



April 2006

## SEN RUG STOPS MORE TRAINS!

Virgin CrossCountry Trains have agreed to stop their last northbound evening train at Morpeth. During the week this will be the 14:25 p.m. from Plymouth, which arrives at Newcastle at 21:40 p.m. and should reach Morpeth by 21:57 p.m.. They will also stop the late evening trains on Saturday and Sunday. Our thanks go to Trevor Watson and to Brian Johnson, the Franchise Director for VXC Trains.

Last year Trevor noticed that there was space in the schedule to stop these late evening trains. He asked Brian Johnson if Virgin could stop these trains. They had met on Morpeth station last December, when greeting the first Virgin train to arrive.

These new services will run from December 2006, though the times might vary slightly. Also, they are subject to Network Rail approval.

This is great news. It will provide us with a better cross-country service, a later train from Newcastle and a late evening train to Alnmouth, Berwick and Edinburgh. This will enable people to spend the early evening in Newcastle or to catch a later train from London, and still get back to Morpeth by train.

The new Virgin trains at Morpeth are a great success; passenger numbers have doubled since they started only three months ago



The first Virgin train in Morpeth, Dec. 12/05

### CHATHILL SERVICE SAVED!

A success, more good news. There will be no cuts to either our local trains or stations.

Thank you to everybody who wrote to their MP or local councillor.

Thanks to Denis Murphy MP for his Early Day Motion, and to all the other local MPs who signed it. Without your help things might have been very different, but all the political pressure has worked. The Northern Service Review was published on Wednesday 22nd March, later than initially promised but sooner than expected, perhaps because there was no bad news to announce before the local elections in May.

Derek Twigg, the Undersecretary of State for Transport, announced "that service patterns will not change as a result of this review" and that "the current level of subsidy is also unaffected". Congratulations go to Northern Rail, as the review found that "the franchise operates efficiently".

Why did the Department for Transport need a review costing £300,000 only six months after they had drawn up and awarded the franchise? Did they get the specification wrong in the first place? All the review could suggest was that ticket prices could be "optimised" i.e. raised, which might bring in £2 or £3 million. Fortunately, they saw that this "would come at the cost of a large negative net economic benefit" by which they mean passengers would desert the trains in droves.

#### MORPETH STATION LEASE FINALLY AGREED

SENUG understands that the lease on the remaining space in Morpeth station has been taken up for a restaurant. This is good news, as the space in this Grade 1 listed building has been gradually deteriorating over the years, with roof tiles missing and water coming in.

With the taxi office already in the building, and the Northern booking office working during the mornings until 12.40, this will extend the working day for the station, and it will be a well-lit and much more attractive place in the evenings, making it a much better place for those who want to catch trains late at night.

This is a step in the right direction, but SENUG still wants to see the booking office working throughout the day, and we are continuing to talk to Northern about this as well as the continuing problem of no access for buggies and the disabled to the Northbound platform.

We are also keeping an eye on the buildings opposite, owned by Network Rail and of great historic interest, being the only remaining buildings of the famous Blyth and Tyne Railway.

#### GOOD OFFERS YOU MAY NOT KNOW ABOUT

The Secretary of the Friends of the Settle-Carlisle Railway, who came to speak to SENUG on the 16<sup>th</sup> March, told us that there was a "round robin" ticket available from Newcastle for only £35. This would give you a good day out on this most spectacular of railway lines, returning

via Leeds. A pity this is not widely advertised, as it is a considerable saving on the ordinary tickets.

Talking of cheap deals, GNER had announced that the Railover ticket could not be accepted on their trains earlier this year. SENUG was on to this as soon as it was reported by member Richard Hilton. Sustained pressure by Ken Allott, SENUG Chairman, ensured that GNER withdrew this ridiculous and unfair ban immediately.

Did you know that the M17 bus from Lancaster Park goes past the railway station in Morpeth? It will drop you there for £1, a considerable saving on the taxi fare, and a convenient way to avoid using the car – just as well with parking now at a premium! It connects with most of the morning trains to Newcastle.

#### ASHINGTON BLYTH TYNE LINE

SENUG continues to be disappointed with the County Council's lukewarm support for this line, which they made the case for enthusiastically only a few years ago. Despite SENUG having secured a review of the cost of reinstatement which is far below that originally quoted, the County has decided not to put it into their latest Local Transport Plan. Meanwhile, Railfuture is still fighting for it on the national level, which makes NCC's position even less acceptable. This is a very achievable project, it is right in line with the green targets the Council is supposed to meet, and it would make Northumberland look forward-looking and dynamic, bringing us into line with other regions such as Scotland and Wales where such projects are embraced enthusiastically. Come on Northumberland, what happened to the spirit of George Stephenson? We should still be leading the way on rail!

**Membership Enquiries – Rates £5pa per adult or couple (£2.50 unwaged). Send cheque payable to Senrug to membership secretary:**

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11 Campion Way, Ashington, NE63 8JG

**SENUG AGM With Guest Speaker  
from NORTHERN RAIL:  
13<sup>th</sup> July 7.30 at MORPETH TOWN HALL**

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