

The Rages Rag

Newsletter of Rail Action Group, East of Scotland

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Local Rail Consultations

Both the ScotRail and MVA Consultancy consultations into local services are still underway with their publishing due in late November.

MVA Consultancy asked if RAGES could be involved in gauging local opinion about their study which encompasses a local service between Edinburgh and Newcastle with possible re-opening of stations at East Linton and Reston.

To this end, East Lothian Council, along with Sustaining Dunbar and RAGES, organised two public meetings during October: Dunbar at the Hallhill Healthy Living Centre and East Linton at the Village Hall. Sustaining Dunbar were involved in producing a poster to advertise the events.

RAGES organised a similar public meeting for the Reston area which was held in the Coldingham Public Hall. Two RAGES members produced an advertising poster.

Dunbar

The meeting at Dunbar was held on 13th October when 16 members of the public attended. Seven of the RAGES Committee were also present. The public were arranged round several tables with flipchart paper and pens. Cllr Paul McLennan introduced the meeting and also invited Tom Thorburn, RAGES Chairman, to describe how we had arrived at this stage. Three questions were posed during the meeting:

- How is the existing service at Dunbar?
- What extra services should be implemented?
- How does a local service integrate with the long distance trains?

Those present were given 15 minutes to discuss each of these questions in turn and afterwards report back on their answers. The RAGES Committee circulated to assist the discussion. Many good points were raised for each question.

Paul would collate the answers and forward them to the consultants. He promised all present that the compilation and response from MVA would be circulated to them.

East Linton

The meeting at East Linton was held on 20th October when 18 members of the public were present. There was also four members of the RAGES Committee.

The format of this meeting was similar to that at Dunbar, but the questions were slightly different:

- What sort of rail service would you like to see at a re-opened East Linton station; what times if it was not feasible to have an hourly stopping service; and are there any additional stops between East Linton and

Edinburgh that would be suitable for East Linton residents?

- Connecting services: which station do you currently go to for train journeys; if there was an East Linton station, where would you prefer to change for a main line connection given that East Coast and CrossCountry would not stop at East Linton.

Again there was good discussion and points raised for each question. Cllr McLennan would prepare a compilation for the consultants. These would be circulated along with MVA's responses to those present.

Reston

The meeting to discuss the Reston area took place on 25th October with around 85 members of the public present, including John Lamont MSP and Paul Wheelhouse, SNP candidate for the constituency. Euan Robson, formerly MSP for the area, was present representing Michael Moore MP, currently Chief Secretary for Scotland. Also present were Cllr J Fullarton and Brian Young, Scottish Borders Council. Tom Thorburn, Barrie Forrest and Brian Patton (who prepared this section of the report) attended from the RAGES Committee.

Due to the layout of the hall, it was not possible to have people seated around tables as at the other meetings. Instead, after a short presentation by Tom Thorburn, who outlined the history of recent attempts to put the matter on to the agenda of various studies, those present were asked to give their views on the level of service which they wanted to see at a re-opened Reston station, working together in groups of two rows. There was complete unanimity on the question of the necessity of re-opening Reston station, as not a single person queried this proposal.

The main conclusions about the service to be provided were as follows:

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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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Consultations

