

SUPPORT FOR ASHINGTON RAIL RE-OPENING

SENRUG, the group that campaigns for better rail services in South East and East Northumberland, is calling for the community to get behind Northumberland County Council's plans for restoring passenger rail services between Newcastle and Ashington.

Although passenger trains were withdrawn in 1964, the line remains fully in tact as it carries freight trains to and from the power station at Lynemouth. "We have been campaigning for passenger trains to be re-instated since 2005" said SENRUG Chair Dennis Fancett. "We are fortunate that our campaign has been fully supported by each of the Lib-Dem, Labour and now Conservative administrations whilst they have been in power at County Hall. Nevertheless, the process to re-open a passenger train service is longwinded and complex - itself an issue that needs to be looked at - but now we have reached the position where there is a plan being submitted to the government and a strong chance we could see passenger services running again by late 2022 or 2023. We should grab this opportunity to make a real difference to our local economy, and have some rail investment in the North East rather than just London schemes."

"That doesn't mean to say we are in agreement with the Council on every detail" he added. "We would have liked more to be included in Phase 1 - as indeed would everyone - including the County Council themselves. And we have comments on some of the station designs which we are feeding back, though we all need to recognise that simply re-instating what used to exist doesn't work in all cases since the original station layouts no longer meet Network Rail's current quality and safety standards. "

"Nevertheless, our conclusion is that the current phased plan is a pragmatic way of getting something actually delivered. A lot of hard work has gone in to getting us this far and I particularly commend the staff at the County Council who are working very hard to meet a number of deadlines. We can also re-assure the community that once Phase 1 is completed, SENRUG won't rest on its laurels but will continue to campaign not just for those stations not included in the initial phase, but for further extensions such as Ashington to Woodhorn and Newbiggin, Newsham to Blyth Town Centre, Bedlington to

Choppington and Morpeth, and the link from Ashington to Alnmouth via Butterwell on the East Coast Main Line.”

“But after 14 years of campaigning, this is an opportunity to get something, and we are supporting it. It’s a desperately needed scheme, and finally we have a strong chance of seeing it signed off and passenger trains running once again.”

Re-opening the rail line to Ashington is just one of SENRUG’s campaigns. To find out the other things the group wants to achieve, or to join up, go to www.senrug.co.uk.

Ends (474 words)

Notes for Editors

SENRUG – The South East Northumberland Rail User Group - is a voluntary pro rail campaign group: contact Dennis Fancett, Chair, tel 01670 825500 or 07810 353651, e: chair@senrug.co.uk.
www.senrug.co.uk

The Newcastle to Ashington rail link is part of a working freight line previously known as “The Ashington Blyth & Tyne Line”. Northumberland County Council are now calling it “The Northumberland Line” More on SENRUG’s campaign to re-introduce passenger services on the line at <http://www.senrug.co.uk/Re-open-AshingtonBlythTyneLine.php>.

Northumberland County Council consultation website is at <https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/News/2019/Aug/Public-s-view-sought-on-rail-line-plans.aspx>

Photo caption: SENRUG’s special charter train in 2008 crossing the River Wansbeck. Could trains soon be making this journey every day? Credit Graham Galbraith.

