

The Rages Rag

Newsletter of Rail Action Group, East of Scotland

www.rages.org.uk

Issue No. 51 - October 2011

Local Rail Study Published

The study into a local rail service between Edinburgh and Newcastle with the possibility of re-opened stations at East Linton and Reston was published in mid-September with just over 100 pages. This had been commissioned by Transport Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Government and was carried out by MVA Consultancy.

The stated objective of the study was to 'provide a complete, operationally robust, demand driven and economically sustainable train service proposal for the Edinburgh-Newcastle route, having considered and appraised all of the stakeholder desires'.

RAGES was invited to have an input and we had a public meeting in Haddington with the consultants in June 2010 when they outlined their approach and we were able to air our aims. RAGES also organised public meetings in collaboration with the councils at East Linton, Dunbar and Reston in October 2010 when those present had the opportunity to discuss what they wished to see from a local train service. Reston in particular had a very good turnout of over 80. These requirements were passed to the consultants.

The study took forward a number of potential enhancements to east coast services as noted in the East Coast Route Utilisation Study undertaken by Network Rail in 2008, where it said that local services to Dunbar and Berwick-upon-Tweed would create the opportunity for new stations at East Linton and Reston served by Berwick services only. RAGES came into being in 1999 with these as our main aims.

This latest study comprised three primary elements:

- consultation with local stakeholders to determine the scope and scale of aspirations for rail services locally;
- detailed timetable modelling using industry standard software to identify potential train paths for new services to operate in;
- demand forecasting and economic appraisal of the resulting potential service enhancements.

In addition to 40 stakeholders, a number of other organisations and individuals fed into the consultation process.

The study gives a table presenting the key themes emerging from the consultation responses ordered by frequency of response. The table shows that Reston, East Linton and Dunbar concerns and suggestions feature prominently in the responses due to the strong support in the area and active rail user groups, including RAGES, leading to a high number of individual and community council responses. The responses show particular support for opening stations at Reston, East Linton and improved services for Dunbar.

The report continued by saying that there are clearly very strong local networks in support of improved rail services and new stations in the area and that these groups have been active and effective in campaigning for many years in this regard, and

Late Saturday Night Train to Dunbar

After many years of campaigning by RAGES, First ScotRail is to introduce a late Saturday night service from Edinburgh to Dunbar. The new service, which will call at Musselburgh, will be launched on Saturday 17 December as part of the new winter timetable and will depart Edinburgh Waverley at 22:06hrs.

The service is some three hours later than the current last train to Dunbar which is provided by East Coast.

Councillor Paul McLennan, leader of East Lothian Council, said: "We welcome the new ScotRail service which will provide Dunbar and Musselburgh residents with an additional transport option from Edinburgh.

"The timing means people can enjoy Christmas shopping or festive celebrations without worrying about parking or designated drivers."

The new service will operate initially for 12 months and be subject to review beyond December 2012.

that they have strong support from elected representatives. There is therefore no doubt that there is a local desire for improved services and this has been fully expressed throughout the study.

One theme which recurs is the aspiration for improved local services along the corridor to be implemented without any associated reduction in long distance high speed (LDHS) station stops. In many ways this is the key issue. Reducing travel times on LDHS services would create benefits for users of these services and assist in encouraging modal shift from air to rail for anglo-Scottish travel.

It suggests that these reduced travel times could be achieved by removing intermediate stops at some or all of Morpeth, Alnmouth, Berwick-upon-Tweed and Dunbar, if suitable alternative local services were provided, but this would in most cases lead to longer journey times and reduced connectivity to the national networks from these locations. The benefits generated for LDHS services from reduced travel times may or may not be enough to outweigh the disbenefits to local passengers.

Options

Three main options have been evaluated:

- Edinburgh to Dunbar stopping all stations;
- Edinburgh to Berwick-upon-Tweed stopping all stations;
- Edinburgh to Newcastle semi-fast key stations only.

The results showed that adding new station stops at Reston and East Linton could generally be accommodated without

Go to page 2

Local Rail Study

From page 1

significant changes to the timetable.

In addition it was noted that there is the potential for up to 17 northbound and 23 southbound extra services and that capacity on the single platform at Dunbar limits the number of services that can turn back at the platform and turning back at Berwick assumed only a single platform available.

