

The Rages Rag

Newsletter of Rail Action Group, East of Scotland

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Edinburgh to Berwick Local Rail Study

A study into East Lothian Rail was carried out in 1999 and reported fully in the April 2000 edition (Issue 5) of *The Rages Rag*.

One of the study objectives was to carry out "A full assessment of the re-instatement of local services to Dunbar". This was one of a number of options assessed and tested by the consultants, but was not considered viable to take forward at that time. In a table of "Suggested Rail Strategy", it stated that the proposed East Linton site should be protected within local plans and the option to be reviewed during the medium and long term timescales.

Since then RAGES has continued to press for this local service to Dunbar and further extended to Berwick with re-opened stations at East Linton and Reston. These plans were frustrated by the infrastructure problems suffered by Railtrack (now Network Rail).

As has been well documented in recent editions of *The Rages Rag*, RAGES has attended meetings with East Lothian and Scottish Borders Councils in an effort to progress our aims.

In 2002, RAGES gathered over 1912 signatures for a petition to re-open Reston station. This was presented to the Petitions Committee at the Scottish Executive. Their recommendation after consultation with all the relevant agencies was that we should work with the above councils to produce a business case.

Eventually, a joint study was undertaken last year on behalf of the councils and published in May.

Initially, a workshop was organised to solicit the views of the two councils and other interested groups. RAGES was asked (and accepted) to be involved in this workshop.

The study looked in great detail at:

- current population and travel patterns
- use of current rail services
- operational assessment
- engineering assessment
- business case evaluation

Current population and travel patterns

In this section, it was noted that apart from Haddington, all other principal settlements had increased in population numbers between the censuses of 1991 and 2001. Under current plans all areas will see new housing being developed in the next 10 or so years. Car ownership is also fairly high.

The majority of workers commute by car, the number increasing as the distance increases from rail served areas. Bus travel decreases proportionately as the distance from Edinburgh increases.

Both North Berwick and Dunbar have high levels of train commuters.

Use of current rail services

It is noted that Edinburgh Waverley and Haymarket are the main destinations from all East Lothian stations. Most of the station car parks are full by early morning, creating problems with commuters leaving their cars on residential streets around the stations.

During peak times, train journeys compare well with car times, but bus traffic is in a less competitive position. In more outlying regions where there is no train alternative to the bus, car journeys are more favoured.

Both East Linton and Reston have potential population catchment areas for rail commuters. These areas are also targets for further housing development, further increasing the likely use of rail by commuters.

Figures showing this increase over time is encouraging.

Operational assessment

This section looks at the existing services operated between Edinburgh and Berwick on the East Coast Main Line (ECML). It notes that there is also freight traffic which is timed to fit round the passenger services.

In addressing a local service to Dunbar, the report notes that it should interface with the existing North Berwick service and thus provide additional services to the common stations. It must not interfere with fast services and requires a robust turn-round at Dunbar.

Journey times to Dunbar, as previously suggested by RAGES in the April 2002 edition of *The Rages Rag*, would be about 32 minutes, timed outward-bound at the opposite half-hour from the North Berwick service, e.g. 13 minutes past. The return leg could be at 10 minutes past the hour. While the Saturday service is a bit more problematic, a Sunday service does not seem to have been addressed.

Welcome to this issue of *The Rages Rag*, which we publish regularly. It is the main means of communication with our members.

