

The Rages Rag

Newsletter of Rail Action Group, East of Scotland

Issue No. 8 - February 2001

Review of our Second Year By our Chairman

This second year for the RAGES has been very busy again, as it seems as though it was only a couple of months ago that I wrote the 'Review of our First Year' when the editor prompted me for this years. Your committed committee continues to do sterling work in the form of meetings with the Train Operating Companies, Scottish Borders and East Lothian Councillors and MSP/MPs. On top of this we attend SESTAR (South East Scotland Transport Activists Roundtable) meetings where we have contributed to the leaflet that has been published for distribution to Parliamentarians of all levels and other relevant bodies. Attendance at these meetings also gives us the opportunity to discuss our aims with our colleagues with whom our paths interface i.e. Capital Rail Action Group (CRAG) and Campaign for Borders Rail (CBR) from Portobello Junction into Waverley.

On May 10th we held our first Annual General Meeting where the minor amendments to our Constitution were approved such that it would align itself to an 'Awards For All' Lottery application. Everything else went very well at the A.G.M. and to this end I would encourage more of you to attend – it's not boring at all! As you no doubt saw in the local newspapers our Lottery application was successful and this money will be put

to good use.

Moving on to our achievements, it was very nice to see that GNER continued with the two new trains introduced during the summer timetable at Dunbar – the 16.00 & 23.00 ex-Edinburgh in the winter timetable. Unfortunately a sacrifice had to be made, post the Hatfield incident, and the 23.00 service has been withdrawn (*hopefully temporarily - Ed*).

The big milestone achieved is the inclusion of Reston in the Scottish Borders Council Structure Plan and Transport Strategy Document – a large thank you to all concerned with this. I am also confident that we will see Reston appearing in Railtrack's Network Management Statement along with East Linton and the Haddington Branch. It is also worthy of note that South East Scotland Transport Partnership (SESTRAN) and the Rail Passengers Committee for Scotland both agree with our aims.

On the North Berwick service front, much co-ordination with ScotRail has taken place in respect of the 40 year-old 305 class electric multiple units which are somewhat beyond their 'sell by date'. To this end, ScotRail's Managing Director, Alastair McPherson will attend our first RailShow (*Ed - see this page*).

RAGES RailShows

Not only has ScotRail's Managing Director replied in writing to the issues we raised in the last Rages Rag, but also he has agreed to address an Open Meeting in the Longniddry Community Centre on 16th March 2001 at 19:30 hrs.

This meeting, organised by RAGES, is open to members and non-members alike. Please make a note of the date in your diary and come along on the day. Entrance is free.

Mr McPherson will talk about Scotrail's plans for the North Berwick service and answer your questions about this and RAGES other aims.

Come along and hear what he has to say.

ScotRail fill-in service to Dunbar?

Learning that the Strategic Rail Authority was reportedly disappointed by the relatively few bids for Rail Passenger Partnership grants from Scotland, RAGES has opened explorations with East Lothian Council about a possible bid for an off-peak daytime fill-in service to Dunbar to be provided by ScotRail. This would supplement the service provided by GNER.

At the time of writing this exploratory work is at the very earliest stages of debate, illustrating the efforts of your committee to investigate every potential rail improvement in the area.

Roger Burley

It is with sadness that RAGES records the death of Dr Roger Burley on 21 December 2000. Roger was one of our founder members and always took an active interest in our activities.

Welcome to this issue of The Rages Rag, which we intend to publish regularly. It will be the main means of communication to our members.

Inside Issue 8:

- Awards for All - Page 2
- Reston news - Page 2
- Member helps Railtrack - Page 2
- Rail Passengers Committee - Page 3
- Member's letter - Page 3
- ScotRail's response - Page 4

The editor invites contributions which should be sent to him at the address at the foot of page 4.

Awards for All

As some members may have seen in the local press, RAGES has been awarded a grant of £2625 to help us in our work until the end of November 2001. The award will cover the purchase of an overhead projector, screen and display panels; also the costs of hiring halls, speakers' expenses, attending conferences as well as postage, stationery etc. The committee is most grateful to Awards for All for its support.

The equipment mentioned above will be put to good use in a series of public meetings which RAGES is planning over the rest of the year. The first one is in the Longniddry Community Centre on 16th March when Alastair McPherson, Managing Director of ScotRail will be the speaker. He will respond to

criticisms of the North Berwick service aired in the previous Rages Rag, (see his letter on page 4 - Ed) and also hopefully talk about future rail developments in the East of Scotland.

Further meetings will follow at different venues which will describe RAGES' work. We shall also publicise our plans for an enhanced rail service in the East of Scotland, including local services to Dunbar and Berwick and allowing for re-opened stations at East Linton and Reston.

