

The Rages Rag

Newsletter of Rail Action Group, East of Scotland

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ECML Route Utilisation Strategy

By Brian Patton

This document is now out for consultation and a seminar, organised by Network Rail, was held in Edinburgh on 18 July to explain the background to interested parties. I attended on behalf of RAGES. The information was introduced by Roland Anderson, Rail Utilisation Strategy (RUS) Consultation Manager, and then explained in detail by Richard Thomas, Principal Route Planner, London and North Eastern section. Unfortunately the seminar was not very well attended, there being only about 20 present, but it was encouraging to note that Scottish Borders Council was well represented by Councillor J Fullerton and two officers. The Environmental Maintenance Manager from Berwick Borough Council was also present. The Strategy looks ahead to a maximum of ten years. Of course much of it is taken up with matters relating to the south of England and so of little relevance to the area with which RAGES is concerned, though alterations or improvements to the pattern of long-distance services would have an impact on the area.

There are aspirations for improved journey times between London, the North East of England and Scotland. In the face of competition from low-cost airlines, rail's share of the Edinburgh-London market has dropped significantly from 730,000 in 1998/9 to 565,000 in 2004/5. For this service, a growth in passenger numbers of 16% is forecast for the period under review. In current European terms, the ECML can scarcely be classified as a high speed railway, with a general maximum speed of only 200km/hr, but there seems to be little hope for any great improvement during the currency of the Strategy. There is also a wish to be able to offer a more regular-interval service, with a timetable which repeated every hour or every two hours. This would apply to both GNER and Arriva Trains. To an extent these two aspirations are in conflict. The intervention of new entrant to the ECML market - Grand Central - further complicates the scene. Freight services are important but there are no pressing issues relating to the section between Berwick and Edinburgh. Quite a lot of attention was given to congestion in the south-east of England, in the approaches to King's Cross and in that station itself, but no mention was made of congestion in the Edinburgh area, despite a statement in the document that that point generates by far the greatest amount of delay on the entire ECML. Doncaster and York are the next two main points for delay, but each of these is responsible for only one third of the time lost at Edinburgh.

For Dunbar, it would therefore seem unlikely that a request to stop one additional GNER service in each direction would receive favourable consideration. It would have to be a case of

either no additional stops at all or a regular pattern of stops throughout the day.

The main issues relating to the south-east of Scotland to emerge from the seminar were as follows.

The case for the reinstatement of the northbound platform at Dunbar would appear to offer a benefit to the service as a whole and it is being appraised at present. Apart from reducing the delay to northbound services which have to cross on to the southbound line to serve the station, it would also reduce delays which occur when a northbound and a southbound service call within a short time of each other and one, usually the northbound, is delayed by even a short time.

The case for an Edinburgh-Dunbar-Berwick local service, with stops at new stations at Reston and East Linton, does not seem to offer value for money and is therefore not favoured. However, questions about this uncovered a rather glaring anomaly. The Strategy is largely based on projections of growth of existing services, but, as there is no existing local service, no projection of growth can be made. Further data on population figures and travel patterns, is required to appraise a business case for the two new stations mentioned. This is clearly an unsatisfactory situation overall. This data has already been produced for the STAG 1 carried out in 2005.

However, the idea of a two-hourly Edinburgh-Newcastle semi-fast service seems to command greater official support. This could be run by First ScotRail and, with the precedent of the Caledonian Sleepers, there is apparently no problem foreseen in that TOC running a service into England. This would call at Dunbar, Berwick, Alnmouth and Morpeth and would clearly improve links between Berwick and the county town of Northumberland, which are at present abysmal. Such a service would probably be looked on more favourably by

Go to page 3

Meetings with politicians

Since the May elections, RAGES committee members have met with new MSPs for East Lothian and Roxburgh & Berwickshire respectively. Meetings have also been held with the new transport portfolio holders of East Lothian and Scottish Borders Councils, Paul McLennan and Jim Fullarton respectively.

These were very successful and have led to a meeting of all the above and our chairman with SEStran (South East of Scotland Transport Partnership) to promote our aims further.

New Cross Country Franchise

Arriva plc has been awarded the franchise for the New Cross Country network. The DfT announced recently.

An extra 40 carriages, and refurbishment of others, will provide 3000 more seats a day for passengers on the busiest parts of the network, which extends across Britain from Penzance to Aberdeen, from Cardiff to Stansted Airport and from Manchester to Bournemouth.

