

The Rages Rag

Newsletter of Rail Action Group, East of Scotland

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East Coast Responds to RAGES Criticism of their May Timetable

Following the publication of the new (Eureka) timetable for the East Coast Main Line starting in May, RAGES discussed its implications and decided that our chairman should write to Karen Boswell, Managing Director of East Coast with our observations.

Tom started his letter by saying that: "The RAGES committee, members and public at large are very unhappy with the final draft of the Eureka Timetable as far as Dunbar is concerned and to a lesser but equally important extent at Berwick. Individuals from all three groups of the aforementioned have bent my ear that I as Chairman should let yourselves at East Coast know the depth of resentment regarding East Coast at Dunbar."

Points raised were:

- Dunbar and its catchment area passengers have been requesting an additional train to London King's Cross around mid morning to lunchtime for a number of years. Sadly Eureka has not addressed this situation, indeed it has made the matter considerably worse by the withdrawal of the 16:00 ex-Edinburgh which called at Dunbar at 16:20. This means that at Dunbar, when the new summer timetable starts, there will be a virtual 12 hour gap between direct trains to King's Cross. He quoted the passenger figures detailed elsewhere in this newsletter of the 16:20.
- Passenger uptake could be so much greater if 'Miniature' fares were available from Dunbar as they are from all other East Coast stations. Quite a number of people will either go to Edinburgh or Berwick at great inconvenience just to take advantage of the much reduced fare.
- A lot of passengers are unhappy with the withdrawal of East Coast services to Glasgow Central, i.e. the 07:38 and 08:52 at Dunbar have no direct service to Central. Reasons given for the withdrawal of East Coast 225 sets from Central were that loadings were inadequate to justify such large sets continuing from Edinburgh to Central. RAGES found that loadings are much higher than those claimed in the justification argument, an average of 118 passengers as against 20 to 30.
- As I stated in my return to comments on the first draft, we feel it is somewhat strange in this environmentally aware era to be withdrawing electric trains and replacing them with diesels under the wire.
- The latest available statistics show Dunbar as having a yearly patronage of 162k with 24 trains calling, whereas Berwick has 195k with 55 trains calling. This works out as 6.75k and 3.54k per train year

respectively which shows just how popular Dunbar is and could be so much more if there were more trains.

Non Eureka points raised with regard to Dunbar station are:

- At East Coast meetings, we were promised additional cycle racks due to acute shortage of available racks, but have not materialised
- Car park extension has not been progressed and Dunbar station is the only station in East Lothian to have a charge - currently £4 per day.
- No Miniature fares available and unlike all other ScotRail served stations, there are no off peak fares available or any Family Weekend fares 'Kids go Free' available. We were told that it was up to East Coast to have this very 'unfair' situation remedied.

Observations regarding Berwick when the May timetable comes into force:

- Eureka has removed some three King's Cross bound services between mid morning and mid afternoon. Our Berwick committee member who uses these southbound services regularly, quite correctly makes the point that on four occasions during March and April his passenger count boarding the 09:39 worked out at an average of 39 and this increases during the summer months.
- Eureka has failed to address the age old problem of no late night trains to Berwick from Edinburgh - this still being 21:00 Sun to Fri and at the ridiculous time 19:00 on Saturdays, which coincidentally is the same for Dunbar.

East Coast's replies are on page 4.

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

Brian Patton

There is not a great deal to report about Berwick since the last newsletter. The café-bar has a completely new frontage, which looks very smart, and this has made the premises much warmer both for those having a cup of something and those who work there. The carpet in the waiting area at the front of the station has been re-laid but the toilets at that point continue to have problems and for quite some days now have been out of use. As these include the adapted toilet for those with special needs, the closure has been especially inconvenient for them, as there is no alternative at the station.

There have been a couple of major disruptions, on one occasion resulting in delays of up to six hours.

