

ASHINGTON CHARTER TRAIN A “COMPLETE SUCCESS”

SENUG have declared their charter train event round the Ashington Blyth & Tyne Railway Line, that took place on 7th June, a complete success. The event was organised as part of their ongoing campaign to see the line permanently re-opened to passenger trains. Three separate trips were run on the same day. The 2nd and 3rd were open to members of the general public who purchased tickets from SENUG. However, tickets on the 1st trip were reserved for local stakeholders and this train included over 130 guests including Wansbeck MP Denis Murphy (Labour), North East England MEP Fiona Hall (Lib Dem), over 40 local authority Councillors, staff from 6 different local councils and representatives from The Association of North East Councils, North East Assembly, Nexus, Government Office North East, SENNTRI and local businesses. Significant press coverage was achieved with the trip being highlighted on BBC TV The Politics Show (8th June), BBC TV Look North (7th June), BBC Radio



Newcastle Drivetime (6th June), Century Radio and Smooth Radio's hourly news broadcasts (7th June) and with reporters / photographers from 4 local / regional newspapers also present.

Dennis Fancett, Chairman of SENUG was interviewed for the 2 BBC TV programmes and was extensively quoted in the local press. "We called the charter train 'The Ashington Future' because we want to highlight the regenerative benefits re-opening the line will bring" he said. "This was not a heritage or nostalgic trip. We deliberately chartered a standard 2 coach train from Northern Rail - exactly the kind of stock that would be used if the line is indeed re-opened, and we set the fares for the trains open to members of the public at the kind of level they are likely to be once the line is re-opened. rather

than charge a premium as often happens on heritage trips. As we completely sold out, we are being inundated with messages asking us if we are going to do this again next year. Our reply however is that we hope the line will soon be re-opened permanently, meaning local people can travel on it every single day, and not just on special occasions".

Photos: Above: The charter train at Bedlington Station. *John Brierley*. Below: Crossing the Wansbeck Viaduct. *Graham Galbraith*



EAST COAST MD TO SPEAK AT SENRUG AGM

David Franks, Managing Director National Express East Coast, has kindly agreed to be the guest speaker at SENRUG's AGM, which takes place at 7.30 pm on Monday 14th July, at Morpeth Methodist Church, Howard Terrace, Morpeth.

National Express took over the East Coast Main Line franchise from GNER in December 2007 and have made a number of significant changes already. WiFi is now free to all passengers, there is a new internet booking system which offers more options when selecting tickets, and standard class passengers are now made to feel welcome if using the restaurant car.

SENUG submitted a number of aspirations to the DfT as part of the franchise renewal process and although none of these became enshrined in the

AGM: MON 14th JULY 2008
(please note revised date)

franchise specification, SENRUG hopes to convince National Express the market for rail at Morpeth is growing rapidly so it will be prepared to introduce at least some of SENRUG's suggestions on a voluntary basis—but that requires us to convince National Express the ideas would result in greater ticket revenue for them.

The meeting will include a short presentation from David, followed by a Question and Answer session. There

Continued overleaf

The Government Responds ...

1092 people signed our petition to 10 Downing Street about re-opening the Ashington, Blyth & Tyne Line, and this is the response we received from No 10:

The Government is committed to the growth and development of the railway. This is reflected in the White Paper Towards a Sustainable Railway (Cm 7176) which was published in July 2007 and commits to £15 billion in total Government support to the railway for the period from 2009 to 2014.

The Government's priority over this period is to increase rail capacity. This is necessary to allow the network to cater for the steady growth which has seen the number of passenger journeys exceed a billion in each of the last three years. With this in mind, £10 billion out of the £15 billion promised in the White Paper will be devoted to measures designed to increase capacity. The White Paper commits to a range of specific capacity-increasing measures including 1300 new carriages to be used on the most congested lines in the country and major improvements at a number of individual stations. It does



not commit to any line reopenings because these are not the most effective way of securing the early capacity increases that are the most pressing need for both passengers and freight operators. This does not mean that the Government is against the principle of rail reopening. Where, as with the Blyth and Tyne line, local and regional authorities are prepared to take the lead in drawing up a proper business case for reopening a particular line or stations and identifying funding, the Government will carefully consider the case.

