

The Rages Rag

Newsletter of Rail Action Group, East of Scotland

www.rages.org.uk

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RAGES meets the Minister for Transport

In October, MSPs Iain Gray (East Lothian) and John Lamont (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) took RAGES concerns to a meeting with the Minister for Transport, Stewart Stevenson, MSP. At that meeting Mr Stevenson suggested that he would like to meet with representatives from Rail Action Group, East of Scotland (RAGES).

This meeting took place on 13th March when the two MSPs, a Transport Scotland representative, Tom Thorburn (RAGES Chairman), Barrie Forrest (Reston representative) and Russell Darling (Haddington representative) met with the Minister.



Photo: Stewart Stevenson, MSP, left, with Tom Thorburn (© RAGES)

RAGES raised the issue of the local rail service from Edinburgh to Berwick with re-opened stations at East Linton and Reston and noted the studies already undertaken in 1999, 2003 and 2005. Tom pointed out that with Dunbar being served by long-distance operators, commuters there were at the mercy of problems further south - the day of the meeting was one such day with overhead lines down at Doncaster.

One "quick fix" option was to implement a local service to Dunbar. This is supported by Iain Gray and the East Lothian Council. Iain noted that park and ride facilities in East Lothian were good apart from over-spilling at Dunbar.

Most towns or villages near to the railway have new housing to be developed and it is likely, particularly around Reston, that the home occupiers will be commuters rather than local workers.

It was suggested that developers could contribute funds to the infrastructure such as stations and parking.

The East Coast Main Line Route Utilisation Strategy report had just been finalised and included several options for improvements to Scottish rail services east of Edinburgh - most of which had good benefit-cost ratios.

Transport Scotland suggested that one way forward would

be to pick elements from these options and create a package which would be cost effective. The rail network should be developed focusing on best returns.

The Minister offered to visit East Lothian and the eastern area of Scottish Borders to view the sites and meet with local councils. This was warmly welcomed by RAGES and the two MSPs.

It was also suggested that the STAG 2 should be commenced in parallel, but perhaps focusing on bus options to integrate with railheads.

The need for more late-night trains to Dunbar was raised and Transport Scotland noted these concerns particularly regarding the lack of late night services on a Saturday.

The case for re-opening the Haddington station was put forward with a short paper showing options for a station and facilities for park and ride. This case has been well published by RAGES and does not need to be reiterated here, but the main driving force is new housing (750) around Haddington and the fact that the 1999 East Lothian Rail Study suggested that this should be reviewed in the 2005 to 2011 timescale which we are now halfway through. The Minister promised to look at the case.

Iain Gray raised the situation at Prestonpans for disabled access. Although Network Rail were adding parking facilities on the south side of the station, the only way to get from one side of the station to the other is by the footbridge. The Minister will write to Iain Gray and John Lamont to let them know the current position regarding Prestonpans and how it fits into the Access for All scheme..

Tom thanked the Minister for taking the time to discuss our concerns and looked forward to meeting him again at the various sites in the counties.

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.

Berwick News

By Brian Patton

To begin on the positive side, I shall first mention the arrival of a new automatic ticket machine at Berwick station. This is larger than the previous one, can work in any one of six languages and is rather more user-friendly. Its main advantage is that it accepts cash, including bank notes, and it therefore no longer presents a standing invitation to passengers to increase the amount outstanding on a credit card. However, like most machines, it is not totally reliable and has occasionally been out of action. The other improvement effected has been the reconstruction of the steps on the footbridge which have been resurfaced in a non-slip black rubber material. New white strips have been fitted to the edges of the steps, while the first and last have these in yellow, making them easily visible.

Otherwise it has not been a good winter for ECML passengers. There were three occasions when major problems with the overhead lines led to severe disruption of services - only that on February 13 being due to weather conditions. On

12 March the pantograph of the locomotive hauling the 10:00 hrs northbound Edinburgh train became entangled in, and thus damaged, the overhead wires at a point between Doncaster and York and normal working was not resumed until the afternoon of the following day. Reports suggest that on these occasions little is done for the comfort of passengers who have been turned out of trains to wait

around for a replacement bus, although on one such emergency, an enterprising York lady set up a mobile trolley service to provide some refreshment for those waiting in the cold at the front of the station. She had many customers!

