

The Rages Rag

Newsletter of Rail Action Group, East of Scotland

www.rages.org.uk

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A piece of the action - when?

“30 billion and climbing - passenger miles highest since WW2” was the headline in the May issue of Railnews, a monthly newspaper for railway staff.

The article went on to say that a total of 30.1 billion passenger miles were generated in 2007 - up from 28.1 billion the previous year. Passengers made 1.2 billion journeys last year which is an increase of 8%.

Apart from wartime in the 1940's, rail travel stayed around 20 billion passenger miles each year from 1919 to 1995. It was after that something changed and people are returning to rail.

In the article, George Muir, director general of ATOC, said: “People are increasingly turning to rail; not only is it a faster and more convenient way of travelling, it is greener than travelling on our congested roads and domestic air routes.”

New lines

Rail re-opening in Scotland have seen success on the Bathgate line to the extent that the track is now being doubled. Other lines have re-opened around Glasgow, notably Larkhall in 2005. This line had more passengers than initial studies expected.

Just recently, the Glasgow to Stirling line has been extended to Alloa giving its residents direct hourly access to the city, with connections to Edinburgh at Stirling. Again, within weeks 8000 people were using the line weekly which

was well above forecasts.

This brings us back to the headline. When will East Lothian and Berwickshire get a piece of the action? With fuel costs rising for motorists and, despite this, traffic congestion not getting any better there is no time like the present to be able to have the alternative transport of rail.

East Linton, Dunbar, Reston and even Haddington deserve good rail connections - all of these places are expecting many houses to be built in the next few years and the roads will not be able to cope with this additional commuting (and off-peak) traffic.

Unlike the re-openings mentioned above, East Linton and Reston have rail tracks passing through them - their only need are stations and car parks. Dunbar has its station and just lacks a regular service run locally - not from London.

Car parks

Car parking at our existing stations has reached capacity and is overflowing onto adjacent roads to the annoyance of local residents. After the morning peak, it is unlikely that you will be able to park near a station which, of course, deters people from using off-peak services. However, East Lothian Council, First ScotRail and National Express East Coast are all looking at ways of expanding the car parks.

ECML Improvements

A statement by National Express in response to the Office of Rail Regulation announcement on Network Rail funding included:

“In addition to the inclusion of a number of much-needed schemes to boost capacity on the busy East Coast Main Line, we understand that £30m is to be spent on improved maintenance of the overhead power lines, one of the biggest causes of delays to our services. This is a positive step in the right direction, but the work needs to be done soon to deliver early benefits for passengers.”

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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The editor invites contributions which should be sent to him at the “Published by” address at the foot of page 4.

East Linton News

RAGES is pleased to note the following Extract from Development Brief at Orchardfield Site, East Linton - ELC 2008 (sections 7 and 8).

Station Safeguarding

Land covering approximately 1.2 hectares is safeguarded for a potential railway station at East Linton. It is likely to be laid out as a car park in the future, if a station is approved. The layout of the site should not prevent the possible future expansion of this car park. The land safeguarded for the station should be accessed directly from, and form a coterminous boundary with, the access road serving the housing development. It should be accessed as directly as possible from the existing Orchardfield road. The land immediately around the station site and the entrance to it, should be provided with a treed landscape strip of sufficient depth to form an effective buffer between it and houses.

It is intended that the land safeguarded for a railway station will be acquired by East Lothian Council after the grant of planning permission for the housing development. The land should be grassed and presented in a tidy condition prior to handover on completion of the development. East Lothian Council will then be responsible for the maintenance of the safeguarded area until such time as a station is approved.

The Underpass under the Railway

The underpass will form part of a key route to East Linton

and particularly the safe route to the primary school. It requires to be made as attractive to use as possible for pedestrians both within it and on the flanked approach to it from the site. The approach from the park also requires to be improved to encourage its use. The developer of the site will require to provide these improvements to the satisfaction of East Lothian Council and Network Rail who maintain the underpass. Safety will be an important consideration in the design of these improvements both for personal safety and to ensure any opportunity for trespass on to the railway is prevented, whilst at the same time making the route attractive to users. As a right of way passes under the railway Network Rail will continue to maintain the structure after the development. In principle lighting, surface, wall and ceiling treatment and improvements to the entrance to the underpass will be acceptable but once a draft scheme of improvement is prepared, Network Rail must be consulted. Network Rail has advised that it is unlikely to oppose any repositioning of the fences by the embankments to make the entrances more welcoming though there may need to be an adjustment to the land ownership.

The underpass lies at the low lying corner of the field. Water can collect in this area making the underpass unpleasant to use and occasionally impassable. The developer must ensure that the underpass, and associated new footways are adequately drained on both sides of the railway to ensure that the new residents have full access at all times through to the village on foot and by cycle.

Help for the blind and partially sighted

The Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) have developed a talking sign system to help people get around more easily.

