

The Rages Rag

Newsletter of Rail Action Group, East of Scotland

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New Improved Timetable for Dunbar

GNER and Virgin CrossCountry have announced that, following consultation with the Scottish Executive, Strategic Rail Authority and stakeholders, a new improved timetable for Dunbar will be introduced on 12 June 2005.

Dunbar is currently served solely by GNER services on a relatively ad-hoc basis and whilst the level of service is above the Public Service Requirement (PSR), the timetable has remained unchanged for a number of years. RAGES has, of course, been instrumental in the addition of some important additions.

From June, Dunbar will gain more frequent services to and from Edinburgh with trains at regular intervals throughout the day. This boost to the Dunbar/Edinburgh timetable will be particularly important as 92 per cent of people using Dunbar station are travelling to, from or via Edinburgh.

The timetable retains the morning direct service to London and late afternoon service from London and there will be more London journey opportunities (with changes at Newcastle or York) including later weekend departures from London. Whilst there is a reduction in direct London services (five each day), there will be a wider range of new destinations in England including Birmingham, Oxford, Southampton and Bournemouth provided by Virgin CrossCountry.

Most of the calls by Virgin CrossCountry will be additional trains for Dunbar, plugging gaps in the existing timetable. Some others will substitute for stops currently made by GNER at about the same times.

Timetable Summary

Over 40 extra services per week will stop at Dunbar.

The new timetable provided by GNER and Virgin CrossCountry delivers a

memorable two-hourly off-peak pattern, with an improved evening peak commuter service and more afternoon/early evening weekend services Edinburgh to Dunbar.

Proposed Monday to Friday at Dunbar

Northbound

07.44 GNER
08.52 GNER
09.55 GNER
11.45 Virgin
13.45 Virgin
15.45 Virgin
17.45 Virgin
19.45 Virgin
21.46 GNER
22.40 Virgin

Southbound

06.20 GNER
07.25 Virgin
09.25 Virgin
11.25 Virgin
13.25 Virgin
15.25 Virgin
16.20 GNER
17.25 Virgin
17.50 GNER
18.25 Virgin
18.55 GNER
19.22 GNER
21.22 GNER

GNER have dropped off the 13.12 and 17.05 north-bound and 07.20, 09.50, 14.20 and 17.22 south-bound stops from their weekday services.

The Virgin Trains Saturday timetable is expected to be: 5 minutes past the odd hours leaving Edinburgh from 07.05 to 17.05; and 45 minutes past the odd hours from Dunbar from 11.45 to 17.45 to Edinburgh with two further trains at 19.55 and 22.05. There can be variations due to engineering work.

The Virgin Trains Sunday pattern is not available at present, but there will be variations on individual dates depending on engineering work.

More details

RAGES had raised the adequacy of the seating capacity on the 17.05 from Edinburgh, but Virgin CrossCountry have re-assured us that they are planning to make this train a five-car Super Voyager with 246 seats, as they reckon on fewer

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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New Improved Timetable for Dunbar

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than 100 people on that train at the moment. The peak for longer journeys from Edinburgh on the route via Leeds is earlier in the day, so there should be room for the usual 100 to 150 Dunbar commuters that use GNER's current 17.00 service.

The Virgin CrossCountry trains that are earmarked to call at Dunbar run between Edinburgh and Birmingham New Street via Leeds with most continuing to/from Southampton or Bournemouth with stops including Birmingham International, Coventry, Oxford, Reading, Basingstoke and Winchester.

On weekdays, our last north-bound of the evening is the 14.25 from Plymouth, with calls south of Birmingham New Street including Exeter St Davids, Bristol Temple Meads, Bristol Parkway and Cheltenham Spa.

Except for the 18.25 from Dunbar (18.05 Edinburgh-Birmingham) all the Virgin south-bounds call at Berwick, which is served by all the north-bound ones that call at Dunbar.

Virgin's other calls include Newcastle, Durham, Darlington, York, Leeds, Wakefield Westgate, Sheffield and Derby.

