

SENUG Press Release: 13th March 2015

SENUG Welcomes First Group Bid To Run 5 Trains Daily from Morpeth to London

SENUG, the group that campaigns for better rail services in South East Northumberland, today welcomed the news that First Group are bidding to run 5 train services per day from Morpeth to London and Edinburgh, as an Open Access Operator.

The proposed services will start from Edinburgh and only call at Morpeth and Newcastle (with some trains also serving Stevenage), and will be in competition to the franchised services run by Virgin Trains East Coast who took over the franchise from the beginning of this month.

SENUG Chair Dennis Fancett said:” We have long argued that there is a strong commercial case for a regular inter-city service at Morpeth. Our aspiration is for a service every 2 hours in each direction. We acknowledge the peak hour provision is now reasonable, though more choice is always good, but we don’t have any off-peak services at all, and the new service proposed by First Group should address that.”

“We made a strong case to the DfT to include a better provision for Morpeth in the franchise specification and were disappointed that did not happen. We also had some dialogue with First Group when they were bidding for the franchise, and used the opportunity to push strongly the case for Morpeth.”

“We acknowledge the business case most likely focuses on the larger markets of Edinburgh and Newcastle, but what is particularly innovative about this proposal is that the trains will stop at Morpeth as well. That indicates that First Group recognise there is a large untapped market

here. Not just for London, but we believe there is a strong market between Morpeth and Edinburgh too, both for business and leisure, which is stifled by lack of sufficient suitable services.”

“We realise of course it is by no means certain that First Group’s application will be successful. We recognise that incumbent operators will object and that there will be a battle to demonstrate the necessary train paths are available. But First have considerable experience in the UK rail industry and we wish them well as they progress this application.”

“Even if the bid is not successful, First Group’s proposal certainly puts a stake in the ground and we hope it will encourage the existing operators, most of whose services run through Morpeth without stopping, to look more closely at the commercial case for providing a regular inter-city service here”

SENRUG is also campaigning for services on the TransPennine Express route from Liverpool, Manchester & Leeds to be extended on from Newcastle to Cramlington & Morpeth from the start of the next franchise. This, when coupled with the existing Northern Rail service, would deliver a half hourly service throughout the day at these stations.

Ends (450 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.

Enquiries: SENRUG Chair Dennis Fancett, Tel 01670 825500, Mob 07810 353651, email dennis.fancett@btopenworld.com, web www.senrug.co.uk. Facebook www.facebook.com/SENRUG

The First Group plc Press Release about their new service is on their website at <http://www.firstgroupplc.com/news-and-media/latest-news/2015/10-03-15.aspx>