

# The Rages Rag

Newsletter of Rail Action Group, East of Scotland

www.rages.org.uk

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## RAGES ups the Campaign

Last month the RAGES committee decided to raise the profile of the campaign for better rail opportunities in East Lothian and Berwickshire. Despite recent encouraging talks with the Minister for Transport, we have launched a postcard campaign.

This postcard, which is sent to the Minister for Transport, shows four railway sites on one side and a plea to him to expedite the Aims of RAGES to see stations re-opened at these sites along with a local service via Dunbar to Berwick. The four photographs are: Dunbar, Haddington, East Linton and Reston.

The postcard has been printed by a local printer in Dunbar.

Members will find two postcards with this newsletter and are asked to add their name, address and postcode and to post it to the Minister. The other could be given to a family member or a friend for them to do likewise.

Members who receive this newsletter by e-mail will be told how they can be involved with the newsletter's e-mail.

So far we have distributed almost 400 postcards.

The launch was at the recent East Linton fair where Allison and Barrie had a stall to promote our aims. Over 80 postcards were signed on that day and posted over the next few days.

The Queen Margaret University, a member of RAGES, is very keen to improve the rail opportunities for their students and lecturers to be able to attend the university. Those from east of Drem have no easy access by public transport. The University invited RAGES to attend their recent Travel Clinic. Barrie, Harald and Russell manned the stall and had around 120 postcards signed.

The committee is considering attending other local organisations to promote this postcard campaign.

At our Annual General Meeting, the postcard was met with enthusiasm and many were taken away - indeed some members have asked for more!

We were fortunate to get funding towards the costs of the postcard printing and stamps through the Association of Community Councils using funds from LEADER.

LEADER is part of the Scottish Rural Development Programme aimed at promoting economic and community development within rural areas. Support is aimed primarily at small-scale, community driven projects that are pilot and innovative in nature.

RAGES would like to thank those who have already kick-started our new initiative.

## Extra trains to North Berwick

First ScotRail (FSR) recently announced that the extra 23:37 hrs Friday and Saturday service to North Berwick for the duration of the Edinburgh Festival had been a success with an average of 100 passengers on each of the journeys.

FSR are considering the merits of making this service permanent.

They have also announced that the new timetable introduces additional services from Sunday 13 December, bringing benefits to thousands of passengers. Amongst these are earlier morning services from various points in their network allowing better connections to London.

One of these is the 06:09 hrs (Monday to Saturday) from North Berwick arriving in Edinburgh at 06:44, stopping at the usual stations.

## 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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# Local Service Progress

In the last issue of our newsletter, it was reported that the outcome of the ScotRail Franchise Consultation appeared to be somewhat disappointing for our area. At the regular meeting hosted by East Lothian Council in Haddington, it had been agreed that the councils would write to the Minister for Transport asking for clarification on the recommendations. The Minister responded with an invitation to meet him at Holyrood.

On 2nd September, Barrie Forrest, vice-chair of RAGES, attended that meeting, along with: Iain Gray, MSP for East Lothian; John Lamont, MSP for Berwickshire and Roxburgh; Paul McLennan, East Lothian Councillor; Jim Fullarton, Scottish Borders Council; and Russell Imrie, SEStran. Stewart Stevenson, Minister for Transport, was supported at the meeting by a representative from Transport Scotland.

The outcome of the meeting was very encouraging as the Minister explained that he was about to sign First ScotRail's takeover in December 2010 of the existing 06:40 hrs from Dunbar to Edinburgh and the Fridays only 23:19 hrs Edinburgh to Dunbar services as well as a new weekday service around 21:30 hrs from Edinburgh to Dunbar. These had been part of the outcome of the Consultation. The main reason for the meeting was to discuss the proposed study into a local service. The Minister clarified the situation by stating that this study would start before the end of 2009 and not as we had read into the consultation 2010. It would take the form of a Development Study and be funded by the Scottish Government to look at the re-opening of East Linton and Reston stations together with an hourly service between Edinburgh and Dunbar and would be completed within twelve months.

Barrie Forrest said "I welcome the continued support of John Lamont and Iain Gray for the local train services and new stations at Reston and East Linton. I emphasised to the Transport Minister that many Berwickshire residents feel that they are often forgotten about when it comes to public investment. However, I believe that there was positive news from the Minister that progress will soon be made."

John Lamont said later that: "This is extremely welcome news and is a step in the right direction. Whilst the Scottish Government had previously indicated that it was supportive of the re-opening of the station at Reston, there was growing frustration that more progress was not being made to move this project forward. The Transport Minister has confirmed that the Government is ready to move to the next stage and expects to do so shortly."

