

The Rages Rag

Newsletter of Rail Action Group, East of Scotland

www.rages.org.uk

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Berwick News

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Apart from considerable disruption caused when the overhead line was brought down at Belford, the rail services to and from Berwick have generally functioned well in the last three months, with no great delays or cancellations. The staff at Berwick station have, as always, given excellent service and on the occasion of the above-mentioned disruption, kept the station open until 02:30 hrs, to deal with stranded passengers.

On a perusal of the timetable for the 60 and 260 buses, it seemed to me that there is scope for considerable improvement in the connections at Berwick and accordingly I wrote to the Scottish Borders Council about this. I received a very prompt reply from Mr Dellow, the Public Transport Officer, in which he agreed with many of the points raised and undertook to do something when next the timetable comes up for review, in 2008.

GNER has not had its troubles to seek in recent months! The result of these could be a cost-cutting exercise and in May it was rumoured that this, in the case of Berwick, could mean a reduction in staff in the travel centre. This would effectively mean that only one ticket window was open for most of the day, which would inevitably result in a lower quality of service to passengers. I wrote to the local paper about this and my letter was published in full, along with another from a

regular traveller who was equally concerned. Nothing further has transpired since then, but we have probably not heard the last of this.

I recently had a meeting with Christine Grahame, MSP, and among the topics we discussed was the rail service to Berwick, as the current rail head for the eastern Borders. She was not sure about the exact position regarding the GNER franchise and I was able to clarify this for her. She was also unaware of the poor evening service we receive, in comparison with destinations served by First ScotRail, and has put down parliamentary questions about this for the Minister for Transport.

I shall look forward to developing the post of RAGES representative in Berwick and district and hope that more members will join to support our campaign.

Volunteered!

RAGES is pleased to say that after the last *Rages Rag* indicated that we required a representative for Berwick, one came forward. Brian Patton has been a RAGES member for five years and is a frequent traveller on the East Coast Main Line.

Volunteers?

Editor

At a recent committee meeting, the editor of *The Rages Rag* announced that after producing this newsletter, which will be his thirtieth, he intends to resign from that role. He feels that after thirty editions, it is time for a change of style and hence editor.

Therefore the committee are looking for one or more members to take on the role(s) of editor and distributor of *The Rages Rag* to our 160 or so members. There are also a further 40 complimentary issues that are sent to other interested parties. As you know the newsletter is produced quarterly.

The two roles could be done by different people. Address labels are

produced from our database. Stamps and envelopes are also self-adhesive which makes for easier packaging. Responsibility would start with the October issue.

The committee considers that the newsletter is an important means of communicating with members and others and looks forward to hearing from one or more volunteers.

Dunbar Representative

RAGES thanks Joanne Fairbairn for her contribution as Dunbar Representative, but she has decided to resign due to other commitments. We are therefore looking for a member to cover and report on Dunbar at the committee meetings.

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.

North Berwick Service News

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Service performance continues to be generally reliable, with two of the five units now refurbished. The work has been carried out to a high standard and some passengers have commented that they thought that they were brand new units.

Service performance continues to be good, although occasional problems continue to occur. These were largely documented at a well-attended passenger forum held at the Scottish Seabird Centre on June 28th of which there is a more detailed report below.

Bus connections have been re-introduced for the summer for local attractions, with the service operating daily until September 30th. Unlike two separate routes last year, resources are concentrated on one bus, provided by First, operating from North Berwick station to the Scottish Seabird Centre and Museum of Flight and returning via the Seabird Centre. These

offer excellent rail connections: departures are on Monday to Friday hourly from 10:20 to 15:20, Saturday 09:50 and hourly to 15:50 and Sunday 11:15 and hourly to 16:15 – presumably buses wait for any late train arrivals. The bus service is free, although it does only stop at the station, Seabird Centre and Museum of Flight.

Engineering Work

Advance notice of engineering work has been given during the autumn with the branch due to be closed for eight weekends between September 16th and November 5th. On Saturdays replacement buses travel between North Berwick line stations and Newcraighall for onward connections, whilst on Sundays the route is bus all the way. These details are subject to alteration, but RAGES is grateful to First ScotRail for giving this early notice.

First ScotRail Forum

By Allison Cosgrove

This was held on June 28th when questions were raised on the following matters: the lack of a proper evening service; a comparison with the hourly evening service from Newcraighall; the need for a later service during the Edinburgh Festival; the lack of communication between staff at the control centre and train crews (particularly in relation to disruptions to the service on 10th and 13th June); dirty seats; disabled access at Drem; the Sunday service at Newcraighall; platform acrobatics at Waverley and the short timescale to do so being insufficient for wheelchair users/parents with buggies; lateness of the 17:40 hrs service to allow GNER service through; lack of ramp provision at Haymarket; not enough room for eight full size bikes on trains; lack of ticket collection – why not a ticket machine at North Berwick?; would like to see a presence from Network Rail and GNER at the next meeting; lack of ramps for wheelchairs; lack of information when de-camped at Prestonpans; travelling to London easier from Berwick than from Dunbar – why?; no stop at Drem for southbound services; no Edinburgh to Dunbar service; First ScotRail newsletter not available on-train; through service from Glasgow Central to North Berwick not publicised (15:19 hrs); better evening service would help tourism in North Berwick; and not enough space for tall passengers on North Berwick Flyer.

