

The Rages Rag

Newsletter of Rail Action Group, East of Scotland

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Dunbar Railway Woes

Dunbar has had more than its fair share of problems recently: parking charges have gone up; and all its trains did not appear on the various forms of timetable in a timely manner.

Parking at Dunbar Station

RAGES has written to National Express East Coast (NEXC) regarding increased parking charges at Dunbar Station stating that we are very dismayed with the second increase to be implemented at Dunbar within less than 13 months of National Express taking over the ECML franchise - i.e. from £1 to £2 and from 4th January from £2 to £4. Members and non members alike, who use Dunbar have registered their disgust with us, pointing out that this is wholly unjust given that the cost of their fares has also been significantly increased with Dunbar to Edinburgh return now being £9.40. Given that we are in the midst of a financial recession it does seem somewhat strange that NEXC would implement these price hikes. It was pointed out that "...these hikes fly in the face of your deputy Susan Goldsmith's press release of 11th December 2008 on the NEXC first birthday, when she said 'Passenger numbers have also increased towards the 18 million mark and hopefully this offer may also encourage those who haven't travelled before with us to give us a try, leaving their car at home or taking the train instead of the plane'.

The RAGES Committee firmly believe that there should be no car parking charges at stations, which in turn will encourage people to leave their cars at stations and use the train which totally fits in with Government policy of reducing car usage and better use of public transport. These car parking increases on top of fare increases will

result in: drivers returning to their cars *en masse* in favour of the train; and increased parking in nearby residential streets which East Lothian Council are already implementing measures against.

Members who have first class tickets (most of whom have season) have additionally pointed out that they are very unhappy with services they receive during their journey i.e. staff have reduced to two per train and quality is not in keeping with or to what were GNER standards.

In the NEXC e-mail to RAGES, it was said that: "Car parks are busy along the east coast mainline and as such we would encourage customers to consider buying season tickets where possible. With a season ticket a commuter who does a five-day week for 44 weeks a year will pay a daily rate for parking of less than £2.

"The increase in price will be used to improve services at Dunbar station. Additional CCTV cameras are being installed in 2009, for example."

At the time of editing this article, no response has been forthcoming from NEXC.

However, our Dunbar representative informs us that discussions continue with regard to additional car parking space at Dunbar.

Timetable changes in December

It is now in the past, but it has to be mentioned that the arrangements for service agreements for trains stopping at Dunbar was somewhat inadequate. At least four trains were "missing" from the on-line timetables when the three-month rolling booking period reached the start of the new timetables. These were the 11:05 and 13:05 ex-Edinburgh, the 23:22 Fridays only ex-Edinburgh and the 13:44 Sundays only north-bound ex-Dunbar.

The first two appeared fairly quickly,

but RAGES and more importantly the passengers did not know if the Friday night train would run until its first due date of 19th December. The previous Friday, rail staff had announced that it was its last run! There were many e-mails from all agencies during that week saying that it would run, but it did not appear in the on-line timetables. Richard Gibson, Head of Communications of Arriva CrossCountry, with whom RAGES was in contact in all these timetable matters gave an explanation:

"Firstly, my apologies for the confusing information provided by the Train Manager last week. They should have been aware steps were being taken to ensure its continuation and I have asked our local managers in Scotland to re-brief their people.

"While we have finally confirmed with Network Rail a path for this train to travel to Dunbar, unfortunately it looks as though the systems will not have updated with the information in time for this evening's service. Consequently, while I am assured the train will operate, unless we are able to provide a manual override it will not be shown on

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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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Berwick News

By Brian Patton

“The buses do not connect with the trains here” observed the overseas visitor, with more sadness than anger in his voice, as we watched the tail lights of the 60 rail link bus disappear up the ramp at Berwick station. We had just alighted from the 17:08 hrs from Waverley – still made up of four cars only – and had hoped to catch the 17:47 bus. When that train was the 17:05, there was a sporting chance of doing so, but since its departure has been put back by three minutes, it is virtually impossible. The episode once again made me reflect on the total lack of co-ordination in which we specialise, and how odd this must seem to visitors. In 2006 I outlined to the public transport officer of Scottish Borders Council (SBC) the many “near misses” at Berwick and he said that they would be reviewed in 2008. That year has now come and gone and, as usual with anything involving SBC, nothing at all has been done to improve matters.

