

Silence over Parking Charges

As Network Rail's plans to extend the car park at Morpeth have been deferred, Northern Rail remain silent over proposed parking charges.

CASTLE MORPETH BC has deferred Network Rail's application to extend the car park at Morpeth Station at its January meeting, saying more consultation is necessary. New plans have been submitted which will be discussed at the Council's 10th March meeting.

The Borough Council, Town Council and SENRUG all support increased parking provision, but are concerned at the

level of charges proposed. In a letter to Network Rail, Borough Chief Executive Ken Dunbar

"Charges of £3 to £4 at Morpeth are likely to discourage rail use"

points out that it only costs £2 to park at Four Lane Ends Metro, so charges of £3 to £4 at Morpeth are likely to put more cars back on the A1 and

A189 and discourage rail use. At the time of going to press no reply had been received.

Crucially, the level of charges proposed is not a planning issue, and the Borough will not be able to reject the plans on these grounds alone.

Northern Rail, who are likely to be the main losers if punitive charges are introduced, have remained strangely silent on the matter. ●



PICTURED: Peppercorn class A1 Pacific No 60163 ("Tornado") hauls a charter train through Morpeth station

Morpeth Steam

NEW-BUILD STEAM locomotive "Tornado" passed through Morpeth on 28th February on its first run north of Newcastle. See photo below left. ●

NEXT MEETING

Thursday 26th March,
7.30pm at
Morpeth Methodist Church
Guest Speaker: Richard
Gibson (CrossCountry)
» www.senrug.co.uk

Key Speakers at SENRUG Meetings

SENRUG has lined up two important guests for its next two meetings.

CROSSCOUNTRY'S HEAD of Communications, Richard Gibson, will be speaking at SENRUG's next public meeting at 7.30pm on Thursday 26th March at Morpeth Methodist Church, Howard Terrace, Morpeth.

Richard will be outlining CrossCountry's plans for the franchise, and talking about the challenges of last December's timetable change. All members of the public are welcome.

WANSBECK MP Dennis Murphy has agreed to speak at SENRUG's AGM on 16th July. Details to follow. ●

High Hopes for Opening Hours

After three years of waiting, we may soon hear whether Northern Rail will extend ticket office opening hours at Morpeth station.

IT'S BEEN three years in the writing but SENRUG has been told that Northern Rail's business case to extend the opening hours of the ticket office at Morpeth is now complete, and will be submitted to the

company's management board soon.

The case is based on the successful trial of afternoon opening in Summer 2006 in which commission from increased ticket sales covered

the costs involved. In addition to ticket sales, an open ticket office also allows access to the station's waiting room and toilet, plus train running information. Let's hope the answer is going to be "yes"! ●

'Allo Alloa

A survey into the popularity of the new Alloa rail link in Scotland has shown that the number of passengers in the first nine months exceeded all expectation. Could the proposed Ashington, Blyth & Tyne line follow suit?



PICTURED: SPT Turbostar № 170 475 at Alloa Railway Station

RESEARCH CONDUCTED by South East Scotland Transport Partnership (SESTran) said more than 400,000 passengers were expected to use Alloa station this year. That figure is more than double the original estimate of 155,000 passengers. The service, re-introduced on 19th May 2008, has also cut car journeys in and out of Alloa by more than 100,000.

A spokesman for SESTran said: "The incredible success of Alloa station is excellent news. It is proof-positive that when people have the option of a high-quality public transportation service, they will use it in preference to the car. The figures suggest that over a 12-month period the new station will deal with up to 400,000 rail journeys. Of these 100,000 will be passengers who would otherwise have gone by car. That's a lot of cars off the roads, and a major contribution towards reducing South East Scotland's carbon footprint."

Alloa's railway station was re-opened after a break of 40 years when a 13-mile stretch of existing but disused track between

"It is clear that the cost to re-open the ABT line provides exceptional value for money.

So what are we waiting for?"

Stirling and Longannet Power Station in Kincardine was reinstated. As a link between a small suburban town and a conurbation it begs comparison with the Ashington, Blyth & Tyne (ABT) line. However, the fact that it was reinstated at all—despite the hefty £80m price tag—shows how unprogressive England is compared to Scotland in backing the simplest of solutions to congestion, sustainability and carbon-efficiency.

SENRUG believes that the reinstatement of the ABT line would show equally spectacular results in getting people out of their cars and enjoying an eco-friendly, comfortable ride into work or for leisure; the recent bad weather only serves to highlight the requirement for reliable rail transport.

And how many people does a line which cost over £80m benefit? Alloa is a town of just over 18,000 inhabitants. Compare this to Blyth (36,000), Ashington (27,000) and Bedlington (15,000) and it is clear the estimated cost of £4.1 million to re-open the ABT line from Morpeth to Bedlington provides exceptional value for money. So what are we waiting for? ●

ABT Setbacks

Whilst the Alloa line experiences levels of use that are unprecedented, the report into the reopening of the Ashington, Blyth & Tyne line has been set back six months. And Network Rail now intends to remove vital infrastructure.



