

The Rages Rag

Newsletter of Rail Action Group, East of Scotland

www.rages.org.uk

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Transport Security Conference

On behalf of RAGES, Allison attended the Transport Security Conference on 14 February 2007 and gives the following report.

Regrettably because of a fire on a Tube line, I arrived a little late for the start of the Conference and missed one of the morning speakers, the Depute Director of Aviation at the DfT. However, I was able to hear from the following speaker, the Depute Chief Constable of British Transport Police, Andy Trotter.

Mr. Trotter referred to the 700 British Transport Police – who to my mind are largely invisible – although he perceived this staffing level as high. Every London bus would be equipped with CCTV and this would also extend to the Underground, which I think will go some way towards making passengers feel safer. Resources were being put towards counter terrorism and the infrastructure was being upgraded with security “designed in”.

A question was asked on how polonium could have been imported undetected into Britain, which received a fairly unsatisfactory answer in that “measures were being taken” in this regard. I felt that he did not accept responsibility for the importation of polonium, a view shared by others I talked to later. He was pressed quite hard on this by the audience.

Jeroen Weimar, director of transport policing for Transport for London, spoke about lessons learned from the London bombings, emphasising that public confidence had remained strong despite road closures and the damage to infrastructure. However, it was apparent the mobile phone systems couldn't cope with the large volume of traffic, especially the crucial role of the media. Training for staff was very important especially when dealing with disabled passengers. In this aspect, they seemed to have been caught on the hop.

David Bishop, secretary of the British

Ports Association, gave as his view that the main challenges at ports are dealing with cargo then passengers. On a question as to the seriousness of the risk to ports in the UK, he noted Special Branch involvement (although he did not specify to what level), and the existence of radiological screen development in ports around the UK.

I had booked to attend a workshop on security outside stations, entitled “From Car Park to Car Park” as I felt this might have useful advice to passengers. However, this turned out to be largely a sales pitch from a CCTV provider. One participant pointed out that vandal proof cameras only gave information after a crime, but did not prevent an incident occurring. What was helpful was a realisation that authorities were sharing data to assist in identifying criminals.

A speaker from London Ambulance also spoke on the London bombings and how they had been the catalyst for the setting up of a Family Assistance Centre, as they realised the lack of facilities was a major handicap in dealing with relatives. Should another such incident occur, they were more prepared to deal with it. He identified a flooding risk on the Underground as a cause for concern in the future.

Dr. Andrew Ryan, Chief Security Adviser to the International Olympic Committee followed. This was a most interesting session, with likely targets during the 60 day Olympic period already identified; including, surprisingly, the supply chain to supermarkets. Likely methods of attack were already being considered. He noted that training in risk assessing for transport operators in Beijing was already compulsory.

An interesting fact was that 30% of private security employees at the Atlanta Games didn't show up for work after only two days on the job, so security at the Games themselves would be a priority.

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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 “Published by” address at the foot of page 4.

North Berwick Service News

An unfortunate start to the year with a freight train fire at Drem on January 30th closed the line: First ScotRail commendably arranged a Prestonpans to Edinburgh shuttle with connecting buses from North Berwick, Drem and Longniddry, but failed to advise the times when the buses would run.

On February 6th a broken down train at 17:20 hrs in North Berwick caused subsequent journeys to be curtailed at Drem and passengers were told to catch buses to North Berwick: but none arrived within a reasonable time - if they did at all - so lifts had to be arranged, a not particularly satisfactory situation.

These incidents indicate a disappointment that when First ScotRail were granted the rail franchise, with both buses and trains being owned by the same company, the feeling was that there would be joined up working. So, if for example, trains had to be terminated at Drem, as above, First's North Berwick bus depot could send a vehicle to provide a replacement service or failing that Musselburgh or Dalkeith. The North Berwick bus depot allocation is fully committed during the day but after the evening peak and drivers completing duties around 18:30 hrs it may have been possible to get a volunteer to make the 20 minute trip to Drem rather than leave everyone waiting and waiting...

After these problems, the service has been very reliable. The signallers' dispute in March curtailed the operation but First ScotRail advertised the restricted timetable well and

ensured that most daytime commitments were met - in fact on Wednesday March 7th and Thursday March 8th the honour of the last train to leave Waverley was the 18:10 to North Berwick.

The new shelter and ticket machine at North Berwick had still not been completed in mid March and it will be interesting to see how off-train ticket issuing works. Whilst peak fares are the same on-train or off, so there isn't much incentive to buy before you board, off-peak fares will only be available off-train (subject to the machine working). But whether the machine can handle a steady stream of £10 notes for a £5.10 cheap day return fare before exhausting its change stocks will be worth seeing.

There must also be a question mark over the reliability of these machines as on March 23rd: only one of the four on the Waverley station forecourt was working fully, whilst the one at Linlithgow would not take debit or credit cards.

