

The Rages Rag

Newsletter of Rail Action Group, East of Scotland

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Reston News

As reported in the last *Rages Rag*, the January 28th meeting of the Berwickshire Area Committee concluded that Council Convenor John Ross Scott would like to see a partnership between Scottish Borders Council, a Train Operating Company and neighbouring council(s) to carry out a feasibility study into extending the local rail commuter service on the East Coast Main Line to Berwick and, in particular, the re-opening of Reston station. Councillor Jim Scott, transport portfolio holder, also stated that he would be working closely with the executive on the Reston case. A follow up meeting would be convened for two months time.

This meeting took place on 25 March and reported that sources of funding for such a feasibility study was likely to be resourced from neighbouring Local Authorities, the Scottish Executive, the Strategic Rail

Authority, Network Rail and the new franchisee who will be operating the train services within Scotland.

Discussions had taken place with East Lothian Council with a view to carrying out the feasibility study with Scottish Borders Council. East Lothian Council had indicated that they were already considering the extension of a local service to Dunbar.

East Lothian Council had also agreed that Northumberland County Council should be invited to take part because of the impact at Berwick station and possible linkage with Northumberland local services.

Meetings and discussions have also been held with the Scottish Executive, the Strategic Rail Authority, Network Rail and ScotRail (National Express is the current holder of the ScotRail franchise).

Letters have been sent to all the above interested parties from the Scottish Borders Council indicating the Reston strategy and asking if they would be willing to contribute to the funding of a feasibility study.

RAGES again met on 22 April with Scottish Borders Council Transport Department members Bruce Rutherford and Brian Young. In attendance were: Councillor John Elliot (in the chair); Council Convenor John Ross Scott; Councillors Logan Forrest and David Jones. Bridget Darling represented the Community Councils.

Brian and Bruce gave a résumé of who the Scottish Borders Council had written to, inviting them to partner or contribute to the Reston feasibility study. The letter to the Scottish Executive also requested that a local Edinburgh to Berwick-upon-Tweed service be included in the forthcoming ScotRail franchise renewal. Unfortunately they had received only three replies, these being from the Scottish Executive, Northumberland Council and Network Rail. However, the three replies were more favourable than unfavourable. The

Scottish Executive letter stated that the loops at Reston would be installed, but did not state when and that funding was available through the Integrated Transport Fund – all in all good news. The letter from Northumberland Council stated that they were willing to contribute £2000 towards the study and wished to be kept informed of its findings – again very welcome news. Finally the Network Rail letter was not forthcoming with good news, quite the opposite. They declined any financial support, which I can, to some degree, accept, but then went on to state

that any technical information or searches would have to be paid for!

The meeting concluded that Scottish Borders Council would contact the main partners in this project, those being East Lothian and the Strategic Rail Authority, who had not replied to the original letter. RAGES is pleased with the outcome of this meeting and would like to extend their thanks to all of the above mentioned Councillors and Council members.



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

North Berwick Service News

New ticket machines

ScotRail are presently introducing Avantix ticket machines for conductors on their network. These machines are able to produce a ticket for any fare on the UK Rail network, and can also store vast amounts of timetable information. They are also incredibly slow to operate, with even the more conscientious conductors unable to take more than a small percentage of fares on some journeys.

Transactions can take twice the time the old machines required. Whether this is lack of familiarity, too much complexity or a combination of both is debatable, although conversations with staff would suggest the latter option. In any event, fare collection is slower and thus it is not unusual for passengers to travel free.

A prime example was when an announcement was made one day on the 07:03 Longniddry to Edinburgh service that a problem with ticket machines meant that passengers would have to buy tickets at the ticket office! The only ticket offices are at Waverley and Haymarket. Other problems such as 'lack of change' and lack of staff suggest a significant shortfall in fare revenue. It may be the case that the forthcoming end of franchise has impacted adversely on motivation.

A letter to Peter Cotton, Managing Director of ScotRail, [*who gets a copy of this newsletter - Ed*] expressing concern over this, resulted in a reply suggesting that once staff were familiar with the machines they should be able to issue tickets more quickly. But there is no doubt that compared to the old machines ticket issue is much slower and revenue loss must be greater.