There was complete chaos at Berwick on the afternoon of 28 January, when a train failed there and there were also problems between Darlington and Newcastle. There was also trouble on the morning of Tuesday 19 February, when a locomotive failed in the same area and had to be dragged by a diesel into Newcastle, where passengers were first told to remain aboard, then told to leave the train and board the following service, by then also severely delayed. At Bewick at 10:10 hrs the 10:22 hrs was showing as running 25 minutes late. As it was still then sitting in Newcastle Central, quite incapable of movement, this was rubbish, as was the announcement that the delay was due to "safety checks". Passengers who should have reached Waverley at 11:14 were thus almost an hour late.

However, problems can occur on any railway and what has been particularly annoying on the occasions mentioned above is, firstly, the apparent complete lack of liaison between control and those responsible for passing on information to passengers. On both 28 January and 28 February the monitors at Berwick station lapsed into complete gibberish, and at 18:25 on 28 January the 17:25 northbound CrossCountry train was still shown as leaving at 17:55. The platform staff of course did an excellent job, trying to help but they were just as much in the

dark as passengers were. Matters were equally bad on 13 March, when announcements had to be made to advise passengers to ignore the monitors. In these days of computerised information and hand phones, there is no excuse for such chaos. It is even more worrying to think what might happen in case of an accident.

The second aspect of the situation following a severe delay is the lack of concern shown by National Express East Coast (NEEC) on-board staff about passengers' onward connections. On the train which collected all those who should have been on the 10:22 ex-Berwick, there was no sign of the conductor and although there were the usual apologetic announcements over the PA system "for any inconvenience caused", there was no information on such useful topics as the next train to Inverness or Aberdeen from Waverley. Nor was there any information given about compensation. One would have expected the conductor to come through the train with the necessary forms, or at least to announce how these could be obtained, but there was total silence on this point. I raised the matter in a letter to National Express but the point was ignored in the reply. The conditions for compensation are clearly set out in the timetable and passengers should be sure to claim it as and when appropriate.

An interesting sideline to emerge from the matter of delays is that of extended schedules. For example, the 10:22 from Berwick used to arrive into Waverley at 11:07. This has now been altered to an 11:14 arrival. The advantage to the operator is clear. In the case of a severe delay, such a change can make the difference between compensation for a delay of over one hour and that for one of over 30 minutes. If there is no delay, the conductor can proudly announce that "we are arriving x minutes early", not mentioning the massive recovery time that the schedule now contains. It's a win-win situation for the operator and a worse service for the passenger. An average speed of 105km/hr over the 91km from Berwick to Edinburgh, with modern electric traction and no intermediate stops, is pathetic.

On a general note, it should be mentioned that:

- Northbound from Berwick, ticket checking is virtually unknown on NEEC trains.
- Conductors on the PA system use the public relations speak of "If there is any problem, do not hesitate to contact me" but they give no idea of how to do so. Is an elderly lady, worried about her onward connection, really going to fight her way through a crowded 225 set to find her/him?
- Going north, buffets on Edinburgh trains often close for stocktaking immediately on departure from Berwick, allowing 45 minutes for this operation. With computer control this is ridiculous. NEEC should contact SNCF or DBAG to find out how it should be done.

It will not have escaped the notice of Berwick passengers that the majority of delays are caused by events south of the border. It is inevitable that, when a service is provided by



Photo: CrossCountry train at Berwick. © B Forrest

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Berwick News

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trains originating 300 miles away, there is a much greater likelihood of problems than there is with a purely local service, such as Edinburgh-Dunblane. This problem will not be remedied until there is a local Edinburgh-Dunbar-Berwick service, provided by First ScotRail. Despite the efforts of RAGES, other organisations and the local MSPs, the prospects for this are still not good. Network Rail has now produced the route utilisation strategy for the East Coast Main Line, in which the only crumb of comfort for passengers in this part of the world is the promise of a second platform at Dunbar.

