

The Rages Rag

Newsletter of Rail Action Group, East of Scotland

www.rages.org.uk

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The Power of Lobbying

At the end of November, RAGES became aware from a number of members that the 07:38 hrs train would not be running on the 24th December.

RAGES wrote to GNER (as it was at that time) noting that this train is the busiest one to call at Dunbar so making the reason for its omission all the more perplexing. RAGES also noted that the 08:52 hrs was not running either! This meant that Dunbar passengers from these two trains would have to wait until the 09:52 hrs, which would no doubt be full before it arrived at Dunbar.

Members pointed out that they had paid a princely sum for a season ticket to get to work.

RAGES hoped that GNER would give careful consideration to those Berwick and Dunbar passengers that were going to be severely disadvantaged and uncomfortable due to the lack of these two trains.

GNER's initial response was discouraging:

"Each year during the Christmas and New Year period train operators throughout the rail network operate a special timetable which reflects the distinct change in passenger demand and type of journeys made.

"In the run up to Christmas the trains remain busy, however closer to Christmas we see a pattern change, with fewer passengers travelling during the morning and evening peaks but more passengers travelling long-distance and throughout the day, as people take time off to see friends and relations, go Christmas shopping or get away earlier.

"Although we appreciate that Monday 24 December is a working day for some people, it is within the Christmas holiday period and is one of the quietest days for travel in the year.

"However, the 09:52 hrs from Dunbar will start from Newcastle rather than, as normal, from Leeds and therefore will have plenty of seats available upon arrival at Dunbar."

"Please be assured, it is certainly not the case that National Express East Coast will choose locations to serve in preference to others. Rather, it is a purely logistical issue about how best to serve the majority of customers across the East Coast route, taking into consideration passenger demand, route capacity and a limited train fleet."

However, whether by sight of our electronic rags or by their own initiative, Passenger Focus took up the problem. This produced a satisfactory result as the announcement from National Express (as they were by then) to RAGES showed:

"Further to your previous correspondence and in response to passenger demand for an earlier morning service on not only the 24th of December but also on 27th and 28th, I can confirm that National Express East Coast will provide an earlier than advertised train from Berwick and Dunbar to Edinburgh. This will offer an additional travel option for commuters travelling

into Edinburgh for work commitments during the quieter holiday period.

"The extra train will run on 24, 27 and 28 December and will depart from Berwick at 07:14 hrs, calling at Dunbar at 07:38 hrs.

"I have arranged for a poster to be placed at Dunbar and Berwick stations to advise passengers of the extra service but



National Express's new livery on an HST - photo by National Express

would be grateful if you could also inform your members via your RAGES news service."

This was immediately communicated to our members on e-mail.

Unfortunately the 07:38 hrs did not run on the 24th and one bus was hastily arranged by Dunbar staff. Our members told us that a large number of passengers departed the station on hearing that the train was not coming and others that could not

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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.

North Berwick Service News

The introduction of the winter timetable from December 9th saw through trains at peak hours restored to operate to and from Haymarket and it was pleasing to note that publicity was available well before the change.

One idiosyncrasy of the schedule though is that there is a departure at 14:15 hrs from North Berwick to Edinburgh on Monday to Saturday instead of the standard 20 minutes past the hour time – this is apparently to allow a reasonable arrival in Edinburgh Waverley – 48 minutes past the hour – rather than leave at 20 minutes past and get stuck behind East Coast trains and therefore not arrive until after 15:00 hrs. Whether passengers welcome this remains to be seen judging by the looks of anguish at 14:16 hrs in North Berwick station when potential travellers see the train pulling away!

The timetable also restores the two Monday to Saturday return trains to and from Glasgow Central, although these Saturday trains will cease to operate west of Edinburgh when another engineering programme starts.

