

The Rages Rag

Newsletter of Rail Action Group, East of Scotland

www.rages.org.uk

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Class 322 Train Refurbishment

A press release from First ScotRail announced the new look class 322s which are on service on the North Berwick service.

The first of five trains undergoing a £3m refurbishment programme, returned to service on 10 April on the North Berwick to Edinburgh line, under the name of the 'North Berwick Flyer 1850 - 2000'.



Photo: Fishbones Glover

The refurbishment upgrades are aimed at providing more comfort for passengers and increased reliability of the trains.

Improvements include the installation of on board CCTV and audio/visual passenger information systems as well as new floor and wall coverings.

Changes to the seating layout will result in capacity increasing from 252 to 293.

First ScotRail has also funded the installation of eight dedicated cycle storage spaces for the

convenience of customers who travel to and from stations by bike.

A number of technical modifications will boost their reliability and are designed to ensure a better service and overall journey experience.

The refurbishment is being carried out by Hunslet-Barclay, the railway engineering company based in Kilmarnock. It is also responsible for the refurbishment of First ScotRail's Class 318 trains, of which five have been completed and are operating in Strathclyde.

Andy Mellors, First ScotRail's engineering director said: "This refurbishment programme is testimony to our ongoing commitment to improve the quality and reliability of our trains, for the benefit of our customers.

Robert Edmond, business development manager at Hunslet-Barclay, said: "These units, when they enter service, will be a credit to the skilled workforce based here in Kilmarnock."

The full refurbishment programme is set to be completed by the end of 2006.

One of our RAGES' members e-mailed us to say, "I travelled on it last night and it was a joy to sit in a CLEAN, fresh and comfortable carriage!" Unfortunately just after that it failed and had to be returned to base for repairs.

Rages has also been advised that there is: "... still no intermediate door controls for the guard! These sets are a nightmare to work by yourself, flying back through banging doors and causing delays."



Photo: First ScotRail

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.

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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.

New Departure Monitor Screens at GNER's Stations

TRAIN operator GNER is spending £1 million to install new easy-to-read platform departure monitor screens at the 12 stations it manages on the East Coast Main Line.

The high-tech monitors feature a much clearer dot-matrix display than the old television-type installations they replace - and they will be much more reliable, harnessing the most up-to-date technology behind the screens.

The new screens will also be much more efficient, using less power and costing less to maintain - while the old equipment will be safely recycled.

Work on installing the first of the new screens at Newcastle and Newark North Gate stations has already begun - and when the project is complete by the end of this year, 225 screens from Dunbar in the north to Peterborough in the south will have been replaced.

Ian Brough, GNER station projects director, said: "The Cathode Ray Tube (CRT) displays in the original monitors had reached the end of their effective life, but were housed inside aluminium and steel enclosures which will be good for years to come.

"Our contractor, Infotec, came up with a design which features Light Emitting Diode (LED) panels in place of the old CRT screens, mounted on a slimline plate which allows the existing steel and aluminium enclosures to be retained.

"The new monitors are much more user-friendly and initial passenger reaction has been very positive".

Monitors showing next train due, summary of departures and arrivals and special notices for passengers are all being replaced along the GNER route.

The new displays feature LED lettering which is 9 pixels high, complying fully with the latest disability legislation and offering highly-visible instant information to the thousands of passengers who will see them every day.

[Ed: This article was a GNER Press Release]

North Berwick Service News

A pretty uneventful first few months of the year with a generally good level of reliability and punctuality means that there is little to report.

However issues still arise with delays at ticket barriers – the guard on the 09:20 hrs from North Berwick, for example, struggles to collect all fares and RAGES will again be asking if First ScotRail intend to install ticket machines in addition to those already at Edinburgh, Wallyford and Musselburgh at other North Berwick line stations.

These machines do seem rather temperamental. I saw a First guard with a screwdriver desperately trying to extricate a lady's debit card from a machine the other day and I cannot help thinking that all that is needed is a Quickfare machine which issues fast tickets to Edinburgh Waverley or Haymarket (single/day return). This would cover over half of the travellers and if anyone wants to travel elsewhere then they can buy them on-train.

RAGES will also continue to press for an improved evening service and also earlier trains from Dunbar; we have been asking for these for some time and, although the rail operators seem enthusiastic enough, there is the matter of financial support to get the services running which seems to be causing delays.

Value fares from Dunbar

RAGES has related before that the Virgin Trains' website does not make Virgin Value tickets available from Dunbar, leading to uncompetitive prices for some journeys. RAGES have been advised that Value tickets are available, but you can only discover them by keying into the "buy a ticket" section on the web and, somewhat illogically, ignoring the value ticket item. Virgin have promised that their website will be made more user-friendly when it is revamped for the summer, when Dunbar will then appear in the "value" section

Berwick News

Train services have performed reasonably well over the past three months. However, weekend engineering works at various locations continue to cause diversions which usually result in extended journey times.

With regard to Berwick upon Tweed station itself, several improvements have recently taken place. The Entrance Hall floor has been re-surfaced and automatic doors have been installed. Also a new seated waiting area for bus passengers has been created.