However, the machines can issue magnetically-encoded tickets which are essential when barriers are introduced later in the year at Waverley and Haymarket. Given the present on-train performance, the length of queues at these stations to buy tickets

could be horrendous - you could take a 6 minute train ride from Musselburgh to Edinburgh and then spend 10 minutes queuing for a ticket.

Interestingly, quoting from Modern Railways, April 2003, a letter from Christine Collett, Retail Solutions Manager, SchlumbergerSema, manufacturers of the Avantix machine, emphasised how the machine "reduces the overhead of time for the users (i.e. staff) at end of shift", so never mind what happens during the shift!

General news

Units are generally speaking in good condition and, early in the day anyway, are usually clean. Stations are not as tidy and provision of litter receptacles and an occasional man with a broom would make a significant difference. Punctuality has been acceptable.

Our correspondent is concerned about the apparent rust on the connectors holding up the HT lines at Longniddry and he presumes the same is true elsewhere on the line. He is only an observer and knows nothing about the engineering in question but would like reassurance on this matter.

Summer timetable

Summer timetables commence on Sunday May 18th with the usual addition of earlier Sunday trains from Edinburgh to North Berwick at 10:37 and 11:37, returning at 11:20 and 12:20. The first train, 06:50, on Monday to Friday from North Berwick is due to be advanced by 2 minutes and extended to Haymarket, although this depends on progress on the works at Dolphinstone.

As ever these times given in good faith by RAGES – but please check before travelling for the final version of summer timings.

Dunbar News

With the new summer timetable starting on Sunday 18 May, the only change affecting Dunbar is that the 13:00 from London on Sundays will no longer stop there, but the next train, the 13:30 from London will do. There is no sign of a 23:00 ex-Edinburgh.

The new car parking charges are reported on page 3.

Disruptions

During the Dolphinstone closure, Lothian Buses had the contract for the North Berwick service bus replacement. Departures on Saturday were eight minutes earlier than normal from North Berwick - at 12 and 42 minutes past to Newcraighall so anyone arriving for normal departure would have had a 22 minute wait. Running times still seemed very generous for the bus.

One train user was surprised to find out that people who got on the bus in Dunbar going to Edinburgh would not have been able to make a connection which would have been possible with the train. This was due to the buses leaving Dunbar on their scheduled time, rather than having the bus arrive at Waverley at the train's scheduled time - a catch 22 situation?

More RMT stoppages on ScotRail and Virgin Trains are scheduled for 6/7 and 27/28 May.

RAGES believes that the SRA compensated the Train Companies for their staff being on strike last month!

E-Rags

Many of you have given RAGES your e-mail addresses and therefore receive information as it happens. However, more than half of the membership do not have e-mail access and therefore the information which was sent in E-rags is detailed below.

Dunbar car parking

GNER has relented to a degree which RAGES feel is acceptable over the car parking charges. RAGES received a letter from GNER stating that season ticket holders will now get their parking free with the exception of a £10 administration fee and daily/ad hoc users will now pay £1 rather than £2.50. GNER will inform passengers of the date the charges will reduce. 60 spaces will be available for season ticket holders and 20 for day travellers.

It is hoped that commuters will now park their cars in the station car park rather than in residential areas. *[RAGES believes that parking in Countess Road will be restricted to one hour - Ed]*

Waverley Station redevelopment

The Scotsman had an article about the re-development of Waverley Station. It would appear that despite the Strategic Rail Authority cutbacks, this is still being assessed, albeit on a reduced basis initially. Time will tell if any redevelopment benefits commuters in our area.

Edinburgh South Suburban line

The Evening News raised the South Suburban line again. Transport consultants are investigating the possibility of re-opening parts of the track with services between Waverley and Haymarket via stations such as Gorgie, Morningside and Craigmillar. Existing services from Glasgow, Fife, Dunblane and Bathgate would be integrated with these new services, rather than a standalone service as was the case 40 years ago.