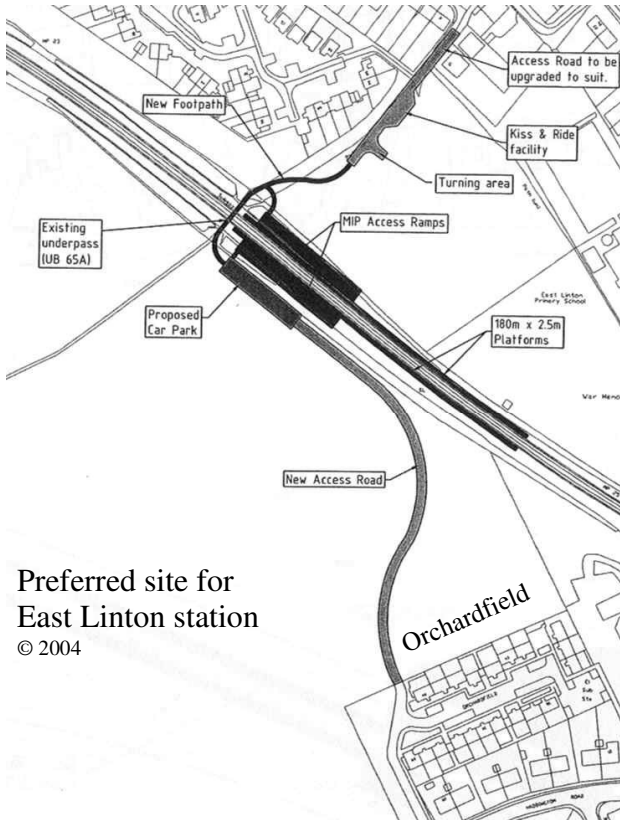
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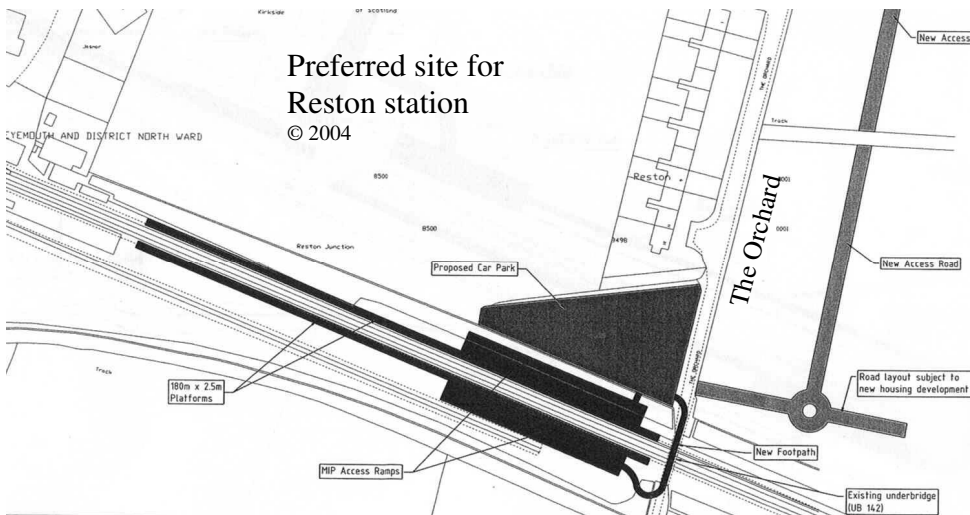
The editor invites contributions which should be sent to him at the "Published by" address at the foot of page 4.

The study looks at extending the service to Berwick with the same requirements as for Dunbar. Journey times to Reston and Berwick could be 42 and 52 minutes respectively. The return times could be such that they provide a good feed for GNER passengers alighting at Berwick to transfer for Reston and Dunbar.

The study addresses the pathing situation between the Portobello East junction and Waverley and notes that the



Preferred site for East Linton station
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Preferred site for Reston station
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signalling system can adequately cater for the new services, but the junction has special rules affecting the line capacity. However, it does suggest possible infrastructure enhancements for the junction to alleviate this problem.

Rolling stock costs are itemised.

Engineering assessment

In addressing new stations at East Linton and Reston, platform lengths should be sufficient for 8-car trains. Stations would be unmanned with shelters, CCTV and information points. Car parks would also be provided based on passenger forecasts.

Several sites were looked at for the two new stations. These are discussed in detail and the maps show the preferred sites for each. Station costs, including access roads, car parks and re-location of track-side equipment are around £2.7m to £2.9m each.

Business case evaluation

The different options of:

- service to Dunbar
- service to Dunbar with a new station at East Linton
- extension of service to Berwick
- service to Berwick with a new station at Reston
- all with various combinations of new station sites

are put through a discounted cash flow exercise. This is done assuming the following implementation timetable:

- Year 0 Implement Dunbar service
- Year 2 Add East Linton station
- Year 4 Implement Berwick service
- Year 6 Add Reston station

It concludes that the most viable option is the introduction of a local service between Edinburgh and Dunbar with a new station at East Linton on a site north-west of its previous site in the village.

The report notes that the revenue obtained from operating a local service will not meet the operating costs, but adds that this is not atypical of regional rail services in the UK.

The analysis of demand for an extension of the service to Berwick-upon-Tweed is not so positive with only nominal revenue generation, but notes that park and ride facilities at Reston would draw from a much wider catchment area.

The study does not include non-economic factors that would be considered in the next stage of the project.

It is now up to East Lothian and Scottish Border Councils to take that next step towards re-instating the local rail service to Berwick with new stations at East Linton and Reston. They will be forwarding a copy of the report to the Scottish Executive and requesting a meeting with them to discuss the best way forward. With First Group now announced as the

next franchisee, they will be approached to determine their plans for this service.

As it has been doing for the last five years, RAGES will continue to pursue the re-instatement of this local service.

Membership

RAGES now has over 180 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.