So, it seems the government wants local and regional authorities to take the lead. Let's hope our new unitary authority are willing to do just that.

Thanks To Northern Rail & Wansbeck DC

SENTRUG has written to the Area Director at Northern Rail, to thank them for their tremendous effort in making the charter event a success. Not just for the charter itself, but all the extras such as the window stickers, the headboard, and keeping Morpeth's Ticket Office open longer on the day. A separate email went to the Chief Exec of Wansbeck District Council who sponsored the event.

Ministerial Visit Announced

Following the event, Wansbeck MP Denis Murphy announced Transport Minister Tom Harris has agreed to visit the constituency



and see the ABT infrastructure for himself. The Ministerial visit is exactly the sort of follow-up action we had hoped the charter event would provoke, and we think increases the very real chance that phase 1 of the re-opening (Morpeth - Choppington - Bedlington) could be authorised very quickly.

Level Access at Morpeth

More encouraging news came from the government on 31st January 2008 when the DfT Press Release included Morpeth in the list of stations that are being given "Access For All" funding. SENTRUG had been pressing the authorities to apply for this for some time to cover the cost of providing level access to Morpeth's northbound platform. Whilst we're still not sure who actually asked for the money - it's there in black and white - we got it. Not sure if the funding awarded is just for a study or will cover the building costs of the ramps, and inevitably there is a long time delay, but watch this space!

An Apology To Our Members

Although we say on page 1 our ABT charter event was a complete success, we are aware that even some of our own members could not get hold of tickets for the public trains. We're not entirely sure how this happened but we know it has something to do with information reaching those with email before those without. So, our apologies if you were disappointed. We are of course reviewing our internal procedures to try and work out how we can stop this happening again

Photos: left: A visitor to SENTRUG's exhibition at Woodhorn's climate change event stops to sign our online petition. Above, MP Denis Murphy [right] with SENTRUG chairman Dennis Fancett, helps Deb Copley of Northern Rail wave away Ashington's first passenger train for 40 years. Both photos from John Brierley.

National Express at SENRUG AGM

(continued from page 1)

will then be a short break, after which SENRUG's AGM business will be taken. This will include election of officers and committee for the coming year, and consideration of the Chairman's & Treasurer's reports. Those wishing to stand for any position within the organisation should notify the current chairman Dennis Fancett beforehand, though nominations will also be accepted from the floor.

Annual Subscription Renewal

The forthcoming AGM means its also time to renew your SENRUG membership for a further year. We have again kept the subscription rate at just £5 for an individual or couple membership, £2.50 for unwaged or £10 for corporate. Please help us by sending your renewal cheque to our Membership Secretary right away. We now have a standing order facility for those that prefer not to be troubled with a reminder every year.

No Response From CrossCountry over Morpeth Cuts.

Following an interview with Arriva CrossCountry MD Andy Cooper in Modern Railways, SENRUG Chairman wrote to him directly about the proposed cuts in service at Morpeth, from December 2008. A copy of the letter is on our website. The letter starts off by applauding CrossCountry for their focus on solving the overcrowding problem but then goes on to ask why they are so determined to reduce service at Morpeth when everyone else can see the market for rail here is growing, and why they have refused the County Council's request for a meeting at which the commercial case for Morpeth could be presented.

New Ticket Pricing Structure

Simplification of intercity ticket structures has been a SENRUG objective for some time, and now it seems we've got it. The Chairman's own idea was simple. Red, Amber or Green tickets. Green would be valid on any day on any train, Amber for a restricted range of trains, and Red valid only for the train booked when the ticket was purchased. Which is not too different from the Anytime, Off Peak and Advance the Rail Companies have come up with, so well done. There will admittedly be winners and losers under the new rules, but at first sight it looks like we in the North East could be a winner. Railcard discounts were never permitted on GNER / National Express Advance Purchase tickets, but they will be valid on the new Advance tickets. //