

Non-Stop on The Flying Scotsman

The Flying Scotsman service, which now runs non-stop from Newcastle to London, was re-launched by East Coast on 23rd May, writes SENRUG committee member Janet MacLeod Trotter

NOT MANY things will get me out of bed at 5.30am on a chilly morning, but the chance to go on a fast train with a cooked breakfast is one of them! I was one of the two lucky members of the SENRUG committee to be given the opportunity of travelling on the inaugural Flying Scotsman

on 23rd May. Meeting up with Chairman Dennis Fancett at Morpeth station, we caught the 6.35am service that connects in Newcastle with the new high-speed service.

At Newcastle excitement

PICTURED: East Coast class 91 locomotive N° 91101 sporting its new "Flying Scotsman" livery.

mounted on the crowded platform as the Flying Scotsman, with its sleek purple livery and thistle emblems, slipped into view. One of the highlights of the trip was devouring the tasty full English breakfast while sitting in the comfort of first class. The train was busy, but there was a steady supply of tea and coffee (served by the East Coast executives) while Chair Elaine Holt took time to chat to passengers as we sped non-stop from Newcastle to London.

There was the occasional roving reporter and camera team in our carriage who, strangely, seemed more interested in Olympian Jonathan Edwards and Sir Alan Beith MP than a couple of SENRUG

members, but all were treated equally well on board.

We made it into Kings Cross on time at 9.40am and were welcomed by the skirl of bagpipes and trays of purple cakes. What a way to enter the city! The new service allows a full day in London. I caught the 6.30pm service north, by which time the high winds were disrupting services, not reaching Morpeth until nearly midnight. But the crew remained cheery and helpful, plying their tired passengers with hot and cold drinks long after they should have finished their shift. A long day, but an historic one. ◆

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PHOTO: EAST COAST



Tributes Paid to SENRUG Founder Ken Allott

It is with great sadness that we bring news of the recent death of Ken Allott, one of the founders and the first Chairman of SENRUG.

KENNETH (KEN) Michael Allott was born in 1945 in Ripon, but spent most of his childhood in Lincolnshire where his father taught. There were regular trips by steam train to family in Durham and Newcastle, and Ken became a keen and knowledgeable train spotter. He was absolutely thrilled, when train-spotting in Durham, to be invited to travel in the cab of a steam locomotive to and from the Sunderland depot.

His teenage years were spent in Gosforth before read-

ing Physical Geography at Liverpool University. This is where he met his wife, Caroline. After teaching in Northampton in the early 1970s, Ken got a job teaching geography and geology at The King Edward VI School, Morpeth, and moved to the town in 1973.

Ken was involved in many areas of town life, musically, politically and culturally. In the late 1980s he became parish councillor for the Liberal/Social Democrat alliance, but always insisted that national politics were irrelevant to the

local council. He wanted to get things done for the town. Amongst his achievements were recycling facilities and a BMX track.

At school, Ken was deputy head of the geography department and eventually became the only geology teacher. He supervised Duke of Edinburgh Award expeditions for many years and took part in music tours to Italy and Austria, even after his diagnosis with Motor Neurone Disease (MND). He is remembered fondly by a great number of students (including

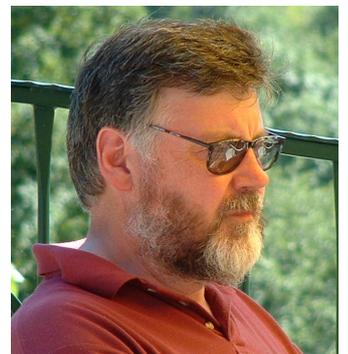


PHOTO: JONATHAN HUGHES

PICTURED: Ken Allott on a school music tour to Austria in 2002, shortly after his diagnosis with MND.

the editor of this newsletter).
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East Coast Update

East Coast Managing Director Karen Boswell outlines the service changes made on 22nd May

THE BIG change to the East Coast timetable that was introduced on Sunday 22nd May is now well established and there is much to be pleased about. The flagship “Flying Scotsman” weekday express service from Edinburgh to King’s Cross, with Newcastle as its only stop, is proving a major success with our business customers. Our other new services—Lincoln to London and a direct return from the capital to Harrogate—are also looking promising in terms of

passenger numbers.

