

The Rages Rag



Newsletter of Rail Action Group, East of Scotland



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Local Rail Study Shows Positive Case

On 10 December 2013, the local rail study for a service between Edinburgh and Berwick with re-opened stations at East Linton and Reston was launched at the Scottish Parliament.

The study recommends establishing a local rail service from Edinburgh to Dunbar and Berwick, together with re-opened stations at East Linton and Reston.

Seen below at the launch from the left are: Cllr Michael Veitch of East Lothian Council, John Lamont MSP, Paul Wheelhouse MSP, Tom Thorburn, Chairman of RAGES, Barrie Forrest, Vice Chairman and Reston representative of RAGES, Russell Imrie of SEStran, Iain Gray MSP, Cllr Gordon Edgar of Scottish Borders Council and Jim Hume MSP.



Photograph courtesy of SEStran

This joint study was commissioned and funded by the East Lothian and Scottish Borders Councils along with SEStran. RAGES has also had an input to it, as it has done with the preceding studies. Latterly Transport Scotland has given input and advice as to how to present the information in STAG2 format.

The additional study was requested by the Minister of Transport and along with the September 2011 study will satisfy the STAG requirements for the project to be considered by the Scottish Government.

A brief was drawn up by SEStran on behalf of the East Lothian and Scottish Borders Councils to the satisfaction of Transport Scotland and MVA Consultancy was commissioned to carry out the study. The brief was described in a previous newsletter.

The study has now been completed and covers some 116 pages, including many graphs, tables and maps.

In a covering letter from the three study commissioners to Keith Brown, Minister for Transport, they "hope there will be an opportunity to meet in due course to discuss the provision of a service to Dunbar and Berwick-upon-Tweed together with the two new stations during the next ScotRail franchise."

RAGES is delighted that the study recommends that this local service with the re-opened stations should be taken forward to the next stage.

At the launch, Russell Imrie, SEStran chairman, said: "The report shows that there is a clear social and economic case for improving access to rail along the Edinburgh to Berwick-upon-Tweed line.

"It would open up access to rail travel for thousands of commuters in East Lothian and the Borders, and offers major benefits for the local economies and tourism.

"The study has been prepared in close liaison with Transport Scotland and we are grateful for all their input and advice. We

also greatly appreciate that this proposal is included as a priced option in the draft ITT for the re-letting of the ScotRail franchise."

Cllr Michael Veitch, East Lothian Council's transport spokesman, said: "I'm delighted that after many months of hard work by everyone involved, this important report has been published.

"It makes a robust case for a comprehensive local rail service between Edinburgh and Berwick

serving the various stations in East Lothian.

"I hope that it is received enthusiastically by the Scottish government, and, crucially, that it paves the way for the speedy re-opening of a station at East Linton."

Gordon Edgar, Scottish Borders Council's executive member for roads and infrastructure, said: "This is a vital report for the future of rail travel on the East Coast, including the opportunity to re-open the station at Reston.

"We hope the Scottish government will consider the report in full and give their support to all the hard work which has so far been carried out by Scottish Borders Council, East Lothian Council, SEStran and Rail Action Group East of Scotland."

Draft Invitation to Tender (ITT)

This document was released by Transport Scotland and within there is a paragraph in the section on priced options which asks bidders to consider improved services between Edinburgh and Berwick-upon-Tweed/Newcastle.

They are asked to find a solution to increase services between Edinburgh and Berwick-upon-Tweed, incorporating services to potential new stations at Reston and East Linton, by

extending existing services between Edinburgh and Dunbar. Bidders may be informed by the recent appraisal carried out on behalf of SEStrans, available on the Data Site. It also suggests that there may be scope for these services to extend further to Newcastle, through an agreement with appropriate DfT sponsored rail franchisees.

Bidders are required to include the following:

- A full description of the 7-day timetable for the services affected;
- A full description of rolling stock diagram changes; and
- An explanation of the revenue and cost impacts of the proposals.

In addition, Bidders should outline how they will work with Network Rail, local support groups and any DfT sponsored rail franchises.

Analysis of the Study

The introduction to the study notes that a new train service can be thought of as offering three distinct benefits:

- higher frequency, more capacity and better connectivity for communities served by existing ECML stations (Musselburgh to Dunbar);
- significant but relatively localised accessibility improvements focused on the village of East Linton; and
- more wide ranging impacts on accessibility around Reston and east Berwickshire.