North Berwick Service News

The former Virgin Trains loco-hauled stock took their appointed place on May 24th, with commendable work by ScotRail and their contractors to get the units serviceable. Although offering more seats and excellent ride quality, operation is slower with the absence of automatic doors and there have been several examples of missed journeys or very late running. Crucially the 06:45 hrs North Berwick to Haymarket was truncated at Waverley, despite appearing as a through journey in the timetable, because of fears that the train could not return in time to pick up the 08:08 hrs timing from Prestonpans. Given that not so long ago the first train from North Berwick was at 06:58 hrs and has progressively been advanced to 06:45 hrs, the question is whether commuters would welcome an even earlier departure, say 06:40 hrs, to allow an extension to Haymarket. However, RAGES has heard from ScotRail that this would present difficulties for them in that the train would have to leave Edinburgh much earlier than it does at present, 05:53 hrs, to avoid London trains which would result in considerable extra staff costs. As the rental costs of the units and staff apparently exceed fares revenue any extra burden is thus most unwelcome and unsustainable.

These units offer temporary cover until longer term solutions are considered. The preferred bidder status of First Group to take over the ScotRail franchise from October may alter future aspirations, but bearing in mind that the costs of using the former Inter City trains are around twice what the previous trains cost, there will be every incentive to obtain more economical stock as soon as possible.

Before the new stock was put into service, RAGES was pleased to accept an invitation from ScotRail to visit Alstom's Polmadie maintenance depot where the coaches were being refurbished. An informative day was enjoyed by four of the committee and was fully reported in a special colour edition of *The Rages Rag* which was only circulated to members who were within the new stock's catchment area.

The Bank of Scotland Fireworks Concert takes place in Edinburgh on Sunday September 5th and extra trains will depart from Waverley for North Berwick at 22:07 and 22:37, stopping at all stations.

Feedback from the Dunbar Passenger Forum

GNER would like to thank all the passengers who attended the passenger forum held on 25th May 2004 in the Hillhall Sports Centre in Dunbar. Tim Armour, Operations Manager Scotland, lists below GNER's actions to the points raised at the meeting.

- The ticket machine has been reprogrammed to enable the sale of tickets, after 16:00 hours, for travel the following and this commenced on Wednesday 16th June 2004. As from Monday 21st June 2004, the machine will also have the capability to sell weekly tickets.
- Weekly season tickets can now be renewed at the ticket office at any time on a Saturday, for travel the following week.
- Due to possible discount depending on the previous month's train performance it is not possible to renew monthly tickets at the fast ticket machine.
- Unfortunately the fast ticket machine cannot be moved to an outside location for security reasons. We are currently reviewing the staffing levels with a view to enhancing staff numbers at peak commuter times and reducing instances where the station is not manned.
- We have carried out ticket checks at Dunbar and have found a total of 5 passengers travelling without tickets. We will continue to conduct similar unannounced checks over the coming weeks.
- Sixteen GNER services currently stop at Dunbar. At the Forum it was requested that an additional north heading service was introduced during the mid evening, particularly on a Saturday. I have passed this request on to our train-planning department and I shall let you have an answer as soon as they get back to me.
- At the Forum, passengers also told us of their frustration when a train arrives with a coach short. This may sometimes occur due to the strict maintenance routine that GNER has in place. It is a key priority for our fleet management team to eradicate these shortfalls, and everything possible is being done to minimise the occurrences in the meantime.

Ticket Machines

Physical ticket inspections are now taking place at Waverley on most peak-hour services, which makes it even more desirable that, on journeys into Edinburgh, tickets can be bought on the train to allow a speedy exit from the platform. ScotRail have in build ticket machines that are scheduled to be installed at Musselburgh and Wallyford and it will be interesting to see how they perform in an unmanned environment. Certainly the machine at Linlithgow, which is a manned station for most of the time, has, throughout the past few months, suffered from various idiosyncrasies ranging from accepting coins only to refusing to allow credit card payments and RAGES will be asking ScotRail that any machine in unmanned locations should have a helpline number so that if a malfunction occurs there is someone to call for help.

Buy two tickets and save!

With conductors allegedly able to issue a ticket for any UK rail journey on their portable ticket machines, fares anomalies are now easier to spot. So anyone travelling off-peak from North Berwick to Stirling would be charged £12.50 for a cheap day return if the ticket is purchased on the train in East Lothian. Yet if the passenger buys a cheap day North Berwick to Edinburgh ticket (£4.50) and then buys an Edinburgh to Stirling cheap day ticket at Edinburgh (£6) an immediate saving of £2 is made.

There are probably other examples around so it is always worth checking the cheapest option if making a cross-Edinburgh off-peak journey.

