

The Rages Rag

Newsletter of Rail Action Group, East of Scotland

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Virgin comes to Dunbar

The photograph shows the first weekday Virgin CrossCountry train arriving from Birmingham at Dunbar on 13th June. Unfortunately it was almost an hour late due to another company's train breaking down outside Birmingham, but the previous day's start to this new service started well.



Photo: RAGES

On the 13th June, RAGES were invited to celebrate Virgin Trains stopping at Dunbar. As seen in the photograph on page 4, also present were politicians John Home Robertson, MSP and Norman Hampshire, East Lothian Councillor. GNER management were also there as this was a combined venture. To underline this there are now wallet/purse sized timetables detailing all GNER/Virgin trains that stop at Edinburgh, Dunbar, Berwick and Newcastle.

During conversation, RAGES raised the need for an earlier morning train from Dunbar to Edinburgh and a later evening train from the capital to Dunbar (or even Berwick). You may remember that GNER had a 23:00 hrs service from Edinburgh a few years ago, but it was not well supported. However, there are

many new houses in Dunbar now and things could be different.

Chris Gibb, Managing Director of Virgin CrossCountry, said that he would consider our request, but his main difficulty was financing these extra trains in light of the CrossCountry franchise being on a rolling year to year basis. The smaller Virgin Voyagers are ideal units for this sort of service at the beginning and end of a day's schedule, but would require extra staff, hence long term training and extra finance.

In conjunction with this new service, new low-price tickets have been introduced by Virgin Trains to celebrate the 45 per cent boost in

the number of trains calling at Dunbar. The new single fares from Dunbar are Value Advance tickets including £14.50 to Birmingham, £17.50 to Oxford and £20 to Bournemouth for people who book at least 14 days ahead.

These off-peak prices mean that passengers who plan ahead can travel all the way between Scotland's North Sea Coast and the South Coast for fares from £40 return.

Other cheap advance-purchase tickets are available for a range of destinations, and there are also Value Advance fares bookable at least 3 or 7 days ahead for off-peak travel. The earlier bookings are made, the cheaper the fare, subject to availability. Discounts are available on Value Advance fares for holders of National Railcards.

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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 address at the foot of page 4.

Rail Passengers Committee in Scotland

In the last issue we highlighted the end of the current Rail Passenger Committees and suggested that individuals should write to their politicians. Several of our members did so and I have included a slightly edited reply below. This came from Nicol Stephen, the then Scottish Executive Transport Minister, via John Home Robertson, the East Lothian MSP.

“The dissolution of the rail passengers committees across Great Britain and the reformation of the Rail Passengers Council will take place soon once the Railways Act 2005 is commenced, but effective passenger representation will continue to be a central element of our ongoing effort to improve rail services and public transport in Scotland. The current Scottish Rail Passengers Committee has been an effective customer champion and watchdog for passengers and I think it is important to build on and learn from its success.

“The new Rail Passengers Council will form an integral part of the future system for rail passenger representation in Scotland. The organisation will secure better services, help passengers with information and advice, develop policy and act as a campaigning and lobbying organisation. It will need to be responsive to passenger needs, for example Passenger Link Managers will be introduced to push forward passenger issues with each franchise and a large number of passenger advocates and champions will be recruited to provide information from rail users. The new Rail Passengers Council will be overseen by a Board which will include a nominated member from the Scottish Ministers.

“The Transport (Scotland) Bill gives us an opportunity to create a statutory independent multi-modal passenger body in Scotland. I see this multi-modal body being served by groups representing individual transport modes, including a representative group for rail. In determining the details of the new structure we have to take into account the views of the existing passenger committees and cast our nets more widely to consult the public.

“I met Mr Lunan and Mr Samson of the Rail Passenger Committee (Scotland) recently to discuss these issues and we are looking forward at ways in which this can be achieved.”

On the 19th July, the Scottish Executive announced that James King is the Scottish Ministers appointment to the Board of the new GB-wide Rail Passengers Council. Mr King is currently a member of the Rail Passengers Committee for Scotland (RPCS) and a member of the British Transport Police Authority. He was also a founding member and vice chairman of RAGES until his appointment to the RPCS.

Transport Minister Tavish Scott said:

“We want to improve the deal for passengers by investing in a modern and efficient Scottish rail network. Improving passengers' experiences is vital if we are to attract more people to using public transport. This appointment will ensure the views of passengers are well represented.

“As a previous member of the Rail Passengers Committee for Scotland, Mr King will bring a wealth of knowledge and experience on issues that affect passengers and I wish him well in his new role.”

This appointment will be for 4 years and will run from 2005 to 2009. The RPC's new Board is scheduled to be in place by the end of July 2005.

