



By Dennis Fancett

THE DEPARTMENT for Transport has announced the 2 new rail franchise awards for the North, which will see Morpeth gain a new, hourly, direct service both to Edinburgh and also to Leeds, Manchester and Liverpool from 2019.

The new services will be delivered by First Group who has won the new TransPennine Express franchise. SENRUG had argued that the current TPE services to Newcastle should be extended to / from Morpeth rather than empty coaches waiting at Newcastle for 55 minutes. In fact the services will extend to Edinburgh, with stops at Morpeth a commitment, and at other stations along the route still to be decided. SENRUG will continue to lobby for Cramlington to be included as well. In addition to the Edinburgh – Morpeth – Newcastle – Leeds – Manchester Victoria - Liverpool service, First will also re-instate direct trains from Newcastle to Manchester Airport.

The new Northern Rail franchise goes to Arriva, who will be introducing an evening and Sunday service on the Cramlington and Morpeth line from 2017. The franchise agreement also requires Arriva to work constructively with Northumberland County Council to help secure the re-introduction of passenger services to Ashington, and to replace the universally hated Pacer trains by 2019.

SENRUG will also be pressing Arriva for better bus/rail integration. We want Arriva buses to serve the rail stations at both Morpeth and Cramlington. We know that bus and rail operate as completely separate business units, but that's no excuse for this nonsense

Morpeth Wins Direct Train Service To Leeds, Manchester & Liverpool From 2019

where you can't get to the station by bus. The entire public transport sector would grow if services were integrated.

It is interesting to note that of the 3 companies who bid for the Northern Rail franchise, only Arriva took the time to come and meet SENRUG to hear our aspirations, and of the 3 companies that bid for TransPennine Express, it was only First that met with SENRUG. Maybe that's a lesson for all rail companies that bid for new franchises.

In particular, SENRUG had very intensive discussions with First Group about the market for a semi fast service at Morpeth and was delighted our points were taken on board. SENRUG Chair Dennis Fancett received a phone call from First on the morning of the announcement thanking SENRUG for our input and contribution to their plans. It makes us feel the hours of volunteer time we spend in meeting with the train companies and responding to consultations is worth it and can genuinely deliver improvements for South East Northumberland.

SENRUG is looking forward to working constructively with both Arriva and First Group as they take over the franchises and introduce their new services in this region from April 2016. ■

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SENUG Launches 2 New Campaigns for Newcastle-Morpeth Railway

By Dennis Fancett



SENUG HAS launched 2 new campaigns for local train services on the Newcastle to Morpeth Line.

Firstly, SENUG is calling for Cramlington Station to be moved 200 yards to the south, adjacent to the pedestrian and cycle path subway under the road into the Manor Walks Shopping Centre, where there is an existing pedestrian footbridge over the railway tracks to Beacon Hill.

The new station site would be central to Cramlington, provide easy access to Manor Walks shops, and allow an adjacent bus station to be constructed providing an integrated transport interchange. A larger station car park with easy access from the main highway could also be built. The campaign compliments SENUG's existing call for train frequency at Cramlington to be doubled by adding calls on the new TransPennine Express Edinburgh service. Evening and Sunday services are also due to be introduced by new local operator Arriva from 2017 (see page 1 article).

Secondly, SENUG proposes a new station should be built at Killingworth at the point where the line passes under the A1056 Killingworth Way. The new station would be served by the local train services running between MetroCentre / Newcastle and Morpeth / Chathill currently an hourly service but with evening and Sunday service due to be added from December 2017 by the new local franchise, just awarded to Arriva.

The new station would serve the existing community of Killingworth less than a quarter of a mile to the east and a major new housing development on the west side of the station site. The current population of Killingworth, excluding the new housing development is 49,000 yet the nearest Metro station at Palmersville is 2.6 miles or a 50 minute walk from the proposed Killingworth station site. From Palmersville, it is an 18 minute journey to Central Newcastle. This would be reduced to 8 minutes on the heavy rail service from the new station at Killingworth.

SENUG estimates both projects would cost about £10m but believes that contributions could be obtained from the DfT new stations fund, European funding and contributions from adjacent housing developers. At Cramlington, some land at the old station site could be sold for housing to help fund the costs of the new transport interchange.

SENUG is asking Northumberland and North Tyneside County Councils respectively to lead each project and is offering its support. For too long we have been lacking any kind of vision for developing and enhancing rail services in this area. We are watching new projects come on stream in other parts of the country but nothing happens here. It is time for local authorities to provide strong leadership and vision, and to think 'rail' ■

Morpeth Station Survey

GREATER MORPETH Development Trust (GMDT) who are leading the project to renovate the dilapidated station buildings at Morpeth, are currently running a survey to find out what people want from the buildings once refurbished. They are keen for as many people who use Morpeth station regularly to respond. The survey closes on 20 December 2015 and is at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/R77XLJY>. SENUG wants the new development to bring an all-day café / buffet to the station and enclosed waiting room and toilet facilities even when the ticket office is closed. ■

Join SENUG

IF YOU support our work, please join us. The more people we speak for the louder our voice is heard. Annual Rates are £5 individual or couple, £2.50 concession or £10 corporate. Send a cheque payable to SENUG with your name, full address including postcode and email address (if you have one) to SENUG Membership Secretary, PO Box 75, Morpeth NE61 2WG. Or to pay by standing order download a Membership Form from www.senrug.co.uk. ■

Ashington, Blyth and Tyne Rail Re-opening Progress

By Dennis Fancett



IN OCTOBER 2015 Northumberland County Council committed to the next stage in the process for introducing a new passenger train service between Newcastle and Ashington. SENRUG has been campaigning for the re-instatement of passenger services on the line, which is a fully maintained freight route, since 2005. The tracks are there and working. It won't take much to re-open the line. This should be the easiest rail re-opening in the country to deliver.