CCTV and Help Points

Work is being carried out at stations other than Musselburgh and Wallyford, which are already equipped, on the North Berwick line to fit CCTV and Help Points. This will improve security and give passengers the opportunity to contact control to catch up to date information of the service, rather than have to rely on tannoy announcements.

Berwick-upon-Tweed Notes

Car parking is still a problem at Berwick and by mid-morning it is impossible to find a space, resulting in intending rail users having to find an alternative car park which of course takes time. However, it is believed that plans for improving the station car park have now been approved and work which will be spread over two financial years will start later this year.

A new timetable came into operation on Sunday 23 May resulting in Virgin Trains being re-timed and making fewer calls at Berwick. However Cross Country services to and from the south coast once again call at Berwick.

There have been few cancellations and punctuality has been fairly good over the past few weeks.

On eight weekends and two Sundays from 11 September to 14 November inclusive, engineering work at various locations between Newcastle and Edinburgh will necessitate the use of rail replacement bus services between Newcastle, Berwick and Edinburgh and vice versa. During this period, certain Inter City 125 (diesel) operated services will continue to operate between Newcastle and Edinburgh but will be diverted via Carlisle.

Franchise News

It has now been announced that First Group are the preferred bidders for the ScotRail franchise. This franchise is for a period of seven years with an option of a further three year extension if First fulfil certain criteria set out within their initial contract.

What does this mean for RAGES? It is to be hoped that we can continue the excellent dialogue that we currently enjoy with the outgoing ScotRail franchise holder, National Express.

The membership can be assured that the committee will be making best efforts in forging a relationship with First Group management.

At the time of the announcement, Tom Thorburn, RAGES chairman, paid tribute to John Yellowlees, External Relations Manager; Peter Cotton, Managing Director and Alastair McPherson, Retired Managing Director for always being available with a listening ear and a positive response to our suggestions and plights.

The East Coast Main Line franchise lost one of its bidders: the consortium of Virgin, Stagecoach and Deutsche Bahn has pulled out. There are now three companies: GNER (Sea Containers Ltd), First Group and Danish Railways-EWS.

New Rail Transport Powers

As part of the rail review the Scottish Executive and the UK Government agreed that Scottish Ministers will take a greater responsibility for rail powers in Scotland. This will include full responsibility for specifying track and infrastructure improvements, as well as all of ScotRail's services.

The changes have been agreed in principle subject to adequate transfer of funding.

The agreement reached between Scottish and UK Ministers will include:

- Transfer of the Strategic Rail Authority's powers to manage and monitor the performance of ScotRail service, creating a more direct, clearer relationship between the Executive and ScotRail
- Sole responsibility for securing future ScotRail franchises
- Power to take long term, strategic decisions about future investment for Scottish services
- Power to fund and specify where resources are targeted by Network Rail on track maintenance and investment in Scotland, enabling the Executive to set the priorities for Network Rail to deliver
- Transfer of funding to the Executive for the additional responsibilities

English Welsh Scottish Railways (EWS) has now joined Danish Railways to form a new company to bid for the franchise. The issuing of detailed invitation-to-tender documents for the franchise was expected before the end of July.

It was also discovered that the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) had planned to withdraw two GNER services as part of the new ECML franchise: the 18:35 hrs service from Edinburgh to Newcastle upon Tyne, which is used by Dunbar commuters, would cease and the 17:30 hrs London to Edinburgh service would terminate at Newcastle.

However, as this newsletter is being prepared, the media reports that Nicol Stephen, Transport Minister, has given advice to the SRA: "The east coast main line is a key cross-Border route which carries services through Edinburgh to Aberdeen, Inverness and Glasgow, and currently provides the only service at Dunbar. The new franchise should build on the previous franchise and must incorporate the existing service levels between London and all Scottish destinations."

The Transport Minister said:

"This is a very significant change which greatly increases our ability to deliver the rail improvements Scotland needs. It will create a simpler, clearer, more streamlined system which for the first time brings together powers over train services, track and stations in Scotland. This new deal allows us to put the interests of passengers at the centre of the rail industry - not expensive, bureaucratic structures.

"Scotland's railways provide vital connections for our communities and for business and are key to our vision of an efficient and reliable, integrated transport network."

RAGES hopes that this will simplify the re-instatement of the local service to Berwick along with the re-opening of East Linton and Reston stations.

It is expected the relevant powers will be transferred to Scottish Ministers once UK legislation is completed and finance agreed.

There is also the creation of a new transport agency for Scotland, which will be tasked with taking on the additional rail powers as outlined in the UK Government's rail review white paper today and is expected to come into effect next year.