

## **RAGES Meeting with Peter Brett Associates (PBA) re Case for Change for transport links to & from East Lothian**

To provide feedback, on 13 March RAGES met with the consultants appointed by East Lothian Council to develop the Scottish Transport Appraisal Group (STAG) Case for Change, primarily concerning the corridor through the west of the county, broadly following the A1 and the East Coast Main Line (ECML) from Haddington westwards, where the majority of journeys converge on the transport network.

It was noted that potential latent demand for rail travel is constrained as services and infrastructure, including station car parks, are operating at capacity and that Haddington in particular is accessible only by road. Tension exists on the ECML between long-distance and commuter demand. RAGES commented that railways must better serve local travel, which in East Lothian and Berwickshire has all but been eliminated since the 1960s to the advantage of intercity and cross-country operators.

Whilst noting that Network Rail (NR) is considering quadrupling the ECML between Prestonpans and Drem, and reconfiguring Portobello Junction where the Borders Railway diverges, for higher speeds (the current single-lead configuration restricts speed to only 15 mph thereby prolonging occupation of the ECML) RAGES commented that additional capacity-improving measures should include re-opening more of the former bay platforms on the east side of Waverley, re-quadrupling the ECML between Waverley and Portobello Junction, including re-doubling North and South Calton Tunnels and re-opening the Abbeyhill Loop (in respect of which RAGES has made several representations in the past, including the need to preserve the alignment), provision of additional loops e.g. Monktonhall, Blindwells and Longniddry (if the Prestonpans-Drem quadrupling does not take place), a second loop at Dunbar and possibly also re-signalling to shorten sections.

There was no dissent that East Lothian residents have a high dependence on road transport and that the A1 and, outwith the county, the A720 are getting more congested by the day, and that this congestion and all the associated delays and traffic pollution will only worsen with the intensive house-building taking place across the county and at Haddington and Blindwells in particular. RAGES noted that, per the National Records of Scotland (NRS) figures, between 1997 and 2017 the population of East Lothian has increased by 19.5%, which is the highest percentage change out of the 32 council areas in Scotland. The massive and ongoing increase in housing, population and therefore transport demand is primarily government-driven, but insufficient consideration has been given to transport and other infrastructure being put in place to meet current and future demand. Equally, governments exhort the public to make less use of their cars and reduce air pollution. With the increasing progress towards 100% renewable electricity generation in Scotland, more electric train services could go a long way to providing sustainable public transport and reducing the congestion, pollution and health problems caused by reliance on road transport.

Additional NRS figures predict that East Lothian's population will increase from 104,090 in 2016 to 113,048 by 2026, an increase of 8.6% which compares to a projected increase of 3.2% nationwide. Additionally, nationwide East Lothian is projected to have the second highest percentage change in population size (only Midlothian is expected to top this with a 13.3% increase).

RAGES expressed its preference for re-opening of the Haddington branch, ideally to the previous terminus on Station Road. Minimal compulsory purchase/relocation of existing industrial units would be required; the biggest physical obstacle would be the reconstruction of the A1 overbridge which was unwisely built without preserving the railway alignment and loading gauge. A level crossing would be required at Gateside, failing which an alternative road access could be provided for the new houses on the north side of the line onto the A199. As insufficient parking exists at Station Road (although part of the West Road field adjacent to the station site could be considered), a park and ride station at Oak Tree would be essential, which could also serve the substantial Letham Mains & Gateside developments. Just east of where the A199 crosses the railway formation, there is a large rectangular piece of ground, occupied only by scrub, which would be suitable as a car park. As only single track would suffice between Longniddry and Haddington, it would be possible to retain a footpath/cycleway as the line was originally provided with double track throughout. An electric train service from Haddington to Edinburgh would provide the speed and capacity which road transport - car or bus - cannot match. Frequency should be half-hourly. It would not be necessary for all East Lothian ScotRail services (i.e. to/from Berwick, Dunbar, North Berwick or Haddington) to stop at every intermediate station - stops could be "staggered" to reduce journey times and maximise track capacity - although the increasing importance of Musselburgh station (serving QMU and the pending Edinburgh Innovation Park) was noted. The possibility of some form of light rapid transit serving Haddington (but avoiding the ECML) was raised by PBA, but RAGES felt that this would not best serve the majority of travellers who wish to get to Edinburgh and beyond quickly.

There was also agreement on the need to improve connectivity not just locally but further afield, such that for example some electric services should be through trains to and from the likes of Alloa, Ayr, Dunblane, Glasgow and Helensburgh. Where necessary, East Lothian platforms should be lengthened/constructed to accommodate 8-car EMUs as a minimum (it was noted that Reston is to be proposed to accommodate 10-vehicle sets). These services would also have the operational benefits of improved train-crew and rolling stock utilisation, and less dwell time at Waverley. In general, not just in the East Lothian area, public transport needs to be properly integrated, with bus and train services offering decent connections with each other.

Development of the Blindwells and Cockenzie sites is also covered by the study, with Blindwells approved for 10,000 new houses plus a secondary school and other facilities. As some of its northern perimeter bounds the ECML, RAGES suggested the provision of a new station, with platforms on the "slow" lines if quadrupling takes place and on new loops if not, midway between Prestonpans and Longniddry stations. Any potential industrial development on the former Cockenzie Power Station site would be well-served by the existing national grid, the potential to reconnect the merry-go-round coal sidings to the ECML, and the potential for a port facility.

Relating to tram and road travel, it was suggested that in and around Edinburgh, the tram system could usefully be extended to serve Portobello, Musselburgh (which is not as well served by the present station at Stoneybank as it was by the original town centre station), Tranent and possibly also the south side of Blindwells/Macmerry by being routed along or beside the A199. Bus lanes should be better policed, and utilities roadworks better co-ordinated.