

The Rages Rag

Newsletter of Rail Action Group, East of Scotland

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Proposed East Coast Timetable from May 2011

A summary by Brian Patton

Since the first meeting in November 2009, matters have moved on and East Coast management has obviously decided that it would be unwise to rush to bring in this timetable in December of this year, as originally planned. A revised version has been circulated but it has just been announced that a further draft of the week-day timetable will be circulated in mid-April and that interested parties will have an opportunity to comment before this is finalised in mid-summer. The Department for Transport (DfT) has stated that work on the weekend timetable is still not far enough advanced to allow the release of a draft, but it is intended to circulate one along with the revised week-day version in mid-April.

As matters stand at present, the draft timetable offers many advantages over the existing services and this must be welcomed, despite the rather silly name with which it has been launched to the public (Eureka). As mentioned elsewhere, the information bus visited Berwick recently and, although much of this visit was a waste of time, it did bring an opportunity to clarify some points of detail. The matter of future rolling stock for service on the East Coast main line has since then been put into some doubt, since the DfT has decided to postpone ordering the new trains of the Super Express (SEP) design pending the outcome of a review and, if this project is then cancelled, the existing plans may have to be further revised.

Basically the present draft proposes a service of five trains per hour between London and the main cities served by East Coast. These would be on a regular interval basis and would provide the following services:

- One train per hour to Edinburgh, running in 4 hours 20 minutes. It would be non-stop to York and thereafter call at Darlington, Newcastle and Berwick.
- One train per hour to Leeds, calling at Peterborough, Doncaster and Wakefield
- One train per hour to Newark, then going on alternately to York and Lincoln
- One stopping train per hour to Newcastle, this being extended on alternate hours to Edinburgh with a call at Alnmouth, but not Berwick
- One stopping train per hour to Leeds.

Additional services at week-ends would offer two trains per hour to Edinburgh, though it is not clear if both of these would serve Berwick.

If further track and infrastructure improvements, such as a flyover at Hitchin to take Cambridge trains over the main line,

are carried out by Network Rail, it would be possible to provide a service of six trains per hour north from London.

The service provided to Berwick would clearly be much better than it is at present and would have the advantage of being on a regular basis. However, there are also drawbacks:

- There would be only one through East Coast train to and from Glasgow. It is proposed that most services to and from Glasgow would be provided by CrossCountry, with trains starting in Leeds or Sheffield and thus providing some improved through facilities. However, nothing has been published by the latter operator and it is not clear what the timetable would be. Nor has it been said what type of train would operate on these services and, given the degree of overcrowding often experienced on Cross Country services south of Leeds, it is not certain that that operator actually has sufficient spare train to take on the commitment to provide a North East of England to Glasgow service. Instead of hauled carriages, it is possible that trains would be made up of diesel multiple units, with only a trolley refreshment service, and this could lead to a proposal to de-electrify the Edinburgh – Carstairs line. That would certainly be a retrograde step.
- Through journeys from Berwick to Lincolnshire and East Anglia, at present possible with one change of train at Doncaster or Peterborough, would require two changes en route.

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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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Proposed East Coast Timetable

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- The question of through services to Aberdeen and Inverness has not been detailed and cancellation of the SEP project would possibly lead to withdrawal of these when the excellent HST trains are finally retired in 2013/4.
- Dunbar seems set to lose all but a couple of through trains to and from London.
- No consideration has been given to the effect of the changes in times at Berwick on the 60 Rail Link bus service to and from Galashiels. It is doubtful if East Coast management was even aware of its existence, despite the availability of through tickets.
- There seems to have been little consideration given to the effect on the services of other operators, a

consequence of the fragmented nature of railway operations in Britain since privatisation by the Conservative government in the 1990s. It is understood that operators of freight trains also have considerable reservations about the proposals. Our colleagues in Northumberland have again raised this point with the DfT and will continue to stress the importance of this matter. RAGES will work closely with them to ensure that the needs of Berwick and Dunbar passengers are not overlooked.

RAGES has responded to this consultation in detail to East Coast.

Reston News

By Barrie Forrest

I accepted an invitation from John Lamont MSP to meet Theresa Villiers MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Transport on her visit to Reston to discuss the dualing of the A1 road. On our walk from Reston post office to the A1 I took the opportunity to inform the Shadow Secretary of the aims of RAGES and the campaign to have Reston station re-opened with a local service to Berwick. I also commented to her that engineering works were the excuse from Transport Scotland preventing a late Dunbar to Berwick Saturday night service - emphasizing that the last train from Edinburgh leaves at 19:00 hrs. On thanking her for coming to Reston I gave her copies of the Rages Rags!

Back to school

Recently I attended Reston School having received an invitation along with the former headmaster from Ayton School Graham Dolan, who is also a rail enthusiast, to give one of the classes a talk about the history of Reston station and the Berwickshire Railway. I was most impressed with the way the young pupils listened and then asked questions. We hope to be able to take the same class for a short walk along part of old Reston Junction to Chirnside railway walk.