The new timetable has been published and we have been horrified to see that the southbound service between 09:00 and 15:00 hrs had been severely cut, from six trains to three. If one can count the 15:11 as replacing the 14:39, that is still a 33% reduction in what was previously offered, at the busiest time of the day for long-distance departures. Most trains which call at Berwick no longer stop at Peterborough and connections through to Lincolnshire and East Anglia have gone by the board. I shall return to this matter next time, when the new timetable will actually be in operation, but on the face of it, it would seem to be a disaster for Berwick passengers.

I had wondered why East Coast publicity constantly tells us that it is all so “exciting” but now I see that this must refer to the game of finding new travel opportunities to replace those lost and new connections to replace those which have been broken.

In March, I did a passenger count at Berwick:

Friday 11th: 14:39 departure - boarded 24, alighted ? (Couldn't wait to check)

Monday 14th: 14:39 departure - boarded 20, alighted 24

Tuesday 15th: 12:39 departure - boarded 21, alighted 2 and 13:39 departure - boarded 16, alighted 8

Wednesday 16th: 09:39 departure - boarded 45, alighted 7; 10:11 departure - boarded 31, alighted 7 and 11:39 departure - boarded 19, alighted 15.

From the figures for the 16th, it is seen that the three trains for which the 10:11 hrs will now have to suffice boarded 95 passengers which was mid-week and at a period when few people are travelling. I am sure that figures for a summer month would be at least double this.

New Stops at Musselburgh

Whilst RAGES was pleased to see the new First ScotRail services introduced last May and December between Edinburgh and Dunbar, we were disappointed that only the mid-afternoon one had intermediate stops.

However, we have now received the good news that all ScotRail trains to and from Dunbar will stop at Musselburgh when the new timetable is implemented on May 22 2011. As well as give students attending the Queen Margaret University the option to travel by rail from the east side of the county, it provides more opportunities for students travelling from Edinburgh.

In addition, there will be an extra service leaving Edinburgh at 16:33 hrs and returning from Dunbar at 17:02, also stopping at Musselburgh. The current Dunbar trains are re-timed from 23rd May to fit into the new Eureka timetable.

Class 380 Introduction

Due to the continuing slow introduction of the new class 380 electric multiple units, the existing class 322s on the North Berwick and Dunbar routes will not be replaced until at least the summer.

Meanwhile RailNews has noted that: “Northern has been named by the DfT as the recipient of five class 322 units due to be cascaded from ScotRail. The Class 322s – five units of four cars each – are due to come into service with Northern from December and will be used to provide additional services between Leeds, Skipton, Ilkley and Doncaster. The Class 322s themselves are far from new – or additional – having been built by British Rail for Stansted Express in 1990.”

Haddington Rail Study

At a recent local rail meeting hosted by Cllr Paul McLennan, the Haddington rail re-opening was given a good airing. The reasons for the re-opening, including the fact that we are now past the timescale for re-assessment suggested by the 1999 Scott Wilson report, was discussed.

Answering Paul's question about costs of studies, Trond Haugen of SEStran informed us that a technical feasibility study would cost around £25,000, a STAG around £75-80,000 and a full-blown STAG nearer £100,000.

The inevitable paths problem was raised and Trond suggested that £100,000 on a full STAG might be wasted if the re-opening was not technically feasible.

Paul favoured this approach and would determine if funds were available.

He suggested that a press release be prepared before the election to announce this study and indicate the support of East Lothian Council, Haddington Community Council, Iain Gray and RAGES.

Trond also noted that it would appear that Transport Scotland had a thing about new stations appearing on the main lines, quoting Winchburgh. Here a station would be supported by a lot of the households of the 3000 new homes to be built and would be funded by the estate builders. However Transport Scotland were concerned about it increasing the target time of 37 minutes from Edinburgh to Glasgow to be achieved with the EGIP project.

Passenger Numbers at Dunbar

With the news that the 16:00 hrs East Coast from Edinburgh will be withdrawn from May 23rd and subsequently no longer stopping at Dunbar, RAGES undertook a passenger count for that train.

