

The Rages Rag

Newsletter of Rail Action Group, East of Scotland

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New East Coast Main Line Franchise

The Department for Transport recently announced that NXEC Trains Ltd, a subsidiary of National Express Group, has been awarded the contract to operate services on the InterCity East Coast rail franchise. The following is extracted from the DfT web site.

The franchise comprises of services connecting London with Scotland via Peterborough and the north of England. It will start on 9th December 2007 until 31st March 2015, with the last 17 months conditional on set performance levels being reached.

The contract will deliver:

- The current (May 2007) timetable, which includes Leeds half-hourly services, until 2010. From December 2010, there is provision for up to 25 extra train services - around 14,000 seats - each weekday. Up to 40 more carriages will be brought into use to deliver increased capacity
- Faster journeys: with more London to Edinburgh trains taking around 4 hours 20 minutes
- Better performance, so that 9 out of 10 trains run on time. NXEC is committed to reducing its delay minutes by 29% by the end of the franchise
- Environmental benefits, including a commitment to reduce fuel consumption per passenger kilometre by 28% over the franchise term, designate four 'green stations' and £400,000 invested in reducing energy use at station and depots
- A simpler website that will highlight the cheapest tickets available and the expected seat availability on each train. Smartcards introduced by 2010
- £7.4m to upgrade stations. Up to 2000 more car parking spaces to be provided by the end of the franchise with half of these expected within the first 2 years
- On board trains, Wi-Fi will be free in Standard Class and full dining services retained on 87 weekday trains.

Rail Minister Tom Harris said: "We want to grow and develop our rail network. In our White Paper we set out plans to deliver increased capacity, better performance and improved connections between key towns and cities. Franchise awards are already delivering these benefits.

"Passengers travelling on the East Coast Main Line will see similar enhancements. There is provision in this contract for extra services and fewer delays. NXEC will also invest in stations and on-board services."

Overall, regulated and unregulated fares together are likely to rise by RPI + 1.6% each year throughout the course of the franchise.

The Government will continue to limit annual rises of

regulated fares, which include season tickets and saver fares, in line with national policy, which is currently RPI + 1%.

As with all franchises, unregulated fares will be the responsibility of the operator. NXEC have indicated that they may wish to raise unregulated fares by an average of 2.1% above inflation each year over the course of the franchise.

NXEC has worked closely with Network Rail during the preparation of their bid, and will continue to work with Network Rail and the Office of the Rail Regulator to put in place extra services from December 2010, based on the conclusions of Network Rail's East Coast Route Utilisation Strategy. The new timetable could provide:

- An increase in the number of weekday trains from 136 to 161, including five trains in each off-peak hour from King's Cross - two to Leeds, two to Newcastle (with half of those trains extended to Edinburgh, and some to Glasgow, Aberdeen and Inverness, as happens today), and a fifth train running in alternate hours to Lincoln and to York;
- An additional 14,411 seats each weekday over and above the current timetable
- A new two hourly direct service between London and Lincoln and a new two hourly London to York service, calling at intermediate stations, giving good connectivity whilst enabling trains between London and Leeds, York, Newcastle and Scotland can be accelerated.

Existing Inter-City East Coast rolling stock will be retained, with HST powercars re-engined to reduce fuel consumption.

- Additional services will be operated on rolling stock previously used on the West Coast Main Line
- DfT is in the process of procuring the next generation of intercity trains (the Inter-City Express Programme) to be introduced across the network from 2014. A pre-series

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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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East Coast Franchise

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batch of the new trains will be introduced on the East Coast Main Line from 2012 before production of the full fleet begins

NXEC will continue to manage 12 stations across the franchise, and will invest in improvements to lighting, toilet facilities, better signing, lounge and waiting facilities, seats, cycle facilities and cleaning, painting and decorating. Stations that will receive improvements include Dunbar.

NXEC will seek to increase car parking capacity by up to 33% over the life of the franchise with an additional 2000 spaces: stations for which capacity is planned include Dunbar.

NXEC will provide a buffet and trolley service throughout First and Standard Class and an at-seat service to standard class customers enabling them to order hot food which will be delivered to seat. NXEC will provide a full restaurant service on 87 train services Monday to Friday with an improved range of full meals. Currently, a full restaurant service operates on 88 train services Monday - Friday.

NXEC is committed to achieving 90.1% PPM by January 2010. A 29% reduction in delay minutes attributed to the TOC will be achieved by the end of the franchise.

