

The Rages Rag

Newsletter of Rail Action Group, East of Scotland

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RAGES Annual General Meeting

The Chairman, Tom Thorburn, welcomed 14 members to our 6th Annual General Meeting, which was held on 27 September 2005 in the Village Hall in East Linton. He thanked Allison Cosgrove for arranging the venue. Apologies were received from 23 members. The Minutes of the 5th Annual General Meeting were accepted.

Résumé of the past year

The Chair advised the meeting that the year had proved to be very busy with several successes. On the North Berwick line screen monitors were now installed at all stations and replacement buses when used to cover engineering work had been retimed following a campaign by RAGES re the unnecessary delays due to painfully slow running times that has occurred before.

Ticket checking and issuing remained a major issue. RAGES had successfully opposed the brief withdrawal of on train ticket sellers, but was still concerned at lengthy queues at Waverley by those unable to buy a ticket en route. RAGES was also keen to support station adoption ideas with Drem being the most appropriate candidate.

Relating to Dunbar, the June change to services, with both GNER and Virgin Trains stopping, had added 10 additional Monday to Friday journeys using the station, but there was still a lack of a late train from Edinburgh. Virgin had been positive regarding such a service during the Edinburgh festival providing suitable funding.

At Haddington a meeting was to take place with the Community Council to discuss developments whilst preliminary findings re the Reston and East Linton station sites are awaited from a Scottish Transport Appraisal Group (STAG1) which has been funded by East Lothian and Scottish Borders Council and the Scottish Executive.

Chairman's Report

Tom Thorburn was pleased that RAGES had achieved a great deal of respect within the rail industry and in government circles and quoted positive messages from members J Hayman: "Congratulations on all your achievements and keep up the good work and excellent communication network" and J Mollison: "extremely useful and informative electronic newsletters". The Chair expressed his thanks for the enthusiasm shown by the Committee with particular mention of the sterling work performed by Russell Darling in producing *The Rages Rag*.

On a discordant note however, the Chair advised that correspondence with the new franchisee, First Group, for ScotRail services, was not handled as efficiently as under the previous owner.

Finally he stressed that it was important to keep writing to politicians, especially MSPs with views so that railways – shortly to be devolved to the Scottish Executive- would remain high on the agenda.

Secretary's Report

Roy Mitchell advised that there had been considerable changes in the year on the North Berwick line with new franchisee First Group, taking over from National Express in October 2004. Initially there were problems: the Christmas/New Year service publicity had been inaccurate; and reliability also suffered with hired-in units performing most weekday journeys on the route. However there had been an improvement in performance throughout 2005 with Class 322 electric multiple units returning to Scotland to replace the hired former Virgin Trains stock.

The Secretary also advised of the abolition of the various regional committees of the Rail Passenger Council and the successful pressure put forward by RAGES that there should be a replacement consumer body for Scotland's railways, which has been agreed by the Scottish Executive.

Treasurer's Report

Harald Vox presented the accounts that indicated a surplus of £73.97 for the year ending to 31 March 2005. with £644.00 remaining in the bank. Increased use of e-mail had helped to reduce postage costs. It was recommended that subscriptions should remain at £3 a year and that Christine McArthur, who has certified the accounts, be presented with flowers on behalf of RAGES.

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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.

Membership Report

Russell Darling, the Membership Secretary, advised that there were presently 189 members with 88% of the previous membership renewing; 33 memberships were lost, but 26 new members joined. Of present locations Reston, 30%, and Dunbar, 27%, had the highest percentage of members. Five Community Councils were also members.

The Membership Secretary produced the quarterly *Rages Rag*. Following quality concerns a new printing firm had been appointed and, although a colour version had been produced relating to the entry into service of the ex-Virgin Trains stock, this was not cost effective and subsequent printed versions returned to black and white. It was noted that e-mail versions are available in colour assuming the recipient's printer has a suitable cartridge installed.

Further emphasis was also given as to the effectiveness of e-mail with approximately 60 copies of *The Rages Rag* sent to members and key railway/government officials by this method. Frequent electronic news updates are sent by this method.

Election of Office Bearers

The existing Office Bearers were re-elected for another year.

Guest Speaker

Our Guest Speaker was once again Gordon Dewar, the Commercial Director of First ScotRail Ltd.

Mr Dewar reviewed the first year of the First ScotRail operation where performance and reliability were improving on a month by month basis, in accordance with very strict service standards. There had been specific improvements throughout the network: flexipasses more widely available; CCTV and monitors at increasing numbers of stations; and "meet the manager" sessions at stations. On-train improvements included: a monthly on-board magazine; and catering taken back in-house.

A number of questions were raised from the floor and a summary of these can be found below.

Mr Dewar was thanked for his presentation and for the hard work that First ScotRail had done to improve the standard of service.

Key Questions raised with the AGM Guest Speaker

At the AGM a number of questions were put to Gordon Dewar.

Q Regular user of Newcraighall service but no Sunday operation. Any opportunity?

A First ScotRail (FSR) would be interested, but would need financial support to offer a service and there may be engineering constraints that preclude regular access to the branch.

Q Waverley station – any improvements?