Their first in the morning from Edinburgh starts from Glasgow Central at 06.00, picking up at Motherwell and Haymarket, and the one to Edinburgh that calls at Dunbar at 19.45 runs through to Haymarket, Carstairs, Motherwell and Glasgow Central (due at 21.27).

The Virgin Trains' pattern on summer Saturdays is expected to be virtually identical to weekdays in almost all cases, but the last Virgin north-bound to call at Dunbar (due 19.55 in the draft timetable) is expected to be the 13.58 Bristol to Edinburgh.

On fares, Virgin Trains report that with Dunbar joining their CrossCountry network in June, they will be rolling out their Value Advance First and Value Advance fares to cover this. Work is on-going with GNER as whether or not Virgin will accept GNER's Standard Class Off-Peak fares on Virgin's services between Dunbar and Doncaster inclusive.

When these new services were announced, there was some confusion regarding ticket validity between Dunbar and Edinburgh, GNER has confirmed that the following tickets for travel between Dunbar and Edinburgh will be inter-available on GNER and Virgin services: First Day Single/Return; Cheap Day Single>Returns and all season tickets.

RAGES also notes that this increased level of service does not address the overloading of trains earlier in the morning nor late night options for returning from Edinburgh, i.e. later than 21.00 and we will continue to press for further improvements.

Thanks are due to Virgin Trains and GNER for their assistance in compiling this article.



Alistair Darling MP, Secretary of State for Scotland and Transport, visited Dunbar station on 29 March to welcome the co-operation between GNER and Virgin Trains that will deliver extra trains from 12 June. He met GNER and Virgin Trains representatives and was welcomed by John Home Robertson MSP, Anne Picking MP and Councillor Norman Hampshire.

Alistair Darling said: "Dunbar is an important and growing commuter town serving Edinburgh. I am pleased that the increase in trains stopping at Dunbar will reflect this importance."

Photo: Ciaran Donnelly

Berwick-upon-Tweed News

By Geoffrey Evison

I would like to begin my report by congratulating GNER on winning the East Coast franchise and wishing them every success in their endeavours. *[Ed - See page 6 for more]*

Services have again run reasonably well since the start of the year. As many users of Berwick station are aware the last train from Kings Cross to Edinburgh on Sundays (18.30 departure) has not called at Berwick, however I can to report that GNER have confirmed that from the start of the summer timetable on 12 June 2005 this train will call at Berwick.

Work on phase one of the Car Park is now complete and work on phase two, scheduled to last for a further four weeks, began on Tuesday 29 March. Unfortunately whilst work on phase two is in progress the number of car parking spaces has been reduced to approximately fifty six. However, alternative parking is available in the Castlegate Long Stay Car Park.

I am sure we have our own aspirations about the future but personally speaking there is one extra service I would like to see provided during the next ten years and that is a weekday Kings Cross - Fort William and Fort William - Kings Cross train appropriately named "The West Highlander". I am sure this could be done initially on a trial basis i.e. during the summer timetable similar to the Inverness - Kings Cross "Highland Chieftain" train was when it first started operating. This would give more travel opportunities from this part of the country.

North Berwick Service News and recent Forum

Service performance improved considerably over the late February /March period, although there were still occasional problems. On Easter Saturday, for example, a number of morning services ran late or were cancelled owing to mechanical and signalling difficulties, but at least passengers were kept informed following the restoration of "long line" announcements - indeed the ScotRail controller was able to apologise *profusely* for any inconvenience caused, rather than a mere apology. On March 31st a broken down freight train blocked the main line and the 07.28 from North Berwick arrived an hour late into Edinburgh, but the guards did a good job in keeping passengers informed.

The lighting on the present units continues to be temperamental, with often one of the four coaches in darkness for part or all of the journey. This has been a feature for many months and it seems that the maintenance contractor cannot deal with the problem, although with lighter nights the situation is less critical. It is possible to restore lights by pressing the "on" button at the end of the coach by the toilet, but the only safe way to retain power is to stand there with one's finger on the button, in the fashion of the famous Dutch boy preventing flooding by putting his finger in the dyke wall. This is not really practical and therefore the trains often end up with only three cars available.