PICTURED: Bedlington Railway Station

IN THE last issue of this newsletter, it was reported that Northumberland County Council had commissioned a study—into Network Rail's "GRIP 3" standard—into the re-opening of the main section of the Ashington, Blyth & Tyne (ABT) line. It was understood that this was to have been completed by December 2008.

This date has slipped, and the report is not now expected

"The delay is most frustrating, especially as central government say that they plan to increase spending on transport infrastructure projects."

until June 2009. Additionally, the study is not being funded by the County Council as previously reported—rather, it is a study looking at how to handle more freight trains on the line and the Council are in effect piggy-backing on this to assess the cost of restoring passenger services at the same time.

This may be a cost effective way of getting the study done, but it means the County Council is not in control of the timescale and urgency. The delay is most frustrating, especially as central government continue to say that they plan to increase public spending on transport infrastructure projects as a way of minimising the effects of the recession. What a pity Northumberland's scheme is not already costed and ready to go.

MEANWHILE, NEWS has reached SENRUG that Network Rail are planning to mothball Ashington North signal box and the

"Network Rail should not be permitted to take any action that would add to the cost of reinstating passenger services."

crossover at Ashington station that is needed to reverse trains at Ashington should passenger service be reinstated. SENRUG has written to Network Rail asking for clarification as to how they can withdraw infrastructure on the one hand whilst at the same time taking money for a commercially funded GRIP 3 study looking at reinstating services that will need to use the infrastructure. SENRUG believes Network Rail should not be permitted to take any action that would add to the eventual cost of reinstating passenger services. ●

Manors Campaign

Manors Metro station has seen passenger numbers surge. So why do only a few commuter trans stop at the railway station?

FOR SOME time, SENRUG has been campaigning for all local trains between Morpeth and Newcastle to call at Manors, rather than just the few peak hour services. The case for this is based on the fact that the demographics of the Manors area have changed considerably since the timetable was set decades ago.

The station now serves several call centres (where people do not work conventional "nine-to-five" hours), the artist quarter (Laing Gallery, Biscuit

Factory, Art Works, etc.) and, most significantly, the huge new Northumbria University campus next door.

These are not just empty words. Nexus have just reported Manors Metro has seen a 42% increase in usage against 2.4% on the Metro network overall, making Manors the fastest growing station on the network. SENRUG have forwarded the Nexus Press Release to its colleagues at Northern Rail and await their response with interest. ●

The French Connection

Imagine his delight when SENRUG Chairman Dennis Fancett found that Eurostar had answered his prayers and released tickets six months in advance.

IF YOU ventured onto the SENRUG website following the previous edition of this newsletter, you may have read Dennis Fancett's account of travelling from Newcastle to Nîmes by train (via St Pancras and Lille). Dennis was strongly critical of the fact that European rail tickets can only be booked 2 months (or less, depending on when your return journey is) in advance.

Perhaps Eurostar read his article, because direct summer Saturday trains from London to Avignon went on sale in December.

Dennis commented: "I was delighted to discover Eurostar now offering their tickets so far in advance. This is fantastic, as it allowed my wife to snap up two bargain tickets for £59 each way. I suspect that Eurostar can make these tickets available because it is a direct train and does not involve any connecting UK or TGV tickets. But well done to Eurostar!" ●

Eurostar tickets, including through-tickets from Newcastle to a variety of European destinations, can be purchased from www.eurostar.co.uk.



PHOTO: JOHN EARL

PICTURED LEFT: if a station serving a village of just 150 inhabitants (Gunton, Norfolk; pictured) can have an information point for passengers to find out train times, why can't Morpeth, Cramlington and the other unmanned stations in Northumberland? Even Morpeth Bus Station now has state-of-the-art electronic display boards.

New SENRUG Website

THANKS TO SENRUG webmaster Luke Earl for producing a new website, which can be found at www.senrug.co.uk. The fresh new design is clearer and should help you to find the

information you need more quickly, as well as attracting new members. ●

What do you think of the new website? Send your comments to lukearl@gmail.com.

Membership & Renewals

IF YOU would like to join SENRUG, you can download a membership form from www.senrug.co.uk/join or request one from the Membership Secretary. Rates remain at £5 for adult or family, £2.50 for unwaged or £10 for corporate members.

The easiest way to pay is by Standing Order—to do so, simply complete a membership form (even if you are renewing) and return it to the Membership Secretary. Pay-

ment by cheque can be posted with a completed membership form (please indicate if you are renewing).

