

The Rages Rag

Newsletter of Rail Action Group, East of Scotland

www.rages.org.uk

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Dunbar by-passed

From 1st to 7th December no trains stopped at Dunbar, even although there was a limited service running to and from Edinburgh and the south.

RAGES was first informed on the Tuesday evening of 30th November when East Coast contacted us to say that: "East Coast and CrossCountry services are unable to call at Dunbar on Wednesday 1 December due to the continued impact of the severe weather which is affecting Network Rail's operation of the signalling and track into and out of the station." They asked us to forward this information to our members. The diagram on page 2 shows the pointwork at Dunbar.

First ScotRail quickly followed to say that their Dunbar services were also cancelled.

During the seven days of isolation, RAGES forwarded many e-mails to their members when information came from the train operating companies.

On Wednesday 1st December, RAGES e-mailed East Coast asking for an update on when Dunbar would again be served as buses were either unavailable or found it unsafe to use the roads.

Whilst the Dunbar was bypassed, North Berwick appeared to be unaffected by this strategy.

On Thursday 2nd, our chairman e-mailed Network Rail with the following: "... that being the lack of services into Dunbar. The problem as we are being made aware, is with points that allow access into the station loop due to the adverse weather. Colleagues at my work are conveying their disgust at the fact that their families cannot get to work in Edinburgh.

"I trust that you will do your utmost to put into place a quick resolution to this problem at Dunbar and/or provide suitable full coach replacement to show that something is being done."

This e-mail was copied to our MSPs, Iain Gray and John Lamont, and the East Lothian Council Leader, all of whom were continually updated via the RAGES e-mails. The Minister for Transport was also contacted.

On Friday 3rd, First ScotRail e-mailed to say that all their services east of Edinburgh had been cancelled for the day.

Also on this day, our chairman e-mailed the Secretary of State for Scotland to ask for his assistance to resolve the situation and continue to press East Coast for a solution.

Cllr Paul McLennan also e-mailed East Coast as he had: "... been approached by many angry residents in regard to the "closure" of Dunbar Station."

It was hoped that buses would be available at peak times from Monday 6th December.

On Monday, our chairman received an e-mail from Iain Gray: "Thank you for your email regarding the suspension of rail services at Dunbar. I have been in contact with Network

Rail and East Coast trains. The explanation given is that Network rail do not want to shift the points for fear that they fail and so close the main line. I have asked why Dunbar has been singled out, while trains stop elsewhere. The explanation is that Dunbar is a junction, and also the nature of the points is a factor. I am also seeking assurances that trains will begin stopping at Dunbar again tomorrow - Tuesday 7 December 2010. My colleague, Fiona o'Donnell MP is also pursuing this."

In East Coast's e-mail to Iain, they noted that:

- "Network Rail Scotland had advised that they would not have the resource available to provide at Dunbar to manually wind points over as they were using all available resource to focus on key routes that were affected across their region."
- "The Network Rail Key Route Strategy (which is generally to keep key parts of the network open) has remained in place since Wednesday [1st December], which we [East Coast] supported to protect the overall industry and keep trains running through, remembering there are other operators on this route."
- "This regrettably means that we are unable to serve Dunbar."

Services remained off on Tuesday 7th, but later that day, an e-mail from Iain Gray's office indicated that: "I am pleased to say that the Chair of East Coast has been in touch to say that after a site assessment today, the hope is that with staff planned to be deployed to undertake work to restore points operability at Dunbar overnight tonight, they will be able to offer trains from Dunbar from start of service on Wednesday morning."

Also received at that time was an e-mail to Paul McLennan (East Lothian Council Leader) from Elaine Holt (Chair of East Coast): "After a site assessment today, the hope is that with staff planned to be deployed to undertake work to

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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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Dunbar by-passed

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restore points operability at Dunbar overnight tonight, we will be able to offer Dunbar station access from start of service Wednesday morning.”

Wednesday 8th December saw Dunbar again being served by East Coast and CrossCountry trains with First ScotRail re-starting the next day.

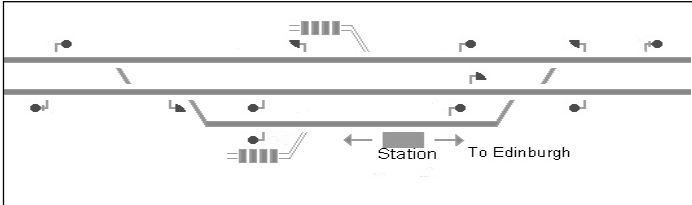


Illustration of pointwork at Dunbar (sourced from the Simsig Edinburgh simulator)

During this period many RAGES members e-mailed us to say thank you for the updates.