Recently the ScotRail Sleeper was diverted via Berwick. Perhaps RAGES should campaign for one of the sleepers to call at Dunbar, Berwick upon Tweed on both southbound and northbound journeys?

Ed: Our Berwick Representative, Geoffrey Evison, has resigned his post on the RAGES Committee. We thank him for his support over the last few years, but meanwhile he is continuing with his Berwick News for *The Rages Rag*.

Membership

We now have almost 200 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.

Re-instating of the Haddington Rail Branch

Haddington and District Community Council invited RAGES to their meeting on 24 January to discuss the re-instating of the rail branch line to Haddington. Also invited was Paul Ince, East Lothian Council Transportation Officer.

Tom Thorburn, Chairman, and Russell Darling, Haddington Representative, gave a presentation which was followed by a useful discussion.

Russell reminded the meeting that in 1999 Scott Wilson published a report into East Lothian Rail which had been commissioned by the East Lothian Council. Whilst the report did not recommend any immediate action on the re-opening of Haddington to rail, it was optimistic in saying that an hourly all-day service to Edinburgh was feasible for a local train operator such as ScotRail although funding might require to be other than public. They suggested that a terminus for the branch could be sited in the area south of the Roodlands Hospital.

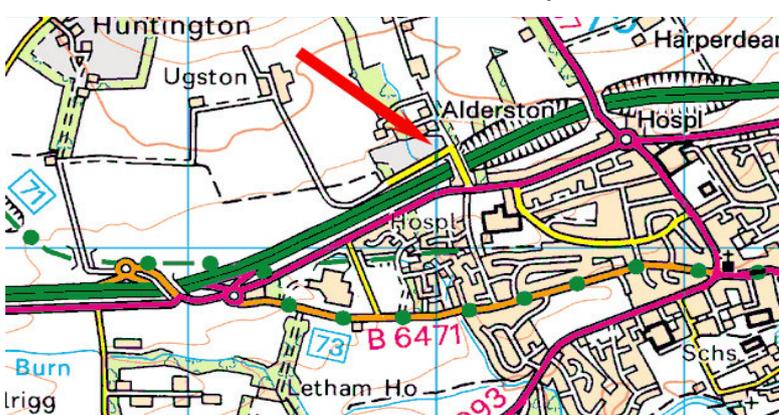
He then outlined three sites for a re-opened station. The first was the original site, now occupied by the Station Yard industrial units. Unfortunately, there is a unit directly over the original track which probably rules out this option.

The second option was that of the 1999 Scott Wilson report which has the advantages of being near the town and having available car parking space. Access to the station would be from Hospital Road.

However, two obstacles were in the way: the traffic lights at Gateside Avenue would require to be converted to a level crossing; and the bridge under the new A1 bypass would have to be rebuilt at an angle to allow trains to pass under the road. It was unfortunate that the Scottish Office did not heed the Council's recommendations at the time, but was presumably for cost reasons.

The third option is a more economical one which does not require the A1 to be ripped up.

This option was suggested both at the open meeting held in 2001 and more recently by the Community Council in their reply to the latest East Lothian Local Plan. The railway would be diverted from its original line just before the bypass bridge and go



The map image is reproduced with kind permission of Ordnance Survey.

along the north side of the A1 as far as Alderston Road, below Alderston House. The arrow on the map shows the location. Again this site has suitable space for parking. Its disadvantage is the distance from the town, but the local bus could be scheduled to arrive and depart from there to coincide with the arrival of the train.

All these options would be looked at when a STAG1 (Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance) study was authorised.

The Local Plan for 2005 noted that the existing trackbed was protected from development, but the Community Council had pointed out that space for a station and car park had not been.

RAGES suggests that the service should go at least as far as Edinburgh without the need to change at

Longniddry which was the case when the railway closed in 1949 and no doubt contributed to its closure.

With the current new housing being built and the 750 houses planned for Letham, alternative transport to the car is required to reduce traffic congestion and help to meet the Scottish Executive's targets in this area.

Paul Ince, also a RAGES member, told the meeting that the re-opening of the Haddington Rail Branch was in the Labour Party Manifesto. He noted that there were several national rail studies currently taking place: Scotland Planning Assessment – Rail; Route Utilisation Strategy for the entire East Coast Main Line; and a Route Utilisation Strategy for Scotland. In reply to the most recent Scottish Executive consultation into the National Transport Strategy, East Lothian Council had included the case for a Haddington Branch, as had RAGES in their reply.

It was also suggested that alternative transport provision should have been planned before giving consent for new housing such as that to be at Letham.

At current prices, it was assumed that the fare structure from Haddington would be similar to that from Drem, around £4.50 for a cheap day return.

The Community Council were very much in favour of a rail link being re-instated to the town.

To progress the re-opening of the Haddington Branch further, it was agreed by all parties that our MSP and local Haddington councillors should be invited in a joint letter to a meeting with the Community Council and RAGES at an early date.

Jan Wilson, Chair of the Community Council, thanked RAGES for their presentation.