What was most encouraging was that near the end of the talk I asked how many of the pupils would go on the train if Reston station was opened and they ALL put their hands up!

As well as giving the teacher a copy of the latest Rages Rag, I explained about the RAGES postcard campaign. She has given postcards to the class to take home to their parents to ask their consent to send them to the Transport Minister - after all it is these young children that are going to benefit most if the station is opened.

I finished by thanking the teacher for inviting me to speak about Reston and the aims of RAGES - a most enjoyable afternoon spent at the school where I first went to and a big thank you to the class who were excellent.

Driver Training to Dunbar



It is certainly "Welcome to Dunbar" for First ScotRail's class 322s whose drivers started undergoing route training to Dunbar in mid-February in preparation for the new mid morning and mid afternoon services between Edinburgh and Dunbar starting on May 24th 2010.

The morning services will be from Edinburgh at 10:00 hrs and leaving Dunbar at 10:57 arriving back at Edinburgh at 11:28. The afternoon service will be from Edinburgh at 14:21, stopping at Musselburgh at 14:30. It will return from Dunbar at 15:04, stop at Musselburgh at 15:25 and arrive at Edinburgh at 15:34. The late night Monday to Thursday service from Edinburgh will be at 22:08 with arrival at Dunbar at 22:40.

The RAGES Committee invites members (at their own expense!) to join them on the first service from Edinburgh at 10:00 returning from Dunbar at 10:57.

East Coast Franchise Consultation

Attended by Brian Patton

RAGES was invited to a meeting to discuss the East Coast Franchise held in Edinburgh on Tuesday 16 March to which I attended. There were twelve people present in the audience and the main presentation was given by Geoffrey Appleby, Franchise Replacement Sponsor at the Department for Transport. A short talk was also given by Guy Dangerfield of Passenger Focus, setting out the results of its survey of passenger opinion on the ECML.

It is intended that the new franchise will be let to come into operation at the end of 2011 and operation under its terms will be based on the new timetable which it is hoped to bring into operation in May 2011. There was consideration of including London suburban services in the franchise, but in the end this proposal was not taken forward. The term of the franchise will be ten years, to encourage investment and allow for possible complete fleet renewal. That last point was set out before the SEP project was called in for review.

The ECML is dominated by passenger flows in the eastern part of England and by journeys to and from London, which account for 57% of all journeys made. The number of journeys made between Peterborough and London in 2008/9 was of the order of 1.8 million. However, there are significant flows outwith that area and of particular interest to RAGES members are the numbers of 124,000 between Newcastle and Glasgow and 116,000 between Dunbar and Edinburgh. These two markets grew between 2002/3 and 2008/9 by 29% and 23% respectively. No separate figures for Berwick are given in the consultation document. The majority of journeys to and from Edinburgh and Glasgow are leisure trips, but there are also a significant number of work-related trips. No separate figures are given for the Edinburgh to Glasgow section, on which it is proposed to discontinue all but one daily East Coast train.

The main objectives to be considered in the letting of the new franchise are:

- To achieve sustainable value for money. Presumably this is considered from the viewpoint of the British Government.
- To improve performance and provide a service in line with stakeholder and passenger aspirations, including such points as value for money and provision of information.
- To provide a service in line with current and future growth in demand.
- To improve accessibility to trains and stations, including car parking and access and storage for cycles.
- To improve the overall environmental performance.
- To ensure that the benefits of infrastructure and rolling stock modernisation are passed on to the passenger.

There is some possibility of the introduction of smart cards and much emphasise on revenue protection, in the context of a

possible simplification of ticket types which is currently under review. Fortunately there seems to be no suggestion on any further introduction of gates at stations.

Other points raised in the consultation document relate to closer co-operation with Network Rail in the matter of repairs affecting week-end travel, on-board catering and improvements at stations. It is suggested that almost all trains should provide a trolley and buffet service, a service of hot meals and a full dining carriage service.

In discussion those present raised points such as:

- The need to attract people who at present do not use trains, and for whom the prospect of organising a rail journey can be quite off-putting.
- The need to remember that the period of the franchise will include not only the Olympic Games (in London), but also the Commonwealth Games in 2014 (in Glasgow).
- The matter of open access operations and the wisdom of continuing to have East Coast trains serve Hull and Northallerton.
- The matter of using reduced fare tickets when a round trip may involve using the trains of different operators.
- Links to Europe via St Pancras.
- Provision for cycles on trains.
- The matter of services to and from Dunbar and the introduction of a ScotRail service to that station, with a possible later extension to Berwick.
- The need to consider also the views of freight operators, who are apparently not altogether happy with the current proposals.
- The possibility that the period covered by this franchise could see Scottish independence come into effect.

It was a useful meeting and those present appreciated that the staff concerned had given considerably of their time to this and similar meetings held elsewhere. Having said that, the usefulness of having a consultation relating to only one operator's trains on the ECML must be questioned. From the Scottish perspective, it is also regrettable that, although the views of Transport Scotland are taken into account, these are not binding on the Department for Transport. Even if the question of Scottish independence mentioned above does not actually come about, it is very likely that there will be a demand for greater powers generally for Holyrood and this possibility should have been taken into account when preparing the franchise specification.