To return to the tourist. I reassured him that there was another departure for Duns in 55 minutes and that it was not worth spending £20+ on a cab. He then asked if I could help him to understand the fare structure on our railways, as he found it all rather confusing. I tried, but only made matters worse and we repaired to the booking office, where we found Rose on duty. With her usual efficiency, she was able to give some coherent information and, as we left, he said that he thought her most helpful. I wondered if he would have had the same standard of service from a ticket machine?

One cannot start a journey south from Waverley now without having to listen to a lecture on the importance of having the correct ticket, for the correct train company, for the correct date and sitting in the correct seat (in addition to minding the gap, taking care on the platform when it rains, keeping our luggage with us at all times etc, etc) and I often wonder how necessary all this rigmarole is and how it strikes visitors, particularly when threats of the “full single fare” are repeated ad nauseam. I have recently several times used advance purchase tickets on Deutsche Bahn – a good bargain if you are travelling around Germany – and noticed that DBAG pays its passengers the compliment of assuming that they are adults, who will make sure that they board the correct train, sit in the correct seat, have the wit to take care on the platform when it rains and keep an eye on their luggage, all without a lecture beforehand. And yet they seem to have fewer problems than we do. How do they manage it? Could it be that constant streams of verbiage are in the end ignored?

It was good to hear from our MSP, John Lamont, that his survey into local transport received a 57% response rate. As anyone who has ever run an exercise of this kind will confirm, this is exceptionally high and it suggests that transport is more important to many voters than most politicians imagine. It is certainly unusual to find one, at local or national level, who devotes such attention to it. It was also good to note that many respondents mentioned the matter of a station at Reston. Sadly, current plans formulated by the government seem to suggest that this question, and the associated one of a local service to Berwick, are not at present a high priority

The matter of ticket gates seems to have moved up the agenda of National Express East Coast (NEXC) and we may

see them at Berwick quite soon. None of the questions mentioned in the last issue of the Rag have as yet been answered, but perhaps more will be said in due course. Certainly gates will have to be staffed at all times, to comply with accessibility regulations apart from anything else. It is likely that the matter is connected with a later introduction of smart cards, which is a franchise requirement. A very recent notice that meal service in dining carriages will now be restricted to peak hours only would suggest that this particular TOC may be worried about one of its other franchise commitments.

We have been able to welcome Lucy to the office staff at Berwick, now that she has completed her training, and appreciate her efficient and cheerful service.

Trains have generally run well during the last few months. It was good to note that, when, sadly, there was a fatality on the line at Durham one morning, passengers were told what had happened, instead of being fobbed off with vague mention of “technical problems” as was the case in the past. Our collective sympathy went out to all who had been involved in this event, in whatever capacity. As suggested above, passengers are adults who are aware that such awful things happen on railways, and that railway staff have to be prepared to deal with them, at some emotional cost to themselves.

Introduction of the new timetable was marked by considerable confusion over Arriva trains which seemed to have been withdrawn and were then reinstated. The company did put up notices to give the correct position, but only after printed timetables and on-line information had repeated the errors. It looked bad. One Berwick call which seems to have been permanently deleted is that of the 19:39 ex-Newcastle, due in Berwick at 20:23, thus opening up a gap of almost two hours in the Newcastle-Berwick-Edinburgh service.

Unfortunately the holiday period was marred by one cancellation which must have upset the travel plans of many people. On 30 December the 09:30 ex-Waverley was cancelled without replacement and such was the commotion in the concourse that I was not able to catch the explanation of why this had been done and so cannot fully comment. However, it was good to see that someone managed to persuade the powers-that-be to stop a later train and thus spare passengers the anticipated wait until 11:42. It is a sad comment on present-day operations that TOCs cannot keep spare stock to cover such eventualities, but no doubt this is because they have to comply with the conditions imposed by the Westminster government when franchises are let.

Sadly, Berwick has now lost the Costa cafe at the station. It closed, presumably due to lack of business, early this month and has now been dismantled. Travellers will miss the good food and pleasant service.

An Anniversary

Those of you observant and arithmetically minded will a) have noticed that this is the 40th edition of *The Rages Rag* and b) being a quarterly publication means that it is 10 years since RAGES came into being - January 1999.