The RNIB React has been used by First ScotRail to provide audio announcements to blind and partially sighted passengers using a key fob which sends out a constant radio frequency signal to trigger speaker units as they approach. The speaker has pre-recorded messages stored on it, giving the person orientation information about their location. The trigger fobs are normally sold to the system owner for them to distribute. So far, First ScotRail have purchased 20 fobs and given them out to individuals based at the Forth Valley Sensory Centre near Camelon station and also Deafblind Scotland based near Lenzie.

Stations that currently have RNIB React are: Camelon, Lenzie, Brunstane, Kirkaldy and Larbert.

Future plans have not yet been decided but Glasgow's Queen Street and Partick stations are being considered.

More information about the system are available on their website at www.rnib.org.uk/react.

Franchise extension

The First ScotRail franchise is to be extended by three years under an agreement which will create an investment fund of more than £70 million for the Scottish Government to spend on new services and enhancements of the Scottish rail network.

The three-year extension to November 2014, announced on April 3 will secure major benefits for rail passengers.

Mary Dickson, First ScotRail's managing director, attributed the franchise extension to the dedication of the First ScotRail team in delivering improvements and exceeding targets in areas such as punctuality and passenger growth.

She said: "I am delighted for our staff and our customers who will see real benefits from the franchise extension.

"It is a fitting tribute to the ongoing transformation which has seen improved performance, with a 50 per cent reduction in delays, and a 19 per cent increase in passenger numbers.

"We will now build on these successes with even more investment in Scotland's railway. Customer benefits will range from new train services and improved journey times to enhancements at stations."

Berwick-upon-Tweed News

Trains have generally been running quite well, but cancellations of two CrossCountry trains on Saturday 28 June caused considerable problems. [Ed: see *Dunbar News* on page 4 for correspondence from CrossCountry]

There are still no announcements about compensation in the event of delays - only passengers who know where to go for the necessary form will actually receive anything.

Recently, National Express East Coast (NEXC) wrote to RAGES inquiring if we were interested in Adopting our local station, which included Berwick and Dunbar. This is to be on a voluntary basis and could involve helping the station team by maintaining a clean and tidy environment, keeping an eye out for anything untoward, or providing feedback to ensure that they meet the high standards expected by passengers.

In return, they were offering the chosen group a number of benefits, including the use of office space at a peppercorn rent and a free poster site at the station for community purposes.

In response, RAGES wrote to NEXC as follows. "The Committee have given this offer careful consideration and regrettably have to inform you that the Committee feels that we cannot commit ourselves/give the adoption scheme the time that such a scheme merits. The Committee currently spend much time working with: TOC's First ScotRail, National Express and Arriva; Local Councillors and MSPs such that we can improve all aspects of rail services i.e. from the point the passenger arrives at the station access, to the point where their journey has been fulfilled.

"The Group will continue to monitor and report things at Berwick and Dunbar to yourself and station staff as and when the time or need arises."

Whilst this has been successful with small unstaffed stations, usually serving a village, it is not intended for busy town stations. It is noted that there is no room at Berwick for office space.

On the positive side, the increased presence of people around a station could deter anti-social behaviour, but, thankfully, Berwick does not suffer from this.

On the negative side, if non-railway staff are on the premises, the public may ask them for information or help. What happens if they get the information wrong? What is the legal position if they help e.g. with luggage? If these people help with an activity such as gardening and then abandon it, who takes over? Any volunteers must not take on work done by professional staff. Lastly, what do railway unions think of this plan, especially in view of reductions in staffing?

On the staffing front, Euan has transferred from booking office to platform duties. He will be missed from behind the counter, but are glad that he is not being lost to railway service and we are sure that he will do just as well on platform duties as he has done at the ticket window. Other staff are having to cover the vacancy as no replacement has been appointed.

It is also noted that the sidings on the west side have been completely re-laid - hard to understand why as they are not used.

Recent meetings

Barrie Forrest attended the Stag User Group Meeting arranged by Transport Scotland on June 19th in Glasgow. It was well presented and he was able to speak to members of Transport Scotland who were most helpful and would be willing to come to one of our meetings.

The original transport appraisal system had two stages, but this has now been reduced to one and Barrie was able to obtain a copy of the new Guidance document, which is also available on the Transport Scotland website at: <http://www.transportscotland.gov.uk/reports/publications-and-guidance/corporate/j9760-00.htm>

There is the intention to have another meeting in six months time.

Barrie noted that there was no transport representative from Scottish Borders or East Lothian Councils, although there was a representative from the latter for housing.

RAGES thanks our member Joyce McLean for bringing this meeting to our attention.

RAGES had a very successful meeting at Scottish Borders Council headquarters when present were Leader David Parker, Calum Hay, Brian Young, Jim Fullerton, John Lamont MSP and RAGES committee members Tom Thorburn and Barrie Forrest.