Revised services operated over the Christmas and New Year period and a timetable amendments book was published – although it didn't appear in stations until the week before Christmas. With more shops – and financial institutions – being open on January 2nd though there is a case for either earlier trains or buses between East Lothian and Edinburgh. The best arrival time by bus is 10:10 and by rail 11:53. Also shops are increasingly open on Boxing Day and it would be a positive step if some form of rail service outwith Strathclyde could be offered as well, although it is acknowledged this would require further subsidy. The UK has probably by far the worst public transport service over the Christmas/New Year

period in Europe and it is regrettable that passengers are forced to travel by car at a time when the weather can be unfavourable when rolling stock lies idle in depots.

The North Berwick News reported that the North Berwick railway station has been named the best unmanned station in the east of Scotland. Their report continues:

First ScotRail bosses, who have installed a heated waiting room with a ticket vending machine and kiosk, have acknowledged the work of members of North Berwick in Bloom.

To mark their achievement, John Yellowlees, External Relations Manager at First ScotRail, presented the group with a certificate recently in recognition of their efforts. Their work was fully supported by the rail company, who provided 21 flower tubs and 10,500 bulbs, which will be fully appreciated in spring.

Mr Yellowlees said: "I am delighted to present this certificate to North Berwick in Bloom, in recognition of the work they have undertaken and which is now being enjoyed by our customers.

"A local station should be at the heart of a community and it is encouraging to know that there is such an enthusiasm in making them look as good as possible."

A spokesperson for North Berwick in Bloom said: "Hopefully, this will encourage people to keep the station clean and tidy. Over the last year we have removed all manner of litter, including discarded cigarettes, crisp packets and newspapers."

Rail services in East Lothian

RAGES recently attended a meeting at Haddington House with David Berry and Paul McLennan, East Lothian Councillors, and Iain Gray, MSP for East Lothian, where discussion took place on how to progress improvements to rail services in East Lothian.

It was agreed that progress to STAG 2 for the complete local service to Berwick with re-opened stations at East Linton and Reston had stalled somewhat. However, it was thought that pressing for a local service as far as Dunbar was worthy of promotion. This would not preclude the full implementation of a full service to Berwick later, but as a quick means to provide travel assistance to the ever increasing Dunbar population. Points raised were:

- Whilst the Queen Margaret University Campus was being well served by rail for students coming from the North Berwick service stations and Edinburgh, this was denied to those from Dunbar
- 800 and 200 houses are to be built in Dunbar and East Linton respectively
- SEStran and the ECML RUS are promoting an Edinburgh to Newcastle semi-fast service which would take longer to agree and implement and therefore to the detriment of East Lothian and Bewrwickshire residents - it is better to have a phased approach

- Iain Gray is supportive of having a local service to Dunbar as a first step in achieving the Berwick goal and is arranging a meeting between RAGES and the Minister for Transport to discuss our aims
- Thereafter all groups will be pressing for progress towards STAG 2, but will also be pressing for a local service to Dunbar
- It is thought that a regular Dunbar service operated by First ScotRail would attract more passengers than indicated in the STAG 1 and would therefore provide a better case for the re-opening of East Linton and Reston with the extension to Berwick
- For First ScotRail to provide a service to Dunbar: their drivers need to be trained on the route from Drem to Dunbar; and funding needs to be arranged as this is not part of their current franchise
- Iain Gray has asked Mary Dickson, First ScotRail, for costs to introduce this service
- Paul McLennan will set up meetings with SEStran and Transport Scotland to promote this service

The important factor in promoting this service is the quick return for not a lot of funding as the infrastructure and rolling stock are in place.

MSPs meeting with the Minister for Transport

Tom Thorburn and Russell Darling met Iain Gray, MSP for East Lothian, at the end of October to discuss his forthcoming meeting with Stewart Stevenson, Minister for Transport. John Lamont, MSP for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, was also to be involved in the ministerial meeting, but was unable to attend our pre-meeting. Iain listened attentively to our concerns which we wished to raise:

- Local Rail from Edinburgh to Berwick - progression to STAG 2
- Haddington STAG 1
- Late trains from and to Dunbar/Berwick, i.e. not just Friday
- An extra southbound calling at Dunbar - 09:20 or 09:50
- Selective door opening on the NB 322s

In the time given to them by the Minister, Iain promised to raise as many of these as possible.