And there’s more. The First Class on-board complimentary service, which was introduced in response to customer feedback, has been well-received. At four weeks into the new timetable that created 19 extra services each weekday, three million additional seats and many faster journey times, our punctuality performance was around 93%.

But we are not resting on our laurels. Work with our



PHOTO: EAST COAST

PICTURED: Karen Boswell, Managing Director of East Coast

infrastructure partners Network Rail on reducing disruption remains a priority and we are also gathering the opinions of our passengers on the food and drink offering.

That Sunday in May was a big day for us at East Coast

but we are now moving on. We will continue to meet and listen to stakeholders along our route and look forward to hearing from you. ◆

Email your comments about the service changes to customers@eastcoast.co.uk.

News from Northumberland County Council

John Lewer, the Public Transport Policy Officer at Northumberland County Council, has updated SENRUG on various rail projects in South East Northumberland.

AT MORPETH Station approval was granted in 2009 to enable the Coopies Lane/Shields Road junction to be signalised, allowing buses to access the railway station as well as making it easier for vehicles exiting the junction.

However, since that scheme was proposed, the situation at the station has changed significantly: the car park is now totally inadequate, which is affecting access for residents and local businesses and making it dangerous for road users.

The Council has decided to review the previously approved scheme to signalise this junction. The key priority is improving safety at the road junction, particularly for pedestrians and vehicles.

The new scheme includes:

- » Widening of existing footway on Coopies Lane between the station and Shield Road
- » Construction of a new footway on Coopies Lane between the former station building and Shields Road
- » Construction of dropped pedestrian crossing on Coopies Lane to link station to the new footway

Negotiations continue with Network Rail to acquire a site on Coopies Lane for an additional 92 space car park. This will ease parking problems on Coopies Lane and encourage more people to take the train from Morpeth. Planning permission for the car park has already been granted.

Improvements at the existing station parking to start before the end of 2011 include:

- » Passenger drop off area adjacent to the platform
- » Short stay (30 minute) parking in the existing station car park
- » Long stay parking in the existing station car park
- » Improved signage

Network Rail in partnership with Northern Rail are planning improvements under the National Station Improvement Programme, and the Department for Transport (DfT) “Access for All” level access programme. This will involve the installation of passenger lifts, repairs to the subway, a self-service ticket machine, and upgraded passenger

information including electronic displays.

CRAMLINGTON STATION sees work progressing on extending the station car park from 48 to 102 spaces including four disabled spaces. There are also plans also to improve pedestrian access to the northbound platform. A funding agreement has recently been signed with Network Rail, which is a first stage in progressing the project. Work should start this financial year.

CONSULTANTS CONTINUE to progress the demand studies for the Ashington, Blyth & Tyne Line, as required by the DfT before Network Rail GRIP studies can be progressed. An interim report is to be submitted to the DfT soon. ◆



PHOTO: TREVOR WATSON

PICTURED: Prior to the recent Royal visit to Alnwick, the Royal Train, flanked by DB Schenker N° 67005 *Queen’s Messenger* and N° 67006 *Royal Sovereign*, hides overnight in the Hepscott branch of the Ashington, Blyth and Tyne line (ABT), close to Morpeth Station, with the Her Majesty the Queen on board. Why can’t the ABT be opened for regular passengers if it is fit for the Queen?

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After his diagnosis of MND in 2002, Ken took early retirement but never really slowed down until very recently. He gave talks—subjects including the railways—to the Antiquarian Society, helped found SENRUG, and sang in choirs.