RAGES has achieved a lot in that time, not without difficulty, but there is still much to be done. Whilst the current recession will make progress difficult, investment must be made now to ensure an improved railway is in place for the revival.

Dunbar Woes

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departure boards or online timetables. We will try to ensure the train is announced at stations so customers are aware.

"When the system updates again in the next few days the train will finally become 'visible' to customers. We will also be reproducing the online timetables customers can download from our website to include this train and it will be shown in any future reprint.

"Again, I must say we have worked hard to accommodate what was a very last minute request from Transport Scotland to operate this train and the delay in confirming its running has not been caused by CrossCountry. While it is disappointing not to have completed the process by the first date of its operation, I do feel we have done everything we could in the short time available."

Whilst we think it is easy to run a train down to Dunbar, Richard noted that: "The empty stock working back to Edinburgh produced a problem in negotiating the move of a freight train which had the path."

Just after New Year, a member noted that the Sunday 13:44 northbound from Dunbar was no longer running. It was also noted that the NXEC timetables had the connection in its printed copies.

An explanation came from Richard: "My understanding is this train will resume again from the May timetable. Because of Network Rail engineering work it was never intended to operate in this timetable period - hence it not being shown in our timetables. The timetable cards you mention were incorrectly produced by another train company, and I was under the impression they were being withdrawn and reproduced."

RAGES must say that, during this period as at other times Richard Gibson has been very prompt in answering our e-mails.

Our Dunbar representative also notes that they are looking to make Dunbar one of their green station with possible installation of solar panels and that he is also pressing for a "meet the manager" meeting every quarter with commuters and RAGES, hopefully by Easter 2009.

Edinburgh Integrated Electronic Control Centre

Not many readers will know that Edinburgh's new "signal box" is a fenced-off uninspiring building in the New Street car park next to Waverley station.

This is the fourth generation of signal control in Edinburgh: "traditional" lever operated semaphore signals; mini-lever colour light signals from 1936 to 1976; panel-operated signals until 2007; and now state-of-the-art VDU workstations. The first type only controlled small parts of Waverley and required four boxes. In 1936, these were replaced by two boxes, one at each end of the station, but in 1976 even these two were replaced by one which was



One of the previous panels

gradually extended to cover not only the immediate area around Edinburgh, but also down to the Scottish border just north of Berwick-On-Tweed, towards Carstairs, Falkirk, Bathgate, and almost all of Fife - representing 229 route miles; 429 single track miles; 523 main signals; 251 position light signals; 439 point ends; and 1326 track circuits.

The IECC consists of seven signaller's workstations, two supervisor's workstations, and various subsystems which will provide comprehensive fault diagnostics and monitoring, automatic route setting (ARS), interfacing with adjacent signalling centres and other equipment, and timetable editing facilities.

The signaller can see the trains moving through their area of responsibility - quite different from the old days when he looked out of his window! Each workstation has several VDU displays some of which could zoom into more detail. The track is detailed showing signals and points. When a train occupies a section of line, the track turns red with the train identifier in a small box. With a roller ball, the signaller can manipulate a cursor to select a route which then changes the track colour to white. The majority of train movements are pre-determined and

fed into the system the previous night. A further display shows which trains are approaching and details such as timekeeping. If all is going well, the signaller does not need to intervene as the routes are set up automatically with ARS. Occasionally intervention is required to direct a slow train into a passing loop to allow an express to pass or a locomotive being used for driver training. These are non-ARS trains and their identifiers show up in pink.

Level crossings have a camera link showing the crossing and when it is clear of road traffic the signaller presses a button to close the gates. Once down, the railway signal can then be changed to show a clear route.

During the day there are around a dozen people involved in



One of the new workstations

the centre - there being 40 signallers (3 ladies) on a two-shift rota. There is also a relief signaller who visits each workstation during the shift to allow for breaks.

Typically there are over 3200 trains in a 24 hour period with the west end of the Waverley panel handling almost 1000 movements!

Network Rail have a training simulator at Leeds for new recruits and nowadays most are fresh to the railway industry. Offices at Leeds also prepare the evening timetable downloads which included platform occupation at Waverley.

For those interested in signalling and/or simulators, there is a web site - www.simsig.co.uk - from which downloads of IECC's can be obtained. These simulators look very like the workstations we saw, but are fed by simulated trains which react very realistically.