A Two more island platforms to be constructed of the same length as 1/19 and 10/11 thus giving many more opportunities for additional services.

Q Trains are often dirty at Newcraighall.

A FSR employ cleaning crews at Waverley, but there is not enough time to clean a train on layover from Bathgate. Guards cannot carry out cleaning duties at Newcraighall as they have other matters to attend to. Would look at cleaning crews travelling between Haymarket and Waverley as acknowledged this is a problem. Gordon also advised that litter bins were not allowed to be placed in the station for security reasons.

Q Improved evening service to North Berwick?

A FSR actively looking at this, although not in time for December timetable.

Q Class 322s have returned to North Berwick – could RAGES be involved in the refurbishment programme? Particularly keen that some tables remain.

A Yes we will be consulted. The plan is to refurbish all units more akin to commuter needs with extra seats (3+2) and reduced luggage space - the present units were designed for airport services.

Q Ticket collection is still a major problem – sometimes fares not collected on board with substantial queues at Waverley and connections missed as a consequence.

A FSR accepted this was a problem- they HAD to keep staff for barrier checks as part of the service commitment and was also recruiting on train ticket sellers. Ticket machines would be installed at other North Berwick line stations in addition to the present ones at Musselburgh and Wallyford. However on-train ticket machines were not approved for use and would not be installed.

Q Are station ticket machines difficult to use?

A Not really, but the present design allows for potential passengers to practice obtaining a ticket without actually purchasing one – so there is plenty of scope to receive free tuition!

Q How about an off-peak flexipass?

A Could be difficult to enforce, but a review of all fares in Scotland is taking place

Q Greater use of electrification?

A No plans for extra electrification. Apart from substantial capital cost, electricity prices often followed oil price rises and so no commercial benefit.

Q RAGES was disappointed that we were not advised of stock changes on North Berwick line.

A Gordon apologised for omission.

Q Could the FSR definition of public holidays be made apparent to passengers as to when cheap day fares are available all day?

A FSR will make this available.

North Berwick Service News

The hired in (from EWS) former Virgin units were replaced by Class 322 electric multiple units during August, thus allowing First ScotRail control over the service provision again and with it a noticeable speeding up of journeys as loading is much faster. First plan to refurbish these units with new seating and removal of some of the substantial luggage areas to enhance capacity, but if there are any aspects that users would like added (or retained) to the design then comments would be appreciated: for example the writer has a preference for some tables still being retained as they are very useful to allow work to be done and for either the Herald or Telegraph to be opened out fully! [Ed - what about the Scotsman!]

The refurbishment programme should be complete by April 2006.

From the First ScotRail side service performance continued to improve: delays, such as a broken down freight train on September 29th, were largely due to other operator or Network Rail problems. However just occasionally decisions taken by control appear baffling. On the above date, for example, the 06:45 train, delayed owing to the breakdown, was allowed to leave at 07:54, three minutes before a scheduled 07:57 departure, with, of course, the latter train subsequently cancelled as it could not get up the single track branch line.

Rail Replacement

Weekend engineering works were carried out during September/October, with Saturday buses generally running North Berwick- Newcraighall to link with rail services for Edinburgh. Following RAGES representations, running time has been reduced so that the bus journey is far speedier. However, there is still one issue to sort out relating to the replacement buses at Newcraighall in that they are leaving 15 minutes after the train arrival. If the train is on time then

passengers are delayed. The writer challenged the Rail replacement supervisor at Newcraighall about this, who incidentally had parked his car straddling the two nearest disabled parking bays near to the entrance to presumably establish his territory. The writer was told that this was to allow local traffic to be carried. The official was rather taken aback to be told that there was not normally a service between Newcraighall and North Berwick anyway and so there would be no local traffic, but we were still delayed. This is one to take up with First ScotRail.

The writer's personal experience of using this rail replacement service lead to the following conclusions:

- Vehicle specification must be firmed by First Scot Rail – one of the buses was a mini-coach with minimal leg room and if these are deemed acceptable, and the writer does not think so, then passengers must be told in advance.
- Speed up the runnings from Newcraighall to North Berwick even more to prevent the need to wait for time - time was "wasted" sitting at intermediate stops.
- Employ guards who can be bothered to collect fares.
- Suggest that blue badge parking areas are for disabled people, i.e. not for First supervisors who are not willing to walk 20 or 30 metres from the nearest ordinary parking spot to the Newcraighall station entrance.

Caffeine fix available at each end of the journey?

For commuters who may need perking up both at the start (and end) of the day there is some good news. At Haymarket Station twixt Platform 2 and 3, Ritazza have opened a coffee bar, whilst Castle Cottage Interiors opposite North Berwick station now open from 06:35 to 09:15 Monday to Friday mornings for the sale of take-away coffees.

