

The Rages Rag

Newsletter of Rail Action Group, East of Scotland

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Local Rail Service - Minister to visit

At the meeting with the Minister for Transport, Keith Brown MSP, on 23 November 2011, he intimated that he was willing to come to East Linton, Reston and Eyemouth to see for himself the areas that would be served by a local rail service and re-opened stations at East Linton and Reston. This has now been arranged for 28 February 2012.

However, we need to go back to 11 November 2011, when Cllr Paul McLennan hosted the regular local rail meeting at John Muir House, East Lothian Council. Present were MSPs, Iain Gray, John Lamont and Paul Wheelhouse, councillors and council staff from East Lothian and Scottish Borders Councils, SEStran and committee members of RAGES.

The discussion was centred on the recently published Local Rail Study by MVA Consultancy which had been commissioned by Transport Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Government. Our last newsletter has a detailed summary of the study.

Paul opened the discussion raising three points:

- Patronage figures were considered as underestimated - there is a well documented history of this with other station or line openings
- A subsidy of £1m to £2m was required
- The economic impact of the new stations and services should be considered.

Various points were raised by those present:

- Capital investment was required and it was hoped that the councils would be able to contribute to a major extent to the building of the stations
- It was suggested that the Scottish Government in renewing the ScotRail franchise in 2014, might be looking to maintain existing services at a reduced cost
- It was surprising, but most agreeable, that new local services would have no impact on the east coast main line services
- No investment since the 1990s has been made in our quarter of Scotland and with no decent transport infrastructure, the east Borders is losing the younger generation
- Currently there is no fairness or balance for residents to be able to commute or pursue leisure activities or indeed for visitors to access the area
- It was noted that the Strategic Development Plan refers to reasonable transport being available. It would be a "disaster" if development went ahead and there was no proper transport facilities
- Later this month, submissions for the ScotRail franchise consultation will start. We need to be able to

input our own submissions to this. These must not be rushed, but be measured and be able to withstand scrutiny

- We must challenge the patronage figures and the likelihood of more development in the area as more users will mean less subsidy
- Regarding subsidy, it was noted that apart from the main line services, all other rail services required a subsidy
- Slightly controversial was the possibility of reducing some main line trains stopping at Dunbar and making Berwick the transfer station for southbound passengers. Berwick has a good service at present and there are high positive outcomes from speeding up the main line trains
- It was noted that the study did not mention weekend services and perhaps the patronage figures did not include weekend travellers?
- How can we challenge the patronage? The East Linton figures are quite easy to compare with many other models, but Reston is a bit more problematic where surrounding settlements need to be considered
- The Minister for Transport had indicated that other forms of transport should be considered, but it was thought that buses were not a strong competition to a rail service here. Buses were essential, however, to feed into a station
- Finally, it was decided that the councils and SEStran would produce a report outlining draft principles for the Franchise response. This would be available for 23 November meeting with the Minister for Transport. We would gain his approval of the principles and thereafter expand them for submission to the ScotRail franchise, if necessary commissioning a study to do so.

Tom Thorburn, RAGES chairman, thanked all present for their continued support in pursuing these main RAGES aims.

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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.

Local rail service progress

From page 1

Meeting with the Minister

On 23 November, members of the RAGES committee met Keith Brown, MSP, Minister for Transport, at Holyrood. Also present were our MSPs, Iain Gray, John Lamont and Paul Wheelhouse, and two members of Transport Scotland.

Although it was constructive, it proved slightly disappointing.

John opened discussions by asking the Minister what the Government's intentions are in light of the recently published local rail study and indicated that there was much community and political support.

The Minister responded that when the next ScotRail franchise is let, the Government will be hoping to improve what is currently in the franchise and at a reduced cost as all budgets are being cut in the current financial climate. He indicated that the STAG process required the need to look at other options as well as rail and be objective by asking what is the need for transport. He noted the subsidy of up to £2.5m annually depending on which options were taken up.