Members will be circulated with information describing our new initiatives and we hope that our members will turn out in droves to these RailShows!

Reston News By Barrie Forrest

The Scottish Borders Council will support the provision of a local train service between Edinburgh and Berwick-upon-Tweed and the re-opening of Reston Station through the re-negotiations of the ScotRail Passenger Train Franchise.

Barrie met pupils from Berwickshire High School at a panel meeting last month and they expressed their views at the lack of public transport in eastern Berwickshire and fully support the opening of Reston Station to further their education and employment opportunities in Edinburgh and beyond.

MSP Euan Robson met with Jim Bellingham from Railtrack, resulting in their coming to Reston to do a survey on the station

and possible loops in the next few weeks.

Tom and Barrie have had very successful meetings with Coldingham and St Abbs Community Councils. The Councils are to write to Sarah Boyack and Henry McLeish supporting RAGES's aims.

(Ed - Reston lies some 46 miles south of Edinburgh. ScotRail have introduced an extended Dingwall service during peak times from Tain to Inverness, some 44 miles. This can also be compared with their flagship service from Edinburgh to Glasgow of 47 miles!)

RAGES member to the rescue!

One of our members, Morris Rogan, recently noticed a defect on the overhead line equipment near Markle.

He phoned Railtrack and this resulted in the next train through the section of track being run at reduced speed in order to assess the defect. It would appear that a preceding train had sheared the dropper wire which had then become loose. There had been no danger of further damage to the infrastructure and trains were returned to normal speed thereafter. Repairs were

carried out that night.

Morris received a letter with the above details and it continued to say that although there were no safety implications in this case there is always the potential for greater damage to occur.

He was thanked for his prompt action and rewarded with two 1st class return tickets to London.

Well done Morris.

Strategic Priorities for Scotland's Passenger Railway - Consultation Paper

In November 2000 the Scottish Executive issued a consultative document entitled "Strategic Priorities for Scotland's Passenger Railway". RAGES received a copy of this paper and the committee are at present preparing replies to the 14 questions posed. Responses have to be in by 28th February.

Dunbar car park

One of RAGES's earlier aims of having a safer car park at Dunbar has now paid off. GNER's car park at Dunbar recently gained a Safe Car Park Award.

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.

Letter to the Editor

Dear Sir,

I read with interest the last issue of the Rages Rag. Although containing the usual informative level of detail, it did seem however to contain disproportionate coverage of the situation regarding North Berwick, which seems to have the best service, at present, of any of the geographic locations covered by our group.

Would it be of more interest to all readers to try a more balanced approach in the areas covered?

Yours etc,

Mark I Lees
West Barns
Dunbar

Platform lengthening starts at North Berwick

As we closed for press, work was about to start on lengthening North Berwick station platform so that it will accommodate pairs of three coach class 318 units that will shortly start to replace the elderly four car class 305s presently use to provide the service.

Pairs of 318s will be required at peak times to cope with the increasing numbers of passengers.

The Rages Rag

We have also decided to reduce the number of issues of the Rages Rag to three per year. This will allow for an 'emergency' posting of information without having to wait for its inclusion in a timetabled RAG.

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.

Rail Passengers Committee

RAGES has a good relationship with the Rail Passengers Committee (RPC) as has been demonstrated by our discussions with them.

They have recently prepared a document "Railways in Southern Scotland/Borders: An Alternative Strategy". It covers the West and East Coast Main Lines and highlights the similarities between them. In their catchment areas, there are 150,000 people who have no railway stations. "On the grounds of social inclusion and economic regeneration it would be worth having a re-look at rail service provision"

Regarding Lockerbie, Carstairs and Dunbar, the document suggests that it would be to the benefit of passengers at these locations if their services were provided by ScotRail rather than the two long distance operators. The RPC thinks that GNER wish to maintain some calls at Dunbar "for sound commercial reasons", but that they should be relieved of the burden of providing all services.

On the East Coast Main Line, Dunbar is the only station not served by ScotRail and there are no stations beyond Dunbar until Berwick, 28¼ miles away.

The RPC suggests that there should be a two-hourly

interval service operating between Berwick and Edinburgh from 07:00 until 19:30 hrs. It goes on to suggest that a re-opened Reston station, apart from serving that locality, would serve as a park and ride rail-head. Similarly, a re-opened East Linton station would serve as a minor rail-head. Another advantage would be the regularisation of services to and from Dunbar.

A variation on the theme would be to run a half-hourly service to Drem with alternate trains running to North Berwick or East Linton/Dunbar hourly. The two-hourly service to Berwick would fit more readily round this.

