



## **The Next LNER Train to arrive at Platform 1 could be an AZUMA**

The Azuma in the picture wasn't stopping at Morpeth but the LNER Website tells us that the first scheduled stop at Morpeth was due on September 28<sup>th</sup> – and details as to which services will be Azuma operated are on the LNER Website [[www.lner.co.uk/the-east-coast-experience/azuma-trains/azuma-schedule/](http://www.lner.co.uk/the-east-coast-experience/azuma-trains/azuma-schedule/)]

So, what exactly is an Azuma and why should we be excited? Azuma is the brand name chosen by LNER for their Class 800 trains assembled by Hitachi at their Newton Aycliffe Plant, and around 70% of the parts come from the North East.

The train sets are bi-modal in that whilst they will spend most of their time operating as electric trains they can, when the wires run out or the power is off, run on diesel power.

North of Doncaster we'll be seeing 9 car units that each offer around 100 more seats than the trains they are replacing. They have extra legroom, improved Wi-Fi, and more luggage space. They also have much better wheelchair access and accessible toilets. It isn't just LNER that will be using this design of train. The new TransPennine service between Liverpool and Edinburgh, due to start December, uses a similar design branded as NOVA 1. These five car trains will seat 161 more passengers than their current 3 car rolling stock. The service will give us a regular hourly service to the Capital of Scotland as well as to all main stations to Leeds and Liverpool.

Join SENRUG at [www.senrug.co.uk](http://www.senrug.co.uk) or email [membership@senrug.co.uk](mailto:membership@senrug.co.uk).

***The outline proposals for developing the Ashington Blyth and Tyne (a.k.a. the Northumberland) Line are emerging. Northumberland County Council ran a series of public meetings during September to showcase their plans and listen to public views. The meetings are over, but you can still have your voice heard through the internet until mid-October. The web address you need is: <https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Highways/Transport-policy/Projects.aspx>***

***For details of our initial comments, and the responses from NCC, please go to page 3 ...***

# AB&T: Plans are moving on ...

## What is the Transforming Cities Fund – and why does it matter?

The Transforming Cities Fund (TCF) was set up to improve transport links in city regions. TCF funding is only available for capital investment in public or sustainable transport. The aim is to transform key commuter routes, increase access to jobs and help ensure that businesses have the infrastructure they need to thrive.

The fund now stands at £1.22bn, available for schemes to be delivered between 2020 and 2023. This £1.22bn should provide most of the money to fund the Northumberland Line

## Who are the North East Joint Transport Committee (NEJTC)?

7 councillors representing both the North East Combined Authority and the North of Tyne Authority [the Mayoral Authority that includes Northumberland and North Tyneside] meet to ensure collaborative working across the region. The Transforming Cities Fund bid is one of their responsibilities. Most other functions are delegated to NCC who also advise the Joint Committee about local needs, deliver local programmes, and determine local priorities. Further information, and committee papers from their website:

<https://northeastca.gov.uk/decision-making/the-north-east-joint-transport-committee/>



*A Metro pauses at Northumberland Park on its way to the Coast. The proposed Northumberland Line platform would be where the trees now stand to the left of the graffiti.*

On 18 June 2019 the North East Joint Transport Committee received a report on the Transforming Cities Fund (TCF) bid – a bid that includes a number of other North East projects. About the Northumberland Line the report said:

*“Northumberland Line proposals will introduce passenger trains on the existing freight railway between Ashington, Bedlington, Blyth, Northumberland Park and the East Coast Main Line at Benton.*

*Trains will operate hourly between Newcastle and Ashington, more regularly in peak hours. Stations will be constructed at Ashington, Bedlington Station, Newsham (for Blyth) and Northumberland Park (integrating with Metro services). Further stations may be constructed in future, but these require regulatory permissions that cannot be obtained within the funding timeframe of TCF. The principal cost items for this project are the upgrade of several level crossings to accommodate a more frequent train service and the provision of new stations, parking and highway infrastructure “*

The total cost of these works is reported as being £117,216,520 with £99,400,000 being sought from the TCF. A further £17,816,520 needs to be found.

As part of the bid a Business Case must be written. This will include details of where the balance of the funding will come from. The SENRUG Newsletter (Spring 2019) reported that NCC had allocated £3.5m to the project, and that some of this money is being spent on developing the business case.

**Other Work:** SENRUG has had reports of additional activity from workers in ‘hi-viz’ clothing as work goes on to complete the Network Rail GRIP 3 process and carry out the ecological and planning surveys that will fit into the Business Plan. Boots on the ground at last!

## **.. but the Devil could still be in the detail.**

SENRUG has always recognised that the cost of the whole project has always been problematic. It would be easy to 'gold plate' a project and make it too expensive. It would also be possible to cut so many corners that future developments could become impossible. NCC have done great work in trying to resolve this dilemma and have brought the cost of the whole project down to a more realistic level.

At Ashington a new bay platform is proposed as the terminus for trains both to and from Newcastle. Our initial concern was that this proposal seemed to rule out an extension to Woodhorn or to the East Coast Mainline via the Butterwell Route. Northumberland County Council (NCC) has assured us this will not be the case and, once the service extends beyond Ashington, it would be possible to use the current down platform using the bay platform to stable a train overnight or remove it entirely and provide more parking spaces. In either case SENRUG suggests that a new crossover between the up and down lines will be required to avoid wrong line running between Ashington and Marchey's house.