The new Rail Passengers Council (RPC) is established under the terms of the Railways Act 2005 as an executive NDPB (non-departmental public body) sponsored by the Department for Transport. The Board of the organisation will comprise up to twelve part-time members appointed by the Secretary of State for Transport, with one additional member nominated by the Scottish Executive, the London Assembly and the National Assembly for Wales.

The RPC's remit will be to act as a rail passenger organisation that:

- secures improvements to services, providing help, advice and information to customers
- helps form and develop the main policies, procedures and regulation of matters affecting rail passengers and
- functions as a national campaigning and lobbying organisation, with more emphasis than its predecessor organisation on research and publishing.

Edinburgh to Berwick Local Service

As previously reported the viability of this service is undergoing a STAG 1 (Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance) assessment. It is understood that this report will be published in August.

Whilst the new Virgin CrossCountry stops at Dunbar have improved the Dunbar service, there are still gaps in the off-peak times and of course Virgin would not stop at a re-opened East Linton or Reston station.

RAGES therefore still believes that a local service operated by First ScotRail running between Edinburgh and Berwick with stops at some of the existing and the re-opened stations, as suggested in the recent Edinburgh to Berwick Local Rail Study, is the best way forward to improve transport communications in East Lothian and Berwickshire.

No Smoking

GNER are to ban smoking on all trains from August 29th, with First ScotRail likely to follow suit before next March on their Caledonian Sleepers. Virgin have had a no smoking policy for at least three years. That removes smoking from all buses and trains in Scotland with those desperate for a drag on public transport restricted to the open decks of ferries.

Membership

We now have around 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

Roy Mitchell

The summer timetable commenced on June 12th with no significant changes to the North Berwick services. Nevertheless publication of new leaflets over one month before was most welcome in allowing travel plans to be made early. Service reliability continues to be largely satisfactory, but there were some delays and occasional cancellations in June mainly due to signalling problems.

At the end of June there were difficulties with fewer conductor guards on morning peak trains resulting in huge queues and lengthy waits upon arrival at Waverley whilst tickets could be bought. It was particularly frustrating for passengers to have a six minute train ride to Edinburgh from Musselburgh and then have to wait up to 15 minutes to buy a ticket. The reason for this change was reported in the Scotsman as a result of First ScotRail being fined for not doing enough station ticket checks and therefore reallocating train staff to the barriers. This seemed rather strange since evidence on the morning peak runs revealed that a combination of two or three ticket sellers and a conductor guard on train, plus five or six ticket checkers/sales at Waverley guaranteed everyone paid and only a small portion of passengers were held up on arrival.

One suggestion was that this was done to encourage use of the automatic ticket machines at Wallyford and Musselburgh, although the previous week ticket sellers had been poised at Musselburgh station entrances to sell tickets and no one was allowed to get to the platform to use the machine and certainly a ticket seller on the 07:57 service from North Berwick to Edinburgh on June 29th spent the latter part of the journey berating those passengers who had not queued at the machine to buy before they boarded. Fortunately after these incidents First ScotRail restored the staffing back to the old level and peace reigned again.

RAGES has always supported the view that passengers should pay the correct fare for their journey, but must have a realistic opportunity to purchase the product. If automatic machines are the way the operator wants to go then it needs to mount an effective publicity campaign and arrange for staff to be at stations to help passengers familiarise themselves with the technology. Additional machines at other North Berwick line stations would also help, otherwise the present arrangements, which work well enough, should continue.

Flexipasses

The flexipass scheme was extended to cover North Berwick line services in June – the pass comprises a book of 10 tickets which can be used for 10 journeys in any direction between Edinburgh and a named station on the routes during a one month period, so are particularly useful for those who travel maybe 3 or 4 days a week. Discounts vary but, for example, a North Berwick - Edinburgh flexipass costs £37.50, representing a saving of £4.50 on buying 10 single fares, although the discount on five full price day returns is a rather less generous 50p.

Bank Holidays

Cheap day returns offer impressive savings on standard fares and, although subject to restrictions on Monday to Friday

peak hours, offer travel at any time during weekends. Therefore it came as a surprise that on May 30th, a day when schools were open but banks were closed, cheap day returns were available all day. This led to some rapid mental arithmetic amongst some passengers whether to renew their weekly ticket then or get a day at cheap rate and renew for seven days the day after.

Since there are various local holiday days declared throughout Scotland, RAGES suggests that the days when there are no ticket restrictions should feature clearly in publicity to prevent any confusion. With Christmas falling on a Sunday and Monday this year a good start would be to confirm what status Dec 27th and Jan 3rd will have in terms of fares availability.