The two main aspects to the appraisal considered were: the financial appraisal which considers in the main any construction costs and the costs of running additional train services against the increases in revenue taken by the train operator; and the social cost benefit analysis which adds to the financial appraisal via a monetary valuation of the benefits accruing to train users, principally through shorter journey times which are turned into monetary benefits using established values of time.

New Dunbar Services

In May 2011, there were 15 northbound services from Dunbar, including four Dunbar to Edinburgh ScotRail services and 18 Edinburgh to Dunbar trains, including four ScotRail Edinburgh to Dunbar services.

The timetable developed in the study for the new services allows for the new trains to call at all stations between Dunbar and Edinburgh, unlike the current ScotRail services which run direct to Dunbar, although some stop at Musselburgh [*Ed: all do so now*] and give a journey time of around 35 minutes from Dunbar to Waverley. This service would therefore provide a step change in frequency offering a near half-hourly service from Drem, Longniddry, Prestonpans, Wallyford and Musselburgh throughout the day.

Two tests were specified: using all possible paths, i.e. an additional 40 services across the day which would require three additional train sets to operate; and limiting it to only 26 additional services, but required only two additional train sets and hence reduced train operating costs.

A table showed the Forecast Change in Annual Passengers for an Edinburgh to Dunbar Service. There are substantial uplifts in passenger numbers along the line overall at around 12%, not just at Dunbar. The increase at Dunbar is actually rather less at around 8%, reflecting the continuing presence of faster, LDHS services there. Musselburgh to Edinburgh shows large absolute and percentage changes in passenger numbers. It was noted that base level travel between Dunbar and Musselburgh (including Queen Margaret University) is very low given the current lack of direct services. These new services will improve this connectivity considerably, and as such the forecasting approach will underestimate this potential new demand. However, if the services did not stop at all the intermediate stations between Dunbar and Edinburgh there would be a loss of benefits to these stations which would impact on the viability of the services.

Another table showed the Distribution of Annual User Benefits for the service where it was seen that although Musselburgh to Edinburgh sees the biggest increase in passenger numbers, Dunbar to Edinburgh sees the greatest share of benefits, i.e. the benefits per passenger are greater there. If say Prestonpans, Longniddry and Drem were excluded from this service, the level of benefits associated with this service would drop by 28%.

Whether or not the service is operated by two or three extra units, the operating costs outweigh the combined user benefits and additional revenue generated. So in both cases, the net financial cost and net benefits are both negative suggesting that

the costs associated with the services outweigh the benefits realised. This service would therefore require an initial annual subsidy of £1.5m to £2.5m to run. The quantified benefit cost ratio (BCR) is 0.89 and 0.88 (two or three extra units respectively) i.e. for every £1 spent only around 90p is returned by way of benefits.

Berwick-upon-Tweed Services

Among the tests specified were: using all possible paths, an additional 33 services requiring three additional train sets; and having just 20 additional trains requiring only two additional train sets.

Again, the tables showed that there are substantial uplifts in passenger numbers along the line, not just at Dunbar. Edinburgh to Musselburgh, Dunbar and Wallyford see the largest rises in passenger numbers. It is notable that Edinburgh to Berwick passenger numbers do not increase significantly. This reflects the uncompetitive journey times offered by the new service compared to the existing East Coast and Cross Country services. Travel volumes between Berwick and stations in East Lothian would anticipated to be very low, although Dunbar to Berwick sees a high percentage increase (although low in absolute terms) reflecting the step change in connectivity between the two locations.

This service would initially require an annual subsidy of over £3m or £2m to run depending on whether three or two train sets are used. The quantified BCR ranged from 0.46 to 0.68. As with the Dunbar services, all options show a BCR of less than one. This reflects the fact that very little additional benefit is realised in taking the services on to Berwick, yet the operating costs are significantly increased with the increased train miles. A local service to Berwick as such would not seem to be an attractive proposition, although new stations could change this picture.

Edinburgh to Newcastle Semi-fast Service

Again various combinations of tests were applied producing quantified BCRs in the range of 0.58 to 0.68. As such, none of the options in isolation represent good value for money.

New stations

East Linton

As the distance from Edinburgh increases, the mode share of train increases dramatically compared to bus, i.e. bus is not attractive for longer distance commuting, but East Linton station would not be likely to be used by residents of any other settlement, as they all have closer options from existing stations. However, there would be a reasonable rural hinterland covering a dispersed number of hamlets south of the A1 in particular.