Nevertheless, the Council still has to go through Network Rail's 8 stage process. Stage 1 was completed in March 2014. The step announced in October is stage 2. Only at stage 4 do Network Rail determine the full re-opening costs of the scheme, allowing the Council and other stakeholders to make the final decision.

However SENRUG is concerned at the amount of time it has been taking to move through the various stages. The process needs to speed up. SENRUG is of course delighted the Council is now fully committed, but we need to move fast before other schemes reserve all the available capacity.

In 2008, SENRUG organised a charter train round the line to Ashington to demonstrate how easy re-opening it would be, and last year the group organised a schools competition in which teams from 5 schools created a DVD setting out their business case for re-opening the line. ■

What would you like to see in the SENRUG Newsletter? Would you like to contribute to the next issue?

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Delightful destinations 7: German Rail Adventure

In the second part of his report, SENRUG member Richard Hilton concludes his story and photos of his most recent visit to Germany and its rail system.

FOR THE next stage of my railway adventure I found myself in the first-class quiet zone at the very front of an ICE Mk 3 (incidentally, the same basic model soon to be introduced by Eurostar in their fleet replacement).



Those familiar with this variety of high-speed train will know that the cab is enclosed by glass, and, driver permitting, it is possible to see out of the front of the train. The manufacturers have even gone to the lengths of tiering the seats, theatre style, so that those sitting a few rows back are rewarded with a view of the tracks as the train races at speeds of up to 200mph.

Arriving at Baden-Baden, I was greeted by my friend Tobias, a native of Germany, who patiently listened to my enthusiasm for the German rail system before carefully explaining why my admiration might be misplaced.

We in the UK berate ourselves for the supposed sorry state of our railways. What is little known in this country is that the Germans are just as critical of their national railways as we are of ours, and with good reason. While the trains are generally much better designed and far more comfortable than their equivalents here, the railway network is beset by poor punctuality, and recent changes in legislation have resulted in frequent strikes by rail workers. Very few people have a polite word to say about Deutsche Bahn (owners of Arriva & CrossCountry).

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Delightful destinations 7: German Rail Adventure *Continued from previous page.*

Baden-Baden is well known for two things: its spas, and the oldest licenced casino in Germany. Unfortunately, due to some European regulation about mineral concentrations in drinking water, the spa water was off limits, so we instead we made the most of the town's other primary attraction. The casino draws the wealthy from all over the world, but primarily Russia. This large and prosperous expat community gives the small city a prosperous appearance.



Having never visited a casino, the attraction of a spin of the roulette table beckoned, and, after a few rounds, to the astonishment of my compatriots, I turned €10 in to €33 (and quickly turned it back in to €10 after spending my ill-gotten gains on a G&T and two small beers).

Baden-Baden provides a good base for visiting the Black Forest and the delightful cities of Heidelberg and Tübingen, both ancient university cities. We chose to spend the third day of my time in the region in Heidelberg, with its impressive castle fortress (home to the largest wine barrel in the world) and medieval city centre, perched on the River Neckar, a major tributary to the Rhine.

Most cities and regions in Germany have an efficient and inexpensive S-Bahn system connecting the suburbs and surrounding cities with each other. But, despite the modernity of most of their rolling-stock, there are places where the equivalent of our old railbus “pacers” can be found, and their attraction is no greater than their British equivalents. Fortunately our railbus journey was short and punctual.

The final mainline rail journey of my trip took me from Karlsruhe (near Baden-Baden) to Munich. To my surprise, a double-decker French TGV drew into the station.



My booked seat was on the top deck, but night was falling so the views were limited. Notable, though, was the on-board cuisine. Gallic gastronomy has a formidable reputation, so it was rather discombobulating to be served, on a French train, the worst railway food that I have ever had the misfortune to sample. And to add insult to injury, the French seemingly don't offer at-seat service in first class – quelle horreur!



I stayed four delightful days in Munich, a city of peaceful parks and palaces. If you find yourself in this city, it is well worth taking a trip to the end of the S-Bahn at Herrsching and enjoying a thirty-minute stroll through the woods to Cloister Andechs. Like so many of the churches in Bavaria, it is in the most flamboyant baroque style, but that is not its chief attraction: it is home to a brauhaus, and their homemade Bavarian beer is served with generous helpings of meat, cheese, brezel and sauerkraut with a fine panoramic view over the surrounding countryside. It was a very pleasant conclusion to ten days of touring. ■



On behalf of SENRUG, we wish all our readers a Merry Christmas and a happy new year.