All three of these benefits improve the travel options from these areas. The question to be answered is “to what extent could bus-based options provide the same benefits, potentially at substantially lower cost”.

MVA Consultancy noted their attendance at public meetings:

- Dunpender Community Council – meeting held in East Linton on 6 September 2012; and
- East Berwickshire Community Councils, elected representatives and other stakeholders – meeting held in Reston on 19 September 2012

and said that “Many of the insights/problems are encapsulated in the sections which follow in this chapter.”

The report notes that East Linton’s current bus services are broadly in line with equivalent East Lothian settlements, but access to rail services is constrained by: parking availability at the nearest stations; and no effective bus links.

In general, car parking at several stations along the line are at their operating capacity. Even if these were extended, pressure would increase on the already overloaded peak North Berwick service from Wallyford inwards and to Musselburgh outwards. Dunbar has recently received improved rail connections, but are still irregular with long gaps at times.

Looking at the current bus services beyond Dunbar, the report makes a key point: “Bus services from Berwickshire to Edinburgh are infrequent and journey times are long. Long journey times and reliability / punctuality issues associated with long distance bus travel effectively exclude Berwickshire from the Edinburgh public transport based employment market.”

In addition:

- Access to the rail network from Berwickshire settlements is compromised by parking availability and charges at Dunbar and Berwick. There are no effective bus links to Dunbar based train services;
- Berwickshire has poor public transport connectivity to

Edinburgh, Scotland’s capital city and main cultural, administrative and political centre and also prevents Berwickshire residents accessing further and higher education there;

- Lack of late evening public transport between Edinburgh and Berwickshire prevents residents accessing entertainment and cultural events using sustainable modes.

Non Rail-based Analysis

The non rail-based options are assessed against Transport Planning Objectives:

- Objective 1: Improve the generalised cost of travelling to Edinburgh by public transport / park and ride by a meaningful amount;
- Objective 2: Improve accessibility and connectivity between Berwickshire and Edinburgh;
- Objective 3: Address known or foreseen public transport capacity issues in the corridor; and
- Objective 4: Improve the reliability of public transport journey travel times from Berwickshire to Edinburgh.

After much analysis of various bus links via different locations of park and ride facilities and different uses by the population, the report summarises the results for each of the above objectives.

Objective 1: None of the bus options would become the optimal travel choice for Berwickshire residents when accessing Edinburgh. Similarly, a slight improvement in generalised costs for East Linton from a faster bus would not lead to a significant change in travel behaviour by East Linton residents.

Objective 2: The travel time provided by an express bus would not be able to compete with the times offered by rail. A direct bus from Reston would take around 75 minutes, 25 minutes longer than by rail. The rail option would essentially bring east Berwickshire area much closer to the Edinburgh employment market, helping address the labour market issues identified in the study. It would also provide a step change in accessibility for East Linton and enable a significant modal shift away from the car to take place.

Objective 3: There are no constraints in terms of bus based public transport capacity. As such, providing additional buses would not provide a benefit in this respect.

Objective 4: Train services are inherently more reliable than bus services, particularly over longer distances. As such, additional bus services would not provide any benefits in this respect. Rail services would bring about a step change in public transport reliability and punctuality in the corridor.

Therefore, as the bus-based options clearly do not meet the Transport Planning Objectives, they can be sifted out at this stage.

Train Operations

A key element of the business case for the new service is its relationship to ScotRail’s other services and in particular how this relates to requirement for rolling stock. As the Edinburgh to Berwick train journey time would be around one hour, in all probability three train sets would be required to provide the service to allow for turnback, driver’s hours and to fit with the available train paths.

If all three train sets were to be newly acquired for use on the route, then the lease and crew costs associated with them has to be accounted for in the economic appraisal of the new service. If however, the service could be provided in part with

the use of existing crew and rolling stock, through e.g. a wider reorganisation of train operations, then incremental costs would fall and the business case would be improved. Such a possibility exists with the through services via the Airdrie-Bathgate or Shotts and Carstairs lines.

The report looks at suitable path times for the new service out of Edinburgh and identifies these as broadly XX:36-39; XX:00 when not taken by long distance services; and XX:11-13 when not taken by ScotRail Dunbar or North Berwick, i.e. evening peak, 17:13, 18:14). In to Edinburgh, the paths are broadly at XX:05-10 and XX:49-55 although again not on a regular hourly basis.