East Berwickshire councillor Jim Fullarton said: "Scottish Borders Council remains committed to the re-opening of the station at Reston. There has been some doubt as to whether the local councils or the Government would be funding the next stage of this project but I am delighted that the Transport Minister has now made it absolutely clear that the Government will be paying for the Development Study. The Minister has suggested that he will give the go ahead for this shortly and the study should be completed within 12 months."

In addition Iain Gray said: "Better train services for the county (East Lothian) are a step nearer we met Transport Minister Stewart Stevenson to discuss the issue. There has been much frustration locally that possible improvements to East Lothian rail services, such as a better Dunbar service and a station at East Linton, have been overtaken by other rail

projects elsewhere in the county. The meeting made that clear to the minister that we were concerned by the slow rate of progress. Dunbar is a growing town and it needs a greatly improved rail service to reflect that. Progress is still far too slow in my view, but welcome nonetheless"

## Follow-on meeting

On the 14th September, RAGES was again involved in the regular meeting hosted and arranged by Cllr Paul McLennan and East Lothian Council. Also present were councillors and staff from both East Lothian and Scottish Borders Councils and SEStran.

All round the table were pleased with the outcome of the recent meeting with the Minister of Transport which had been arranged by our local MSPs.

Particularly of note was the clarification that Transport Scotland will work with First ScotRail to carry out a study, to start before the end of this year, to examine the case for an hourly service between Edinburgh and Dunbar. This study will also consider services from Edinburgh to Berwick with extension to Newcastle and the possibility of new stations at East Linton and Reston. The study will take the form of a business case and should be complete within a year.

Both councils suggested that the study should include the economic benefits to both council areas and SEStran would inquire about this with Transport Scotland.

Transport Scotland had also indicated that they would consider the case for the suggested 21:30 hrs Monday to Thursday First ScotRail service due to start in December 2010 to be somewhat later to maximise patronage - National Express already run a 21:00 hrs service.

At the meeting, RAGES raised the possibility of CrossCountry who will be continuing to run the early morning service from Dunbar and the Fridays only to Dunbar, until First ScotRail take it over, extending these two services to Berwick. RAGES will request this extension.

Also mooted when First ScotRail started the services in December 2010 was:

- the inclusion of two intermediate stops, eg Musselburgh and Drem
- as First ScotRail will have to run through Waverley, unlike CrossCountry at present, perhaps the empty coaching stock runs could become "proper" services.

Although Transport Scotland had suggested that a year was required for driver training for the track between Drem and Dunbar, it was thought that this was a bit pessimistic.

With the probability of National Express losing the East Coast franchise, the meeting thought that there was the opportunity for First ScotRail to take over the running of Dunbar station at that point, particularly when they will be running trains there from December 2010. Although they would not have a presence there for a year, they already manage Lockerbie station and have no trains to that station.

RAGES was pleased with the press coverage of the meeting with the Minister with articles of varying sizes in the Scotsman, the Edinburgh Evening News, the Berwickshire News, the East Lothian News and the East Lothian Courier.

# Berwick News

On the whole train services have run fairly well, that is until we reached the beginning of September. On 3rd September an incident near Grantham and floods much nearer home caused severe delays to ECML services. Worse was to come on Sunday 6th September when a points failure near Drem led to the termination of three northbound trains at Berwick, with the end result that about 900 people were milling around Berwick station and vicinity and the police had to be called in to control the crowds. Buses were ordered to take the passengers on to Edinburgh, but although promised for 14:45 these did not show up until three hours later, by which time trains were running again. The situation was exacerbated by some Japanese visitors who somehow managed to secure a replacement coach for themselves and when this arrived at Berwick, there was almost a riot as other passengers naturally thought that it would take them onwards. How visitors from abroad, not native English speakers, could manage to do what National Express East Coast (Nxec) could not arrange is beyond belief. The entire incident was a fine example of how not to do it and “customers” who are endlessly thanked for “choosing to travel with Nxec” when everything is running smoothly may think twice about so doing in future. The effect on staff morale must also have been adverse.

On 15 September Brian Patton attended a reception held by Passenger Focus in Newcastle to which RAGES had received an invitation. We had an address by the chairman of Nexus, the Tyne and Wear Integrated Transport Authority. While it was an interesting evening, there was nothing of particular relevance to our area and I still wonder why Scotland was deprived of its own passenger representative group when Passenger Focus was created.

## The Tenth Annual General Meeting

The RAGES tenth annual general meeting was held on 9th September in the West Barns Bowling Club in Dunbar.

The chairman, Tom Thorburn, welcomed 14 members and one guest. He noted that 24 apologies had been received.

Other than the venue not being included, the minutes were agreed to be an accurate record. Adoption was proposed by Barrie Forrest and seconded by Harald Vox.