As with recent franchise awards, a single compensation policy for all passengers will be introduced. Discounts on renewal for season tickets valid between one month and one year in compensation for poor punctuality and reliability will be replaced by compensation based on delays to individual journeys, known as Delay/Repay. Under the new system, all passengers will be entitled to claim compensation for all delays, whatever their cause.

- 50% of the price paid for a single-leg journey delayed by between 30 and 59 minutes;
- 100% of the price paid for a single-leg journey delayed by between 60 and 119 minutes; and
- 100% of the price paid for a return journey delayed by more than 119 minutes
- The changes will also start to standardise disparate compensation arrangements for single, return and weekly season ticket holders on different train operators.

Tom Thorburn, RAGES chairman, said:

“Rail Action Group, East of Scotland are pleased that the East Coast Main Line Franchise has finally been awarded. Hopefully National Express will continue to run train services and stations to the high level we have become accustomed to under GNER.

“RAGES welcomes the news that 2000 extra parking spaces are to be provided at stations, as the Dunbar car park overflows on to the surrounding streets by 09:00 hrs. We would also like to see staff levels increased to their former levels at Berwick station to alleviate problems at ticket windows and the resumption of a 09:50 service to London at Dunbar.

“RAGES wish to work with National Express to the benefit of all concerned with rail travel. We enjoyed an excellent relationship with National Express when they held the ScotRail franchise and we would hope to repeat this with the ECML franchise.”

Meeting with Arriva

Arriva Trains invited stakeholders to a meeting in Jurys Inn, Edinburgh on 1st October to inform them of their proposals for the Cross Country franchise. Tom Thorburn attended on behalf of RAGES.

After introductions of Arriva staff: David Judson, Timetable and Resources Manager; and Gavin Bostock, External Relations Manager, Michael Holden, Operations Manager treated the six attendees to a Powerpoint slide show followed by a question and answer session.

Arriva informed us of the reason for opting for HSTs to provide the extra 5000 seats per week that their planned four new services from Scotland to the south via York would give: new build would take too long; Bombardier had scrapped all the equipment that was used for the Voyager fleet build thus eliminating the possibility of ordering extra units for lengthening the current Voyagers; and the only other available stock was the Adelante sets which were being returned to their Rolling Stock Leasing Company due to their unreliability.

Tom enquired as to the depth that these five HSTs would be refurbished: they would be re-engined and full refurbishment of the coaches carried out. A further question posed by Tom related to extra services calling at Dunbar. David replied that this would not be worthwhile as these new services would arrive some twenty minutes from a current calling service. The Voyager Cross Country fleet were to be refurbished with removal of the shop and one toilet from each set. Michael explained that their research had shown that passengers wanted an at-seat service for peace of mind that their seat would not be taken and their luggage remained intact whilst away at the shop. This at-seat service would be carried out by two trolleys

providing the best that was available on the high street.

This refurbishment subject raised many questions: surely it was not feasible to remove a toilet from a set which would leave three toilets for a four-car set, but Arriva insist they require to do this to provide extra seats; the Voyager fleet toilets have a problem of being very smelly, but Michael replied that this would be cured as he had done at South Eastern, apparently due to poor servicing; luggage storage was very scarce, which we were informed would be increased by 25%. On enquiring if this would be enough given that Cross Country were used extensively by the holiday maker with heavy luggage and the racks were very restrictive, Arriva replied that their research had shown that this was the optimum option.

When Tom enquired about the 17:05 ex-Edinburgh being operated by a four-car set due to stock shortage, he was assured that this would return to a five-car set.

The proposed 2008 timetable was discussed at length with many enquiries as to why services had been withdrawn. David said that we had until 23rd November to respond to him on the timetable. Tom thanked Arriva for continuing to operate the Monday to Friday 06:40 and Fridays only 22:54 services. It is worth noting that from the new franchise the 06:40 will be a through service to Glasgow rather than Manchester. Finally as the meeting was about to conclude, Tom asked Michael what input Arriva were going to have in deciding timings of replacement buses which is very pertinent at the moment since buses are replacing trains at the weekends with far too long journey times and stop overs at intermediate stations. Arriva would gladly look into this and they also hoped to see that blockades would become a thing of the past.

North Berwick Service News

Throughout the summer performance continued to be very good, with very few delays. Indeed the only significant problems in September were as a result of broken down freight trains and signalling difficulties when early morning cancellations occurred, both out of the operator's hands.