There have also been problems with the Railink bus service provided by First Edinburgh, as service 60 from Galashiels to Berwick. The service timed to arrive at Berwick station at 10:02 was persistently late, to the extent where passengers for the 10:11 to London had to run for it. I took this up with First Bus and from a most helpful reply, it transpired that they were already aware of the problem and had in fact altered the timetable to allow this working to run five minutes earlier throughout. It still tends to run late, but not to the extent where the connection is in danger. Peak hour congestion in Galashiels is at the root of the trouble. However, on 19 February the 18:47 departure from Berwick did not appear and the three

passengers off the 18:16 arrival, having first checked to find if any message had been placed on the station monitor, then tried to ascertain by phone what was, or was not, happening. All they got was a recorded message detailing the service over the Christmas holidays and at 19:15 they opted for a taxi to Foulden and Chrinside. One then took the matter up with the Company and the reply, from Ms D Sanderson, a Customer Liaison Officer, was a masterpiece of gobbledygook. The local depot had experienced "operational difficulties", which presumably meant that a bus had broken down. It is apparently normal procedure for Carlisle (sic) station (!) to be informed of any failure of service. However, on this occasion this was not possible, due to "restrictions on drivers regarding communications available to them". Perhaps this meant that the driver concerned had forgotten to charge his hand phone! Perhaps also geography is not Ms Sanderson's strong point and, viewed from her office in far-off Larbert, Carlisle and Berwick are virtually one and the same place. Inevitably she apologised "for the inconvenience caused", but there was no mention of compensation. The taxi fare to Foulden is £10 and to Chirnside £13.

New North Berwick Service Representative

At our January committee meeting, Roy Mitchell, our Minutes Secretary and North Berwick representative, announced that he would be moving to South Yorkshire and therefore unable to continue in these posts. Tribute was paid to his work and advice during the past six years.

However, we needed two people to replace Roy: Allison Cosgrove, our East Linton representative, has taken on the role of Secretary and Harald Vox, our Treasurer and a regular traveller from Drem, agreed to be the North Berwick service representative.

ECML Route Utilisation Strategy

RAGES submitted their response to the draft ECML RUS report during the consultation period via SESTRAN.

The final report has just been issued and can be found at www.networkrail.co.uk along with the many responses.

Tom Thorburn, RAGES Chairman, comments:

"Having reviewed the Final Version of Network Rail ECML RUS, it is particularly pleasing to note that the amendments and additions required to Section 6.8, ECML north service pattern, have been fulfilled. Two new sub-sections have been added namely - New Down Platform (northbound) at Dunbar and New Dunbar to Edinburgh hourly service.

"The Edinburgh to Berwick Local Service section has been reviewed to take into consideration new stations at Reston (park and ride) and East Linton with the Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) having risen from 0.3 to 1.0 - this again is pleasing as we were very unhappy with the original figures quoted. The RUS now states that if no park and ride facilities were to be provided at Reston station, passenger demand reduces the BCR to 0.7. RAGES believes that the BCR for this proposal would be much greater than 1.0 given the passenger loadings for East Linton and Reston which the STAG 1 revealed.

"The RUS now covers the new platform for Dunbar and goes on to state the benefits that it would yield in that northbound trains would no longer be held whilst awaiting a southbound service to clear the existing platform - northbound services would be quicker by some two minutes in reaching Edinburgh. This project has a BCR of 2.5.

"The other new entry is New Dunbar to Edinburgh hourly service which quotes a BCR of 1.6. Somewhat puzzling is that the RUS states a turn back facility would be required. Currently trains turn back without this facility and therefore the BCR would be improved to 2.0 with this saving.

"All in all the additions and amendments have greatly improved the quality of this ECML RUS from the viewpoint of RAGES aims."

As RAGES had noted, both the East Lothian and Scottish Borders Councils, in their responses, pointed out that the draft report had not taken into account the STAG 1 results for the local service from Edinburgh to Berwick.

The SBC response also notes that "... there is a strong local desire for an improved local service between Berwick and Edinburgh with the possibility of new stations at Reston and East Linton."

Meeting with East Lothian Council

Councillor Paul McLennan, Transport Portfolio holder for East Lothian Council (ELC), recently held a very useful meeting with RAGES and SEStran. Present were Iain Gray, MSP for East Lothian, East Lothian Council Convenor David Berry, Councillor Turner, Paul Ince and Passenger Focus representative James King. Transport Scotland declined to attend on the basis that they had been at the recent meeting with the Minister of Transport, RAGES and the MSPs.