Newcraighall Services

For members using Newcraighall, from 15 December these services are no longer associated with Bathgate and Dunblane, but going through Edinburgh to the Fife Circle. It remains a half-hourly service, but at different times from previously. The timings are not as consistent as now, so best consult the timetable.

On asking First ScotRail as to the reason for this change, their response was:

“The Route Utilisation Strategy for Scotland proposed that for the benefit of performance the Edinburgh Crossrail should be turned into a Newcraighall-Waverley shuttle.

“However following representations from Councils and others it was found possible to retain through services to and from Haymarket by switching Newcraighall to Fife and thus using the north tracks through Waverley where they can be more easily accommodated.

“The service now becomes symmetrical - i.e. both from and to generally the Cowdenbeath side of the Circle instead of from Bathgate but to Dunblane - and calls at South Gyle instead of Edinburgh Park.”

RAGES hopes that this change will ensure that there are less “operational problems” which prevent services reaching Newcraighall.

Consultation on Initiatives Related to the ScotRail Franchise Extension

RAGES was invited to respond, and have responded, to the above consultation. We have responded in particular to the "Additional services between Dunbar and Edinburgh" proposed initiative in line with our group's aims.

The results of the consultation are not yet available at the time of going to press.

Tram Trains

Allison Cosgrove and Brian Patton attended a recent Edinburgh meeting of Railfuture, with whom RAGES are affiliated. Tram trains are much talked about in the media and feature well abroad. Brian has prepared this brief summary of the talk given by Scott MacIntosh of Mott MacDonald.

There is nothing new in the idea of a vehicle which can run equally well on main line railways and city tramways. More recently, the Manchester Metrolink has increased passenger numbers by 400% on the lines over which it operates. Increased interest is now being taken in the concept by the various authorities which control the railway system.

The advantages of a tram train are:

- It is lighter than a conventional train and thus inflicts less wear and tear on the track.
- It can operate on line of sight and does not of itself require full railway signalling.
- It can leave the railway alignment at the edge of a city's central area and run onwards to the centre on street. This has the advantage of both relieving main line stations which have reached the limit of their capacity and also of bringing passengers nearer to their main destinations – shops, offices, colleges, theatres etc.
- Stations can be much simpler than those built to main line standards, with low platforms. They can be made fully accessible at much less cost and, in particular, they do not legally require footbridges or subways in this context, thus becoming much more easily afforded.
- The vehicles have faster acceleration than a conventional train. This means that additional stops can be inserted along a route without increasing overall journey times.
- They generally have low floors and are therefore very easy of access to passengers who have some kind of impediment, whether a disability, heavy luggage or children in a push chair.

- The cars can be powered either by diesel engines or run on electricity. In the latter case they can be multi-voltage, such as 750V DC for on-street running and 25kV AC for railway running. (SNCF vehicles).
- They have been shown to attract many more passengers to lines which are not in themselves profitable and either turn a loss into a small profit or reduce the amount of subsidy required. This will make them attractive to government which may not in future be prepared to continue subsidies at the current level.

The speaker then suggested some routes on which such tram trains could operate in Scotland. These included some Glasgow suburban lines, the West Highland, Kyle and Far North lines, possibly on the Waverley line or a line around Gorebridge, which could feed into both that and the future Edinburgh tram line 3. It could also run westwards over the South suburban line to the Gyle, and perhaps link up with tram line 2. He regards the South Suburban line on its own as a non-starter. On the Far North line the tram trains could use a new crossing of the Dornoch Firth via the bridge, thus both serving that town and shortening the journey to Thurso by up to 45 minutes. He does not think that they could be used on the ECML, as there is already too much traffic on it. He stressed that it is important to consider these options now, as replacement of the earlier diesel units of classes 150, 156 and 158 will soon have to be considered.

Brian, however, is not convinced about the Far North or West Highland lines - problems with snow, apart from anything else - but he thinks that there is a place for tram trains in the Strathclyde area. He also raised the possibility of an extension of the Waverley line from Tweedbank, if they were to be used on it, as that point is not a natural terminus, does not in itself serve central Galashiels and is a long walk from Borders General Hospital.

We should keep our eye on developments.