Engineering work resulted in weekend closures for six weeks in late autumn but the replacement bus services were well advertised on train and at stations.

Following complaints at its non-appearance on North Berwick lines, First ScotRail's magazine, *First Insight*, was distributed on some trains. This offers, in particular, a useful guide to line closures and engineering work as well as travel tips and articles. Having said that it was probably a good job that the September issue was not widely available as it featured an article on North Berwick and clearly had not been researched. A suggestion, for example, was to visit the Museum when the building has been closed for many years!

First ScotRail hosted a customer forum at the Seabird Centre on September 26th and was attended by over 30 customers. It was expertly chaired by James King of Passenger Focus and RAGES previous vice chair. Steve Montgomery and Peter Williams from First ScotRail fielded questions on the North Berwick service and it is a measure of how the service has improved that most questions did not relate to reliability or service frequency, but to matters concerning problems with individual employees.

The main topic was the station ticket machines, their unreliability and the attitude of conductor guards when tickets could not be purchased. Steve Montgomery advised that there were over 11000 transactions in a month at North Berwick and they were examining whether another machine at this location could be justified. New notices had been provided at stations to try and help in the use of the machine. Other topics debated included: the state of Drem Station; no smoking policies; seating layout on the refurbished trains; a request for through running to Edinburgh Park once the Airdrie to Bathgate line was electrified; unavailability of 10 journey tickets for local journeys, e.g. North Berwick to Musselburgh which are apparently only available to or from 'gated' stations; and Plus Bus tickets. Significantly, the only reference to services was the request that the last train should be at 23:37 hrs rather than 23:07 and that an extra train at 22:37 should be inserted into the schedule. This has been a long-standing issue, but is really out of First ScotRail's hands, as such a late train would break into the period that Network Rail has available for maintenance.

Generally then the service is running well, whilst in the next issue we should be able to report on whether the opening of Queen Margaret University College at Musselburgh has had any impact on the line.

Progress to STAG2 for Local Service?

John Lamont, MSP for Roxburgh and Berwickshire and RAGES member, has sought confirmation from Ministers at the Scottish Parliament over exactly who is responsible for the re-opening of a station at Reston.

His press release went on to say:

The campaign to restore this station has been going on for sometime, and there has been much confusion recently over exactly who is responsible for it; the Local Council or the Scottish Executive. John's question to the Minister aimed to make this clear once and for all.

Commenting, John said: "The restoration of a station at Reston would be a huge boost to the economy and infrastructure of the Eastern part of the Borders. I have been involved with this campaign for some time and it has been quite frustrating that both local and devolved government seem to have been passing the buck of responsibility.

"I was therefore pleased to have the opportunity to ask Stewart Stevenson, as the Minister responsible, for firm clarification over exactly which tier of government is responsible for getting this project off the ground.

"Mr. Stevenson informed me that once Transport Scotland delivers its views on the Feasibility Report, which he assured me would be very soon, it would then be up to Scottish Borders Council to conduct the next stage of this project.

"It is a great relief that we now have an official answer on this and can now take the matter forward. I will be discussing this with my Conservative colleagues on the Council and deciding how we can work together and get this project off the ground.

"If we are to improve the Borders' railway infrastructure, then we have to think much bigger than just an extension from Edinburgh to Galashiels. Berwickshire badly needs this station at Reston, and now we know who is responsible for pushing

this forwards, I look forward to seeing the plans come into place."

Tom Thorburn, RAGES chairman said: "RAGES have for some time been requesting an answer as to the status of Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG1), part of which would see Reston Station re-opened. We appreciated that The East Coast Mainline Rail Utilisation Strategy was being undertaken and as such no decisions could be taken until this RUS was put out for consultation in June/July of this year.

"It is very pleasing that John Lamont MSP has now received clarification from Stewart Stevenson MSP, such that the next step in the re-opening process can be taken. Indeed we have already requested a meeting with John and Scottish Borders Council to progress Reston Station which will have a catchment area population in excess of ten thousand."

John and fellow MSP for East Lothian, Iain Gray, will be speaking to the Minister for Transport at the end of October on this and other RAGES concerns. These will be discussed beforehand at a pre-meeting along with East Lothian Councillor Paul McLennan.

Membership

We now have over 150 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.

