well RAGES are still keen that the limited Monday to Saturday evening service should be improved to hourly, and will continue to press for this at the earliest opportunity, as this probably represents the surviving weakness in the service pattern. Readers are welcome to give their comments if they find other deficiencies they would like to be considered for rectification.

Towards a Transport Strategy for Scotland - Consultation on Rail Priorities

RAGES has responded to the above consultation document compiled by the Scottish Executive and addressed the follow areas:

- How may railways contribute most to the economy and society of Scotland?
- What do existing and potential customers want from the railways? Are there ways in which we could encourage more people to use the train instead of the car?
- To ensure appropriate services for commuters, long-distance passengers and freight, do we need to make choices on parts of the rail network about which type of service should take precedence?
- Are there specific changes you would like to see to the rail network or services?

Each area was subdivided into several questions and we responded in line with our aims.

Change at Newcastle or Darlington?

It has been suggested from a neighbouring rail user group that changing at Darlington might be better than Newcastle when going further south. The attraction is that neither overbridge nor subway is needed to cross between platforms at Darlington, which makes it easier for the encumbered.

However, two other points of view from members:

- I suspect Darlington, despite having no ramps or steps between platforms isn't offered as not all GNER trains stop there and you could have a fair wait for a train, whilst, I think, every GNER train stops at York or Newcastle.
- Clearly Darlington is easier. However, going south, trains stop there for only a short time and there can be quite a crowd boarding, whereas if one is joining a train starting from Newcastle at Newcastle, there is much more time to find a seat and settle in. Coming north it may not be quite so important but trains are usually less busy after Newcastle and, if there is no reservation, it may be easier to find a seat. The ramps up to the overbridge make it fairly easy to handle luggage for a reasonably fit person and I must say that GNER staff are seem to me to be very good at helping out the less able. I am not so sure about Virgin.

I leave it to you ...

GNER News

New coach order keeps it quiet

GNER have made some changes to the order of their train carriages in order to make life easier for passengers — and keep the Quiet Coach that bit quieter.

The carriage order on both the Mallard and High Speed Trains (HST) have been standardised to make it easier for passengers to find their coach, regardless of the type of GNER train. Coaches B to F in Standard Class and M and L in First Class will be in the same position on both types of train.

Following passenger research, the Quiet Coach has moved from Coach D to Coach B at the northern end of the train. This places it at the end of the train, so there will be less disturbance from passengers walking through the carriage.

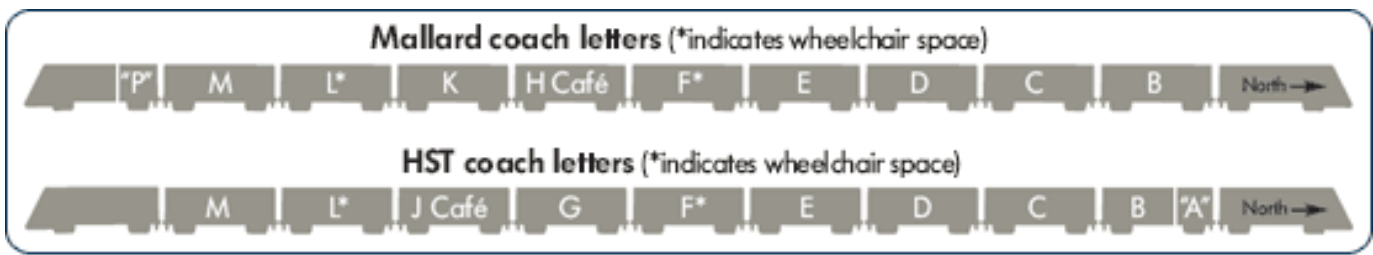
The changes also mean there will be more reservable seats throughout the train, so it should be easier for passengers to make advance reservations. There is also good news for cyclists — bike reservations will now receive an allocated place in the train's guard's van, and it will be possible to make season cycle reservations.

The guard's van has become Coach A (HST — north end of train) or Coach P (Mallard—south end of train). The Standard wheelchair-accessible coach has become Coach F on both Mallards and HSTs.

See a diagram of the new carriage order below.

In the longer term, GNER will be evaluating the possibility of fixed platform-edge markings indicating carriage positions. This would enable passengers to board more quickly, thereby cutting down the time trains spend in stations. This will be trialled in the New Year.

[Ed: This has been the case at Swiss and German stations for many a year with their long-distance trains. In some cases there is a special board on each platform showing the coach positions or they are on the electronic display boards showing the approaching train and its destinations. The other Swiss and German passenger facility is the publication of the platform numbers for all trains on their timetable boards (situated on most platforms) and on their web sites.]