The main impact of opening East Linton station would be likely to be an uplift in public transport modal share in line with other settlements in the area with a station, together with some transfer of demand from Drem station, used by current East Linton based rail travellers.

The estimated demand from East Linton, factoring for the rural hinterland, was that the level of commuting on a typical day, other travel purposes and other Scottish rail destinations, growthed up to 2010 in line with observed growth in rail travel from similar East Lothian stations, would be 197 boardings per

Go to page 3

Local Rail Study

From page 2

weekday. Annualising this figure and accounting for return trips gives the total of 126,000 station entries / exits per annum, a figure midway between observed data for Drem and Longniddry stations. However, some 20% of passengers would prefer East Linton to other stations, mainly Drem, resulting in a net gain of 102,000 passenger journeys.

Reston

The study noted that Reston itself is very small with a population of around 335 at the 2001 Census. The current Scottish Borders Consolidated Local Plan (2011) has an allocation for a further 36 housing units at Reston, although it is understood that there are local aspirations for further development there, and the Local Plan does note two sites for longer term development, in connection with any new station. As such Reston would have a very low 'walk in' catchment and station patronage would depend to a large extent on drive in park and ride. The potential drive-in 'catchment' for Reston could include Ayton, Chirnside, Coldingham, Duns and Eyemouth, with around 8,700 people living in these settlements. The Local Plan has provision for around a further 1,100 homes in these settlements. In addition there would be a number of others living in smaller villages and hamlets, including Burnmouth, Hutton, Grantshouse, Preston and St Abbs and these villages account for around a further 750 people.

The potential patronage at Reston has been estimated that, factored for the rural hinterland, the level of commuting on a typical day, other travel purposes and other Scottish rail destinations, growthed up to 2010, would be 79 boardings per weekday. The report recognises that the station "would provide genuinely new travel opportunities to Edinburgh" and adds an uplift factor of 20% taking the total to 95. Annualising this figure and accounting for return trips gives the total of around 61,000 station entries / exits per annum. However, based on an analysis of existing commuting proportions, around 21% of this demand would however be abstracted from other stations, mainly Dunbar and Berwick, giving a net gain of 48,000 passenger journeys. It is noted that benefits accruing to those travelling from Reston to Berwick have not been included as these are likely to be very small given the size of the walk in catchment at Reston.

Impact of opening East Linton on services

The study suggests that East Linton station stops could form part of a Dunbar or Berwick service. Reston would form part of an Edinburgh to Berwick service. Neither would be likely to be part of an Edinburgh to Newcastle semi-fast service.

The report assumed that any new station stops at East Linton and Reston can be accounted for within the new timetables i.e. there is no loss of time to 'existing' end to end travellers. This is an important assumption as it means that the only costs associated with the stations are the construction costs, i.e. train operation costs and existing user benefits are unaffected. As such, as long as the additional benefits and revenue from the new stations outweigh the construction costs (over a 60 year period) the addition of new stations will improve the business case. Any extension of the end to end core service journey times as a result of the additional station stop(s) would lead to a reduction in benefits to those passengers however, and have a negative

impact on the business case.

The re-opening of East Linton sees a small rise in overall user benefits and a larger rise in total revenues. This means that annual net costs and disbenefits are improved (i.e. less negative). The quantified BCR for an Edinburgh to Dunbar service is raised from 0.88 to 1.26 when considering a re-opened East Linton station, but the study cautions that:

- LDHS service calls at Dunbar are retained; the reduction or removal of stops would result in net disbenefits and a negative BCR given the reduced frequency and longer journey times
- The addition of East Linton does not generally bring about delays for 'existing' Dunbar passengers: note that the timetable work undertaken broadly supports this assumption.

Impact of opening East Linton and Reston stations on a Berwick service

The additional revenue and user benefits generated by the two new stations are significant, but do not eliminate the net costs and disbenefits associated with a purely Berwick service. In financial terms, these services would require an initial annual subsidy of between £2.5m and £3.5m, although the additional stations do have the impact of reducing subsidy. This excludes construction costs.

Any additional journey time associated with the introduction of a Reston stop to a Berwick service would not have a material detrimental impact on existing passengers as very few would be travelling to or from Berwick. However, an East Linton stop would have a material impact on Dunbar passengers if journey times were increased as a result.

The quantified BCR for an Edinburgh to Berwick service is raised from 0.68 to 1.10 when considering re-opened stations at East Linton and Reston.