Berwick News

Generally services have run well, although there were considerable delays in the last week of September, due to bridge problems south of Doncaster. Once again this showed how local passengers on the ECML can be inconvenienced by something happening hundreds of kilometres away, since what is essentially a long-distance service must be more at risk of delays than one which is confined to a short distance, as are most local services in Scotland.

With the staff reductions in the booking office having been maintained, there are still queues at peak times and on occasion the much-vaunted machine has broken down just when it was most needed. There is also a shortage of platform staff and it is clear that the platform duties are only being covered by transferring staff from the booking office. Whether this makes economic sense in the long run could be debated. However, as always, the staff give of their best, whether on the platform or at a ticket counter.

The main problem over recent weeks, and continuing until mid-November, has been the replacement bus service operating at week-ends, supposedly to cover track works, although in fact there has been no sign of any major work going on anywhere that is visible from the road.

The first problem is that of timing. The National Express Edinburgh-London coach is given 75 minutes for a non-stop Edinburgh to Berwick journey (89.6km) and even the local 253 bus, which serves every village between Berwick and Haddington, is allowed only 125 minutes and generally completes its journey in even two hours. It might be assumed that a rail replacement service, operated by modern coaches, could keep to the National Express timetable. However, incredibly, the timetable allows a total of 105 minutes for the non-stop journey and 110 minutes when a stop at Dunbar is included. On four journeys made over two Saturdays, the

actual times taken were 74, 76, 76 and 80 minutes, despite road works and traffic signals in Milton Road, Edinburgh. The last of these was the only one with a Dunbar stop. There was no suggestion on any journey that the driver drove recklessly or ignored speed limits. One has to conclude that either a) the timetable is deliberately drawn up to discourage passengers, or b) it is compiled by someone with no local knowledge, or c) it is arranged to maximise the hire time of the coaches. A lay person cannot decide between these, but at all events it is not a sensible timetable for a rail replacement service. If it is the first of these, it seems to be working, since passenger numbers on the above journeys were 11, 11, 14 and 26 to Dunbar on the last, with only seven continuing to Berwick. This cannot be doing rail revenue any good, at a time when the operator is supposed to be maximising this! [*Ed: RAGES has written to GNER on this subject*]

Another area of concern is the actual operation of the service. No rail staff seem to be in attendance at terminal points and the coaches are dispatched by other staff. It is not clear who employs these. They seem to be unable to answer passengers' questions. There is no attempt to check tickets and timekeeping is sometimes erratic. One could count on having a free ride and again this cannot be good for revenue. Fortunately there have been no instances of drivers not knowing the road and having to ask passengers for directions – indeed the standard of driving and courtesy shown by drivers has been good.

It is simply not good enough that Berwick and Dunbar passengers (and those between Berwick and Newcastle) should be deprived of their normal rail service in this way and in the long run this cannot do rail travel any good – if passengers have taken to the car on one week-end, they may get a taste for it and not come back to rail thereafter.

RAGES 8th Annual General Meeting

The eighth annual general meeting of RAGES took place on September 12th at West Barns Bowling Club. The guest speaker was Councillor Paul McLennan, Environment Cabinet spokesperson of East Lothian Council.

A number of points were raised during his presentation and subsequent discussion, upon which RAGES will seek to act: the lack of through services between Dunbar and London (there is a 10 hour gap between 06:20 hrs and 16:20) to be taken up with the new franchise holder, National Express; proposals to reduce toilet facilities on trains when Arriva assume responsibility for Cross Country services; and general concern that the fragmentation of rail and bus operations was not always to the benefit of the passenger.

Tom Thorburn, Chairman of RAGES, reviewed the year which had seen a number of welcome successes. The introduction of an early morning Dunbar to Edinburgh link and Friday evening Edinburgh to Dunbar service last December had been appreciated. These services will continue until at least December 2008, with the morning service being extended to Glasgow from December 10th.

Refurbishment of the Class 322 units on the North Berwick service had been completed at the turn of the year and with it a substantial improvement in service reliability. In May, First ScotRail had introduced a Monday to Saturday train from Edinburgh to North Berwick at 20:37 hrs, returning at 21:20. This had filled a gap in service provision.

With franchises for Cross Country services passing from Virgin to Arriva in November and the East Coast Main Line from GNER to National Express in December there will certainly be much to keep RAGES busy in the next year!

Tom thanked the committee for their support during the past year and in return, they declared that without Tom's enthusiasm and hard work, RAGES would not be able to do as much as it does.