When Brian Patton was at Dunbar on Monday 28th March, he counted 12 passengers boarding the 16:20 and 35 alighting. Eight of those boarding had significant luggage. He returned on the 17:28, which three boarded and from which at least 150, but probably more, alighted. 35 left by the door at which he waited and about the same at the other end of the carriage.

On Friday 8th April, when Barrie Forrest was at the station, he noted that there were 26 passengers getting on and 68 and 1 dog getting off.

With the loss of the 16:20 call at Dunbar there might have been a severe dent in the Dunbar timetable and precipitated even more passengers trying to use the 17:08 departure from Edinburgh, which has been well over capacity for some time. However, after these counts were taken it was announced by First ScotRail that they would be providing a service to Dunbar leaving Edinburgh at 16:33 hrs.

Report on Railfuture Scotland Annual General Meeting

Allison Cosgrove

The Railfuture Scotland Annual General Meeting was held in the Fairway Hotel, Bathgate, on Saturday 2 April. Many members attending took the opportunity to travel to Bathgate by rail, alighting at the new station site.

The guest speaker was Gordon Casely, a journalist who travels extensively within the UK and abroad, and has used many rail networks across the world. His "target" for the day was ScotRail. In what was a lively speech, he berated ScotRail for the use of Sprinters, Turbostars and SuperSprinters which he described as "truly appalling", not forgetting the 158s, described as "abysmal". At this point, I wondered if there were any trains that Gordon actually liked – yes, the East Coast 125s. His reasons for blaming ScotRail could be summed up in a few words "First ScotRail operates trains it doesn't own over track it doesn't own between stations it doesn't own" which does neatly sum up the post-privatisation of our railways. He did agree that the number of daily services operated has improved out of all proportion, and yes, that services do run to time. However those were the only areas he found necessary to praise.

Although parts of Gordon's speech did resonate with me, especially his remarks on dirty and uncleaned toilets, I found it disappointing that he did not mention First ScotRail staff, whom I consistently find helpful and the fact that small unstaffed rural stations are kept clean and tidy.

Following the speaker, there was time for other issues to be raised, which included questions and comments about High Speed Trains, the Eureka Timetable, and comments from user groups on the progress made in their own areas.

The financial report noted that Railfuture Scotland had not received any proportion of membership contributions from annual subscriptions through Railfuture UK, because a legacy had been left by one of its members. This seemed unfair, especially as Railfuture Scotland had not actually been informed that this subvention would not happen this year. However, the Committee had been able to authorise contributions to two ongoing campaigns in Scotland because of the increase in funds, which was welcomed by these organisations.

After an interesting afternoon, unfortunately travellers returning to the station at Bathgate discovered that all trains had been cancelled due to a signalling failure in Princes Street Gardens. After some delay, buses arrived and we were eventually returned to Edinburgh by 7 pm.

MVA Consultancy's Rail Study

Last year Transport Scotland, on behalf of the Scottish Government, commissioned a report to look at a local rail service between Edinburgh and Newcastle with possible re-opening of East Linton and Reston stations. It was envisaged that the study would be completed by November 2010 and its outcomes feed into the new ScotRail franchise of 2014.

However, due to the much delayed publishing of the Eureka timetable which will start in May 2011, MVA Consultancy was unable to do the detailed study without knowing how this new timetable would impact on the route north of Newcastle.

As we were going to print, MVA Consultancy advised us that: "The situation is that we finally received the timetable in a version suitable for our use at the end of January. This has been uploaded into the RAILSYS timetable modelling software and the scope for additional Edinburgh to Berwick and Edinburgh to Newcastle train paths is being investigated. We are currently assessing the impact of these services on patronage and revenue etc. with and without new [Ed: re-opened] stations at East Linton and Reston. We hope to reach substantive conclusions this month with a view to reporting back more widely in May."

Membership

We now have around 160 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.

ScotRail Investment at East of Scotland Stations

ScotRail recently announced a series of investments at stations in the East of Scotland.