Of course it does give First ScotRail information as to how a reduced capacity train would load and, hopefully given this experience, coupled with the often unpleasant degree of overloading on the 16.39 ex-Edinburgh worked by a 3-car Class 318 (admittedly as the last train before peak hour restrictions always a safe bet for healthy patronage) should indicate to First ScotRail the importance of any replacement trains for the line having enough seated capacity.

Whilst the present 4-car ex-Inter City electric units have sufficient seats, it is understandable why First ScotRail should want replacements. Apart from the substantial costs of operating the powerful electric locos, the need to hire in drivers from another rail subsidiary does not make this the most cost effective operation or offer enough flexibility. But RAGES feels that the needs of the passenger should be paramount and will watch with interest which replacement trains are allocated.

Revenue protection has improved tremendously following the introduction of barrier checks on peak hour journeys. This can lead to delays upon arrival at Waverley if passengers have been unable to buy tickets and RAGES will be asking ScotRail to consider installation of machines at Longniddry and Prestonpans in order to reduce the length of the queues. We would, however, welcome evidence as to how reliable these machines are. The writer noted a passenger pleading with the guard on a train at Wallyford to hold back the service as the machine had allegedly gobbled up his credit card!

First ScotRail held a highly successful meeting at the North Berwick Seabird Centre on March 2nd. Thanks are due to First ScotRail for providing the summary below of the questions raised and the answers given at this meeting. Due to lack of space, some of the points have been omitted.

Reliability

- Q. The first four trains of the day are key to commuters' needs, yet they are the most unreliable. Sources of unreliability must be addressed and back-up resources provided.
- A. The present loco-hauled stock driven by EWS and

maintained by Alstom will be replaced during 2005 by an alternative type of train driven and maintained by First ScotRail (FSR). Meanwhile we must improve management of our present suppliers, and with only one out of four trains booked to go each night to the depot in Glasgow have instituted more proactive checking of the three trains that remain at Waverley. Once we are able to control the supply of drivers, we shall be able to provide more resilience.

- Q. What about last-minute platform alterations at Waverley?
- A. Network Rail operate the station and manage the Signalling Centre which controls train movements. Management of services therefore requires careful attention in partnership with them. We are encouraging Network Rail not to announce platform information until they are sure which platform will be used. Capacity will be improved by the forthcoming upgrading which will provide additional through and east-end platforms.

Passenger information

- Q. Can't you tell people in advance that a train is starting at Drem so that they can arrange to drive there?
- A. We are investing £5m in improving passenger information, and have issued on-train staff with mobile phones that receive service update messages from our Control. Passengers can use the recently launched JourneyCheck at-a-glance web service to find out the latest information on their services. This will shortly be expanded to include SMS text messaging to enable us to convey information about any service disruption directly to a customer's mobile. We are also reviewing public address and customer information systems as a whole.
- Q. Why aren't cancellations and delays always announced over the public address system?
- A. Additional staff have been appointed at our Customer Services Centre in Dunfermline who are dedicated to making announcements to stations and updating the monitors on stations. There is also now a Customer Service Manager in the Control who responsible for ensuring that information reaches the Centre and is paged to Ceefax. The Service Quality Incentive Regime being rolled out across the FSR network this spring incentivises us to ensure that long-line public-address systems are maintained in working order.
- Q. Can you recognise that it's particularly important to convey information about any problem with the 06.45?
- A. We are well aware of the importance of this particular service for early-morning commuters and for people making onward connections. Links are being improved between FSR in Glasgow and the Customer Services Centre in order that the announcer in Dunfermline can have the greatest possible notice of any cancellation. Where appropriate, we shall provide alternative road transport.

Overcrowding

- Q. Do you recognise that the present four coaches are not enough, since many passengers have to stand by the time the train reaches Musselburgh?
- A. Our choice of replacement rolling-stock will bear in mind the need to provide sufficient capacity. We are also

Q and A at the North Berwick Forum

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constrained by other issues including platform lengths and Waverley capacity. It is an aspiration of the Scottish Executive to have no-one standing for more than ten minutes.