Scottish rail franchise

As you may have read in the press, the Scottish franchise has been narrowed to a shortlist of four bidders:

- National Express, who currently operate ScotRail
- FirstGroup, based in Aberdeen, who run the Great Eastern, Great Western and North Western franchises
- Arriva Trains, who run the Merseyside and Northern franchises
- Serco/Netherlands Rail of whom Serco operate the Docklands Light Railway in London.

According to the Scotsman, the SRA will now consider detailed bids from these four and announce a preferred bidder in January 2004.

The losers were:

- Deutsche Bahn
- Danish State Railways
- GB Railways

The RAGES committee were to have met with GB Railways to discuss our aims and aspirations for this part of the country, but of course that was cancelled.

Cameras for more ScotRail stations

CCTV cameras and Help Point facilities are to be installed at more ScotRail stations across Scotland to increase surveillance and provide information and assistance to passengers. The Executive is working in partnership with ScotRail to fund the improvement programme which is expected to start this summer and be completed by March 2004.

Since last November funding has been authorised that will more than double the number of stations to benefit from CCTV from the 22 which already have it outside the Strathclyde area.

Stations to benefit from CCTV coverage, in the RAGES area, are Prestonpans, Longniddry, Drem and North Berwick.

Improved CCTV provision will be installed at Musselburgh and Wallyford.

A CCTV centre at Dunfermline will deal with passenger enquiries; provide timetable information and have a direct link to British Transport Police Headquarters.

Customer Information Systems, with screens showing the time that trains are due, will be installed at Prestonpans, Longniddry, Drem, North Berwick, Musselburgh and Wallyford.

Deputy Transport Minister Lewis Macdonald said:

"New technology can bring real benefits in providing two-way communication, up to date passenger information as well as promoting personal safety on our railways. Passengers will be reassured by the presence of CCTV and Help Points when waiting at stations.

"The Scottish Executive is investing record amounts to build an effective, reliable and integrated transport system which provides increased choice and safety for the travelling public as well as providing surveillance to tackle vandalism at our stations."

Berwick News

Since my last report operations at Berwick upon Tweed have run fairly well with no reported, serious delays or cancellations.

Owing to engineering work at Dolphinstone the line between Berwick upon Tweed and Edinburgh was closed all day on both Easter Saturday and Sunday. G.N.E.R. trains terminated and started from Berwick with bus connections to and from Edinburgh. However, in true Virgin style whenever there is a disruption, all cross country services terminated and started from Newcastle with bus / G.N.E.R. connections to and from Berwick and Edinburgh.

On Sunday 04 May the line will be blocked all day between Newcastle and Edinburgh. [*Possibly before you read this - Ed*] Consequently all trains will terminate and start from Newcastle with bus connections to and from Alnmouth, Berwick, Dunbar and Edinburgh. On Sunday 11 May the line will again be blocked between Newcastle and Edinburgh until 13:00 hours and between Berwick and Edinburgh from 13:00 for the rest of the day. This will result in trains terminating and starting from Newcastle until 13:00 and terminating and starting from Berwick from 13:00 for rest of the day. On Sunday 18 May the line will again be blocked all day between Berwick and Edinburgh resulting in trains terminating and starting from Berwick with bus connections to and from Dunbar and Edinburgh.

The Summer Timetable begins on Sunday 18 May and from this date Virgin Cross Country services will call at Berwick every two hours instead of hourly as at present. The services which will cease to call at Berwick will instead call at Alnmouth.

There are also a few minor alterations to the G.N.E.R. Timetable. Extra G.N.E.R. trains stopping at Berwick are:

Monday to Friday

08:00 and 15:00 London to Edinburgh and

13:00 Edinburgh to London

Saturday

12:00 London to Inverness

18:00 London to Newcastle (extended to Edinburgh)

As ever these times given in good faith by RAGES – but please check before travelling for the final version of summer timings.

Copies of the G.N.E.R. Summer timetable are now available at Berwick Travel Centre free of charge. As always our super award winning staff continue to provide an excellent service.

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.



New line at Dolphinstone

The photograph shows the link to the new track as seen looking west from the Prestonpans' footbridge. The track curves to the left immediately past the end of the platform instead of going straight on. This has also resulted in the station being re-aligned - work is seen to be on-going here.

Membership

We now have over 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.