Looking at the potential connectivity with services coming from the west of Scotland, the study suggests that there may be some scope to tie in the fast hourly Glasgow Central services via Shotts with eastbound departures to Berwick. This line is likely to be electrified as part of Network Rail's Strategic Business Plan 2014-19 (CP5) so would be suitable for Class 380 operation. If not, then this proposal would clearly require the use of diesel rolling stock.

Another option is to integrate with the Airdrie-Bathgate services where trains leave Helensburgh or Milngavie, run through Glasgow and currently terminate at Edinburgh Waverley. The study notes that these services are operated on a driver-only basis. An extension of this service to Berwick may require additional investment in station and signalling infrastructure between Edinburgh and Berwick, as well as agreement with the relevant union. The Class 334 units currently operating this service do, however, feature built-in on-train equipment, which will also be built into new units as standard.

The Winter 2012 ScotRail timetable saw the introduction of a new two-hourly service between Edinburgh and Glasgow Central via Carstairs operated by Class 380 trains on this electrified line. This offers further potential for through services to Berwick. A few of these services start and terminate at North Berwick, so the principal of through services between East Lothian and Glasgow is therefore already established.

Socio-Economic Context

Several pages are dedicated to this subject. The study details comparison tables of Berwickshire towns as against Scotland for population, education and housing.

The data shows that Eyemouth is the main area of concern in east Berwickshire, in terms of economic and labour market related parameters. By most indicators, the area is lagging both the rest of the Scottish Borders and Scotland overall. The 'vulnerable' nature of the local economy has been recognised by many stakeholders. Although the problems have their source in the decline of a traditional local industry, this position cannot be helped by Eyemouth's poor connectivity to the wider employment market of east central Scotland and Edinburgh and this may have an impact on the employment prospects of local residents. Outwith Eyemouth in other parts of east Berwickshire, the socio-economic issues are more associated with an ageing demographic profile in the area. Improved connectivity to Edinburgh would assist in the retention of working age population, although rural areas do in general have an older age profile than the larger cities.

The views of business were considered. The Federation of Small Businesses (Scottish Borders Branch) undertook a survey and gleaned that around 80% of businesses were in favour of a re-instated rail service and stations.

VisitScotland were also approached and within their response noted: "VisitScotland would encourage any new transport strategy that will enable Scottish tourism to grow sustainably. Tourism employs 9% of Scotland's workforce (1.8% of the national total is employed in Scottish Borders) and is therefore a vitally important part of the economy. VisitScotland welcomes the discussion of provision of new routes, particularly in rural areas, and of improvements to the existing rail infrastructure. It would be a missed opportunity if we do not invest in the infrastructure while we have the chance to safeguard the Scottish Borders tourism related businesses."

Testing Programme

Three rail options were tested:

- R1 – Core hourly Edinburgh to Berwick service stopping at all existing stations plus new stations at East Linton and Reston;
- R2 – as R1 but with the Berwickshire station located at Burnmouth rather than Reston;
- R3 – as R1 but with services connected to the Airdrie/Bathgate line services to provide illustrative direct connectivity between East Lothian and Berwickshire to west Edinburgh and beyond.

The basic findings are:

- A new hourly Berwick service would significantly increase service frequency at the existing East Lothian stations and it would be expected that this would have a significant impact on travel behaviour;
- Overall, at existing stations, boardings are forecast to rise by 41% with 2010 demand and by 37% in 2024. Wallyford is forecast to see significant growth as a result of the doubling of train frequency as this site has abundant parking supply;
- The figures for East Linton would suggest a level of usage between that of Prestonpans and Longniddry. For Reston, the forecast usage is closer to the level of Drem. These findings are broadly in line with expectations;
- The overall boardings and alightings figures for tests R2 and R3 are very similar to those above. The exception is Burnmouth (test R2), however, where forecast boardings are higher than Reston, eg in 2024 forecast boardings are around 110,000 at Reston whereas the figure for Burnmouth is around 185,000. This is mainly due to fact that there are good existing bus links between Eyemouth and Burnmouth. Links between Eyemouth and Reston are much less good at present but presumably could be enhanced were the station to be constructed at Reston;
- The increase in rail boardings come from a number of sources but the main one is transfer from bus.

One of the main concerns of the Minister was the subsidy. This study has suggested that the annual rail subsidy required depends heavily on the number of train sets required. In 2016, subsidy would range from £1.9m (three new trains) to £0.7m (zero new trains). In 2024 these figures are forecast to reduce to £1.5m and £0.3m respectively.

