

SENUG Press Release: 15th August 2014

SENUG CALLS FOR BOLD IMPROVEMENTS TO LOCAL RAIL SERVICES

SENUG, the group that campaigns for better rail transport in South East Northumberland, has called for bold improvements to local rail services in its response to the current Department For Transport's consultation on the new Northern & TransPennine Express franchises.

Top of the list comes the full re-opening of the Ashington Blyth & Tyne line, a project which SENUG has been campaigning for many years, and which is now being progressed by Northumberland County Council.

But in addition, SENUG is requesting dramatic improvements in services to Cramlington and Morpeth, to make these every 30 minutes during the day, and hourly in the evenings and on Sundays. SENUG believes this improvement, justified by proposed further population growth in Cramlington, could be achieved very easily by extending the TransPennine Expresses services on from Newcastle, rather than have these units sit idle for 55 minutes in Newcastle before returning south.

SENUG also argues the existing MetroCentre to Morpeth services currently operated by Northern Rail should be extended on to Pegswood and Widdrington, giving these stations a service throughout the day rather than the paltry 1 train in the morning and

1 in the evening, and believes this is be justified by the proposed Blue Sky Forest development at Widdrington.

SENRUG strongly refutes the DfT suggestion that service improvements should be funded by higher than average fare increases and puts forward evidence to contradict the DfT's claim that train fares in the North East are lower than in other regions.

“Only London and the South East have higher fares per mile than here” said SENRUG Chair Dennis Fancett. “And in London, commuters get a 10 coach train every 10 minutes. We get a 2 coach train every hour. The service is not comparable. Furthermore, the DfT should be looking at rail fares as a percentage of average regional salaries, as earnings in this area are on average much lower” argued Dennis.

SENRUG also calls for a minimum set of facilities for each station which should include a Customer Information System and level access to all platforms. For stations such as Morpeth serving inter-city trains, the minimum standard should also include a staffed ticket office, customer waiting room and toilet available to waiting passengers throughout the day, unlike the present situation where these services are closed at lunchtime,

Other proposals in SENRUG's response include extending some Morpeth trains on to Choppington and Bedlington, connecting with the re-opened line to Ashington, and investigating a full Northumberland Coast service with regular local trains running from Newcastle to Berwick, with Belford and Beal re-opened, a

service which SENRUG says could be delivered in conjunction with Transport Scotland, who are investigating a similar service north of the border.

Dennis added: “This is a once in a decade opportunity to secure improvements to our woefully neglected local rail service. Once the franchise specification is set, there will be very little chance of getting anything else done. But the consultation covers a wide geographical area, and we can expect the DfT to be receiving competing demands from a number of other sources. That’s why SENRUG has been urging the County Council, Town and Parish Councils and any other stakeholder group that support its proposals to submit their own response as well before the consultation closes on 18th August.

SENRUG also wants more people who support its campaigns to join the group, so that its own voice will carry more weight. For more information about SENRUG, or to download an application form, go to www.senrug.co.uk.

Ends (580 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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The full DfT consultation document is at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/future-of-northern-and-transpennine-express-rail-franchises> and responses can be sent to NorthernTPEconsultation2014@dft.gsi.gov.uk.

The full text of SENRUG’s response to the consultation is attached.