The required rolling stock would be electric multiple units (emu) in two three-car sets.

The document recognises the line capacity limitations, but suggests that the effect would be at least the loss of one freight train path every two hours during the day. "What is the relative value to society of a one-third to one-

half loaded emu with social, economic and perhaps modal shift benefits against a train-load of coal or containers?"

RPC also recognises that there are possible threats! In particular, passengers at Dunbar raising dissent about the loss of some distant services and their replacement by emus. (*Ed - the Courier carried such a letter recently.*)

It is encouraging that this document covers many of the aims that RAGES is also striving for.



Letter to the Editor

Dear Sir,

If we're on the front page, then I know it's not good news. So it proved with issue 7 of the Rages Rag when the entire page was given over to our sins and omissions. Turning to page 2 brought some relief with a compliment to be found in the right hand corner!

So what exactly are we "playing at"? Well, running a train service actually and not very well, I hear you say. Agreed, which is why our No. 1 priority is to get the 305s off and the 318s on your route. Light is now appearing at the end of the tunnel because we aim to start running 334s in passenger service by the end of this month. Subject to almost everything you can think of, May is in our sights.

So why didn't we hire more trains in the interim? That's partly a "hindsight" argument but it is actually very difficult to do. There is no suitable stock available for short-term hire nor, for example, is the consequential driver-training programme feasible over a short period of time (in railway terms). It wasn't economics, but logistics that was the problem.

But you handed trains back! Yes, we did, but only as "trade-ins" for more new trains. First time round, we bought 6 extra Turbostars and gave back 6 Class 158 sets. Result = 6 extra vehicles. Second time round, we bought 9 more Turbostars and gave back 2 Class 150 sets. Result = 23 extra vehicles. In this case, it was economics!

I know it's no consolation to passengers on the North Berwick line at present but imagine travelling conditions across the network if we hadn't ordered that extra capacity – well above our franchise commitment. More capacity **will** be coming your way soon – we're working on it!



Collect the fares, then, and you can buy more trains! Er, not quite. Without seeking absolution for our sins in this respect, uncollected peak fares won't pay for new trains. But it's a start and in the next month or so you'll see more than a 'token response' on this issue. However, the real debate should be about how we sell and collect tickets and how we discourage the "culture of dishonesty" you mention. Perhaps automatic ticket machines and penalty fares should be on our agenda? (They are.)

Is re-franchising the only answer? No, but it's the best answer available at present. It can't come too quickly from our perspective (win or lose) because it unlocks more investment by the franchise operator and Railtrack. I also hope it's less restrictive than the current one so that we can get on with developing services and service. We share your objectives but of course differ perhaps on how (and how fast) to achieve them.

[Two examples. To get the 318s transferred to you as soon as we can requires lots – and lots – of discussions with the PTE in the West. I can't just get on and do it! To change opening hours of ticket offices took us over a year to get official approval!]

And, finally, the good news. There **will** be an 18 37 service from Edinburgh from the summer timetable! We do listen to customer comments even if we sometimes give an impression to the contrary!

I look forward to a vigorous but hopefully constructive exchange of views in March. Keep up the good work with the RAG."

Yours etc,
Alastair McPherson
Managing Director
ScotRail

Editorial Comment

Alastair McPherson's reply to the points we raised in the last issue is honest, open and informative. It is clear that the North Berwick service now has the attention of the most senior management level within ScotRail.

Mr McPherson has confirmed that most of the issues we raised will be addressed, albeit not as quickly as we would have liked but we have to recognise that in the topsy-turvy post privatisation scene we cannot expect results overnight.

It is clearly in ScotRail's self-interest to hold back on additional service improvements so that they can be included in its re-bid for the franchise when it is called for. So, the news about an additional evening train from 1st May, departing Waverley at 18.37, is a very welcome bonus. We have been pressing for this service as a priority to fill the gap between the 18.12 and the 19.37. This service will suit the needs of many commuters who, after work, cannot get to the station in time for the 18.12 but for whom the 19.37 is too late and consequently have to drive in to Edinburgh every day.

Although RAGES is a pressure group, we recognise that to make pressure pay off we also have to work in partnership with the Train Operating Companies. This extra ScotRail service is the first fruit of our labours for the North Berwick service.

305's - An endangered species?

For those interested, the picture on this page is one of ScotRail's class 305 electric multiple units.

It is seen here on Thursday 15 February 2001 at 12:03 (on time) at Drem, on its way to North Berwick from Edinburgh.

On page 3, a representative of the replacement 318's is seen at North Berwick during trials in early summer 1999.