The following assumptions were made in building up the operating costs and hence the required subsidy:

- 18 return journeys per day (0600-2400) between Edinburgh & Berwick @ 52 miles each way, Monday-Saturday;

- 11 return journeys per day (0600-2400) between Edinburgh & Berwick @ 52 miles each way, Sunday (based on a comparison with North Berwick service patterns); and
- each additional train set comprises three vehicles, two drivers and two guards to cover the operating day. Additional staff cover has been factored into the costs. Crew costs could potentially be reduced by using selective door operation.

Lastly the benefit cost ratio (BCR) calculations, which are also important in assessing whether the project has a future, shows that the BCR for a requirement of three new train sets is R1 - 1.34, R2 - 1.43 and R3 - 1.40. For no new sets being required, the ratio is bettered: R1 - 2.07, R2 - 2.11 and R3 - 2.23. Therefore any reduction in rolling stock requirement has a significant positive impact on the BCR.

A further test was carried out on removing stops at Dunbar by long distance trains. Apart from passengers having to change at Berwick to proceed further south, the impact of this sensitivity test showed a reduction in the BCR.

The full study can be found at:
www.rages.org.uk/downloads/study.pdf

The Next Stage

At the regular local rail meeting hosted by East Lothian Council in Haddington and chaired by Cllr Michael Veitch held on 20 December 2013, it was agreed that two main aspects need to be followed up immediately.

The Draft Invitation to Tender has been given to five bidders: Abellio; Arriva; First Group; MTR of Hong Kong; and National Express and our project has been included in the priced options section of the document.

It was stressed at the meeting that each group should

approach the bidders for a meeting to discuss and emphasise our project such that the bidders are left in no doubt as to the importance of its inclusion in their bids. Whilst the report suggests the level of subsidy for this new service, it is hoped that the bidders may be able to reduce it such that it is even more attractive than as at present. SEStran took an action to forward the various bidders' contact details to the members of the meeting, such that we can be proactive in our approach.

The franchise bids have to be in the Government's hands by April 2014.

The second aspect is the funding of the infrastructure, i.e. the station platforms, car parks etc. The Scottish Government announced last year that a Station Investment Fund of £30m had been created. Bids to access this money can be submitted to Transport Scotland as soon as possible. There was no possibility of funding for the infrastructure coming from the new franchise itself, as the subsidy for running the service would do so.

At SEStran's suggestion, it was agreed to contact ScotRail, Network Rail and Transport Scotland to discover what information needs to be put into such a bid and also what aspects of the infrastructure could be funded by each council.

The Minister had already noted that our stations would not be completely funded from this central fund, but that the councils would be required to raise a fair percentage whether from their own budgets and/or from private concerns.

Both councils commented that their capital budgets for 2014/2015 were being put together in the next couple of months. It was likely that funding would be spread over the next two financial years.

SEStran would be responsible for drafting this funding bid and would produce a draft for discussion by this meeting in February.

Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group on Rail

Allison Cosgrove attended the first meeting of the Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group on Rail on 5th November 2013 which was chaired by John Mason MSP. Allan McLean, ex-Virgin Trains, was also in attendance and has been elected Secretary. Various other parliamentarians attended from across the political spectrum, as did First ScotRail and Network Rail.

Those attending were asked to speak on issues relevant to them, and as Roddy McDougall had already spoken for Railfuture, Allison spoke for RAGES on our aims and objectives, particularly mentioning car parking and accessibility.

Lawrence Marshall was present from Transform Scotland, noting support for Borders Rail but pointing out the lack of double tracking on the route.

It was agreed that Regional Transport partnerships should be included in the future.

A work plan is to be put together as well as suggestions for speakers for future meetings. Suggestions at the meeting were Keith Brown MSP, Minister for Transport and someone to speak on HS2. Meetings will be bi-monthly.

Allison notes that the creation of the group is a great initiative by John Mason and all present hoped it would lead to the voice of rail being heard more strongly in the Scottish Parliament

New Editor

As announced in the last edition of our newsletter, the current editor gave notice to the committee that he wished to retire after producing issue 60. This is issue 60 and the editor wishes to thank all who helped him to produce and distribute *The Rages Rag* over the last 15 years.

The committee is pleased to say that a new editor has come forward. This will be Morag Haddow, recently elected as our Dunbar representative. Morag also plays a large role in Sustaining Dunbar.

She will be assisted by the committee in sourcing articles for each newsletter.