They include the refurbishment and reopening of a former waiting room on the North Berwick-bound platform at Drem. In addition, a cycle rack will be provided at Drem.

Included in the list of stations in the East of Scotland to be repainted in the new "ScotRail, Scotland's Railway" unified livery during 2011 is Brunstane.

ScotRail also confirmed there will be station entrance clocks at Musselburgh and Newcraighall.

Steve Montgomery, managing director of ScotRail, said: "These investments at stations underpin our commitment to delivering real benefits to our customers."

East Coast Response

From page 1

A summary of Karen Boswell's comments are as follows:

- The service structure for Dunbar remains basically unchanged. There will be an East Coast service which will call at the station in the morning, in both directions, to provide a commuter service into Edinburgh. In addition, there will be an early morning direct service to King's Cross which will leave Dunbar at 06:06 and arrive at 10:45. During the evening, East Coast will still provide return journeys for commuters from Edinburgh and a return service direct from King's Cross which will depart at 18:00. This is 30 minutes later than our current service and will arrive into Dunbar at 22:02.
- Throughout the remainder of the day, CrossCountry services will call at Dunbar every two hours in both directions, and ScotRail has introduced a service every two hours between Edinburgh and Dunbar.
- When you look at the full picture as detailed above, after 22nd May Dunbar will effectively receive an hourly service to and from Edinburgh, and will be serviced with frequent direct trains to Newcastle, York, Leeds, Sheffield, Birmingham and the West Country.
- I can understand RAGES' concern regarding the removal of the 16:00 Edinburgh service which currently stops at Dunbar. Current ticket sales tells us that for every 10 journeys made from Dunbar at this time, nine

are actually northbound and more than seven of them are only through to Edinburgh.

- I would like to assure you that a full detailed analysis was undertaken prior to any decisions being made in relation to services to Glasgow. The point you make does actually prove that this service was unviable, given that East Coast had 118 passengers on a 530 seat train, when CrossCountry can operate a service for this number of passengers on a 200-seat Voyager set.
- East Coast is pleased to be able to protect the 21:00 service from Edinburgh to Berwick from Sunday through Friday, but at this time it is unfortunately not possible to offer a later option.
- With regard to fares, East Coast has a wide range of tickets available, and, always, our advice is to book as far in advance as possible to purchase the best deals.
- In regard to your comments about the station at Dunbar, we have had discussions with Network Rail and with East Lothian Council about the release of the land required for a new car park and are currently preparing a business case for expansion. We also intend to look at increasing cycle storage as part of this scheme.
- For information, we have also provided Sustaining Dunbar a car-parking space within the station car-park for their car club car, and we are working with them on signage and markings for the special bay.

Other Repercussions from the Introduction of the May timetable

As already mentioned, the ScotRail Dunbar timings have been changed with the midday and afternoon trains to and from Dunbar being at better times. However, the late night service is earlier: 22:06 on Mondays to Thursdays and 23:01 on Fridays. Although the 16:00 East Coast will no longer run, there is the ScotRail 16:33 which should provide plenty of seats and perhaps ease the seating problems on the 17:08 CrossCountry.

Most of the weekday North Berwick services are around five minutes later at both ends.

The CrossCountry early morning service from Dunbar will leave later at 07:00, whilst the 07:40 and 08:54 will no longer go through to Haymarket. Most of the other north-bound long distance trains arrive and leave Dunbar earlier, apart from last CrossCountry and East Coast which will leave at 21:50 and 22:04 respectively. The weekend trains also have slightly different timings.

Regarding Berwick, the outcome of the Eureka timetable, over and above Brian's comments about south-bound trains on page 2, has increased the opportunity to travel from Berwick to Edinburgh by 4 trains per day, but is reduced by one in the other direction. Again most train times have altered for Berwick.

Newcraighall has not escaped untouched! In general trains will now depart from there at approximately 17 and 47 minutes past the hour. The return times from Edinburgh are also about 10 minutes later than at present.

Travellers are advised to study the new timetables carefully.