One of our North Berwick members has raised an interesting question. She travels regularly, but not enough to make a season ticket viable. She suggests a voucher for say ten journeys which would save queuing every time she was travelling. Caledonian MacBrayne, the operator of the Clyde car ferries has a six or ten voucher system where you hand over one page per journey. With Swiss and German railways, the passenger enters the date of travel in a printed box on the pass. RAGES will be writing to First ScotRail to suggest this.

Better access for disabled passengers

Wheelchair users in the Prestonpans and Cockenzie & Port Seton areas are delighted they should soon be able to board trains to the Capital direct when the Edinburgh-bound platform at Prestonpans station is made disabled-friendly.

The main route to the city-bound platform is a footbridge from the station's main entrance over the line - but its steps make it useless for wheelchair users.

There is direct access to the Edinburgh platform via several steps off Johnnie Cope's Road, but this is not as widely used and there is no parking. Again, the steps rule it out for wheelchair users.

This means that a wheelchair user who wants to travel by train to Edinburgh has either to go to Wallyford station or get on a train at Prestonpans to North Berwick and then back the way they came to Edinburgh, via Prestonpans.

The East Lothian Courier has reported that a ramp is to be installed at the steps at Johnny Cope Road - much to the delight of the community.

A spokesman for First ScotRail said: "I can confirm there is a plan to build a ramp to the 'Edinburgh' platform which is currently accessed by a stepped footbridge. The plan also includes a new car park with disabled parking on the 'to Edinburgh' side."

He added: "We welcome disabled customers and have a clear disabled people's protection policy which spells out how we offer the best possible help and assistance at stations and on the network."

Planning permission is required and it is likely an application will be submitted in April.

[Edited from the East Lothian Courier]

SESTRAN Draft Regional Transport Strategy

In February, RAGES wrote to SESTRAN regarding the level of rail coverage for our area. Disappointingly, to date we have had no response from them.

Membership

We now have around 160 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.

New On-line Ticket Facility

Virgin Trains suggests that it is leading the railway industry with its new website designed to make searching and buying the cheapest possible ticket far simpler. The site provides customers with a one-stop-shop from enquiry through to ticket purchase.

Searching for, and identifying, the cheapest available tickets for a rail journey has long been a bone of contention for many passengers. However, Virgin Trains has simplified the process with this new system and enables passengers to identify and purchase the best rail fare available quickly.

While the railways are moving towards simplification of advance purchase fares across the industry, Virgin Trains is leading the way with its new, improved search engine at www.virgintrains.com which has been developed in conjunction with ticket retailer The Trainline Limited.

Virgin Trains is also announcing a major campaign to make rail ticket fares more transparent and raise awareness of the value for money of rail travel.

The new search engine will present rail passengers with the cheapest advance purchase - or walk-up - fares which are available for their chosen journey. No longer will all fares be shown, irrespective of whether they are available or not.

In a separate development, passengers who are unable to buy a Virgin Advance ticket for both the outward and return legs of their journey, or unable to specify an exact train for one leg of a return journey, will now be able to mix and match ticket types and buy a Saver Half Return (at half the price of a Saver Return) for either the outward or return leg of the journey. This money-saving facility is available for website bookings only.

Passenger Focus welcomed this by saying that: "There are some great deals on fares out there, but many passengers are telling us that the current ticketing system is too complicated to navigate. There is a clear need to simplify the way tickets are sold to help passengers take advantage of the cheaper tickets. Any move to simplify websites is a step in the right direction."

Presentations by RAGES

Recently we have been asked to give several presentations on our aims and achievements.

In February, Tom Thorburn gave a well-received talk to Dunbar Rotary which was supported by a PowerPoint presentation and was slanted towards Dunbar.

In early March, the Haddington and District Amenity Society (HADAS) was given a talk entitled "Rail Renaissance", again making good use of a PowerPoint presentation. The first half was given by Tom on the general aims and achievements of RAGES, whilst the second half was centred on our aim of re-opening the rail branch to Haddington. Russell Darling covered this aspect and included three possible sites for a Haddington Station. Between the two halves, we had a DVD shown of the last train from Haddington. This had been filmed by Jack Tully-Jackson, a well-known Haddington historian, on a cine camera in 1968, had been transferred to a video and was now put on a DVD! As a result of our meeting, we got three new members - including Jack!

At the end of March, Tom gave a presentation to a meeting of East Lothian Community Councils, based, naturally, on our East Lothian aims and achievements.

Hopefully the time taken to prepare and present these will raise our aims further in the public eye.

Dunbar News

Good news for the early birds amongst you!

The new Virgin service at 06:29 hrs from Dunbar is now carrying up to 48 passengers with a good proportion going on to Glasgow. Virgin have also confirmed that this service will from 21st May depart at 06:40 hrs. Operationally, this will help at Dunbar, when there is currently not much time after the GNER London train has left. This new time might be better for more passengers.

RAGES has also asked if the 17:05 hrs ex-Edinburgh could be re-instated to a five-car set as the current four coaches are well packed. Virgin are looking at this, but are not optimistic that it will be feasible in the near future.