The meeting took place and John Lamont produced a press release:

Berwickshire MSP John Lamont has had a meeting with the new Transport Minister, Stewart Stevenson MSP, about the re-opening of a station at Reston in Berwickshire. John has been campaigning with the East of Scotland Rail Action Group for a number of years to bring about the re-opening of a station in Berwickshire. John Lamont was joined at his meeting by East Lothian MSP, Iain Gray who has been working to bring about improvements to the service in East Lothian.

John Lamont said "I am delighted that the Minister has taken the time to meet with us to discuss this very important issue. As your readers will know, the opening of a station in Berwickshire has been on the political agenda for many years and I am pleased that we appear, at long last, to be making progress on this. The meeting was very positive.

"The Minister, who is a well known railway enthusiast, has agreed to meet with the Rail Action Group so that he can hear at first hand from the local campaigners what their objectives are. The re-opening of the station at Reston would bring about significant improvements to the eastern Borders and would allow local residents to have easy access on public transport to Edinburgh, Berwick-upon-Tweed and connections to Newcastle

and further south."

John added "We hope to set up a ministerial meeting with RAGES as soon as possible. We can then move forward to the next stage of the process.

Iain's press release was in a similar encouraging vein:

"I strongly support a local service between Edinburgh and Berwick stopping at East Linton and I believe that the time has come to take that project forward. The Scottish Executive's STAG 1 report into the feasibility of the line from October 2005 recommended that the scheme had merit and should proceed to a more detailed STAG 2 appraisal, but progress has stalled since. So I am pleased that the Minister seems to be willing to look positively at the case for the new service, and might fund, or part fund the next stage appraisal."

He added: "Dunbar and the surrounding area is expanding rapidly and we need to encourage residents to use of public transport wherever possible. While high speed services from Dunbar to Edinburgh provide a fast and direct link, a local service with stops at intermediate stations would complement the East Coast Main Line service perfectly. In particular, a local Edinburgh to Berwick service would make Queen Margaret University more accessible for thousands of local students and potential students.

"The benefits to East Linton of a reopened station and direct link to Edinburgh are obvious. The STAG1 report estimated that 190 people a day would use such a service - I think it would do even better than that."

Iain also raised the possibility of additional late evening stops at Dunbar for high speed trains to fill a major gap in the existing timetable. Stewart Stevenson pledged to consider the feasibility of such a move. However, he was less encouraging with regard to starting the process of considering reinstating a Haddington rail link, but did agree to listen to the case when he meets RAGES.

Tom Thorburn said "It is very pleasing that our constituent MSPs John and Iain have had a good meeting with Transport Minister Stewart Stevenson MSP."

Dunbar News

The Dunbar trains have been running fairly satisfactorily since the new franchises were appointed, although there have been a series of mechanical breakdowns resulting in lengthy delays which affected both Cross Country and National Express services

Passenger numbers continue to grow, particularly on the 06:40 hrs service. Demand for a late night Saturday service is still strong.

Anecdotal evidence points to there not being a huge difference in the perception of both of the new franchisees.

Christmas trains

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get a seat on the bus then got back into their cars - presumably to make their on way to Edinburgh. It was estimated that there were 100 passengers on the 24th and would have been greater as others had made alternative arrangements by the time the announcement was made that the train was running.

From this RAGES concludes that in future some 150 plus would be using this Christmas Eve train.

