

The Rages Rag

Newsletter of Rail Action Group, East of Scotland

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North Berwick Branch News

The main event in recent weeks was the four day closure of the line from January 4th to 7th for engineering work to take place at Dolphinstone. Passengers required to catch a shuttle train between Edinburgh and Newcraighall and undertake the rest of the journey by bus.

The Class 322s were used, with the through service from Bathgate and Dunblane becoming a connection at Waverley for the duration of the works.



A 322 is seen in the photograph at Newcraighall.

Given that further closures are planned for April 18/19th and some weekends in May, some useful lessons could be learned from the January closure.

The contract for the bus replacement service was awarded to First Bus, who then allocated bus workings throughout Central Scotland with drivers and vehicles coming from Glasgow, Motherwell, Stirling, Livingston and even Balfron. In terms of capacity there seemed to be no difficulty in coping, but on Monday January 6th the 06.42 and 06.57 buses from North Berwick both failed to run - the vehicles were still heading across from the west, and the following day the 06.57 still failed to operate.

Some journeys were worked by Glasgow's new 95 seat Nordic six-wheel double decks which may look

impressive, but actually had poor leg room (we shouldn't complain at the seat spacing on Class 322's again!) and air conditioning blowing unwelcome cold air.

The bus timetable offered (too?) generous running time - 65 minutes between North Berwick and Newcraighall, with 20 minutes, for example, between North Berwick and Drem resulting in an excessive wait at stations *en route*. However peak hour expresses for Drem and North Berwick and a local service between Newcraighall and Musselburgh were welcome features. A decision does need to be made as to whether buses should set down in the station car parks or outside - this seemed to vary on journeys to North Berwick at Drem Station.

Given that the work at Dolphinstone had to be carried out - and ScotRail were outvoted by GNER and Virgin in selecting the first weekend in January, ScotRail deserve credit for providing timetables in the trains and ensuring that there were ample bus service resources. However, a huge number of passengers appeared to desert the trains on these days, as regular passengers either travelled by car, took holidays or switched to the bus - on Tuesday Jan 7th the 1810 from Edinburgh, which normally has between 80 and 100 passengers for Drem and North Berwick, could muster only 10 hardy souls on the bus connection at Newcraighall.

Significantly, virtually all the passengers seemed to have returned to the train once full service was restored and a relaxation of the speed limit after the engineering works has helped to make journeys slightly faster.

And now we wait for April and May . . .

Grand Plan hits the Buffers?

The recent announcement by the Strategic Rail Authority that its ten year strategy for modernising and expanding Britain's rail facilities and services has been drastically reduced, indicates that it appears to have hit the buffers. Financial constraints caused by escalating operating and post Hatfield renewal costs have meant that many ambitious schemes have been roped in and scaled down, while some services are to be reduced to enable the railways to do less, but better than they have been.

The effect on the East Coast Main Line is that investment is now likely to be less than £1bn compared to the projected £4-5bn upgrade. A consequence is that top speed will remain at 125 mph with no increase to 140 mph.

The impact here could mean no additional loops provided at Prora, Innerwick or Reston for freight trains, no additional platform and associated track improvements for Dunbar. It could also impact upon plans for a local service to Dunbar.

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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.

Virgin Trains News

Virgin trains introduced a modified service from January 11th which resulted in a slight reduction in early morning trains from Edinburgh and evening trains back to the capital.

These trains now start and finish at Newcastle, thus giving a longer overnight rest period to allow overnight maintenance to be carried out on Tyneside. Virgin make the valid point that GNER have capacity in early mornings and late evenings between Edinburgh and Newcastle, and therefore no journey opportunities should be lost, although a change of train may be less convenient for some passengers .

But given the chequered history of the first three months of Virgin Trains' new service anything that improves reliability is to be welcomed.

Newcastle to York closure

On the four weekends of 11th, 18th, 25th January and February 1st coaches have replaced trains between York and Newcastle whilst engineering works took place. This affected rail services north of Newcastle, but hopefully completion of this work will help timekeeping during the busier summer period.

East Linton News

By Allison Cosgrove

We are pursuing funding options for the proposed feasibility study for East Linton Station. I have made contact with Bill Jamieson at Campaign for Borders Rail and have received some very helpful advice on a possible contractor to carry out the study, as well as helpful information on funding. The Economic Development Department of East Lothian Council are also assisting with fundraising ideas. In addition, I have attended an Open Day run by Viridor/Forward Scotland in Dunbar which clearly explained the process of landfill tax funding. We now have a variety of options open to us and hope to be able to make a more informed choice on the best way forward.