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- There should be a regular interval local service throughout the day, with early morning and late evening trains catering for travellers going both north to Edinburgh and south to Berwick and Newcastle. Co-ordination of time tables at Berwick would be essential to provide for southbound passengers. Possibly an off-peak frequency of two hours would be sufficient, but trains should run more often than this in peak periods. A last departure from Edinburgh at about 23:00 hrs would be suitable, and also a late departure from Newcastle. A Sunday service should be offered, as this would attract visitors and particularly family members.
- It would also be desirable to have some long distance trains stopping at Reston to allow connections to London, York and possibly Glasgow, always assuming that a through service will be provided in future to the last of these. The success of an increased number of calls at Alnmouth (of similar size and catchment to Reston) was cited as proof that these can attract passengers to rail.
- As it is not simply a question of re-opening the station to serve Reston alone, a good level of connecting bus services should be arranged to serve communities such as Eyemouth, Duns, Coldingham, St Abbs, Houndwood, Ayton, Chirnside etc. There should also be taxis available. There should be adequate car parking space at Reston station and free, secure storage for cycles. A car share database could help to attract regular passengers while at the same time limiting the number of cars parking at the station. The station itself should provide adequate shelter on both platforms to allow waiting passengers shelter from the weather.
- As a re-opened station would attract more traffic into Reston, it would be necessary to review the layout at the junction with the A1 road and possibly upgrade it.
- Fares on the trains calling at Reston should be reasonable.
- It should be remembered that passengers would have destinations outwith central Edinburgh, such as the airport and Queen Margaret University, the latter being

provided by trains calling at Musselburgh. Those with an early appointment at a hospital would also use morning peak trains.

The benefits which would be conferred by a re-opened station would be:

- Young people could live at home while studying at college in Edinburgh or while working in the city. People working in Edinburgh could relocate to the area and thus bring increased demand for local services. At present, if one member works outwith the local area, two cars are required in a family. As other rail improvements in Scotland have without exception been successful in attracting passengers, it is reasonable to assume that the same would happen in the case of Reston and this could lead to an increase in demand for local housing, thus bringing work for local builders.
- There would be a reduction in traffic, and thus pollution, on the A1, which can be a dangerous road, especially in winter time. There would also be a reduction in pressure for car parking in Dunbar, as currently some local people drive there and take the train onwards to Edinburgh.
- There could be an increase in inward investment in east Berwickshire, probably mainly in the tourism and its associated facilities, but possibly in other fields. This may be extremely important when authorities come to consider the re-opening of Reston station.

RAGES has sent the Reston area comments to MVA.

The meeting concluded with the showing of a film about the reconstruction of the ECML after the floods of August 1948.

Those present at all the meetings were urged to write to or to send an e-mail to the consultants as individuals.

Nine people, all supporting our aims, who had not been able to attend the meetings, are known to have sent individual responses to the consultants.

The Membership Secretary was pleased to welcome 12 new members to RAGES and three lapsed members re-joining from the three meetings.

East Coast Customers Pay for Parking on the Move

Cashless parking system has been rolled out to nine East Coast stations by train operator East Coast with a new system for customers to pay for their parking on the move with RingGo. This will allow passengers to pay for their parking over the phone with a credit or debit card. Dunbar is one of the nine stations.

Motorists can still pay with coins at the machine, but for regular train users, RingGo offers a number of advantages.

There is no need to visit a machine and queue to get a parking ticket - railway staff check that a vehicle has paid using internet connected handsets.

Each station's car park has its own unique RingGo code, and motorists should quote this number when they call the East Coast RingGo number 01904 899 877 to pay for their parking as they walk to the station, or even from the platform itself. The standard RingGo service uses voice recognition to keep call times to a minimum, but once registered, travellers can use their phone web browser, a text message or the latest RingGo iPhone application to pay, if they prefer.

Motorists can register either by phone or on-line, at www.myRingGo.co.uk, where they will be asked for their vehicle, location code and payment card details. Registering by phone takes a couple of minutes, but on subsequent uses, calls usually take less than a minute.

Membership

We now have 154 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.

Meet the Managers

Two of these sessions have been held recently.

First ScotRail

Two committee members, Brian Patton and Barrie Forrest travelled on the First ScotRail Dunbar train on 9th September. This report is compiled by Brian.

I caught the 14:21 hrs train from Waverley to Dunbar. Unfortunately there were not many passengers on board, about 15 in all. John Yellowlees, External Relations Manager, and Eddie Brown, Ontrain Manager based at Waverley, were present on the train for this "Meet the Manager" session.