This implication of requiring a STAG2 to be carried out caused much concern around the table. The Minister was reminded that after the STAG1 was published, the previous incumbent commissioned the MVA Study in place of a STAG2. Both the Minister and those present from Transport Scotland were unable to answer why this recommendation had been made. However, they would make enquiries.

RAGES commented that we were very disappointed to hear that there may be the need for a further costly study and that this would cause more delays in achieving our aims. However, the Minister assured us that there would be no delay, but if the project is to go ahead then it needs to be in the terms of the new ScotRail franchise due in 2014 which is now out for consultation.

All the well-rehearsed reasons for this local service and station re-openings were given to the Minister by all round the table.

The Minister agreed that in most cases the patronage figures for recent rail studies have not been accurate and that he has asked Transport Scotland to investigate this.

RAGES also noted that many community councils in the Berwickshire area had not been consulted during the MVA study and neither had VisitScotland. The latter was important as the study referred to commuters using Reston with no mention of traffic coming into the area by way of tourism. Transport Scotland and MVA Consultancy should be challenged on these points.

The Minister offered to visit East Lothian and East Berwickshire to see and hear for himself why we are asking for this study to be implemented.

However, he cautioned that we might get to the situation where the project should go ahead, but it would have to await funding.

RAGES pointed out that all internal services require a subsidy and as such our aim is no different in requiring a subsidy to be run.

After a good 45 minutes of discussion RAGES thanked the Minister for getting the late night Saturday service to Dunbar, but could it be extended to Berwick! The Minister said he would look at that.

Finally, our chairman, Tom Thorburn, thanked the Minister for listening to our cause and offering to visit the counties and closed with one word: "Please".

Follow up Local Rail Study Meeting

On Friday 13 January 2012, Cllr Paul McLennan hosted the regular local rail meeting at John Muir House, East Lothian Council. Present were MSPs, Iain Gray, Jim Hume, John Lamont and Paul Wheelhouse, councillors and council staff from East Lothian and Scottish Borders Councils, SEStran and committee members of RAGES.

The agenda for the meeting was to discuss:

- our response to the Minister for Transport's requirement for a STAG 2
- our response for the ScotRail Franchise Consultation
- our preparation for the Minister's visit to East Lothian and Berwickshire.

A summary of the meeting with the Minister in November was heard (see the RAGES Electronic News 356 sent by e-mail on 24 November 2011).

Despite the Minister's problem with an annual subsidy of up to £2.5m for the local service to Berwick with re-opened stations at East Linton and Reston, it was thought that this subsidy was not unreasonable compared with the total subsidy that ScotRail receive from the Government and the fact that Berwickshire in particular has not received any rail subsidy for many years - the Berwickshire area is seen as not being treated fairly regarding rail transport.

STAG 2

The Minister has not responded to our concern about this "new" requirement for a STAG 2 assessment, but SEStran had a meeting with Transport Scotland where it was agreed that a STAG 2 would be required but "proportionate and sufficient" to reinforce the outcomes of the STAG 1.

This would address the deficiencies in the MVA study and re-assess the passenger figures particularly for the Reston station as it would appear that only commuter traffic was included. There would be a significant visitor traffic using Reston and these numbers could be obtained via VisitScotland and the local community councils who were not apparently consulted at the time.

Transport Scotland noted that there was no funds for a STAG 2! Pushed for an estimate cost, SEStran suggested that it should cost no more than £60,000. As speed was of the utmost, it was agreed that East Lothian and Scottish Borders Councils would fund the study up front and try to re-coup the money from the Government later.

SEStran agreed to produce a brief for the consultants who would be commissioned to do the STAG 2 study which should take no more than six months.

Franchise Consultation

The ScotRail Franchise Consultation ends on 20 February 2012. It is extremely important that our "project" of the local service should appear in the Consultation such that it will be considered for funding during the next franchise's timespan which will start in 2014. The length of the franchise is still up for debate, due to several factors.