### Resume of Activities during the Year

Tom spoke on the year’s activities, noting the following:

- BBC Landward programme had featured Reston Station site with Barrie taking the lead role
- £70m made available for improvements across the ScotRail network. A consultation had been issued to which RAGES had responded, seeking better services to Dunbar.
- Continue to correspond with National Express on high parking charges at Dunbar Station
- Good to note that the North Berwick service has run well throughout the year with only minor problems
- SEStran meetings have again been hosted by Cllr McLennan at East Lothian Council. A direct result of these meetings has been the meeting with the Minister recently.
- The group’s postcard campaign was launched at East Linton Community Fair and will be continued at Queen Margaret University Open Day on 23 September. Postcards are also being distributed by the Committee.

### Secretary’s Report

Allison noted that the change of meeting venue had gone reasonably well. A grant had been applied for to help with the cost of the postcards. Printing costs of the RAG were also quite low.

### Treasurer’s Report

All documents were with the Auditor. The balance in the Bank as at 28 August was £666.93.

### Membership Report

There were currently 130 members, 22 less than the previous year. 78% had renewed and there were 7 new members. Reston and Dunbar accounted for 50% of membership. Six Community Councils were members.

Four newsletters had been issued over the year, with e-rags issued as and when required.

The website was regularly updated.

A pro-rail group in Cupar had contacted RAGES for advice on setting up a similar group.

A question from the floor was whether the Rages Rag could be published on Dunbar Community website.

### Election of Office Bearers

Tom Thorburn was proposed as Chair by Joyce McLean and seconded by Russell Darling. As there were no other contenders, Tom was duly elected.

The re-election of the Committee *en bloc* was proposed by Geoff Evison and seconded by Joyce McLean.

### Any Other Competent Business

It was agreed to retain the level of subscriptions at £4.00.

Tom recognised the work done by Cllr Berry towards a local rail service, as he had hosted a meeting with the new Managing Director of First ScotRail, Steve Montgomery, and had written to the Minister for Transport regarding statistics on rail usage at Dunbar.

Barrie and Tom had written to David Hume, Chief Executive at Scottish Borders Council, asking why representation from Scottish Borders Council towards the aims of RAGES were not the same as representation on the Waverley Line.

The meeting ended with a vote of thanks to Tom for his work as Chair during the year.

# Response from National Express

RAGES recently received replies from National Express (NEXE) on several matters concerning our members.

On the cost of parking at Dunbar station. One of the replies came back via Anne Moffat MP to say that:

“The daily car park charge at Dunbar railway station remains significantly lower than at other NEXE-managed stations on the East Coast main line.

“Big discounts are also available for season ticket holders, who travel on regulated fares and represent the majority market at Dunbar.

“Dunbar is not the only railway station in Scotland to charge for car parking. Some ... ScotRail-managed stations also make a charge, which in some cases is higher than that at Dunbar.

“At Dunbar, we have been liaising with East Lothian Council to explore ways in which car parking provision can be further enlarged and improved.”

On the subject of re-imburement for season ticket holders:

“When National Express took over the East Coast Franchise we introduced a new compensation policy 'Delay Repay' covering delays and cancellations. This policy covers all customers and compensation is awarded in the form of Rail Travel vouchers towards the purchase / renewal of a new season ticket. This policy was well publicised at all stations so I am concerned that customers did not appear to know about it.”

On the cleanliness etc. of their trains:

“I accept that some of our trains are not in the condition we would wish. National Express inherited the fleet of trains from the previous franchisee that had commenced a refurbishment programme of the trains. We continue to refurbish the HST fleet and this should be completed by the end of this year.

“The cleanliness of our trains and toilet facilities are improving. We have introduced internal cleanliness / hygiene measures and onboard cleaners and we continue to make changes and improvements on all of our services to ensure our customers experience a clean and comfortable journey.”

## Council News

East Lothian Council met Steve Montgomery, Managing Director of First ScotRail, recently and had a fruitful discussion. They have agreed to look at how they can work together in promoting tourism in the county, by looking at the cross-marketing potential and branding of the North Berwick service.

### Dunbar Station

Cllr Paul McLennan recently met with National Express to look at the possibility of Dunbar becoming a “green station”. National Express are looking at the possibility of installing solar panels, wind turbines and other energy-saving proposals.

Also discussed was the need for additional bike racks in the station to support walking and cycling commuters. [Ed - this has also been raised by a Dunbar member and RAGES is writing to NEXE]

## Haddington News

As well as the postcard campaign highlighting the lack of a railway line to Haddington, following a suggestion to the committee we have written to East Lothian Council asking that a study into the possible re-instatement of the line from Longniddry with a re-opened station at Haddington be undertaken.

It is ten years since an East Lothian Rail Study identified this possibility. At that time it was not economic to do so, but the study suggested that the case should be re-looked at within the next ten years. That timescale is now past.

### Membership

We now have around 135 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.