After the conductor announced their presence, John and Eddie made their way through the train, talking to passengers, who seem to be happy to meet them and had quite a lot to say.

John used the occasion to publicise additional services and extol the delights of the new class 380 stock to arrive in March 2011. They did not reach me until we were almost at Dunbar, but we continued our conversation on the platform, where Barrie joined us.

The main points I made concerned the need for a return train service about mid-day; the importance of having all trains stop at Musselburgh to serve Queen Margaret University; and the need to do something about the overcrowding on the 17:08 hrs CrossCountry departure from Waverley. This may in some part be exacerbated by returning day trippers who have gone up to Edinburgh on one of the ScotRail services.

The first point was of course taken care of by his announcement that there will be a service around mid-day starting in December. He noted the others and asked about the consist of the 17:08 hrs. We then talked about evening and late services. I stressed that in the long term, a regular interval service would probably be the best way to attract more passengers.

I also used the occasion to raise my concern about the withdrawal of through Berwick-Glasgow services, as I had just read that as yet CrossCountry had given no commitment to take these on when East Coast backs out in May 2011.

Departure of the return service was delayed by four minutes due to a late running East Coast up service. The ScotRail team then toured the train again, although until we got to Musselburgh, it was not very busy. However, a good crowd of students joined there.

It seemed that passengers were unanimous in their praise for Dunbar station and its staff. It was a good day and on behalf of RAGES, I thanked John for taking the time to meet local passengers.

Also on board was Willie Scott, a RAGES member, who joined and left the train at Musselburgh.

East Coast

Tom Thorburn, who compiled this report, and Barrie Forrest attended a "Meet the Manager" session at Dunbar Station with East Coast Managers: Angela McKenzie; Karen O'Hanlon; and Andy Lamont on 20th October.

Points raised during the discussion were:

- The need to have a mid-morning London service calling at Dunbar reinstated to cater for young families, tourists with lots of luggage and flexibility of the passengers needs. It was very opportune that RAGES member, Robert Craig, should have just alighted the 17:49 hrs on his way back from London and was able to bolster this very point with the management team.
- The high cost of Dunbar to London fares was discussed at length where it was explained to the Team that Dunbar passengers were being discriminated as they had to either take the train to Edinburgh or drive to Berwick to get a cheaper fare. Again we explained that Christopher Garnett, during the GNER reign, had sorted this very problem and we saw no reason why this should not be the case again.
- The weekend bus replacement service during the September engineering possessions had been inadequate on one weekend. East Coast explained that this had been of another party's lack of communication but that it would be looked into for future engineering possessions.
- The requirement for more cycle racks was highlighted. East Coast have identified a position for the new racks which sounds promising

The management team informed us that a contract has been let to have Station Road pavements and station entrances attended to during the winter months.

All in all, this was a very useful meeting and we complemented the Management Team on the new disabled double facility ticket counter and that the pavement on Station Road was now wheel chair friendly. An added bonus to this meeting was that a Queen Margaret University student, who was representing more of her fellow students from the Dunbar area, complained of the stupidity of the new First ScotRail services not stopping at Musselburgh. It was explained by ourselves that we had and will continue to bring this very point up with First ScotRail and Transport Scotland.

New Railway

Seen in a recent *Scotsman* advert for Network Rail is the good news about Kelly from Armadale where she says: "Network Rail built me a railway so I can go to the university I choose"

Whilst we are happy for Kelly, what about Robert from Reston and Emma Louise from East Linton and all like them in our area?



Photo: Barrie Forrest, Willie Scott, John Yellowlees, Brian Patton and Eddie Brown at Dunbar. © RAGES

Berwick News

Brian Patton

As Berwick is, as always, a very well-run station, there is little to report. The main event of the last few months has been the arrival of Danny in the booking office. He began work there in July and at the time of writing is still on the staff, although not in a permanent capacity. His arrival has allowed the office to have two windows open at busy times and this has been greatly appreciated by both passengers and other staff.