A recent copy of Today's Railways magazine mentioned Dunbar: "Another feature of modern railway operation liable to cause raised eyebrows is the practice of keeping 'key routes' open, which apparently coincides with clipping important junctions for one route only, because the point heaters were not designed for such cold conditions. It beggars belief that East Coast Main Line trains have been running past Dunbar without making their booked stops because the points for the platform loop could not be trusted to operate. Surely there are point heaters available which can cope with -15 to -20 degrees C?"

RAGES will be seeking to convene a meeting with the new Minister for Transport and the train operating companies to

discuss the Dunbar situation and to ensure that in the event of future bad weather, Dunbar will continue to get a service.

Further woes

Even after the snow problems were left behind, other incidents were sent to try us.

On Saturday 11th December flooding caused disruption in the Drem and Berwick-upon-Tweed areas. Because of this, First ScotRail trains between North Berwick and Edinburgh only ran between Prestonpans and Edinburgh. A replacement bus service was scheduled to run between Prestonpans and North Berwick. Unfortunately the synchronising of the bus and train at Prestonpans did not happen and one of our members missed an important engagement. RAGES took this up with First ScotRail and they replied as follows: "When we realised that the bus was not connecting as intended into the train, we extended the buses to run through to Edinburgh. I can only apologise that this change had not taken effect at the time of your member's journey, and regret the inconvenience that we caused her."

Monday 13th December saw one of the class 322 trains develop defective sanders and could not operate, and with several diesels undergoing repairs to damage caused by snow and ice over the preceding fortnight it was not possible to deploy a replacement train.

Tuesday 4th January dawned with a broken rail at Craigenlinny, with train services between Edinburgh and North Berwick, Newcraighall and Dunbar being withdrawn. Replacement road transport operated between Edinburgh and North Berwick. Services resumed later that afternoon.

Local Rail Studies

The two studies, one by First ScotRail and the other by MVA Consultancy on behalf of Transport Scotland, were originally to have been published by October 2010. However, they have been delayed due to the Eureka timetable, to be implemented in May 2011, not yet being available for use in the study.

As this newsletter is being edited, MVA Consultancy advised RAGES that they hoped to obtain a copy of the timetable within a few days and their findings should be available by the end of March 2011. The results of this study will be fed into the next ScotRail franchise due to start in 2014.

RAGES is concerned that the delay in our seeing the next draft of the Eureka timetable will not allow sufficient time to study and respond during the consultation process, as we have done in the past. The last sighting of the timetable did not cover the weekends.

New trains for North Berwick and Dunbar

It had been hoped that the new Class 380 trains featured in last January's Rages Rag would be starting on the North Berwick and Dunbar services at the end of March. However, since their introduction in the west of Scotland, software and other difficulties have been experienced. This is preventing First ScotRail from accepting further Class 380s. The delay in the planned introduction of the new trains may result in the current Class 322s remaining in operation on the East Lothian routes for a few more months.

First ScotRail's new midday return service from Edinburgh to Dunbar started with the new December timetable and runs on Mondays to Fridays, leaving Edinburgh at 12:33 hrs and returning from Dunbar at 13:22 hrs. Both run non-stop between Waverley and Dunbar and take just over 30 minutes.

Community Engagement Small Grants Scheme

RAGES applied for and has been successful in obtaining a grant from the East Lothian's Community Engagement Small Grants Scheme. The application was for a digital projector to enable RAGES to enrich public and other meetings at which we put our case forward for a better railway infrastructure in East Lothian and Berwickshire.

The projector has now been purchased and is normally used in conjunction with a laptop computer.

The Community Engagement Group is a sub group of East Lothian Community Planning Partnership Working Group.

Berwick News

Brian Patton

The main event which has affected railway services in Berwick has been the extreme weather, which began on Friday 26 November. Given the circumstances, East Coast gave a creditable performance, in part with a restricted emergency timetable, and it was clear that all staff gave of their best, often working long hours to maintain some kind of service in dreadful conditions. Not only train and station staff are to be congratulated on their performance, but the people working behind the scenes – people who, despite their high visibility vests, are not always seen or remembered by the general public – must have played a major part in keeping the lines as clear as possible and the trains maintained, at a time when delays had thrown staff, trains and vehicle rosters into total confusion. Thanks to all who took us there and brought us back safely, if at times a little late.