After the meeting, Tom Thorburn said:

“The RAGES slide show and discussion afterwards was very successful, so much so that Haddington and District Community Council are also very keen to see the branch and station re-opened.

“Both parties realise that with the projected new housing for Haddington, things need to be ratcheted up with regard to the branch and station.

“Given that the 1999 Scott Wilson study concluded that the branch and station needed to be reviewed in 2005 to 2011, this time frame is now with us and we need to make arrangements with our Council, Local and Scottish Politicians.”

The above is an edited version of a fuller insert which was sent out to Haddington members with the last issue. Our meeting also featured in the East Lothian Courier and East Lothian News and even rated a paragraph in the Edinburgh Evening News.

Waverley Redevelopment

Just as we were going to press with the last issue of The Rages Rag it was announced that the Waverley station redevelopment had started.

A new platform is being built on the north side of the station which will be the same length as the existing platforms 1 and 19. The brickwork has started for these and new crossovers have been put in place. These, when they come into operation, will give very flexible access to four platforms on the north side of the station.

A new platform is also to be built on the south side of the

One of our trains is missing

It was drawn to our attention that the Saturday 17:05 hrs ex-Edinburgh had been shelved from the recent timetable. RAGES asked Virgin Trains why and more importantly was there any consideration given to requesting GNER to have their 17:00 hrs replace the stops/calls that the 17:05 hrs would have made.

Virgin Trains have responded:

“It is an issue relating to temporary timetable alterations caused by engineering work. On some weekends, closure of part of the route linking Edinburgh with the south via the West Coast Main Line means we end up with too few trains in Edinburgh to source the Saturday 1705 departure via the East Coast. We had hoped GNER would be able to stop their 1700 at Dunbar instead, but this did not prove possible. As an alternative, we considered stopping our Saturday 1605 from Edinburgh at Dunbar, but this idea led to other problems so was not pursued.

Local Edinburgh to Berwick Service

RAGES is disappointed that this initiative seems to have got stuck at the STAG 1 phase, but as we were going to press, we received a press release from Scottish Borders Council also stating their disappointment as follows:

Further delays to the progress of a report to improve Berwickshire rail and road services have been described as “disappointing” by Scottish Borders Council.

The Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) 1 report on rail and road connections between Edinburgh and Berwick-upon-Tweed was released in October last year. However, at a recent meeting with officials from Scottish Borders Council and East Lothian Council, the Scottish Executive advised that it may now be late summer before the Executive is able to comment on it.

The STAG 1 Report was jointly funded by Scottish Borders and East Lothian Councils with the Scottish Executive and undertaken by consultant Scott Wilson (Railways). It looked at a number of options to improve rail and road transport along the East Coast between Edinburgh and Berwick-upon-Tweed, including the possibility of a local rail service with new or re-opened stations at East Linton and Reston. This option, which is favoured by the lobbying group Rail Action Group East of Scotland, RAGES, was identified as worthy of further examination at the more detailed STAG 2 analysis stage.

Brian Young, Scottish Borders Council Transport Policy Manager, described the further delay to the progress of the

station opposite platform 11 which will be half the length of the new north platforms, but will be suitable for a full length train. There are existing crossovers for access.

Platform 5 at the east end is also to be re-instated and will be long enough to hold a 5-car Voyager.

Signalling will also need to be changed.

This first phase of refurbishment is to take place over two years and when completed will see access for four more trains per hour.

“It would be good to have a consistent seven-day railway but track renewal currently features large in Network Rail's requirements.”

They also noted that:

“Various engineering blockades on the West Coast Main Line will continue at weekends, and over an extended period at Easter, until 7 May, sometimes impacting on the East Coast because of the way we link rolling stock around the network.”

Virgin later told RAGES:

“We will run it when we can. Saturday and Sunday schedules are handled through what the industry calls STP - Short Term Planning - as opposed to weekdays which are Long Term, so there will be variations from one weekend to another.

“Intending passengers are advised to check in advance on www.nationalrail.co.uk or 08457 48 49 50”

report as very disappointing, although he added that he could understand the reasons for the hold up.

“The Executive wants more time to consider the wider national picture and, in particular, the Scottish Rail Planning Assessment and Route Utilisation Strategy (Scotland) that it is currently involved in. This is understandable, but, as both of these studies are behind schedule, the resulting delays are having a significant knock-on effect on considering projects such as the Edinburgh to Berwick Local Transport Study.”

Scottish Borders Councillor George Russell, whose ward of Eyemouth & District North includes Reston, also expressed disappointment at the latest delay: “There is great local enthusiasm and expectation for the project and I know that there will be considerable frustration at this latest announcement. The STAG 1 Appraisal Report was issued in October 2005 and has been endorsed by the local authorities, but we really need the Scottish Executive to make its feelings known on the subject”.

Scottish Borders Council Executive Spokesman for Transport, Gordon Edgar, echoed those sentiments and added that, in his role as Vice Chairman of SESTRAN (The South-east of Scotland Transport Partnership), he would be speaking to MSPs to seek assurances that they were seriously considering the issue and that there would be no additional delays on a decision.