Answers were as follows and were fully given in most cases:

Evening service - (where there were most complaints) – a business case would be put together to try and find expansion to the service.

Ticket Collection - Collection has improved. There were new proposals for door control panels which would allow the doors to be opened within the train. However, this would cost £30,000 for each train to be adapted.

Missed Connections because of lateness - It was accepted that last autumn's service had been poor, but

improvements had been made. Passengers should be aware of extra transport available if a connection e.g. to a late night train is missed. Staff are still not advising passengers of this and should be doing so.

Dirty seats - This will be taken back.

Disabled access at Drem - Access for disabled was a big problem at many stations. However, transport was available to the nearest accessible station and passengers should be made aware of this. Noted that the new style of trains at North Berwick meant there were no racks for First ScotRail magazines which would inform of this and other matters of interest to passengers.

Sunday Service at Newcraighall - There was no funding in the budget for this.

Platform acrobatics at Waverley - The five minute time slot for changing from Platform 1 to Platform 20, involving two separate lifts, would be investigated.

Haymarket trains terminating at Waverley - Early termination of services should not happen.

Refurbished trains on North Berwick line - A second train would be introduced in the next couple of days and by the end of November all the trains would be refurbished.

Disruption to service - If GNER trains are late, Network Rail takes the decision on priority, not First ScotRail. There had been problems with docking in the past. This would be investigated further.

Ramp at Haymarket - Haymarket not a good station for access. Lifts would be provided when upgrading works commenced.

More room for bikes - The best use had to be made of the space available.

No ticket machines - The number of staff on trains rather than in stations was being addressed. It was

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Railfuture Conference

From time to time, RAGES send a representative to a rail-based conference which it thinks will benefit our understanding of the railways and other campaigning groups. This conference was such a one which Allison Cosgrove attended on July 1st and reports below.

The day took the format of a number of speakers on differing topics, a Campaigning Round up and a Panel Question Time. I submitted a question to the panel on increasing accessibility for families on railways and stations.

Speakers

George Watson, Vice Chair of Wyvern Rail and operator of the organisation MyTestTrack, spoke on the acquisition of the Wirksworth Branch line, near to Derby, now open to the public. The challenge was to build an economically sustainable business through tourism potential and community use. Park and Ride is one use the line has been put to.

MyTestTrack allows for testing on short availability with a website and a dedicated phone line. The service offers a 24-hour turnaround, site briefings, a training siding and training room, catering and other services. The latest development is Transmission Based Train Control testing for London Underground with profits going towards investment in line development at Wirksworth. This was an excellent demonstration of how commercial work can be undertaken on a previously disused branch line to generate income to run passenger trains.

Ian Yeowart, Managing Director of Grand Central, spoke about the background to his organisation, describing the rejection of their application for the Cross Pennine franchise and the challenge of meeting the Regulator's rules. Securing rolling stock, identifying track capacity and finding investment were also other challenges. He described the relationship with the SRA as poor, believing that they felt there was no room for expansion in the north east and that the ECML was not "full". Population statistics of areas with no direct London service were provided. Grand Central had restrictions on stations it could stop at, which included Newcastle, Doncaster and Peterborough. There were only two fare structures, single and return, and taxi services could be booked on-train from stations to home addresses. Grand Central expected to start operating within the year.

Caspar Lucas from JPM Parry Associates spoke on the Stourbridge light railway, which operates on a Sunday only, and the possibilities that lightweighting could bring to rail services.

Carl Henderson, inventor of Bladerunner, described his product, which is the adaptation of modern tractor units into modular vehicles which could be used for rail freight or passenger travel.

Manuel Cortes from TSSA (Transport and Salaried Staffs Association) advised that the top priority of the union was to end the current fragmentation of the network and to see greater public accountability of rail services. An urgent upgrade in capacity was needed. This was being pursued through the union's Labour Party affiliation and in Scotland, Bristow Muldoon MSP, Chair of the Transport Committee, was a TSSA member.

Campaigns

Two campaigners, Andy Roden and Stuart Walker, described their work on the Save our Sleeper campaign on the Penzance line. They had to challenge the Government's figures produced to substantiate closure and were supported by all Cornwall's MPs, celebrities using the line and hundreds of local people, including an on-line petition and website. The case had to be made for the importance and relevance of the sleeper and it had to be made easy for people to sign up and support. It was vital to get celebrities on-side as this then generated Press coverage to which the Government would pay attention. In this case the campaign had been successful and the service had been retained.