Arriva plc has been awarded the contract to run the franchise from 11th November 2007 for eight years and four months. The DfT will pay it a subsidy of £1.056bn.

The new franchise combines most of the existing Cross Country franchise currently operated by Virgin Cross Country and some services currently operated by Central Trains.

Other benefits for passengers include:

- A new web-based ticketing system will be introduced from December 2009 which will allow customers to reserve seats up to 10 minutes before their train leaves, print tickets at home, receive and display tickets on mobile phones and receive customised journey information packs. The franchise will also accept smartcard tickets issued by other train companies.
- Up to 25% more luggage storage space due to an internal refit of Voyager trains.
- Catering provided to customers at their seats, including hot meals in first class on weekdays.
- Wi-Fi access, which will be free in first class.
- More accessible staff on trains with at least three passing through long-distance trains.
- Extra help for passengers who need to change trains. Staff will be equipped with technology to give up-to-the-minute information on train times and connections.
- Extra staff employed to help passengers during major timetable changes in December 2008.

Rail Minister Tom Harris said: "We have secured an excellent deal with Arriva. Not only are they delivering an even bigger increase in capacity than we asked for, they are doing it a year earlier than expected. I am especially pleased that the new franchisee will connect some of our biggest cities even more effectively. This will benefit both business and leisure travellers"

The Government will continue to limit annual rises of regulated fares in line with national policy, which is currently RPI+1%.

As with all franchises, unregulated fares will be the responsibility of the operator. Arriva have indicated that they may wish to raise unregulated fares by an average of 3.4% above inflation each year.

The New Cross Country (NCC) franchise will consist of the following services:

- The existing Cross Country Trains franchise currently operated by Virgin Rail Group, apart from services between Birmingham and Scotland and Manchester and Scotland which will transfer to West Coast Trains Ltd in November 2007.
- Birmingham-Scotland: through services from south of Birmingham to Scotland on the West Coast mainline will continue to operate for four weeks as a joint operation between New Cross Country and West Coast Trains. In December 2007, the timetable will be re-structured to enable Birmingham to Scotland services

on the West Coast mainline to be operated as a self-contained part of the West Coast Trains franchise. NCC services from south of Birmingham which would previously have used the West Coast mainline will generally operate to/from Manchester or to/from Scotland via the East Coast.

- Manchester - Scotland: these services will be operated by West Coast Trains for four weeks until December 2007 when they will cease. Trans-Pennine Express (TPE) will then restructure its services between Manchester Airport and Cumbria to include through services to Scotland from this time.

As consulted on by DfT, in December 2008 the timetable for the long distance services of the franchise will be further re-structured into four simplified service groups with a regular hourly timetable pattern. These are: Plymouth - Edinburgh via Leeds; Manchester - Bristol; Manchester - Bournemouth; Reading - Newcastle via Doncaster.

Regarding capacity, Arriva will deliver 35% extra capacity - nearly 3000 seats on key routes - by June 2009 with most of the extra seats being provided by December 2008.

Arriva will extend certain services to retain through journey opportunities: e.g. one Edinburgh - Reading return service (Monday - Saturday and Summer Sundays)

Five additional refurbished High Speed Train sets of eight carriages each will be leased for use on the New Cross Country franchise. Maintenance cover means that four of these will be in use at any one time. Modification of existing Voyager trains will add 14 seats to each four-car set and 16 seats to each five-car set. Arriva plan to remove the on-board shop and one toilet from each set to provide extra seats and luggage space for passengers.

Arriva is committed to a 25% reduction in delay minutes attributed to the TOC by the end of the franchise.

A single compensation policy for all passengers will be introduced. With improving Passenger's Charter performance in punctuality and reliability the current discount system means that an increasing number of passengers receive no compensation for delays. Therefore discounts in renewal for season tickets valid between one month and one year in compensation for poor punctuality and reliability will be replaced by compensation based on delays to individual journeys, known as Delay/Repay. Under the new system, all passengers will be entitled to claim compensation for all delays, whatever their cause:

- 50% of the price paid for a single-leg journey delayed by between 30 and 59 minutes;
- 100% of the price paid for a single-leg journey delayed by between 60 and 119 minutes; and
- 100% of the price paid for a return journey delayed by more than 119 minutes.

The changes will also start to standardise disparate compensation arrangements for single, return and weekly season ticket holders on different train operators.

[Ed: The above is an edited version of the Department for Transport's press release.]