Q. What provision will there be for increasing capacity to cope with demand arising from housing growth during the franchise?

A. We evaluated prospects for growth during the preparation of our bid, and are in regular dialogue with East Lothian Council about their Local Plan and with SESTRAN and their consultants working on studies of future transport development. Any provision to accommodate further growth in demand by significantly augmenting the capacity that we provide would be for discussion with the Scottish Executive, who are now responsible for funding railway infrastructure in Scotland, and would have to take account of the long lead-time for recruiting and training additional drivers. We are able to influence the Executive through provision of professional advice, but the final decision on spending priorities must rest with them.

Rolling-stock

Q. What about a persistent smell of burning rubber?

A. This smell comes from the brake pads on the coaches, and should be excluded by the air-conditioning. Again we look to the maintenance team in Glasgow to ensure that this is so.

Q. Why do trains slow to walking pace a quarter-mile before North Berwick?

A. This is a requirement of the Train Protection and Warning System whose introduction as an essential safety precaution was endorsed in the Cullen Report.

Q. Diesel trains working the 21.25 and 23.07 services are often dirty.

A. This has been taken up with our cleaning staff at Edinburgh.

Q. Can there be more capacity for special events?

A. We can and do plan additional capacity for events such as Open Golf or the Edinburgh Festival especially if we are given plenty of advance notice.

Fares and revenue protection

Q. Do you recognise that portable ticket machines used by on-train staff are far too slow?

A. We are pressing the manufacturer to make their performance more resilient.

Q. With ticket vending machines and seasons available online, why not make it illegal to travel without a ticket?

A. We have recruited additional revenue protection staff, and have installed ticket vending machines at Musselburgh and Wallyford. However the imposition of penalty fares could be unfair to people who through no fault of their own had been unable to purchase tickets.

Q. Why not make monthly or ten-journey tickets available for sale on trains?

A. These are too complex time-consuming a task for the on-train staff, but seasons are now available on-line. The North Berwick route will be included in the next extension in the availability of ten-journey Flexipasses which have recently been introduced on the Bathgate and Fife Circle routes.

Q. Do on-train staff get commission?

A. Yes, they get 5% to incentivise them.

Q. Why are there not period returns?

A. Historically these have not been provided for many years on shorter journeys due to concern about revenue risk which FSR are now trying to address by means of additional staff and Ticket Vending Machines.

Q. Can there be Zoncards allowing flexibility between say North Berwick/Newcraighall and central or west Edinburgh stations?

A. FSR are committed to full participation in SESTRAN's one.ticket extending its availability on trains throughout SE Scotland.

Q. Will Club 55 return?

A. A forthcoming announcement will be made about its resumption from 1 April to 30 June.

Timetable

Q. Can you improve early morning services, resuming through running by the 06.45 to Haymarket and bringing the 07.28 forward to 07.20 to improve their spread?

A. These are possibilities that will be considered when we are clear on what type of train will replace the loco-hauled ones. Any decision to restore through running to Haymarket must take account of the performance risk caused by congestion at Waverley.

Q. Can you improve evening services since going down to two-hourly on weekdays after 19.34 discourages use by commuters, leisure travellers and tourists?

A. We shall investigate scope for trialling a couple of additional services in each direction on weekday evenings, thus increasing the frequency to hourly.

Q. Rolling-stock which forms the 21.25 has called at Haymarket on an earlier working, so why not advertise it as a through service from there to North Berwick?

A. Whilst the 21.25 service is formed off a Dunblane arrival, unit swaps at Waverley often occur at that time of night for maintenance purposes hence advertising a through service is not desirable. If we were able to go for an hourly service in the late evenings, this arrangement would cease.

Q. Why not retime the 23.07 to 23.37, which would be welcomed by travellers returning from an evening's entertainment in Edinburgh who have to resort to taxis because they can't get from the theatre to Waverley in time?

A. We can pursue this possibility with Network Rail, but previous information was that running any later would impinge on the time needed to do engineering work (the train has to run empty back from North Berwick to Edinburgh) and could thus incur significant additional cost.