The three main items to come out of yesterday's meeting were actions on:

- SEStran will pursue discussions on multi-modal study with Transport Scotland;
- ELC will provide a map showing stations on ECML with all towns and villages with their planned housing new build;
- Iain Gray MSP will discuss visit details with Minister's office.

RAGES now requires that Scottish Borders Council (SBC) has joint meetings with East Lothian Council, RAGES, SEStran and Transport Scotland for the furtherance of Reston and East Linton stations and the move to have local services initially (which is a very quick and achievable win). In line with ELC it would be helpful if SBC produced a similar map as to that described above - taking in the Duns, Cockburnspath to Burnmouth triangle.

East Lothian were very supportive of Reston throughout this meeting and they have been invited to the Scottish Borders Council meeting with RAGES on 12 May.

Tom Thorburn said "We are very keen to see dialogue at all levels to show the Minister at his visit to Berwickshire and East Lothian that we are the ones who deserve to receive the investment in our stations and train services."

CrossCountry Problems

RAGES has in the past raised two points with Arriva on their CrossCountry services: the removal of one toilet during unit refurbishing; and the 17:05 ex-Edinburgh to become a five-coach set.

Recently we have relayed the following experience to Arriva.

We were informed by a member of their experience of toilet problems on an Aberdeen to Edinburgh First ScotRail service which had one out of two toilets unserviceable at Aberdeen. By the time the train reached Stonehaven, the remaining toilet was out of service. The train manager/guard, to relieve the situation, informed passengers that he would hold the train at Dundee to allow passengers to use the station toilets. This held the train by some 10 minutes to allow this to take place.

Also from our ex-secretary comes his recent experiences that one toilet often becomes out of action during the journey and so a second one is essential. He says that he would strongly object to the removal of a toilet and suggests that it would be unworkable.

We have again noted to Arriva that CrossCountry's proposal to remove a toilet from their Voyager sets is not well founded, given that the distances travelled are far greater than the example above and therefore there is a greater demand on toilets. If indeed they were to make calls at stations with toilet facilities then the time delays would soon add up considerably making journeys much longer, unpleasant and more difficult for on-train staff.

RAGES hope that they will reconsider the decision to remove a toilet from Voyager sets.

As we go to press, RAGES understands that Arriva will not be removing any toilets from their trains. The removal of the shop will create 14 to 16 extra seats and more luggage space.

With regard to the 17:05 ex-Edinburgh, Arriva have responded saying that it was their aspiration for this set to become a five-car set in association with the timetable change in December 2008. However, their plans for switching one of the Glasgow departures to a 10:10 slot have had to be altered

due to no slot being available and as part of the knock-on effects, the 17:05 departure from Edinburgh will continue to be a four-car Voyager for the foreseeable future.

"However, the modifications we are making to the Voyagers will mean that more seats are available on a unit than is currently the case. Furthermore, with certain other services being either high speed trains (HST) or double Voyager operated, we have a greater opportunity to focus more of our discounted tickets onto trains with more seating capacity available, alleviating crowding pressures on busy trains.

"HSTs will be going into operation in the summer with full introduction of the refurbished sets by the end of the year. At this stage we cannot confirm the particular services on which they will be operating but they will be exclusively allocated to the Edinburgh-Plymouth route for weekday operation. We will confirm the details of the particular services they will be allocated to in the new timetable later in the year."

It has also been noted that the map inside the train showing the CrossCountry Network inexplicably fails to mention Dunbar - trains apparently run non-stop between Edinburgh and Berwick which hardly helps to promote Dunbar. Three key connections from Edinburgh are shown to Bathgate and North Berwick seem fair but the decision to select Newcraighall as a key connection is baffling - especially as it is positioned south-west of Edinburgh!

Virgin produced the excellent Hotline magazine and GNER the Livewire. The latter has been continued by NEEC but Arriva seemed to have abandoned providing magazines for passengers to read.

Membership

We now have about 160 members from around the counties.

Please encourage your neighbours or fellow passengers to join RAGES.

Membership forms can be obtained from committee members.