Current Railfuture Scottish Campaigns

Railfuture considers the following additions to the Scottish railway system to be essential for a competitive and more relevant network, the majority of which have already been put forward by ScotRail or local authorities:

- Glasgow Crossrail - giving direct ScotRail services across central Scotland, with neither change nor reversal
- Rail - Airport links - Construction of direct rail links into Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen Airports
- Main line electrification of Glasgow via Falkirk to Edinburgh, Edinburgh via Dundee to Aberdeen. Early electrification of the Glasgow to Edinburgh line should include Cumbernauld and Stirling to Dunblane commuter lines as a prelude to Perth to Dundee, logically linking the ECML electrification extension north of Edinburgh to Aberdeen via Fife and Dundee.
- Introduction of 14 new commuter lines, some with tourism potential. Among those easy to implement and of interest to RAGES:
 - wEdinburgh's South Suburban Line
 - wPenicuik extension of Edinburgh's Crossrail
 - wHaddington-Longniddry
- Restoration of Edinburgh via Galashiels and Hawick to Carlisle Borders Regional line.
- Implementing Dornoch rail link on Inverness to Thurso and Wick line.

Grand Plan hits the Buffers?

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Because most use of the line is between London and Newcastle, it is likely that most the funding will be spent here. It should not all be though. Our local authorities and elected representatives should be making the case that south-east Scotland should also get its fair share. This is an area of increasing population that requires improved local rail services than those currently provided. This means improved infrastructure and East Lothian and Berwickshire are entitled to their share of any investment going.

The Scottish Executive has announced its intention to re-open the Airdrie-Bathgate line as part of its strategy of improving public transport to the west of Edinburgh. This is a laudable objective, but in so doing the Scottish Executive should not lose sight of the need to improve rail facilities east of Edinburgh as well.

Reston News

Barrie Forrest met with councillors John Elliot, Chair of Berwickshire Area Committee, and Jim Scott, Scottish Borders Council for Transport and Environmental Standards, to view the site where the new station could be built. Councillor Scott was most impressed with what he was told and saw.

Barrie also briefed Jim Scott on the land being made available by the local land owner for a station car park and housing development. He said that he would be keen to get a group together to examine the situation in a professional and calm way but could see why we were getting excited.

Response to our petition

Having read the Scottish Borders Council's (SBC) reply to the Scottish Parliament's Public Petitions Committee on behalf of the Reston Station petition, I immediately went about to have it withdrawn. Such was the consternation, that Councillor Elliot made it an agenda item of The Berwickshire Area Committee December 17th meeting and also requested that SBC executives attend this meeting. Councillor Elliot, after his delivery on how we had been let down, moved that the aforesaid letter be withdrawn and replaced by one more appropriate. The committee unanimously passed this motion and moved that a pre Berwickshire Area Committee on January 28th would discuss the content of the new letter.

On 17th January, RAGES received the reply from the Scottish Parliament's Public Petitions Committee concerning our submission for the re-opening of Reston Station. They had considered responses from the Scottish Executive, Scottish Borders Council, the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA), GNER and South East Scotland Transport Partnership (SESTRAN). They made the following points:

- it is clear that the introduction of a new station at Reston would not be straightforward
- the possible siting of new freight loops at Reston by the SRA would not appear to provide a suitable opportunity to build a new station
- there appear to be real concerns that any new commuter services and stations on the East Coast Main Line would have an adverse impact on existing passenger services
- specific proposals should be considered in the context of

a wider review of rail provision

- the Executive makes clear that it is for local authorities to identify opportunities for the re-opening of local railway stations and take any projects forward.

The Petitions Committee said that it seemed to them that the willingness of the Scottish Borders Council to move towards a feasibility study in relation to a new station at Reston, in partnership with other key stakeholders, at the time of the next Scottish franchise, would offer the most appropriate route for our progressing the case.

It was agreed that the Petitions Committee would write to the Scottish Borders Council welcoming its willingness to conduct a feasibility study into the Reston proposal and to recommend that RAGES developed links with the Council, with a view to participating in this exercise.

RAGES contacted Bill Ure of the Rail Passengers Committee for Scotland to request his attendance at the January 28th meeting. Bill has a wealth of knowledge of our area and has written a paper on the poorly served areas of the East and West Coast Main Lines on our side of the Border (*Ed: a summary appeared in Issue 8 of The Rages Rag*). The meeting of the 28th January chaired by Councillor Elliot got off to a slightly stormy start with the SBC executive members being told in no certain manner of their misdemeanour, but then, thankfully, went about the way forward. The executive explained that they had attempted to withdraw the letter but were unfortunately too late. Bruce Rutherford stated that he would be meeting the Scottish Executive in two weeks time, where he would discuss the Reston issue. Council Convenor John Ross Scott added that he would like to see a partnership between SBC, a Train Operating Company and neighbouring council(s) to carry out a feasibility study in the autumn. Councillor Jim Scott, transport portfolio holder, stated that he will be working closely with the executive on the Reston case and moved that a follow up meeting be convened for two months time.

To conclude, RAGES committee feel that things have now turned the corner with Scottish Borders Council and would like to thank all those who supported us at the December and January meetings.