Andy Roden said that following the campaign success, business on the sleeper had been busier than ever. To encourage success in other campaigns he recommended:

- writing your own press releases on a regular (but not daily basis) and including national and local radio as well as newspapers
- making sure your campaign literature is clear, concise and easy to understand
- using a petition web-site, but remembering that not everyone will have access to the internet, so hard copies will be necessary

Reviving Rural Railways was the next session, involving studies of branch lines in Cornwall and the Wensleydale line.

In 2003, only 4.2% of visitors came to Cornwall by train, with 87.5% driving to the county. However there had been a big increase in train use in Looe (16%), St Ives (25%), Newquay (40%) and North Devon (26%) since 2001. Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership has produced several useful leaflets - perhaps something RAGES could consider in the future. Joint tickets with train and buses were available between Liskeard and Looe. Upgrading costs for Newquay airport, which supported cheap flights to Cornwall as against using the train, were given as £21m upwards.

Some improvements have been made to the Newquay service, but both branch and main line services had cuts anticipated. In order to try and pre-empt this, railway groups had produced a planning document for railways for the next 10 years, with suggestions for services it was felt would be used.

Ruth Annison spoke on the successful campaign to re-open the Wensleydale line and gave several recommendations for such a tourist railway. Wensleydale had launched a £2m share option to provide the funding necessary, as well as other fundraising activities.

Graham Nalty described the campaign by the rail industry to develop high speed rail links between London stations and Edinburgh, Glasgow and Cardiff as well as larger cities in England.

Representatives from different areas gave brief updates on their campaigns. I was congratulated on the positive attitude of the Scottish Executive towards rail travel.

The Question Time Panel was an enjoyable end to a very productive day.

First ScotRail Forum

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possible to buy a ticket for the next day on the train to avoid queueing the following morning. Ticket machines were being considered for the North Berwick line.

Penalties for First ScotRail for late trains - Network Rail's decision on priorities was noted.

Growth in service? - Between 5 – 7% overall. North Berwick figures were not available for this meeting, but would be issued to the questioner.

Ramp provision - Not acceptable. There should not be a train without a ramp, and refurbished trains should all have ramps in place. A shuttle bus would be available with a through ticket from 1 July going to the Museum of Flight and the Seabird Centre. This would be advertised on the website and elsewhere.

Incident at Prestonpans on 13th June - It was accepted that it should have been clearer on the day that a signalling failure had happened. Also accepted that information could be patchy and this was an area which must be improved.

Maintenance programme causing delays at Dunbar - The programme would be checked and the questioner

would receive the information.

No Edinburgh to Dunbar service - Not at the moment, but the service does allow for expansion.

Why do ramps always need to be booked? - (Disabled person) It was recommended to book to ensure that these are provided and space not given to bikes for example.

Why no information available for visitors - There is limited space for this although information was available at the kiosk.

Link between North Berwick and Newcraighall re Queen Margaret University Campus development? - Nothing is planned at the moment.

Lack of space on North Berwick Flyer - Refurbishment meant that best use had to be made of space available with necessary compromises.

Mary Dickson from First ScotRail concluded by encouraging passengers to be as vocal as possible. The North Berwick customer forum was the best attended of all and people in the town care about their service and want it to continue. First had a commitment to improvement. She encouraged all to keep comments coming and write directly to

Re-launch of Web Site

Our web site has not been updated for some time. Unfortunately our aims are not being achieved as quickly as we would wish, so sometimes there is not much progress to report.

However, the committee has decided that the web site is an important means of communication and it has now been updated and re-launched with a new web site address - www.rages.org.uk Please update your bookmarks.

Associated with the new web address are new e-mail addresses.

The current e-mail address of rages@btinternet.com will have ceased to work by the time that you read this, so please update your records with one of the following that is most relevant:

General/Enquiry information@rages.org.uk

Chairman chairman@rages.org.uk
Membership membership@rages.org.uk
Secretary secretary@rages.org.uk
Treasurer treasurer@rages.org.uk

Newsletters (paper and electronic):

Editor editor@rages.org.uk

Individual stations/areas:

Berwick berwick@rages.org.uk
Dunbar dunbar@rages.org.uk
East Linton eastlinton@rages.org.uk
Haddington haddington@rages.org.uk
North Berwick northberwick@rages.org.uk
Reston reston@rages.org.uk

Christopher Garnett Steps Down From GNER

GNER has announced that Christopher Garnett has decided to step down as Chief Executive after ten years with the company. Mr Garnett will leave the company on August 31. Bob MacKenzie, President and Chief Executive Officer of Sea Containers Ltd, GNER's parent company, will become Executive Chairman of GNER, supported by the other GNER directors.

Mr Garnett said: "After ten challenging and rewarding years helping to transform GNER into a company renowned for customer service, now is the right time to step down and hand over to others to lead the next stage in GNER's development."

Commenting on Mr Garnett's departure, Mr MacKenzie said: "We thank Christopher for his sterling work building GNER into a first class train operating company, and for his efforts and commitment to the company since 1996. Looking ahead, GNER does face a number of challenges, which in the current financial environment need urgent attention. I will be working with the GNER team to address these."

RAGES also thanks Mr Garnett for his interest in and action on RAGES aims.

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.