Recently, having heard from GNER train staff that no reduced fares would be available for sale on the train, one of our members wrote to GNER noting that even if you arrive early, you can be "thwarted by the Fastticket machine crashing (a tiresomely common occurrence) or the person in front at the ticket window trying to buy tickets for a family of six to Penzance."

He further commented: "In addition to the continual rise of passenger numbers, the situation has been made worse by the move to chip-and-pin, which has made the Fastticket machine about twice as slow as it was before."

He has suggested to GNER that a) they would need two or preferably three Fastticket machines, preferably re-located so that their queue does not get in such a tangle with the ticket window queue and b) they consider some other mechanism for purchasing journeys in bulk. The latter for passengers who travel frequently, but not sufficiently that a season ticket is an option.

On discussing the problem with train staff they suggested that customers could buy tickets the evening before they travel.

After this report was published as an E-rag, GNER's Public Affairs Manager responded to RAGES:

"I can confirm GNER's positioning regarding the issuing of tickets at Dunbar station is under review following various representations to GNER. We have been monitoring the number of passengers that are still queuing when the trains arrive and also monitoring the numbers of people purchasing tickets on board. An additional Fastticket machine is due to be introduced shortly and when we have concluded our review I will write to you again confirming any new arrangements."

Transport Security Conference

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He expressed concern about responding to events instead of proper avoidance planning being entered into; and thought that the Government should step in to sort out friction between the emergency services as to who should take a lead in any disaster. More direction and financial underpinning from governments was needed, as well as simple things like carrying out screening in areas well outside the central stadium to minimise delays.

Chris Yates from Jane's Airport Review was the last speaker, saying that airports lack the fundamental tools to protect passengers, with screening often not passing muster, especially at airport perimeters, which he described as "appalling". What was the point of screening passengers when other security was so poor? New technology allowed for examination of substances within luggage, but he pointed to a lack of cargo security and screening.

The variety of speakers provided a very interesting insight into the different security concerns on buses, trains, ships and ports, the Olympics and airports. Some speakers, especially the last, were quite dismissive of existing security provision. Others were unable to be very objective and adopted an attitude

of "we're doing all right". The audience were challenging on several occasions proving that they at least could be more impartial.

The programme was not provided until the actual day, or I might have had an awareness that a lot of it was London-focused. I also was not aware that there would be so much promotion by commercial interests. Nevertheless I found it a very useful day, albeit I wished to attend as I would be travelling through London anyway.

I met a Nottingham councillor who gave me a lot of information about the tram system there, and another councillor from a regional transport partnership in East Anglia who was able to tell me how that worked.

I discovered that the after-conference drinks reception was being sponsored by a political candidate aspiring to be Mayor of London, so I did not attend, although I had earlier planned to do so. I and others advised the organisers that this sort of sponsorship was not appropriate.

Many thanks to RAGES for allowing me to attend.

Fare Evasion

Further to our report "On Train Fares" in our last newsletter, RAGES asked Virgin Trains about their policy to counter fare evasion.

"Those who try to avoid payment, by deliberately travelling without obtaining the appropriate ticket or authority to travel, can be reported for prosecution. Those found guilty end up with a criminal record as well as a hefty fine. There have been many cases in courts around the country.

"The National Rail Conditions of Carriage state that a ticket must be obtained before joining the train, unless there is no ticket office at the station, or the ticket office is closed, and there are no self-service ticket machines, or there are no machines in full working order.

"If you travel on a train without a ticket or other authority to travel which is valid for the train(s) you intend to use you will be liable to pay the full fare for your journey, with no discount available.

"People who do not have a ticket or other authority to travel or who fail to show it, when asked, to the staff of a train company or its agent, together with any relevant Railcard, photo card or other required form of personal identification, are in breach of the conditions, which are required as part of all train operating companies' passenger licences."

So why risk the chance of getting a criminal record for the price of a ticket?

Local Service to Berwick

Since our last newsletter and despite assurances from the Minister for Transport at our November meeting with him, there has been no visible progress on the acceptance of STAG 1 produced over a year ago and the recommended progression to STAG 2.

RAGES has written to the Minister asking for the status of the report.

Berwick News

Our Berwick representative reports that trains have been running very smoothly since the last newsletter. He was impressed by the competent way in which the troubles arising from the train fire at Drem on 30 January was handled.

There have been problems with the connections for the Raillink 60 bus due to two sets of roadworks in Berwick, one at the railway bridge and one in the town centre. No one in Berwick Borough Council seems to have considered the impact these would have on traffic, especially in the morning peak. The result has been that connections to southbound trains have been missed and passengers arriving off northbound trains have had to wait longer than they should have done.

He overheard yet another compliment for the staff at Berwick recently. A partially-sighted elderly man was so impressed by the service he receives that he is going to write to Richard Branson. He tried to suggest that, as Berwick is run by GNER, it might be better to write to York, but he would have none of it! Anyway he was clearly happy.