

Alnmouth Rail User Group

MINUTES OF Public Meeting held at St James's Church Centre, Alnwick, Northumberland On Thursday 12th May 2011

The meeting was chaired by Murray Davies. Invited attendees were Neal Smith (East Coast) and Claire Mills (Researcher for Sir Alan Beith). Committee members present were: Kirsten Wolff, Arthur Leewis, Peter Groves, Paddy Conway and Jean Barr.

AGENDA ITEM

1

Introductions:

Murray Davies (MD) welcomed Neal Smith and Claire Mills, who was representing Sir Alan Beith.

2

New Timetable May 2011:

MD distributed print-outs of the new timetable – northbound and southbound. He reported on the discussions ARUG had held with TOCs to date.

Neal Smith (NS) spoke to the meeting about the new timetable and East Coasts (EC) future plans to revitalise East Coast mainline services.

- Neal thanked MD and Sir Alan Beith for their valuable input during the planning phase of the timetable. Following consultation with them, EC had helped increase the number of EC trains stopping at Alnmouth from 30 services a week to 43.
- It is now possible to travel from Alnmouth and arrive in London before 10 o'clock by changing trains at Newcastle and connecting to the 7.02 new Flying Scotsman service.
- EC currently have 3 named trains – The Flying Scotsman, The Sir Bobby Robson and The Lincolnshire Echo. They invite submissions for naming further services. Suggestions for a name with Northumberland connections may be e-mailed to train.naming@eastcost.co.uk
- Acting on a request from ARUG members, EC had changed the last service from London to 18.30 hours (Mon – Thur), 19.30 on a Friday.
- Again, following discussions with ARUG, East Coast and Xcountry have maintained a good afternoon school/commuter service – 15.37, 16.37 and 17.37 north from Newcastle and the later night 21.00 service from Edinburgh has been protected.
- Currently a two hour gap in the evening service. ARUG are working with Dept of Transport and Sir Alan Beith to try and fill this.
- In order to fill a 4 hour gap in southbound trains stopping at Berwick, EC withdrew the 1258 from Alnmouth to Kings X (the train now stops at Berwick instead). There did not seem a strong feeling on this loss amongst members present. The Berwick stops are being looked at by EC and if these can be met with other trains, then Alnmouth may get the 1258 reinstated.
- EC to launch a Northumberland Newsletter, serving Morpeth, Alnmouth and Berwick, proposed 6 times a year.
- Other plans include introducing a Quiet Coach in First Class and also closing the Restaurant Car Service. First Class meals, snacks and drinks would all be served at seat. Buffet counter service and trolley to remain for standard class.

ARUG

Peter Groves (PG) conceded that the vast majority of users' wants had been attended to but the two hour gap from Newcastle to Alnmouth in the evening remained a concern. Kirsten Wolff (KW) commented on Berwick's twice-hourly service and asked if EC could think about stopping one of them at Alnmouth instead to help plug this gap.

Peter Hignett (PH) asked about trains to and from Alnmouth in the evening during the Edinburgh Festival. NS reported a very poor take-up for the services which were put on in 2010 and advised EC would not be repeating the experiment this year. PH felt that lack of advertising was the cause of the poor take up and agreed to contact NS personally about this matter.

PH

Gareth Breeze (GB) asked Neal about the Eureka EC Roadshow and the feedback – Alnmouth's roadshow had been very well attended. NS advised that the main concerns were the loss of the 16.32,

which has been addressed by XC stopping the 16.37 and later trains on a week-day. The latter had not been possible but the service from London was later.

Claire Mills (CM) reported that other train operators may soon be able to offer further services on the east coast line. First Scotrail now go to Dunbar and are considering extending this to Berwick and Newcastle if possible.

John Taylor (JT), Councillor, provided some figures on projected population growth in the region – Berwick, Alnmouth for Alnwick and Morpeth. Alnmouth is the area with the lowest projection. NS advised Alnmouth are getting proportionately better service per head of population than other stations.

PG questioned EC's first class pricing policy. Would it not generate more use if the tickets were reduced from the current approx £300 return to KX? MD pointed out that the return from Edinburgh to London was currently approx £200. NS advised that this was a special price for Edinburgh which could not be duplicated from Newcastle.

3

Alnmouth Station Update:

MD had quizzed Northern Trains about opening hours. They are proposing on a trial basis to open earlier in the morning to serve the new trains but cannot open later in the evening than they do currently.

Northern had advised they have the following station improvements in their plans: Customer Information Systems / CCTV / Cycle Lockers. There is funding for these under the Station Improvement Scheme. They are still looking into Ticket Machines but many tickets can now be printed off at home. Improved waiting facilities are also being looked into for both platforms.

JT advised that the funding for the proposed Lift System was ring-fenced. Members expressed their various concerns about the proposed lifts, including call-out times for breakdowns, increased potential for vandalism, etc. It was suggested that the new car park solved most of the access problems. JT was asked if it would be possible to carry out some kind of survey of rail users about the feasibility of this scheme. This matter was left open.

JT also advised that the old car park would increase in size when Network Rail move out. There are also plans to extend the new car park. While the new car park had made a major difference, it was noted that there was still some congestion and parking in local streets at very busy times.

4

Newcastle Station Update:

This is an East Coast managed station. Any comments may be sent to Neal Smith or sent via ARUG who will pass them on.

5

Any Other Business:

Bus Meets Train:

Liz Woods expressed concern about the lack of progress on Bus Meets Train, which is completely unreliable. We need to look into subsidising local shuttle services at peak train times.

The meeting closed at 9.30pm. No date was set for the next meeting.