If you are yet to renew your membership, please do so as soon as possible as we rely on your support. ●

Membership enquiries: John Earl, Membership Secretary, SENRUG, 28 Bracken Ridge, Morpeth NE61 3SY; email j.earl942@btinternet.com; or phone 01670 518411. Forms from www.senrug.co.uk/join.

Can you help SENRUG?

SENRUG'S SMALL exhibition on the Ashington Blyth & Tyne Re-opening Campaign urgently needs updating. Some of the text has been overtaken by more recent events, and of course there is now an excellent range of photos of the line in use, taken on the 7th June 2008 charter trip. Is this something you could do? You

would need the ability to print digital photos and have some free time to mount displays on backing card. SENRUG would pay for the cost of any materials used. Contact Dennis Fancett (SENRUG Chairman) if you can help. ●

Email enquiries@senrug.co.uk or phone 01670 825500 if you are interested.

Manifesto Launched

SENRUG HAS launched a new manifesto, bringing together in a single document all of its campaign aspirations. Different sections cover Morpeth and Cramlington stations, local services, intercity services, local services north of Morpeth, the Ashington Blyth & Tyne line and bus/rail integration. Find a copy on our website at www.senrug.co.uk/manifesto, request one

by email or send an A4 size envelope with a 42p stamp to the Chairman if you would like a copy. ●

The manifesto can be downloaded from www.senrug.co.uk/manifesto. To request a copy, send an email to enquiries@senrug.co.uk or send an SAE (with a 42p stamp) to Dennis Fancett, Chairman, SENRUG, 34 Front St East, Bedlington NE22 5AA.

The Mystery of the Missing Viaducts

Could the Ashington “Black” and Bebside bridges be a hidden treasure of the Ashington, Blyth & Tyne line? John Earl attempts to rescue them from obscurity. *John Earl, Membership Secretary*

AN AMATEUR video on the video-sharing website YouTube claims that Bennerly Viaduct in Derbyshire is the only remaining latticework trestle viaduct in the UK. On the old Great Northern line from Nottingham, it entered Derby over the river Erewash. Closed in 1973, it is now Grade 2 listed, and is part of the Sus-trans cycle network.

According to the video, the “only other one”—the Huntington or Frankley Viaduct—was demolished in 1964.

But have we got news for YouTube! Two such bridges remain, alive and well—and still carrying regular rail traffic—on the Ashington, Blyth & Tyne line. Whilst Derbyshire’s Bennerley Viaduct is the longer at 1,420 yards, Ashington Black Bridge’s 85 feet above the water and Bebside Bridge’s 80 feet knock Bennerley’s 60 feet into a cocked hat.

That makes these the only



PHOTO: GRAHAM GALBRAITH

PICTURED: A Northern Rail class 156 DMU passes over the Ashington “Black” Viaduct on a SENRUG charter.

two examples of the type still in use in the country—and, it seems, confined to obscurity. SENRUG’s aim, as with the entirety of the Ashington, Blyth & Tyne line, is to put them firmly back on the map where they belong.

It is known that the Ashington Bridge was built by the Cleveland Bridge Company who also built the famous bridge at Victoria Falls, and that it replaced an earlier wooden trestle bridge. But if anyone knows who built the

Bebside Bridge, or has any other useful knowledge of these bridges, SENRUG would like to hear from you. ●

Watch at www.youtube.com/watch?v=C8IDvFDq9_Y. Email j.earl942@btinternet.com if you know more about the bridges.

Flying by Rail—with a little help from the bus

If rail is to compete with air for domestic travel, public transport links to some of the country’s busiest airports need to be better integrated. *Dennis Fancett, Chairman.*

NEWCASTLE AIRPORT can be tricky to reach from parts of Northumberland, as reported in the last newsletter. But did you know there is a direct bus—route 100—between Ashington and the Airport during college term time?

Calling at Morpeth on the way to the Airport and Bedlington on the return journey, it is sponsored by Northumberland College to provide a link between their Ashington campus and Kirkley Hall.

Arriva has confirmed that the public are welcome on the service, but neither they nor the County Council advertise its existence. Only Nexus

provides timetables, both on their website and at Newcastle Airport.

It has been suggested to Northumberland College that their subsidy of the service may be helped if it were promoted to regular fare-paying passengers. As it is, the service is almost unused, with no more than a paltry two passengers spotted using it.

LUTON AIRPORT’S National Express coach link from Stevenage Bus Station has recently seen promotion by National Express East Coast in their free “Livewire” magazine and in leaflets available from Newcastle station. This follows

campaigning by SENRUG on the matter.

Stevenage bus station, from which the coach service operates, is a short walk of two to three minutes from the railway station, and coaches depart every one to two hours during the day. ●

The timetable for route 100 can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/route-100> though note that it only operates Monday to Friday during college term time.

National Express coach and rail timetables can be found at www.nationalexpress.com.

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

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