Ken was community spirited, greatly enjoyed family life with Caroline and their three children, and lived a very full life. He never dwelt on his condition, except insofar as it affected his family and those around him. Indeed, he was

at the fore of the campaign to make Morpeth Station wheelchair friendly, taking part in a short film for the local news.

Ken died on Friday 13th May at home surrounded by his family. He will be greatly missed by all. ◆

PICTURED: Hardy's Florist in Morpeth was awarded first prize for its window display on SENRUG's campaign to re-open the Ashington Blyth & Tyne Line during the annual Northumbria Gathering. Thanks to Hardy's and to SENRUG Committee Member Trevor Watson for making the display



AGM Roundup

SENRUG'S AGM was held on Tuesday 5th July. Business included the appointment of the committee: Dennis Fancett (Chair), John Earl (Deputy Chair & Exhibitions), Adrian King (Treasurer), Ronald Hunt (Membership Secretary), Richard Hilton (Newsletter Editor), Andrew Carmichael, Neil Pothecary, Janet Macleod Trotter and Trevor Watson. Richard Hilton stood down as Treasurer.

The meeting closed with the Chair thanking everyone for their ongoing support for SENRUG. ◆

Cautious Welcome to Local Rail Initiatives

SENRUG Chairman Dennis Fancett gives his view on pro-rail action from other local groups.

SENRUG ALWAYS wants to see more people taking an interest in how to improve train services. So, on the one hand, two recent petitions about local rail services is a good thing. But slightly disappointing is that neither organiser sought to work through SENRUG or advise SENRUG of what they were doing.

Maybe they have simply never heard of SENRUG, or perhaps they don't believe it's the best group to represent them. Both possibilities are cause for concern and SENRUG has tried to contact the petition organisers for a mutually beneficial dialogue. We may not agree on everything but working together is surely better than separately. SENRUG members who feel SENRUG is missing an issue or an opportunity can take it up with a committee member or attend a committee meeting if desired.

THE FIRST petition has been started by Morpeth commuters objecting to the re-timing of the former 8.30am Newcastle service. Whilst SENRUG acknowledges that this could

be an issue for some Morpeth passengers, it is those using the stations at Cramlington and Manors who are worst affected, as Morpeth has a CrossCountry service at 8.13am.

The argument about arriving in Newcastle before 9am is not robust as the train only arrived at 8.57am in the old timetable, meaning only an athlete could get through the station barrier gates—let alone into the office—before the clock struck nine.

It should be noted Northern Rail are franchised to run an hourly service, and whatever time within the hour the train runs will inevitably please some and disappoint others. Credit should be given to Northern Rail for eliminating the 80 minute gap that came after 8.30am in the old timetable, making it difficult to reach Newcastle for a 10am meeting.

SENRUG is also keen that the problems with local train timings should not be expressed in a way that implies criticism of the new East Coast timetable which delivers benefits

for Morpeth. Some protesters thought East Coast were to blame for the issue, but whilst Northern Rail must schedule their trains after the inter-city slots have been taken, it is not true to think they have no flexibility at all, so shame on Northern's own Customer Service staff for implying this.

We'd all like to see Northern Rail run a more frequent service, but the body to whom that point should be addressed is the Department for Transport when the consultation on the new franchise commences next year.

Also of interest is that the feasibility study on extending the Morpeth service through to Choppington and Bedlington priced two options with a half-hourly service (including to Cramlington and Morpeth) at just £26,000 per year more than the hourly option.

THE SECOND petition has been started by a group in Seaton Delaval, calling for the Ashington, Blyth & Tyne line (ABT) to be re-opened by extending the Metro.

SENRUG absolutely supports re-opening the ABT and

has had three separate meetings with former Transport Ministers to discuss it. By working closely with Northumberland County Council, SENRUG ensured the scheme is in the Local Transport Plan—a prerequisite for further action—and were delighted when the Association of Train Operating Companies listed it as one of 14 schemes across England that would be cost effective.