SEStran agreed to produce a draft core response by 31 January 2012 which would be circulated to all present, who could then add specific details as required before making their own response to Transport Scotland.

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Local rail service progress

From page 2

Minister's Visit

The Minister for Transport, Keith Brown MSP, has intimated that he will visit East Linton, Reston and Eyemouth in the near future. MSP Paul Wheelhouse has been asked by the Minister to co-ordinate the visit.

Since the meeting, the visit by the Minister has been arranged for Tuesday 28 February.

The Minister would be furnished with the STAG 2 briefing note and maps of the areas he will visit.

Scottish Borders Council had already produced an excellent map showing Reston and the surrounding area.



In addition, it was agreed that the MSPs present would lodge a motion in Parliament for discussion of the rail study.

Also a press release would be issued to show the strong cross-party support for this local rail project to become reality.

The next meeting of this group would be scheduled for March.

Photograph: Attendees at the meeting of 13 January
© P Wheelhouse

Reston News

By Barrie Forrest

It is some time ago since I last wrote in the Rages Rag. During that time I have met with John Lamont MSP at his surgeries in Reston, Eyemouth, and Duns. John is giving his full support for the re-opening of Reston Station. Also giving his support is Scottish Secretary Michael Moore MP whom I have also met at his surgeries in Duns and Eyemouth.

Since the election in May we now have Paul Wheelhouse MSP for South of Scotland. He is well aware of the need for the re-opening of Reston Station having commuted to Edinburgh from Berwickshire for a long time and is giving us his full support.

I have also been in contact with all Community Councils nearest to Reston and all have submitted letters of support for Reston.

Now that the long awaited East Coast Rail Study has been published it gives encouraging news for the re-opening of East Linton and Reston stations. RAGES committee members, Chairman Tom Thorburn, Russell Darling and I, have met Transport Minister Keith Brown MSP. *[Ed - see lead story]*

I would like to thank all RAGES members for renewing their membership and also give a warm welcome to new members some of whom are from the Reston area.

Berwick News

By Brian Patton

There is really very little to say, other than to wish all our readers a Happy New Year. The main development at the station has been the arrival of two part-time members to the booking office team and this has allowed a much better service to be offered to passengers, since it is now quite often possible to have two windows manned at busy times. We wish them well and hope that they will enjoy the work.

Services have run well, with – understandably – a few cancellations during the high winds of the first week of January. The holiday season with its peak travel loads once again highlighted the complete unsuitability of the CrossCountry Voyagers on the services to and from the west of Scotland and it was common to find one of these coming into Berwick northbound already with a goodly number of standing passengers on board and then to watch as more than sixty passengers from Berwick tried to find at least a corner in which they could stand in some degree of comfort to Edinburgh. The change from East Coast to CrossCountry on these trains was a by-product of the Eureka timetable changes, but not set out as part of these during the “consultation” process. The first definite idea we had of the proposals was when the printed timetables appeared in May. It was a good example of transport decisions being taken in middle England without any input from north-eastern or Scottish passengers or their representatives and the result is a standard of service well below that which should be offered to inter-city travellers.

RAGES wishes to apologise to the staff at Berwick station for specifically naming them and relaying incorrect information in the last issue.

Twelfth Annual General Meeting

The 12th Annual General Meeting of RAGES was held on 14 September 2011 in the West Barns Bowling Club, when 19 members were present.

Our Chairman, Tom Thorburn, welcomed all and read the list of apologies.

With a minor amendment, the minutes of the previous AGM were proposed by Brian Patton and seconded by Barrie Forrest.

Tom spoke on the year's activities.

This past year has been a bit of a mixed bag to say the least. October was a particularly busy month for the Committee attending and running meetings in Dunbar, East Linton and Coldingham in regard to the MVA Edinburgh and Newcastle Rail Service Consultation. We have had good indications that a meeting with the Transport Minister, Keith Brown will take place in the next few weeks with regard to this consultation.

