

SENUG Press Release: 10th June 2013

**SENUG DELIGHTED AS COUNCIL COMMITS TO
ASHINGTON RAIL RE-OPENING COST STUDY**

SENUG, the group that campaigns for better rail transport in South East Northumberland, has warmly welcomed the news that Northumberland County Council has finally commissioned Network Rail to complete a full costing report on the re-introduction of passenger rail services to Ashington.

The voluntary group has been campaigning for the re-introduction of passenger services on the freight only Ashington Blyth & Tyne line for some years and sees last week's announcement from the Council as a crucial step forward in its campaign.

SENUG Chairman Dennis Fancett said "originally we didn't have any support from the County Council at all. But we have been vigilant, articulating the economic and regenerative benefits of the scheme at every opportunity. At the same time, we have sought to work constructively with the local authority, and over the last few years we have seen a sea change in approach, and acknowledge the considerable preliminary work the Council has undertaken prior to this step."

Network Rail will now complete a GRIP stages 1 to 3 study on the scheme which should recommend the preferred technical solution and associated capital costs.

“Important as this step is, we still have some ongoing concerns” stated Dennis. “Critically, there is a need to ensure Network Rail does not over-engineer the scheme and make it so expensive that it no longer costs in. This is, after all, a fully working, maintained operational railway. Our charter train to Ashington back in 2008 evidenced that the line as it stands is of sufficient quality to carry passenger trains at reasonable speed. The tracks should not need upgraded, though stations will need to be re-built and a passing loop on the single track section is likely”

A number of other SENRUG campaigns have recently come to fruition in recent months such as the installation of lifts and Customer Information Screens at Morpeth station. The group believes that its voluntary campaign efforts really do make a difference, and invite those that support its objectives to join them. More details at www.senrug.co.uk

Ends (336 words)

Notes For Editors

SENRUG is The South East Northumberland Rail User Group, a pro-rail campaign group that campaigns for better rail services for existing and potential passengers in South East Northumberland.

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GRIP is an internal Network Rail acronym standing for “Governance for Rail Investment Projects”. For details see <http://www.networkrail.co.uk/asp/4171.aspx>