Maintaining and Improving Britain's Railway Stations

This report was published by the National Audit Office in July 2005. The survey of stations was divided into four classes:

- National and regional hubs (A)
- Important feeder (B)
- Medium and small staffed (C)
- Small unstaffed (D)

| Facilities at the stations visited | A | D |
|--|----|----|
| Number of stations visited | 30 | 30 |
| Passenger information system | 30 | 7 |
| Public address system | 29 | 14 |
| Freephone/help point | 14 | 11 |
| Public telephone inside or close outside | 30 | 20 |
| Toilet(s) | 29 | 4 |
| Waiting room(s) | 22 | 4 |
| Seating | 29 | 28 |
| Luggage trolleys | 17 | 0 |
| Self-service ticket machines | 26 | 4 |
| A clock on the platform or concourse | 30 | 8 |
| Staffed refreshment facilities | 29 | 3 |
| Newspaper/sweets shop/kiosk | 28 | 3 |
| Vending machines for drinks/food | 20 | 1 |
| Working cashpoint machines | 20 | 2 |

Of interest to us were Waverley in the first group (A) and North Berwick in the last (D).

Waverley only failed on three facilities: freephone/help point; waiting room(s); and vending machines.

Of the 14 facilities, North Berwick only passed on five: public address system; public telephone; waiting room(s); seating; and kiosk.

Data source: National Audit Office survey of stations, April-July 2004

Membership

We now have around 190 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.

Who needs trains?

At frequent intervals various writers in the local press offer negative thoughts about the railway, and indeed public transport in general, usually after some minor inconvenience, but the proof as to how important an efficient rail network is was surely underlined on Thursday September 29th when a major signalling failure resulted in all trains from the West at Haymarket being cancelled in the morning peak and, with 15000 passengers transferring to car or bus instead, resulted in tailbacks of over eight miles on the M8 and massive delays; the lines in East Lothian were also affected because of a broken-down freight train near Prestonpans. Having found, in RAGES view, unmistakable evidence that the economic well-being of the area is underpinned by good rail links, what did the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) feel was the answer? - build extra lanes on to the M8 of course!

Berwick News

After the weekends of engineering works, the service through Berwick has settled to normality. The car park alterations have now been completed and it remains for its users to decide its worth for the few extra car spaces.

Railfuture's Autumn Meeting

Regrettably James King, Scotland's representative on the Rail Passenger Committee, was not able to be present due to illness. However, John Yellowlees, from First ScotRail, stepped into the breach at short notice and provided an informative briefing on "First ScotRail – One Year On".

John noted the priorities for the year as:

- A £40m investment – half in stations
- Pro-active safety standards
- Increase in station maintenance staff from 20 to 60
- Expansion of trolley catering through being brought in-house
- Monthly customer forum meetings around the country

John also drew attention to :

- The bus link between Queen Street and Central Stations in Glasgow
- Improvement in facilities at North Berwick and Bathgate due to happen soon
- Adopt a Station scheme – a charity bookshop had opened in buildings in Pitlochry and ScotRail were keen to see other redundant buildings come back into use in other areas
- New stations opening
- Waverley station to be made DDA compliant, and provide facilities for disabled users under the refurbishment scheme

Questions were raised from the floor concerning:

- The projected journey time from Edinburgh to Tweedbank on the Waverley line, as a 1 hour journey was seen as too long and would not encourage new rail users. John replied that a half hourly service was envisaged on this line.
- The condition of the 322s on the North Berwick line. John said that there would be new seats allowing a

MO WI FI ??

Look through the latest GNER pocket timetable and there are scattered throughout the timings the heading *mo* above some journeys. The writer, following national timetable convention, thought these journeys ran Monday Only which may have appeared strange but could have been journeys that repositioned stock after weekend engineering shutdown for all he knew. The *mo* symbol was discovered to mean Wireless Internet Access (or *wi fi*) . *Mo* meaning *Wi fi*? Beyond me, but given that this may cause confusion, RAGES will be recommending that a symbol (as the knife and fork symbol signifies a restaurant service) would be more appropriate above the journeys.

Haddington News

A meeting has now been arranged with the Haddington and District Community Council in January to discuss the way forward to achieve the re-opening of rail to Haddington.

larger number of passengers.

- The asymmetric travelling from Newcraighall to Linlithgow where it was possible to travel in one direction on one train, but a change was required on the way back. John explained that this was due to pathing difficulties. It was noted that passengers could be advised to change at Haymarket, when they would not require to change platforms, instead of the acrobatics sometimes required at Waverley. John would ask staff to advise passengers of the easier change at Haymarket.

John followed this session with a slide show highlighting some of the events that had taken place during the year.

John was thanked for his informative presentation, especially at such short notice.

The business of the meeting followed, with approval of the financial statement.

Members' attention was then drawn to a Scottish Rail Transport consultation document "Towards the Transport Strategy for Scotland; Consultation on Rail Priorities". Few present were aware of this document as there appeared to have been little publicity surrounding its issue in early October. The deadline was given as 28 December, and all those present were asked to submit a response and encourage others to do so. Copies can be obtained from Denise Manzor at the Scottish Executive on 0131-244-0855. It can be obtained online on the Executive's website at www.scotland.gov.uk and going to "consultation rail".

A report was also given by a member representing Railfuture at the Scottish Civic Forum, where he reported a regular slot for transport issues. He described the Forum as an opportunity for unrepresented bodies to have a voice.

A skills database information log would be in the April edition of Railwatch, in order to utilise the skills of members who were willing to assist the organisation.