The late night trains which ran during the Edinburgh Festival seem to have been most successful, with up to 200 passengers being carried to Berwick on certain nights and little sign of anti-social behaviour. It is hoped that the success of this venture will encourage timetable planners to consider repeating it and expanding it to other nights in the year.

Mention of anti-social behaviour brings to mind the problem of policing the quiet coach on main line trains. On a recent occasion, having remonstrated with a woman who insisted on using her hand phone in coach B (East Coast) and with a loudmouth who said she had every right to do so while the train was stationary, I asked the conductor, when he came on his rounds, to have a word with each of them about such conduct. This he declined to do, on the grounds that the policy of East Coast is to "avoid confrontation". If correct, this is not very re-assuring for passengers confronted with those who do not know how to behave when travelling by train.

A recent return trip to London in first class – at a very good bargain fare – suggests that catering on East Coast has not improved since re-nationalisation. The main dishes offered at meal times are basically sausages and mash, fish and chips or pasta. Although the service is good, it is a far cry from the days of British Rail InterCity and GNER and it is to be hoped that some attention can be given to providing a more varied and interesting menu.

The matter of showing cancellations of the Rail Link 60 bus at Berwick station has cropped up twice this year and in August, I contacted First Bus to ask about their policy on this. Although I have had two acknowledging letters, I still have not – after more than seven weeks – actually received an answer. The correspondence continues.

Better than Expected

Extracted from October's copy of Railwatch, the magazine of Railfuture:

- The re-opened Stirling-Alloa-Kinross line is carrying nearly three times the projected number of passengers
- Edinburgh-Bathgate, re-opened in 1986, is carrying four times more than projected
- Larkhall-Hamilton and Anniesland-Maryhill are both carrying 40% more passengers than expected.
- Laurencekirk station is being used by nearly twice the number of passengers predicted since being re-opened in May 2009.

All good news for passengers in these areas. This should be encouraging for those involved in preparing the current studies to bring more frequent services to East Lothian and Berwickshire with re-opened stations at East Linton and Reston. We are getting left behind!

However, the Laurencekirk station study was based on an annual patronage of 36,000. Using the daily figures published in the 2005 study for East Linton (190) and Reston (200) scaled up, these become annual usages of 59,000 and 62,000 respectively - 64% and 72% higher than that for Laurencekirk. Also there has been a large number of houses built within the catchment areas of these stations since 2005. Surely these are good pointers for our area.

Station Improvements Just the Ticket for Dunbar

Train operator East Coast has unveiled a £50,000 package of improvements at Dunbar station which has been supported by Transport Scotland through its Access for All scheme and includes two new DDA compliant ticket windows with counters at three different levels, two new automatic doors at the station front entrance and platform exit, and a new ramp leading main entrance, providing easier access for wheelchairs and prams.

New seating has also been installed in addition to refurbished back-office accommodation for staff. Plans are also underway to install a new notice board which will be managed in partnership with Dunbar station's new adopters 'Sustaining Dunbar'. The notice board will display local cycling and walking routes in addition to community notices.

Andy Lamont, East Coast Station Manager Scotland, said: "East Coast is delighted to open the new ticket office and accessibility improvements at Dunbar station.

"We continue to invest in our stations and to take on board the views of our passengers. We know that they welcome these developments and hope the improvements will encourage even more people to travel by train."

Chris Clark, Rail Accessibility Manager for Transport Scotland, said: "The Scottish Government is delighted to support East Coast's improvement of facilities that should encourage passengers with mobility impairments to travel by train."

The improvements have also been welcomed by Stan Flett of the Scottish Accessible Transport Alliance (SATA), who said: "We are very impressed with the station environment and the accessibility improvements East Coast has introduced at Dunbar. It is essential that station facilities are easily accessible for passengers with mobility impairments."