The plan for Bedlington station doesn't include any easy way for passengers move between platforms, important for a number of reasons. NCC say that it may be possible, subject to budgetary constraints, to provide a footpath from the southbound platform to Bedlington South level crossing. This path would both improve access from West Bedlington and allow passengers to move between platforms.

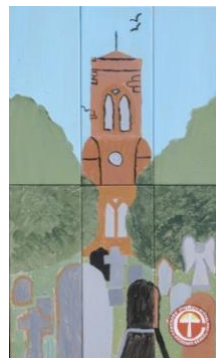
At Seaton Delaval the station is taken away from its original site immediately beside the road bridge and moved some distance towards Seghill. SENRUG had suggested that the station should be moved to a site behind the Co-op but modern rail design standards say that stations should be sited on straights or flat curves. There are, however, real issues with moving the proposed station closer to the road bridge. NCC say that disabled access

would be more difficult and more expensive. They also point to problems accommodating safe passenger access and egress from the road bridge. SENRUG has been told that that the present proposal can be 'tweaked' to allow the platform to be moved some distance towards the old station site. The exact position of the promised car park, important if the station is to serve the people of Cramlington, isn't clear and SENRUG will be asking for clarification.

Northumberland Park will be the important interchange with the Metro system and SENRUG says that it needs to have a both a single ticket hall for both systems and easy interchange between the AB&T and Metro platforms. The current design provides for a separate AB&T platform accessed, by separate lifts and stairs, from the bridge that runs above both systems. NCC suggests that it might be possible to link the two station entrances on the overbridge at a later stage.



*Visitors to both Morpeth and Cramlington stations have been enjoying a display of artwork on the*



*platforms. The project was a co-operation between Newminster Middle School, Cragside C of E Primary School, Northern, and SENRUG. It's been a great example of how art can brighten railway stations and make them a better place for us all.*

### **Next SENRUG Public Meeting.**

**Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> December at Morpeth Town Hall. Hear Graham Meiklejohn, Regional Development Manager at TransPennine Express, talk about their new services.**



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# A Day out with the Prince Bishops

*Dave Shaw explores the roots of our railways*

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This is a journey through history - and into the future. You'll travel the route of the Stockton to Darlington and you'll catch a glimpse of the newest trains on the network. You'll see the home of the Prince Bishops and a cultural capital for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

We settle down by the window of a Pacer at Darlington, and a few moments later we arrive at North Road. Now just a halt this was once the home of a large railway works, building many of the locomotives used in the North East. The Head of Steam Museum sits beside the



*End of the line for this Pacer. If we want to go further up Weardale by train it is a ten minute walk to a completely separate platform. Would it not be nice if the two companies could work out how to share a single station?*

platform with a treasure trove of archives, maps, photographs and printed ephemera setting out the history of the railways of County Durham. An hour here is well spent. We head West and leave the industrial hinterland of Darlington behind to move into more open country. Just before Newton Aycliffe we can see our window into the future. An electrified section of track runs beside the branch and slips away into the Hitachi works – home of the Azuma. A visibly excited fellow traveller from Japan starts a conversation about railways with the guard on our train - on leaving the train

he seems pleased, and surprised, by the impressive knowledge of railways on display from the guard. Shildon is home to Locomotion – an outpost of the National Railway Museum - stocked with a collection of old engines and carriages from all over the UK.

Bishop Auckland, once a major junction, is the terminus for the line. Travel further into Weardale is possible, courtesy of the Weardale Railway volunteers and their heritage trains.

What can Bishop Auckland offer us? A walk towards the Market place takes us to the 4 Clocks Centre. Owned and run by the local community this old church has a café and some wonderful pictures of the glory days of the railway. A little further is the site of the Hippodrome Theatre, once managed by Stan Laurel's father who is further celebrated by having a pub named after him in the market-place. Look upwards to admire the fine Victorian architecture and then turn into the Market Place. Once full of market stalls and bus stops it has been cleared and cleaned to become the cultural heart of the town.

The Spanish Gallery, opening later this year, will be the home to the UK's largest collection of Spanish art. Auckland Tower allows you views over the wider landscape including the Deer Park, part of the former hunting grounds of the Prince Bishops of Durham. The redeveloped Castle and its Walled Garden open in early November, but the Mining Art Gallery has already become a place of pilgrimage to those who love the work of artists who drew their inspiration from life in the local collieries and communities. This end of town is also home to Kynren - a spectacular show about the last 2,000 years of British History. Sadly, the last train leaves before the end of the performance – a car is required or an overnight stay.

**Further Information.** The **Bishop Train & Bus Day Ranger** is a joint train and bus ticket between Bishop Auckland and Darlington, allowing you to travel either way by train or bus as many times as you wish on that day. Available at staffed railway stations, conductors on the train or from the Arriva bus driver.

For onward travel on the **Weardale Railway** see [www.weardale-railway.org.uk/timetables](http://www.weardale-railway.org.uk/timetables).

For the attractions around the **Market Place** see [www.aucklandproject.org](http://www.aucklandproject.org)