John Lamont and David Parker agreed to issue a press release giving their support to the opening of Reston. [Ed: Issued on 20 May] They will also be writing to the Transport Minister Stewart Stevenson MSP who at a previous meeting with RAGES said he will visit Reston at a date yet to be confirmed.

Scottish Borders and East Lothian Councils are working together to have the local service re-instated between Edinburgh and Berwick with the re-opening of Reston and East Linton stations.

Barrie was also present at the July meeting in Haddington with East Lothian Council and SESTRan. Again the council continued to press for the local rail service and points were put forward to SESTRan who will take them to Transport Scotland for consideration.

RAGES would like to thank the local councillors and MSPs for bringing all the relevant bodies together at such meetings. We are also encouraged to read articles in the local newspapers giving support to the opening of Reston.

Barrie reminds us that RAGES members can also help our aims by asking their friends to become members or writing a letter to their MSP.

Membership

We now have around 150 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.

Dunbar News

As reported in the Berwick News on page 3, Dunbar suffered the cancellation of two CrossCountry trains on June 28th. RAGES wrote to CrossCountry and National Express East Coast (NEXC) as follows.

“It was brought to the attention of RAGES members of the problems being experienced last Saturday, 28th June. Dunbar passengers who wished to travel into Edinburgh using the 15:45 hrs were told by station staff that they couldn't sell them a ticket as the 15:45 hrs was cancelled. These passengers then enquired as to the time of the next train/replacement bus. Unfortunately the reply was not the normal high standard that it used to be under the previous franchisee, GNER. The next train at 17:45 hrs was also cancelled and there had been no reply from Operational Staff that a replacement coach had been ordered. Passengers according to our members were becoming increasingly agitated with station staff at this poor standard being offered, which we know is no fault of their making.

“This sort of management of our rail network is totally unacceptable, given that no trains were calling at Dunbar between 13:44 hrs and 19:44 hrs with no replacement coaches being ordered or offered.

“In conclusion, Dunbar station staff carried out their work admirably trying to get coaches - even trying to get a National Express train to make a call at Dunbar, but to no avail. This lack of support from both National Express and Arriva CrossCountry is totally unacceptable ... We do not wish to see a repeat of last Saturday's abandonment of passengers at Dunbar for these extended periods.”

In reply CrossCountry told RAGES:

“Firstly, I would like to offer my apologies for the inconvenience they and other customers experienced because of the cancellation of our Bournemouth to Edinburgh service. This service was unfortunately terminated at Leeds because of a shortage of available drivers that day to take the train on the remainder of its journey. Under normal circumstances we would have investigated the opportunity of stopping our Plymouth to Edinburgh service which passes through Dunbar between this and the later 17:42 hrs service. However, this train too was unfortunately terminated at Newcastle for the same reason.

“I am concerned at the information they apparently received regarding the later Bournemouth to Edinburgh service, due to arrive in Dunbar at 17:42 hrs. This service was not cancelled and arrived at Dunbar approximately eight minutes late, having called additionally at Morpeth and Alnmouth, and continued on to Edinburgh. This information should have been displayed on the passenger information systems at Dunbar and through the 'Live Departure' service on rail company websites.

“We normally receive an excellent level of service from our National Express East Coast colleagues who manage the stations we call at and I, again, offer my apologies if this was not the case on 28 June. There may have been some confusion because of a number of infrastructure and train problems CrossCountry experienced that day, although I am certain NEEC will be able to clarify the exact circumstances.

“CrossCountry would not have provided alternative road transport to customers at Dunbar as the next service was within two hours of the cancelled train. This information is explained in our Passenger's Charter, along with information on how

those customers with tickets would be able to claim compensation for their delay.”

NXEC responded in a similar vein confirming that “... the later Plymouth to Edinburgh service which calls at Dunbar at 17:42 did in fact run and stop at Dunbar ... Information about this service was made available to passengers at Dunbar station.”

“I understand from the Dunbar station team that when the 15:45 hrs Cross Country service was cancelled, National Express East Coast station staff called Cross Country's control office several times to request a replacement coach, however as the next service was within two hours of the cancelled train, Cross Country did not supply alternative road transport.

“Whilst National Express East Coast manage the station at Dunbar, it is not expected to provide replacement coach services nor add additional stops into its services when another train operator's service is cancelled, particularly when the next available service was due to run as normal. However, ... where assistance is requested from another train operator then NXEC would of course consider suitable assistance, such as adding additional stops.”

On 19th June, our vice-chairman was waiting for the 07:37 hrs NXEC to Glasgow. Just after the southbound train to Bournemouth had left a ganger appeared (see photograph) and repaired a broken fishplate at one of the rail joints.

The message came over the tannoy saying that the 07:37 hrs would be by-passing Dunbar because of the problem with the rail. However, a few minutes later the tannoy announced that they would be holding the 07:37 outside Dunbar for ten minutes until the rail was repaired. He did not know how many people left to take their cars after the first announcement but most people seemed to stay and they arrived in Edinburgh only a few minutes late.



Photo: B Forrest