Allan McLean, Communications Manager, Scotland &
Go to page 3

ECML Route Utilisation Strategy

From page 1

Berwick Council than a stopping service to Edinburgh. Incidentally, no mention is made either in the Strategy or at the seminar about the irregular local service which at present operates on the ECML north of Morpeth, although figures in the document show that some stations, such as Widdrington, see only about ten passengers per day.

All these points could be academic. I asked about track capacity to the east of Edinburgh and apparently there is at present only sufficient spare capacity to allow one extra train path per hour. This did not take account of the need to fit in Waverley Line trains on the eastern approach to Edinburgh

New Cross Country Franchise

From page 2

North England, Virgin Trains, said: "I am proud of what Virgin has done for CrossCountry including almost doubling passenger numbers and extending Scottish services, for example from two a day between Edinburgh and Birmingham via Leeds to one every hour, providing a double length train to give Fife commuters a seat on their way to work in Edinburgh, and expanding services to new places including Dunbar.

"I look forward to Virgin delivering improvements on the West Coast franchise which will include Edinburgh and Glasgow/Birmingham via Carlisle from 11 November."

Our chairman, Tom Thorburn said: "The announcement by the Department for Transport on the decision to award the Cross Country franchise to Arriva was a somewhat surprise. We at Rail Action Group, East of Scotland (RAGES) have enjoyed what can only be described as an excellent relationship

Berwick Report

Apart from delays in June caused by flooding in England, and also by a signal problem near Morpeth on 9 July, services have run well during the last few months. Even when the flooding did occur, the replacement services to and from York were put in place very quickly and ran punctually.

The main area of concern has been the closure of one window in the booking office for almost all of the time that the station is open. This has resulted in long delays for those wishing to buy tickets and even longer delays for those who are making enquiries, since they often have to give way to those who are travelling immediately. Queues have sometimes stretched back into the concourse and the situation is clearly frustrating for the staff who, as always, strive to give the best service possible. From diagrams of passenger flows used in the ECML Route Utilisation Strategy, it would seem that over 600 journeys per day are made on Berwick-Edinburgh services, with

Flexipasses

In the last edition of *The Rages Rag* we related over someone wishing to travel irregularly and wanted to buy a number of tickets in advance to save daily purchases. First ScotRail has pointed out the Flexipass system offers that facility.

The Flexipass offers 10 journeys between two points which can be carried out in any direction over a calendar month: however whilst the savings are worthwhile compared to 10 single journeys (an Edinburgh- North Berwick 10 journey ticket costs £40.90, or £4.09 a single journey compared to the on-train single of £4.60), when compared to full price day returns (£8.20) the Flexipass saving of 2p is hardly worthwhile. If any two of the journeys could be done at times when cheap day returns are available it is not worth using.

Flexipasses can only be bought at staffed railway stations or online at www.firstgroup.com/scotrail

after, presumably, 2011. The RUS for Scotland covers the section from Portobello Junction into Waverley.

The meeting was certainly useful, but there was general agreement with one speaker who suggested that the Strategy concentrates too much on the South East of England and that in Scotland we will not see any real improvement in local links as long as our services remain entirely in the hands of Inter-city Train Operating Companies based outwith Scotland.

Comments have to be returned to Network Rail by 21 September 2007 and RAGES will be doing so.

with Virgin Cross Country's (VXC) management team. Communications could not have been bettered in any shape or form, i.e. requests for information regarding any problem whether it be infrastructure or train would be answered within 10 to 30 minutes and the level of information was both accurate and comprehensive.

"VXC also listened to our plight for a quick fix to the problem of the need for an early morning service out of Dunbar and a late night service. The management team of Chris Gibb and Allan McLean took this on with enthusiasm and came up with the trains.

"In conclusion, I would hope to build on this excellent relationship with Arriva and that we will be dealing with the same conscientious personnel as at VXC."

rather fewer on Berwick-Newcastle. But figures of those travelling do not take any account of those who visit the station to make enquiries, generally of a complex nature. Nor do passengers and enquirers come evenly throughout the day, but are concentrated in peaks, particularly in the morning. If only one person is on duty, (s)he cannot possibly deal fully with both groups of visitors to the station, leading to frustration for passengers and staff alike. Our correspondent has written to the local press to express disquiet at the downgrading of facilities at the station and it is to be hoped that some notice has been taken of this. It would seem also that there are fewer staff on the platform these days.

On the whole Virgin Trains have given Berwick good service and there is no reason to suppose that Arriva will do any better. Time will tell.