That being so, it is disappointing that one criticism has to be made. On 21 December the locomotive of the 18:35 hrs down train from Waverley failed at Reston and passengers ultimately reached Berwick at half past midnight. The train staff were excellent. Eddie, the conductor, kept us fully informed at all times of what was or was not happening, and the buffet staff cheerfully dispensed snacks and drinks and, later, thermal blankets. It has to be said that the passengers also took it all very well. But when we finally reached Berwick, there was no kind of onward transport and I only reached home by the kindness of Northumbria police, two of whose officers provided a lift. In the past, one remembers taxis being provided at a later hour than even 00:30, to ensure that all passengers did get home. It can only be assumed that the budgetary constraints imposed by the British government have now made it impossible for train operators to provide a service of that kind. Perhaps some of the millions which are regularly wasted on failed franchise bids could in future be devoted to onward transport for passengers when trains are seriously delayed. Otherwise it has to be said that not all the marketing speak, not all the endless thanks for “choosing to travel by ...” can make up for the poor impression created when there is no obvious onward transport after a prolonged journey.

After a long delay, a system has at last been put in place by First Bus to ensure that the indicator at Berwick station does not show buses on rail link service 60 as running when, for very understandable reasons, they have in fact been cancelled. However, on Christmas Eve passengers waited in vain for a bus which appeared on the board but did not turn up.

Eleventh Annual General Meeting

Tom Thorburn, chairman, welcomed 13 members and one guest at the eleventh annual general meeting of RAGES held on 22nd September 2010 in the West Barns Bowling Club. A list of apologies had been received and was read out.

The minutes of the 2009 annual general meeting were approved after an explanation was requested about the last part of the minutes relating to Scottish Borders Council. The Chair explained that priority appeared to be given to the Waverley Line with little mention of Reston or support for RAGES' work in Eastern Berwickshire.

Tom spoke on the year's activities, noting the following:

There were a lot of very welcome achievements within the RAGES Aims this year. It was to be hoped that this would continue next year with the same enthusiasm and pace.

Our Post Card Campaign continued this year with a successful visit to the Queen Margaret University Campus where the Committee had an enthusiastic response by staff and students alike. The Committee continued passing out Post Cards to members and the public throughout this year and we believe this has been a very successful method of informing those in power how much enthusiasm there is for better Rail services in our area.

After much consultation with The Transport Minister, our constituent MSPs Iain Gray and John Lamont, SEStran and East Lothian Council, we were delighted that First ScotRail (FSR) started to run services to Dunbar in May. FSR are currently conducting their own study into services to Dunbar, whereas consultants MVA Consultancy are carrying out a wider ranging study of local services between Edinburgh and Newcastle with the provision of re-opened stations at East Linton and Reston. The Group attended MVA's consultation meeting in Haddington to register their points for better services and the re-opening of stations. East Lothian Council have arranged for meetings to be held in Dunbar and East Linton next month.

East Coast, having taken over from National Express East

Coast immediately set about having 'Meet the Manager' sessions at their stations which the Committee responded to with our list of requirements and pleas on behalf of the passenger. It was pleasing again to see that there has been a large degree of success to these sessions and subsequent communications. We have seen a marked improvement to First class travel, Dunbar now enjoys 'Miniature Fares' and we saw the late night Edinburgh Festival weekend trains which proved hugely successful to Dunbar and Berwick. The Group responded to East Coast's Eureka consultation document on the ECML timetable which has wide ranging changes proposed none other than the withdrawal of all but a return service from Glasgow Central to Kings Cross.

FSR kindly provided an additional 06:09 hrs from North Berwick and additional trains for the 'Festival by the Sea' at North Berwick. With regard to the North Berwick service we sought and received clarification/resolution with FSR on ticket machine and monitor problems. The Group continued to press the case for new/additional parking on the south side of the line which will alleviate the problem experienced by the disabled trying to use this service.

Quarterly meetings continue with SEStran and again these have been hosted by Councillor McLennan at East Lothian Council. Attendance at these meetings by ourselves and the politicians you will agree have proved to be very worthwhile given the achievements above.

Paul McLennan advised that ScotRail was due to report on their survey on 6 October, with MVA now likely to report by the end of November. *[Ed: But see report opposite.]* Public meetings were being held in Dunbar on 13 October and East Linton on 20 October. Paul suggested that RAGES write to Angela McKenzie to get figures of those using the late night Festival trains for Dunbar and Berwick.