Q. Can we have reduced journey-times and limited-stop services?

A. Journey-times had to be extended on the introduction of the present loco-hauled trains due to their slam doors, so we could revert to the previous timings on their replacement by trains with sliding doors. In view of the volume of passengers at intermediate stations, there are no present plans for limited-stop services.

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Q and A at the North Berwick Forum

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Stations

- Q. What are you doing about the present poor facilities at North Berwick, which has little shelter and no toilets?
- A. FSR will be investing £20m in station improvements, and our programme including detailed priorities for the early years of the franchise which has been presented to the Scottish Executive for their approval contains a specific proposal for North Berwick.

Disabled

- Q. When can disabled passengers with mobility difficulties look forward to delivery of a seamless service?
- A. We recognise that the present inconsistent delivery of assistance does not inspire confidence among mobility-impaired users. Our £7m investment in staff training will include promotion of disability awareness, and dedicated staff will be able to draw on the improved information in the new national Assisted Persons Reservations System database. We shall be moving provision of such assistance into the proposed Customer Contact Centre where we shall be able to monitor quality and delivery more closely from late summer.

Cycles

- Q. What is FSR policy on conveying cycles?
- A. FSR are keen to promote cycling by rail, as can be seen in our introduction of a free cycle-recovery service. There is no charge for taking a bike on any First ScotRail service. As spaces are limited, reservations are also provided free on many routes. Where it is not possible to accommodate all demand on our trains, we shall look to supplement the cycle-storage facilities which are being introduced at all stations during the franchise.

- Q. Can you deliver greater consistency in the numbers of bikes accepted on North Berwick services?
- A. We shall re-brief staff on our policy, which is that the driving van trailer of the loco-hauled trains has sufficient accommodation to meet any likely needs. Of the other types of train used in the evenings and at weekends, Classes 156 and 158 have respectively six and two dedicated cycle-spaces, and our Class 170/4 fleet is being modified to take four cycles per train.

- Q. Can cycle-carrying capacity be increased?
- A. Conveyance of cycles has to be consistent with health and safety requirements, and there might have to be a trade-off with seating capacity. We shall re-state our policy about cycle-carrying on the North Berwick route when a decision has been taken on the type of train that is to replace the loco-hauled stock.

Next steps

- Q. What is the timescale for your delivery of tonight's commitments?
- A. Investment is taking place now in improving passenger information. Our station improvement plan will define the programme of work on stations. Improved staff training will be continuous throughout the franchise. We would hope to have replacement rolling stock in place by the summer and to reach decisions during 2005 on any timetable improvements. Developments on these and other fronts will be communicated through our monthly customer newsletter, which is now being distributed on North Berwick trains.
- Q. Will there be another such public meeting?
- A. In about a year from now.

The Future of RPC Scotland

By James King

You may be aware that the regional Rail Passenger Committees are about to be wound up soon as a consequence of the GB Railways Bill. This will leave Scotland with no "local" statutory rail passenger representation, other than a Scottish member of the new GB Rail Passenger Council, unless an amendment is tabled to the Transport (Scotland) Bill, which is presently at Stage 2 of the parliamentary process.

I have written a personal letter to John Home Robertson, MSP, and the seven regional MSPs (Chris Balance, Rosemary Byrne, Phil Gallie, Christine Grahame, Adam Ingram, Alasdair Morgan and David Mundell) to ask for their support in establishing a new organisation to represent the interests of rail passengers in Scotland using an amendment to the Transport (Scotland) Bill as the vehicle. The crux of what I said was: "The Transport (Scotland) Bill, which is at Stage 2 of the parliamentary process, presents an opportunity for an amendment which establishes a new Scottish rail passenger organisation which will ensure that passengers continue to be represented and remain at the heart of the decision-making process about the railways.

"RPC Scotland has an excellent record of achievement on behalf of passengers in what is a very complex and "noisy" industry. Without an equivalent body to replace RPCS there is a danger the passenger voice will no longer be heard in industry debates or central to our common endeavours. A statutory rail consumer organisation in Scotland, which ensures that the passenger voice will continue to be conveyed to the rail industry and other key decision-makers, including the Scottish Executive and Parliament, is the final piece of the Scottish jigsaw that is missing. We hope that you will assist in putting that final jigsaw piece in place."