Dunbar News

RAGES received a letter from Andy Naylor of GNER. In it he confirmed the car park charges at Dunbar from January 2003 as:

* Daily	£2.50
* Weekly	£9.00
* Monthly	£30.00
* Quarterly	£70.00
* Annually	£150.00

Andy Naylor points out that GNER have tried to keep charges to a minimum and feels this will go some way to alleviating the present problems of passengers parking in Countess Road etc. Also mentioned is their recent meeting with East Lothian Council and the possible expansion plans for car parking and improved pedestrian access.

Parking has certainly eased around the station, as there are now plenty of spaces in the car park for those who wish to pay!

Berwick-upon-Tweed News

By Geoffrey Evison

As we are at the start of another year, I would like to wish all our members a very happy and prosperous 2003.

Since the last newsletter, things have been running fairly well apart from one or two instances of late running and cancellations. However, there have been two significant happenings, which have affected rail travel between Berwick and Edinburgh.

Firstly, owing to adverse weather conditions the line became flooded in the Cockburnspath area on 21 October last and was not re-opened until 28 October. This necessitated replacement bus travel between Berwick and Edinburgh and in certain cases between Newcastle and Edinburgh. South of Berwick an emergency timetable was put in place which resulted in G.N.E.R. providing a half hourly service between Berwick and London Kings Cross for most of the day. The emergency temporary timetable seemed to work very well and the Berwick station staff assisted by certain other of their colleagues from other stations coped very well with the situation. Of special note was the non-existence of any Virgin Trains staff to help with the bus/rail transfers, together with the hourly in each direction Virgin cross country service which had been introduced at the start in the Winter Timetable on 29 September last. On making enquiries I was informed that during the blockage Virgin Trains would be terminating and starting from Newcastle. Personally speaking I feel that this was a totally unacceptable and unnecessary situation. Whilst I fully accept that line blockages can result in operating difficulties with regard to train crews etc., I do not accept that this necessitates the total withdrawal of all services, in this case between Berwick and Newcastle and *vice versa*. During the blockage, I was travelling on a northbound Virgin Trains service from York which should have gone to Edinburgh. Soon after the train left York an announcement was made by the train manager that "Owing to a blockage of the line between Newcastle and Edinburgh this train would be terminating its journey at Newcastle". Consequently I immediately telephoned Berwick station to ask if the line had become blocked between

Newcastle and Edinburgh? However, I was assured that this was not the case and that the blockage was between Berwick and Edinburgh only. Needless to say, I promptly informed the train manager that his information to passengers was incorrect and that the line was clear to Berwick. Unfortunately all my efforts came to no avail and the train terminated at Newcastle. As we were approaching Newcastle we were informed by the train manager that onward transport would be waiting for us and that we were to report to the G.N.E.R. station staff. Whilst passengers for Edinburgh were sent on a non-stop coach, Alnmouth and Berwick passengers had to wait for over an hour for what was supposed to be a train but instead turned out to be a coach.

Secondly, a further blockage of the line occurred between Berwick and Edinburgh from 4th to 7th January inclusive. However, this blockage had been planned in order to facilitate engineering work in the form of track re-alignment and diversion at Dolphinstone near Musselburgh. Again, this necessitated bus replacement services between Berwick and Edinburgh with G.N.E.R. providing rail services south of Berwick to and from London Kings Cross. Unfortunately, once again all Virgin services started and terminated at Newcastle, although I understand that members of their staff were on duty at Berwick station to assist in the bus/rail transfers. Overall, I believe that operations ran smoothly during this blockage and that the work was completed in time for the re-commencement of services on 8th January.

Finally, I would like to congratulate the Berwick station staff on winning the G.N.E.R. Customer Service Award Certificate of Excellence for outstanding performance and lasting contribution in the category of Team of the Year for both Customer Operations (Travel Centre Staff) and Stations (Platform Staff). The certificates were presented at Gosforth Park, Newcastle upon Tyne, by Sir Bobby Robson, Manager of Newcastle United football team. Well done to Berwick-upon-Tweed!

Railfuture Ticket Leaflet

Railfuture is the national independent organisation campaigning for better rail services throughout Britain. They have 17 local branches which are affiliated to thousands of people in rail user groups. Railfuture has had many successes in its 48 years of existence. They have won more frequent trains, more modern trains and more stations. Without us, lines would have closed, stations would not have re-opened, and there probably have been no Eurostar station at Ashford, Kent. Now we are fighting for better peak and off-peak trains into UK cities. The Mayor of London has taken up our idea for an orbital railway, a rail equivalent of the M25. For further details about Railfuture, please see the enclosed leaflet.

Current Scottish Campaigns are detailed on Page 2 of this issue.

RAGES has links with Railfuture and their Scottish Secretary, David Hansen, addressed our 2001 AGM.

Membership

We now have over 200 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.