Overall, there is therefore a finely balanced proposal which would be sensitive to any changes in the underlying assumptions. As previously stated, any diminution of the LDHS station stops at Dunbar or Berwick would lead to disbenefits which, taken together with the above could turn the NPV negative, depending on the balance of benefits to LDHS passengers and disbenefits to local Passengers.

Postscript

At our last committee meeting, Paul Wheelhouse, MSP for South of Scotland and RAGES member, updated the committee on a meeting which he and Iain Gray, MSP for East Lothian, attended with Keith Brown MSP, Minister for Transport. The meeting was very constructive and whilst it was noted that an annual subsidy would be required to provide the realisation of our aims, Keith Brown did not dismiss it completely. It was suggested that the MSPs should further consult with the two councils and others in order to add weight to the study. Paul suggested that these should take account of cohesion of the study and equity, i.e. equal treatment as in other parts of the country.

RAGES would be contributing to this. Paul McLennan would be chairing his Local Rail Study meeting in Haddington in early November when representatives from the two councils, SEStrans and RAGES would also discuss their responses.

Go to page 4

Berwick News

By Brian Patton

There being at present no representative for Berwick on the RAGES committee, I have compiled a short report to keep readers up to date with happenings at the station.

The main item of news is that Lucy, having successfully completed her training, has now transferred to the platform, where she is helping passengers and dispatching trains with her usual efficiency. However, we miss her presence in the booking office, more especially so as she has not as yet been replaced by a full-time appointee, although two temporary posts have been created, but as yet unfilled. The effect of the vacancy is that there is less chance of having two posts in the office open at busy times and queues have been longer, both at windows and for the machine. Susan had been off on sick leave for some weeks but is now back to work and we are pleased to hear that she is better.

The other piece of news is that, at long last, the toilets on the concourse side have been returned to full working order. This in fact happened between the compilation of my last report and its publication and so is not very new news, but it is good to know that the station has once again a full set of facilities.

Trains have generally run well. The through trains to and from Glasgow, now provided by Cross-Country, are often very crowded, with standing passengers on quite a few occasions during the summer. This overcrowding does not do much for the image of inter-city travel.

Local Rail Study

From page 3

It is hoped that the councils will agree to fund, either fully or to a major extent, the building of the two stations.

It is noted that the positive outcome of this study is required soon as it will be required to be included in the ScotRail franchise consultation which will no doubt start next year in time of the franchise renewal in 2014.

Editor's note

The original document is 104 pages in length and I have attempted to precis what I feel are the major arguments in the consultants arriving at their conclusions. In doing so, I hope that I have not done the study an injustice and if the reader is able to access the web version at www.transportscotland.gov.uk/files/documents/reports/Enhanced-Rail-Services-between-Edinburgh-and-Newcastle.pdf they will be able to access more details given in barcharts, tables and timetables.

Stop press

As we go to press, RAGES has secured a meeting with the Minister for Transport on 23rd November, when we will be raising all our concerns such as the local rail study and the expectation, that in the event of severe weather, Dunbar's station will not be bypassed as it was in December 2010.

Musselburgh fare anomaly

After our article in the last newsletter about Dunbar to Musselburgh fare being dearer than that to Edinburgh, First ScotRail have informed RAGES that Musselburgh fare will be reduced to the same as Edinburgh from January 2012.

Thanks are due to Passenger Focus for also taking up our complaint with ScotRail.

Plaque Unveiled in Memory of James King

A special tribute was made to "the voice of Scottish rail passengers" at a poignant ceremony at North Berwick Station on Monday 10 October when a plaque was unveiled in memory of James King, Scottish Board Member of Passenger Focus, the independent watchdog.

On the official inauguration of RAGES in 1999, James was appointed Vice Chairman and North Berwick Services representative. James carried out these posts for a number of years until he joined the committee of Rail Passengers Committee, Scotland which after a name change has become Passenger Focus.

The plaque was unveiled by his widow Katie (right) and by Christine Knights, a former Passenger Focus Board member.



Photo: Courtesy of Gordon Fraser / ScotRail

Katie King said: "I am very proud and honoured that the railway industry, in association with North Berwick in Bloom, has paid tribute to James' memory in this way and at a location with which he was closely associated. He would be so 'chuffed!'"

The stainless steel plaque was procured by North Berwick in Bloom, whose award-winning garden at North Berwick Station helped the town in winning the Coastal Resort category at this year's Beautiful Scotland awards.

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

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