If RAGES members were minded to write to John Home Robertson, MSP and others in support of the establishment of a new Scottish rail passenger committee with statutory powers to replace the about-to-be dissolved RPCS, I am sure this would be welcomed by passengers. Just as now, such a body would complement the work of RAGES. The politicians can be reached at The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP.

GNER signs new East Coast Franchise

Train operator GNER has signed an agreement with the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) to operate a new ten-year franchise on the East Coast Main Line between London and Scotland.

The new franchise will start from 1 May 2005 and will run for seven years with a further three years if specified performance targets are met.

Under the deal, GNER will invest more than £125 million to deliver a bigger, more reliable and value for money railway, building on progress to date.

GNER will contribute £1.3 billion of premium payments to Government over the next ten years.

GNER's chief executive Christopher Garnett said: "Everyone in GNER is delighted to have won a new franchise. We look forward to building a bigger and better railway, running extra services with more reliable and more comfortable trains, and carrying many more passengers. Today's welcome announcement is the next step in GNER's continuing development. We've come a long way in almost nine years and will go a lot further in the next ten.

"I am very grateful for the fantastic support we have received from passengers across the route. We will be working doubly hard to repay the faith shown in us. I would also like to pay tribute to GNER's employees who have kept going during recent uncertain months and have continued to deliver an excellent standard of service."

Key highlights of the new franchise, relevant to RAGES area include:

- Continuation of the 17.30 departure from King's Cross running through to Edinburgh stopping at all existing stations including Morpeth, Alnmouth, Berwick-upon-Tweed and Dunbar.

- An investment of up to £75m in GNER's fleet of diesel High Speed Trains (HST). Together that would increase the size of GNER's fleet of HSTs from 10 to 13. £25m will be spent transforming the interior of every HST to bring them up to the same high standard of passenger comfort as GNER's rebuilt electric trains, known as Mallards. Further work will be undertaken to improve the reliability of the entire HST fleet. The completion of the rebuild of all electric Mallard trains by October 2005.
- A 90% punctuality target by 2010, achieved by a host of initiatives.
- A £25m station modernisation programme, including 900 extra car parking spaces, 400 extra covered cycle spaces and improved access at all 12 GNER-managed stations.
- Tackling fare evasion by a range of measures, supported by additional ticket examiners across the route
- At least £3m on measures to improve passenger security.

It also notes the following points:

- GNER has operated the East Coast franchise for the past nine years, having been awarded it initially in 1996 for seven years. Subsequently a two-year extension was granted which expires at the end of April 2005.
- Since starting, GNER now carries 34% more passengers on 22% more trains.
- It has consistently achieved the highest passenger satisfaction ratings of any UK long-distance operator (according to the SRA's National Passenger Surveys) and has created the most reliable long-distance train fleet in Britain.

RAGES comment on the franchise renewal

Although there was general satisfaction that GNER has retained the East Coast franchise some press reports seemed a little lukewarm in fearing that the Company's offer to pay a no doubt very grateful HM Treasury £1.3 billion pounds over 10 years had overstretched the operator and it would need to raise fares and cut staff to achieve this.

Certainly the target is very ambitious but GNER will know its market better than anyone and it is worth noting that with an overall load factor of 50% on trains there is ample scope for extra seats to be sold on off-peak services using the yield management techniques favoured by low cost airlines and if any low cost airline sold only 50% of its seats it would be out of business. Even if all targets are met the trains will still load to 65% capacity on average – so there is still plenty of scope! Until quite recently GNER participated in a number of promotions – 2 for 1 seats, evening fare reductions, etc and it is to be hoped that, with the franchise contest over, GNER will be able to seek to positively fill these empty seats. Certainly the writer's experience of GNER offering the lowest price day return fare at £40 (£80 for two) between Dunbar and York on a midweek day at off peak times with more than a week's notice was not that attractive!

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.