The above article was originally published in the current edition of the GNER Livewire magazine

Train and bus made easy

It's never been easier to complete your journey by train and bus with through fares and PLUSBUS tickets available from GNER and Virgin. These options enable you to buy one ticket for your whole journey, making transport connections easier and saving you money in the process.

Through fares

Why not make use of the expanding network of bus routes linking stations with local towns and airports? With through fares you can buy one ticket for the train and bus journey before you travel, either at the station or in advance from Telesales. Destinations served by bus links include Robin Hood Airport and Durham Tees Valley Airport, as well as towns from King's Lynn to the Scottish Borders.

PLUSBUS

Enjoy unlimited one-day bus travel in cities such as Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds, York and Newcastle for around £2 added on to the price of your train ticket.

That's the unique advantage of PLUSBUS combined train and bus tickets, which give you the freedom to get around your destination without having to worry about fares. You can buy PLUSBUS tickets from your local station and the ticket can include bus travel at both ends of your journey. Ask at your Travel Centre or visit www.plusbus.info for more details.

[Ed: The above information was obtained from GNER's Livewire magazine.]

Hurdles we face

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also be considered.

Mothers do not want to abandon their babies in a waiting area, but often that is the only choice.

My own experience when travelling with small children has not always been good, and it required perseverance to keep using the train. But children generally enjoy train travel – it's fun, and they are much less likely to be travel sick than

travelling by bus. It is such a pity that so many obstacles are placed in their way.

This article was written by Allison Cosgrove, our East Linton Representative. It was originally published in Railfuture's magazine *Railwatch*. RAGES is grateful to both parties for allowing its publication here.

STAG1 Report on Local Rail Service from Edinburgh to Berwick



Photograph: B Forrest

Scottish Borders Councillor Gordon Edgar, Portfolio Holder for Transport and Environmental Standards, met with Rail Action Group, East of Scotland Chairman Tom Thorburn and Vice Chairman Barrie Forrest to hand over the Final Draft of the Edinburgh to Berwick Local Transport Study at the site of the proposed new station for Reston on Sunday 20th November. This study forms Part 1 of the Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG1) to look at the potential for a local Rail Service to Berwick with increased trains for Dunbar with new stations at East Linton and Reston.

RAGES have been asked for their comments on the study which was funded jointly by Scottish Borders Council, East Lothian Council and The Scottish Executive.

The photograph shows Cllr Edgar, on the left, presenting the report to Tom Thorburn.

Service at Dunbar and Berwick

Members have complained to us about recent problems at Dunbar and Berwick. RAGES wrote to GNER and Virgin Trains outlining these problems. The response times varied, but their answers were complete. Space does not allow these answers to be printed here, but E-rags were sent out to e-mail members at the time.

Toilet problems on trains were also raised.

Virgin replied that "My own experience suggests that toilet problems are far fewer than they used to be. I have checked and this is more than just my impression - the position is getting better. Action has been taken on this issue and improvement should continue."

GNER's response was "I can confirm that a joint action plan between GNER and Bombardier has been agreed to address reliability issues and problems with toilets on-board our Mallard trains. This action plan should ensure that problems with obnoxious smells and flooding will be alleviated in the near future."

We also noted in our e-mail to GNER that "We are very impressed with the cleanliness of Dunbar station, especially the toilet, and have made a point of informing your duty staff." - to which they responded their thanks.

In response to our E-rag on Dunbar's cleanliness, a Berwick member noted that "but so is Berwick! Iain and the other platform staff look after it very well, despite passengers who leave sticky sweets crushed on the waiting room carpet and have other unpleasant habits."

National Travel Permit

Those entitled to free bus travel will know that discounts are available for rail travel as well. The new Travel Permit will become Scotland wide and will bear the logo of your local District Council. RAGES expects, but at the time of publishing was unable to confirm, that discounted rail fares will continue as at present.

Berwick News

The winter timetable began on 11 December 2005 with a few changes to the previous one. As usual, apart from a few delays and the odd cancellation, both GNER and Virgin services have run fairly smoothly. Work on the car park now seems to be complete and although a number of motorists are still not too happy about it, things seem to be settling down and folk are getting used to it. The staff are as usual always very obliging and always ready to help. The comfort of the travelling public could I believe be greatly improved by the enlargement of the shop to include a permanent seating and table area. The present seating arrangement is very poor and must be very cold and uncomfortable during the autumn and winter months for anyone having a drink in this area. One might say "Food for thought".