Dunbar station during the extremes of last December's snow storms was totally isolated from the network due to not enough personnel to man the points – coincidentally the group found out that there was nothing wrong with the points or their heaters. We have sought reassurance that this episode shall never be repeated again where Dunbar passengers lives were put at risk by having to make their own transport arrangements. On the brighter side, Dunbar ticket office saw refurbishment with two new DDA compliant ticket counters.

After all the consultation responses and a limited amount of passenger counts by the group with regard to Eureka, we saw this timetable implemented from May this year. Unfortunately, this timetable has done a great disservice to Dunbar and Berwick passengers alike. Much communication has taken place with East Coast over these shortcomings which were to no avail but we are hopeful to meet with Karen Boswell early next month.

June saw the introduction of the new FSR class 380s on the North Berwick and Dunbar services. These will be most welcome especially on the North Berwick service as we were beginning to see the odd failure of the Class 322s, much to the annoyance and disruption of passengers. Another very welcome item is that all FSR trains now call at Musselburgh albeit there is the fares issue to resolve here. The group continues to press the case for new/additional parking on the south side of the line at Drem, which will alleviate the problem experienced by the disabled trying to use this station.

The Committee continues to meet with: our MSPs to argue the case for further investment in Rail; Railfuture to also press our Aims; attend applicable Rail conferences and the quarterly meetings still continue with SEStran, hosted by Councillor McLennan at East Lothian Council.

Tom thanked the Committee for their work during the year and proposed a vote of thanks to Brian Patton who was standing down as the Berwick representative. This was heartily endorsed by all present.

In the Secretary's report, Allison Cosgrove gave information about the activities of Railfuture Scotland, advising that she would be attending the Branches meeting in October.

The accounts, duly signed off by the auditor, were presented by the Treasurer, Harald Vox, and accepted.

A grant of £250 had been received from Railfuture towards

the postcard campaign and Russell advised members of the purchase of a digital projector, through the Community Engagement Small Grants Scheme operated by the East Lothian Community Planning Partnership.

Membership currently stood at 162 which was 27 more than this time last year. An all time high of 96.5% of last year's members had renewed their subscriptions. Since the last AGM we had recruited 31 new members – mainly due to our open meetings in the autumn where we offered an 18 month subscription for the usual annual fee of £4. Barrie had also been instrumental in gaining new members in the last couple of months.

RAGES has seven community councils as members and, recently, Sustaining Dunbar are also corporate members.

The use of banker's orders as a method of subscription payment went well this year and Russell continued with the e-membership card as a form of acknowledgement of receipt of a member's subscription if he had their e-mail address. 89 out of 129 members had their acknowledgements in this manner, a saving of stationery and stamps.

Russell was grateful to the committee who took it in turns to distribute the Rages Rags.

At the end of the meeting, a member renewed his subscription after a year's absence. This raised our membership to 163.

Tom noted compliments from staff at Torness Power Station on the E-rags.

On the proposal of Geoff Evison, seconded by Mrs Woodburn, and having being advised by the Chair that all Committee members were willing to stand again, the Committee as a whole was elected *en bloc*, after which the Committee introduced themselves to all members.

General Discussion

Jacquie Bell mentioned the consultation on the local transport strategy and the meeting on 28 September at West Barns Village Hall. Barrie would attend.

Mrs Woodburn advised that she had attended James King's memorial service.

Geoffrey advised of an open weekend he was organising at Melrose Station on 23 and 24 September.

Paul McLennan advised that he had met with ScotRail recently and had discussed the late night Saturday service which would be publicised soon.

The MVA study had highlighted the up-front costs of re-opening East Linton and Reston stations, but the Council would pay the station costs at East Linton, and if Scottish Borders Council would do likewise at Reston, this would improve the BCR figure. The study would be published shortly.

Tom welcomed Morag Haddow from Sustaining Dunbar.

Paul Wheelhouse, MSP, would try to contact David Parker of Scottish Borders Council to get a commitment for Reston station provision.

The Chairman concluded the meeting with a vote of thanks to all politicians who had supported the group during the year.