SENRUG is not convinced that extending Metro is the best approach since the re-opened line must serve Ashington to generate sufficient passengers to be cost effective—but journey times by Metro over that distance would be too long. SENRUG would have preferred the petition worded in such a way that sets out the problem, rather than insisting on a particular solution. SENRUG's own petition to 10 Downing Street in 2007 followed that principle and attracted over a thousand signatures. ◆

Is SENRUG right to raise concerns about these petitions, or has it missed the mark? Email enquiries@senrug.co.uk.

Montenegro or Bust

SENRUG committee member Neil Pothecary writes about his experiences on the rail system in Montenegro earlier this year.

IN MAY 2011 I had the pleasure of visiting the small southeastern European country of Montenegro, which gained independence in 2006 (although briefly independent for a few years after 1910). Many readers will be familiar with this region in the context of the “Balkan Wars” of the 1990s, but don’t be put off, this is an area of spectacular beauty and friendly people; reasonably inexpensive, it is quite easy to get around with a little planning.

Although we commonly call this country “Montenegro”, its true name is Republika Crna Gora, literally translated from the Serbo-Croatian or Montenegrin languages (very similar, but not quite the same) as meaning “The Republic of the Black Mountain”, a reference to the Dinaric Alps which dominate the whole country.

The main rail axis is the electrified Belgrade (Serbia) to Bar line (25kV at 50Hz), entering Montenegro at the



PICTURED: ZPCG locomotive No. 461-033 stands in Belgrade Station ready to depart with a Belgrade to Bar service.

and infrastructure activities, passenger trains have been operated by Željeznički prevoz Crne Gore AD Podgorica (ŽPCG).

My first rail journey in the country was Podgorica to Bar just after midday on a sunny Sunday. Montenegro uses the Euro (but is not a formal member of the “Eurozone”, nor a member of the EU) and my ticket cost €2.40. On the south side of the modern station, a

at the airport but easily walkable for those without too much luggage.

The coast was reached at the resort town of Sutomore but the station was disappointing, with a lot of graffiti in evidence. A bit further along, Bar station is in very nice condition and has a preserved narrow-gauge locomotive and baggage car.

My second journey was from Bar to Belgrade, just after midday on a very rainy Monday. I was lucky, as the train was provided by ŽPCG; on alternate days, the Serbian Railways run a set of scruffy, graffiti-ridden carriages on this service.

A smart red Romanian-built electric locomotive headed three smart, modern second-class carriages, a buffet car—though I didn’t use this as I stocked up on food at the Bar supermarket the previous day—and a first class compart-

ment carriage where I established myself. The seats were very comfortable and, with the exception of a young man for a few stops on the Serbian side of the border, I had the compartment to myself.

I didn’t need a ticket, instead using a day on my InterRail Pass. The train kept good time in Montenegro but lost two hours in Serbia, arriving in Belgrade close to midnight. Fortunately I booked a hotel that was close to the station.

There was a spot of bother at the border crossing on account of not having the receipt for my stay at the hotel in Podgorica, so anyone planning to go this way should be careful to retain such documents. However, these two inconveniences—and the bad weather—didn’t detract from a really lovely trip through some of the best scenery in Europe. ◆



PICTURED: ZPCG EMU No. 412-049 at Bar Station

border town of Bielo Polje, passing through the capital of Podgorica and ending at the port and resort of Bar on the Adriatic Sea. Construction of the line was a key project of the former Yugoslavia, accomplished with some difficulty due to countless viaducts and tunnels, with long sections running high up along deep valleys. The route opened in 1976. Since the recent separation of passenger, freight

preserved 750mm gauge train can be found—a reminder of the narrow-gauge lines that once served this area.

The local train to Bar was formed of a smart four-car Electric Multiple Unit (EMU) originally built at Riga but smartly refurbished with comfortable red satin seats arranged in conventional facing bays. Air passengers should note that the first station is Aerodrom, not directly

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

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PHOTO: NEIL POTHECARY

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