Bus Connections for North Berwick and Drem

Two new services started in early July which offer bus connections to rail routes.

First Service 130 runs Saturday and Sunday until September 25th every 15 minutes from North Berwick Station to the Seabird Centre, Rugby Ground, Sports Centre between 09:45 and 16:45; advertised more as a park and ride service with car drivers invited to park in the half empty station car park (a risky statement since the first Saturday service coincided with the 'Make Poverty History' march and the station car park was full with rail travellers by 11:30) and continue on their journey by bus. A flat fare of 60p is charged.

First Service 131 runs daily until September 30th and provides a circular link between Drem, with Museum of Flight, Preston Mill, Tantallon Castle, North Berwick Seabird Centre, Dirleton Castle and Fenton Barns.

Route 131 offers connections to 00 hrs rail arrivals at Drem from Edinburgh, with buses leaving at 10:10, 11:14, 13:05, 14:09, 16:05 and 17:09, although should the connection be missed with a late running train there is precious little to do there and a wait of approximately 40 minutes at the station having returned from the Museum of Flight is rather daunting.

With some positive marketing both routes have some potential, but they have been started very hastily, and publicity is thin on the ground. The timetable leaflet would also benefit from a map and route description since there is no indication of the route followed from North Berwick Seabird Centre to Dirleton (past the station or not?) whilst bus stops were put up so hurriedly by East Lothian Council that the one at North Berwick Rugby Ground is behind a fence!

It is to be hoped that after operational experience this year the services will run in 2006, but there will be time to market positively.

G8

And finally a big thank you to all at First ScotRail for their services during the week of the G8 summit – on several occasions the train proved to be the only way that anyone could travel.

Dunbar News

From page 1



While the cheapest Value Advance fares offer a return journey between Dunbar and Birmingham from £29, a Saver, valid on any train and available for walk-up purchase on the day, is £85.40 return. This proves that booking ahead can mean big savings. Seat reservations are free of charge, another reason to book ahead.

As well as the new fares to match the new journey opportunities, other types of ticket continue to be offered. These are available for travel by either Virgin Trains or GNER and include One Ticket which combines train journeys between East Lothian and Edinburgh with bus journeys.

Photo: RAGES - J Home Robertson MSP, T Armour (GNER), T Thorburn (RAGES), C Gibb (Virgin), P Ince (East Lothian Council) and N Hampshire (East Lothian Councillor)

The Return of the 322s?

Our eagle-eyed vice chairman spotted these old friends in Shields Depot in Glasgow.

June/July's "Railway Strategies" magazine reports that: "HSBC has issued a refurbishment contract to Hunslet Barclay. The ex-Stanstead class 322 units will receive their first significant upgrade since their original build in 1990. This upgrade includes corrosion repairs, full repaint and a revised seating plan to match the similar class 321." The magazine states that the units are operated by One, but makes no mention of their use after refurbishment. Market speculation suggests they might be replacements for the North Berwick service class 90s.

First ScotRail has told RAGES that "The team at First ScotRail have invested significant time identifying replacement rolling stock for the North Berwick route. From the beginning of August some of the current locomotive hauled trains will be replaced by First ScotRail's existing multiple-unit train fleet, in advance of a permanent solution being introduced within the next couple of months."



Photo: B Forrest

Haddington Branch

RAGES has written to the Haddington and District Community Council and the East Lothian Council to arrange a meeting to discuss how we can progress the re-opening of the line to Haddington. As it is their summer recess, a reply is awaited.

Berwick-upon-Tweed News

Geoffery Evison

The summer timetable began on 12 June and as can be seen in the GNER timetable, the last departure from Kings Cross on Sundays, 18:30 until 17 September and 18:15 from 24 September, now calls at both Berwick upon Tweed and Dunbar. Apart from a couple of major incidents operations have been running reasonably well. Both incidents unfortunately caused delay and cancellations to GNER services. The first one was on 23 June when the pantograph on the locomotive of the 16:30 Kings Cross - Newcastle train became entangled in the overhead wires near Huntingdon and was subsequently ripped off. This resulted in the power having to be switched off on all lines over a seventeen mile section in the area also causing two other GNER trains to become stranded. Consequently, services were severely disrupted for the rest of the day as they were terminated/started at Peterborough with bus connections to and from Kings Cross. The second incident was following the tragic events in London on Thursday 7 July, which resulted in Kings Cross main line station being closed for the rest of that day and for most of Friday 8 July when services again started/terminated at Peterborough.

I have been informed that work on the car park is running about seven weeks behind schedule and should therefore be completed sometime towards the end of August. It remains to be seen whether or not there will be any improvements.