RAGES has replied to the DfT within the railfuture submission from its branches along the route.

Membership

We now have around 140 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.

Berwick News

By Brian Patton

Work on the glazing of the station has now finished and the result is excellent. The new material – it is not clear if it is actually called glass – allows an increased amount of light to reach the platforms and the already bright appearance of the station has been increased considerably. It is good to record that the work was carried out with minimal inconvenience to passengers and staff and completed in a fairly short space of time, despite interruptions caused by high winds and later by snow and ice later.

Apart from delays caused by weather conditions, train services have generally run well. As always it has been noticeable that most of the delays which have occurred have been to northbound services and as a result of incidents happening far to the south of Berwick. One notable delay was when services had to be suspended between Edinburgh and Newcastle on 30 and 31 March, due to landslips, but they resumed on 1 April, with slightly extended journey times.

On the evening of Friday 26 February, police in some numbers had to attend the 21:00 hrs service from Edinburgh following disturbances on board. The incident once again showed the inconvenience, aggression and unpleasant travelling conditions which passengers and railway staff often have to endure, especially at week-ends, as a result of the conduct of an anti-social minority of other travellers.

The bus which has been visiting East Coast stations to inform passengers of the proposed new timetable arrived at Berwick on the afternoon of Monday 22 February and I attended an on-board session, along with Barrie Forrest, RAGES vice chairman. About half a dozen other people were present and the session was, to say the least, animated. One matter which gave rise to particular concern was the proposed withdrawal of the call by the 17:30 hrs ex-Waverley. [*Ed - see note at the end of this article*] Unfortunately the very pleasant member of East Coast staff who was present had been given no information of the background to the proposed changes - his only functions being to drive the bus and inform visitors how to gain access to the time-table on-line, in a marketing exercise. It was therefore impossible to have a meaningful discussion about the many topics which those present wished to raise, although he understood the concerns aired, and the result was general frustration and, initially, some hostility. It seemed to be most unfair to put a member of staff into the situation in which that man found himself, without ensuring that he was fully briefed on points which were likely to be raised. I had to leave to catch the delayed 16:42 northbound train (showing as arriving at 17:00, although it did not in fact reach Berwick until 17:34) and so could not be present when the evening commuter trains arrived. There appeared to be no contact with local staff and, later in the week, I observed the same at Motherwell.

There is no doubt that the proposed changes could bring an improved service to Berwick, with calls by East Coast trains in

both directions at least every hour, on a more regular pattern than is the case at present and, in most cases, with a reduced journey time to and from London. This could be at the price of losing connections through Doncaster and Peterborough. However, there is still a need for clarification on many points and, in particular, the matter of through services from the East and NE of England to Glasgow. Originally it seemed that that was to be withdrawn this year, but it is now clear that the question is to be considered in the context of the re-letting of the East Coast franchise in 2011. It is likely that the service will be transferred to Cross-Country, although as yet nothing has been heard from that operator. The service is important to many residents of and visitors to Berwick and the Borders, who value the facility of travelling to the west of Scotland without any need to change trains in Edinburgh and who may not wish to exchange trains with a full buffet and, in some cases, a dining carriage service for a ride in a thumping diesel unit with a trolley service whose availability depends on the absence of any overcrowding.

I have been following up the matter of information about the running of the 60 rail link bus to Galashiels, as mentioned in the report in the last issue, and have also raised the matter of the impact of proposed timetable changes on connections at Berwick. This has proved to be a frustrating exercise, as the response ultimately received from East Coast Customer Services stated that the service (to “Galashiels”) is sponsored by CrossCountry and that the matter had been raised with that TOC by the station management team at Berwick. The first point is incorrect, as the service is sponsored by Scottish Borders Council, the present contract being with First Bus Edinburgh. From discussion with staff of Scottish Borders Council, it would seem that no information about timetable changes - either generally or in the context of the proposed EC timetable for 2011 - is given to them. The saga continues, but it does not augur well for road-rail co-ordination and perhaps managers from both TOCs should pay a visit to Switzerland or Germany to see how things are done there.

On Tuesday 16 March I attended a meeting in Edinburgh when a presentation was given by the Department for Transport (DfT), about the re-letting of the East Coast franchise in the context of the timetable proposed for May 2011. More details on this meeting are on page 3.

The 17:30 Edinburgh service

After representation via John Lamont MSP and Michael Moore MP, both Roxburgh and Berwickshire, to the Department of Transport, RAGES has been told that the 17:30 hrs departure from Edinburgh will now have a Berwick call "to serve the important commuter market between Edinburgh and Berwickshire."

Local Rail Service Meeting

The regular meeting was held in mid-February at the East Lothian Council offices in Haddington, hosted and chaired by Cllr Paul McLennan, with council staff from East Lothian and Scottish Borders, SEStran and RAGES.

Space limits a full report, but of note is that plans are being made for extending the car park at Dunbar as local residents were somewhat annoyed at commuters parking in Countess Road to their detriment.