North Berwick Service News

Rail services on the Edinburgh to North Berwick line have proved to be exceptionally reliable in the past few months. Occasional cancellations, such as in the morning peak on June 19th caused by a broken down freight train, can be forgiven, whilst the addition of the extra Monday to Saturday train at 20:37 hrs from Edinburgh to North Berwick returning at 21:20 has been well received.

As a result the previous 21:25 train has been put back to run at 21:37, thus reducing the gap to 90 minutes before the last train at 23:07. However, the journey time on this is extended with the train being allocated 13 minutes to get to Musselburgh rather than six, the reason being apparently to allow empty coaching stock to be moved ahead of this train, but in fact on the occasions the writer has caught the 21:37 service it has taken the normal six minutes between Edinburgh and Musselburgh and then hung around for seven minutes. RAGES will be seeing if some adjustment can be made: would it not be possible for the train to leave at 21:44 instead from Edinburgh?

Despite the reliable level of service the main concern has however been the decision of First ScotRail to refuse to offer reduced rate fares on board the train as all stations have ticket machines and passengers should buy before they board. Unfortunately this is much easier said than done as a catalogue of problems have occurred which RAGES has asked First ScotRail to address:

- Ticket sales points not clearly marked - the large shed-like structure by North Berwick Car Park does indeed house a ticket machine but there are no direction signs or notices saying tickets should be purchased here. With the tourist season in full swing it is inevitable that many casual passengers will be unaware that not only are they supposed to buy before boarding but where the sales outlet is. Mary Dickson, MD of First ScotRail has undertaken to ensure that machine locations are clearly marked.
- The machines only issue certain types of ticket and yet First ScotRail have been strangely reticent to tell passengers which tickets should still be bought on

board trains. In small print attached to a host of instructions is the evasive narrative that “restricted availability or certain economy fares” may not be purchased from the machine. We have asked for clear notice of which tickets are not available. We know the machines can not handle local authority concessions and family fundays and there are probably others, but please can you tell us!

- There have been problems with the reliability of the machines with reports of debit and credit cards not being accepted and certain types of Clydesdale notes also being rejected. Another small print note by the machine says that if there is a problem you should consult First ScotRail staff for help. As all stations except Waverley and Haymarket are not staffed, exactly who should the passenger consult?

The most persistent criticism of the new arrangements however concerns the much longer journey times that have resulted as passengers are no longer able to arrive at the station a minute or so before departure and pay on board. In order to ensure a ticket is obtained, passengers are having to reach the station 15 or 20 minutes before departure and there is certainly a case for more than one machine to be installed at some of the stations to reduce the length of queues, with trains being missed as a result. RAGES will indeed be asking for additional machines to be installed if First ScotRail continue to want not to issue reduced rate off-peak tickets on train.

Another point relating to this policy is that the effectiveness of bus-rail interchange, which is not particularly strong anyway, is even further eroded. For example, the First Bus 121 from Haddington arrived at North Berwick Station at 12 minutes past on the hours it ran – a comfortable 8 minute connection which now can not be guaranteed if you have not time to get a rail ticket.

The above situation seems to have coincided with a marked reduction in barrier checks at Waverley Station. On the week commencing July 2nd they were carried out on only one of the five morning peaks.

A correction and an apology

In the last Rages Rag, Allison Cosgrove in her report on the Transport Security Conference referred to 700 British Transport Police. There are in fact 2,800 British Transport Police officers, but with shift working there would probably be 700 at any one time.

RAGES wishes to apologise to the few members who received, or rejected, the last issue unstamped. We will ensure that the stamps are affixed securely and do not come adrift.

One Ticket

The SESTRAN one ticket scheme was extended to cover bus-rail services from May 20th. It is designed for regular users, with tickets being available in 7-day, monthly or annual formations. Sample weekly costs to Edinburgh are:

Dunbar	£46.00
North.Berwick/ Drem	£43.00
Prestonpans/Longniddry	£35.00
Musselburgh/Wallyford/Newcraighall	£25.00

For this you get unlimited rail travel to any station in the Edinburgh zone - so extending to Edinburgh Park, Curriehill and Dalmeny - virtually unlimited bus travel in the same zone and also bus travel within the East Lothian area you were entitled to have rail travel to and from. So buying a North Berwick ticket, you can use it on connecting buses from Aberlady, Gullane or Dirleton. A photocard is needed - a current rail photocard will do - and tickets can be bought at staffed rail stations or online from www.firstgroup.com/scotrail.