CrossCountry Draft Timetable for next

Arriva CrossCountry published a draft timetable for 2009 and asked for comments. RAGES has responded, limiting the review to services on the ECML, between Edinburgh and Newcastle, in particular those calling at intermediate stations Dunbar and Berwick-upon-Tweed. Our comments and suggestions to Arriva were as follows:

- Monday to Friday Southbound: the timetable omits the 08:48 at Berwick and the Fridays only 23:25 at Dunbar. An additional service at Berwick is the 18:53. Removal of the Berwick 08:48 from the timetable would result in a 2-hour gap in southbound services (including NXEC). Clearly it would be in Arriva's best interest to have the 08:48 call at Berwick.
- Monday to Friday Northbound: the timetable omits the 20:25 and 22:36 at Berwick, 06:40 and 22:59 at Dunbar. Somewhat puzzling is the additional call at each of the above stations of the 20:40 ex-Newcastle at 21:22 and 21:45 which were/are GNER/NXEC calls and the Cross Country train is doing it 10 minutes quicker.
- Summer Saturdays Southbound: the timetable omits the 08:54 and shows an additional call at 07:31 and 18:53 at Berwick. A slight preference here would surely be to have the 08:54 in place of the 07:31 to give more balanced calling pattern. A welcome addition is the 17:27 call at Dunbar. The 06:05 ex Edinburgh takes 6 minutes longer to reach Newcastle and previously the 08:05 now departs Edinburgh at 08:12.
- Summer Saturdays Northbound: the timetable omits the 20:22 and shows additional call at 21:45 at Berwick. Dunbar enjoys an extra call brought about by the omission of the 17:45 and 22:08, and the addition of the 16:48, 18:45 and 21:45.
- Winter Saturdays Southbound: the timetable is virtually as the Summer timetable apart from the 17:53 rather than 18:53 calling at Berwick.
- Winter Saturdays Northbound: again the timetable is virtually as the Summer timetable.
- Summer Sundays Southbound: the timetable makes a welcome additional 09:27 call at Dunbar and 14:33 and 18:33 calls at Berwick.
- Summer Sundays Northbound: the timetable omits the 20:23 and 22:30, and shows additional calls at 11:45, 20:42 and 21:45 at Berwick. Dunbar enjoys an extra call brought about by the omission of the 17:45, and the addition of the 11:22 and 16:45.
- Winter Sundays Southbound: the timetable makes a welcome additional 09:27 call at Dunbar and 18:53 call at Berwick.
- Winter Sundays Northbound: Comments on this are identical to Summer Sundays Timetable.

In conclusion to reviewing the proposed timetables RAGES noted that the additional calls are most welcome at Dunbar and Berwick, but would nevertheless be very grateful if Arriva would include the Dunbar omissions of the 06:40 and 23:25

FO, and review services where particular comments have been raised.

In reply, Arriva said very much welcomed our comments regarding Berwick-upon-Tweed, saying that Berwick is an important station serving a wide catchment area and that they had no intention of reducing the overall level of service provided by CrossCountry to and from it.



Arriva CrossCountry's new livery - photo from their web site

They continued:

“The pattern we have put forward in our December 2008 proposals provides a frequency of CrossCountry services (one per two hours during most of the day) similar to that provided currently. You have raised some concerns about the need for calls at particular times of the day (and on the additional Sunday service) and we will continue to look at the optimal pattern of calls for Berwick-upon-Tweed within our overall proposals. Services between Newcastle, Berwick and Edinburgh will of course be shared between ourselves and National Express East Coast and we will of course be talking to our Industry colleagues during the development of our timetable plans.

“We are glad you welcome the additional 1727 call at Dunbar Southbound on summer Saturdays, and 0927 Northbound on summer and winter Sundays, and note your points regarding more balanced calling patterns on summer Saturdays.

“We have also noted your comments regarding additional calls on the Monday to Friday Northbound services, and their relation to current East Coast services. We will bear these in mind during the timetable planning process.

“As part of the timetable consultation process, we will now consider carefully all of the comments received, including the issues that you have raised, as we continue to discuss its introduction with Network Rail, the Department for Transport and other industry partners. We will keep you updated on our progress throughout the process.”