In the Secretary's Report, Allison advised that she was a member of the Railfuture Scotland Committee and hoped that

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Railfuture Conference – Saturday 13 November 2010

Allison Cosgrove

The first part of the conference was taken up with presentations from London Rail and London Overground – as the conference was held in London these were probably of interest to the majority of those attending.

Jonathan Roberts, adviser to the East London Line Group, spoke on the London Orbital Railway. He noted that there had been a funding shortfall among other issues, including Government control of Network Rail as well as no London-wide authority until 2000. A strong economic case had to be made for this railway, but latterly the tie in with the Olympics and the fact that it would be located in 20% of the most deprived areas of London, were contributing factors. Support from the Greater London Authority was essential to the success of the project.

David Smith, Rail Planning Manager for the Association of TOCs gave a presentation, where he described passenger numbers as having increased to the levels of 1946 and 1928, but they still had to achieve the levels of 1900! He noted that growth was not consistent and planning had to be done through RUSs. The fastest growth section was in long-distance, but regional growth was also good, at around 7% - especially from rural to cities.

Stations illustrated were Beaulieu – 26,000 passengers per year and Alloa, an increase of 175% on projected numbers. Although 25% of stations had underperformed, there was still growth.

Key issues were: forecasting demand; catchment area

analysis; quality of service and rolling stock; car accessibility and parking; marketing and selling a service; and being realistic in building up a service.

John Bamford, Nottingham County Council, gave a presentation on the Robin Hood Railway, which in 2002 was the worst performing line in the UK with only 52% of trains on time, and was now one of the best. Line speeds had been significantly increased to improve reliability, journey times cut by 20 minutes and turn around times increased to a realistic timespan, avoiding cancellations. He described the “50 minutes slot” as critical to commuters and cited the Borders Railway as an example where this time should be achieved.

Patrick O’Sullivan spoke on the East-West Rail consortium which aimed to replace most of the Oxford-Cambridge rail line, closed in 1968 – remarkably not a recommendation of Dr Beeching. There was an exceptional business case for this restoration and the service was expected to start in 2017 to show a profit within 5 years.

Anthony Smith, Chief Executive of Passenger Focus, described how Passenger Focus had been in touch with 120,000 passengers last year. He felt that the years of suppression of weekend travel were over and that Sunday was now Virgin Trains second busiest day. Railways had done well out of the Comprehensive Spending Review and there was good feedback from passengers using Open Access operators, such as Hull Trains and Grand Central.

Annual General Meeting

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the Committee would be active in the year ahead.

The Treasurer presented a written account, signed off by the auditor. The balance in the bank as at 31 March had been £76.87. The Secretary reported on the grant which had been anticipated for the postcard campaign. She was currently following up other sources of funding.

The Membership Secretary reported that there were currently 136 members. 80% of the previous year’s membership had renewed with 18 not renewing. Eleven new members had been recruited. 41 members now paid by Bankers Order. The E-membership card scheme had resulted in 66 members receiving their membership this way. Paul McLennan suggested that those attending the public meetings be encouraged to join. The option of 6 months at £2 or 18 months at £4 was agreed.

The election of office bearers resulted in the Committee as a whole was elected *en bloc*.

Russell Darling thanked Tom for his leadership of the Committee during the year.

Tom welcomed Morag Haddow from Sustaining Dunbar, who advised that Sustaining Dunbar was looking to adopt Dunbar Station. This would allow posters to be put up in the station. She would also be producing a Walking Map of Dunbar in the near future.

During other competent business, the following points were raised:

Paul McLennan reported that the car park extension at Dunbar was on track with a scheme being drawn up. This would provide 60 new spaces and should be in place within the next 6 months or so.

Barrie Forrest noted that Scottish Borders Council had submitted a positive report to the MVA Survey. It was hoped that Iain Gray and Fiona O’Donnell had also submitted a response – Paul would check and report back.

Geoff Evison advised that ScotRail did not give any rewards for work done at stations, unlike England and Wales. Paul agreed to take this up with Steve Montgomery.

Malcolm Clubb referred to the numbers using the North Berwick service and sometimes passengers could not get on at Edinburgh. Extra stops on the Dunbar service would relieve this – Tom would take this up. Paul suggested having a future meeting in the Prestonpans area.

It was agreed that subscriptions would remain at the same level as the previous year.

The meeting concluded with a vote of thanks to all members of the committee for work done during the year.