

McNulty MisGuided, Says SENRUG

Buried deep within an otherwise-welcome McNulty Report is a recommendation to close ticket offices at all "Category E" stations, including Morpeth, Alnmouth, and Berwick. SENRUG issued a press release in response, quoted in the prestigious RAIL magazine.

SENRUG'S KEY response was to point out that McNulty doesn't simply say close the station ticket offices; he also states a prerequisite is "the installation of sufficient modern and easy-to-use TVMs (Ticket Vending

Machines) and provision of adequate information for passengers" (§12.1.6, *Retail*).

But when SENRUG asked intercity operators to install a Fastticket machine for intercity tickets at Morpeth they

said they could not, because such machines require the station to be staffed at all times, and Morpeth is un-staffed during the afternoon.

This catch-22 situation comes about because several Category E stations have inter-city services. Morpeth now has 14 per day. So it should either be upgraded to a higher classification category, or that particular recommendation should be amended to exclude stations with

"The answer is to enhance station facilities to make rail travel more attractive, as passengers do not want to turn up at an empty station with no facilities."

intercity services. SENRUG also queried the massive investment of installing barrier gates at Newcastle if connecting passengers could arrive from Morpeth without a ticket.

SENRUG also supported the McNulty recommendation that, before closure, the rail companies should develop "additional retail outlets, such as newsagents and convenience stores, to sell a limited range of tickets" (§12.1.6, *Retail*). SENRUG pointed out that a coffee shop or convenience store, a children's nursery, or a laundry or ironing drop-off point, which would also sell travel tickets and be able to provide up to the minute train running information, could reduce costs

for the station operator and enhance the facilities available to passengers waiting at the station.

It was also noted that McNulty states the reason regional rail services cost more per mile than inter-city and suburban trains is that fewer people use them (§19.1.1). SENRUG argued that the answer is to enhance

station facilities to make rail travel more attractive, as passengers do not want to turn up at an empty station with no facilities. ♦

The full report by Sir Roy McNulty, entitled *Realising the Potential of GB Rail*, is available to download on the Office of Rail Regulation website at www.linkmeto.it/d3mw. Section references in this article refer to the detailed version of the report.

SENRUG's full press release can be found at www.senrug.co.uk/press-releases.

Northern Rail recently confirmed they are to install a ticket machine at Morpeth Station.

What do you think? Are station facilities the answer? Email your comments to enquiries@senrug.co.uk.

PHOTO: JOHN BRIERLEY



PICTURED: Northern Rail class 142 DMU № 142065 pauses at an un-staffed and deserted Cramlington Station. Could a similar fate await Morpeth too?

Simpler Fares Campaign

A recent public meeting with rail fares expert Alex Nelson, attracted SENRUG's largest ever audience. Prior to that, SENRUG launched a "Simpler Fares" campaign, calling for changes to be made to the overwhelmingly-complex rail fare structure currently in place.

THE CAMPAIGN is to make intercity fares easier to understand, giving customers greater confidence they have bought the cheapest ticket for the journey, and to increase the number of people travelling by train through reducing the hostility many people feel about the current structure.

To be able to travel from Morpeth to London off-peak

for £12.45 is an absolute bargain, but the person sitting next to you could have paid a whopping £111.40 for the same journey because he or she didn't understand the need to buy in advance, or the advantages of getting two singles instead of a return. It's also wrong that for Morpeth to York, savvy customers will

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SPECIAL FEATURE: INTEGRATED TRANSPORT

The North Face Of The Eiger—by Train!

SENRUG Chairman Dennis Fancett travels from Morpeth to the North Face of the Eiger by train, and checks out how integrated transport Swiss style really does work.

BELIEVE IT or not, it's possible to get all the way from Morpeth to Grindelwald, a small town in Switzerland, by train in a single day, thanks to East Coast's new early morning departure from Morpeth at 6.35am, connecting with the Flying Scotsman service at Newcastle and delivering you to London at 9.40am.

The connections are admittedly tight (you would need to negotiate the security checks at St Pancras before catching the 10.25am Eurostar), so we opted to go to London the previous evening using the new direct service from Morpeth at 7.53pm, and stay in a hotel. Our departure from St Pancras at 8.02am the next morning delivered us safely to Grindelwald at 19.35pm, travelling via Paris, Lausanne, Bern and Interlaken Ost.

We booked through Northumbria Travel in Bedlington, who were most helpful, and our Tour Operator Inghams thoughtfully included the Metro tickets for the transfer between Gare du Nord and Gare de Lyon in Paris. This gesture is far more valuable than the cost of the tickets, since Switzerland is a non-Euro zone country, and passengers only transiting through Paris are unlikely to have small change for the Metro tickets.

Astonishingly though, Inghams don't tell you it is necessary to "compost" (date and time stamp) your European TGV tickets in the little yellow machine before getting on the train at Paris which is a serious omission.

In Switzerland itself, there are a variety of trains, mountain railways, cable cars, gondolas, busses and post busses but everything connects

seamlessly and reliably. No problems with the wrong type of snow or leaves on the line here. The five minute connections at Bern and Interlaken Ost on our outward journey were achieved without difficulty, though I took the precaution of checking arrival and departure platforms for each train in advance with the Swiss rail website (www.rail.ch)

If travelling independently, you should book as far as your Swiss gateway city only (e.g. Lausanne or Basel) and then add internal Swiss transfer tickets as these tickets also give you half price travel within Switzerland for any other journey you make or pass you might buy. Remember to book UK tickets to and from "London CIV" or "London Eurostar"; this all important designation entitles you to board the next train if a connection is missed under the European conditions of carriage.

We purchased a Jungfrau region public transport pass—expensive at £99 for 6 days (after the half-price discount) but well worth it, and slightly cheaper to buy in advance before leaving the UK. This gives free travel on all transport in the Jungfrau region except the final section of the mountain railway to Jungfrau-joch itself, for which a supplement is payable.

From Grindelwald, the mountain railway leaves every half hour, and climbs slowly up the north face of the Eiger.



PHOTO: DENNIS FANCETT

Passengers from Grindelwald should note the train reverses direction at the next station (Grund) so sit facing the "wrong" way to start with for the best views for the main part of the journey. A change of trains is necessary at Kleine Scheidegg, from where a second line continues to Eigergletscher at which point

it disappears into tunnels, first through the Eiger itself, then through the Mönch, before emerging at Jungfrau-joch station at 3,454 metres—just below the

Jungfrau summit.

There are two stations within the tunnels at which a five minute stop allows passengers to alight and look out the windows carved into the rocks onto the exterior of the mountains, but no "way out" signs were visible. From these stations only an experienced mountaineer with all the equipment should venture outside.

At Jungfrau-joch it is pos-

sible to leave the bewildering tunnel network and go on to the mountain itself. The views are impressive. We decided to venture across the glacier on a half mile walk through cleared snow to a mountain hut (actually a café and toilet stop). But be warned. The air is very thin and even just small steps take considerable energy, and we found ourselves short of breath at points, taking somewhat longer than the expected 45 minutes each way for the walk. And on no account leave the cleared path as all sorts of dangers lurk beneath the snow.

Public transport in Switzerland is so well integrated that it is not necessarily clear from the timetable whether a particular connection is by train, bus, cable car or some other mode of transport. It's also noteworthy that the Swiss don't seem to have any problem mixing passengers with light freight as most of the mountain railways have trucks on the back. Thus pallets of bricks or cement or bulk foods are often forklifted on to the train out of sight of the passengers. ●

The Swiss have mastered the art of Integrated Transport. What can we in Northumberland learn from them, and how could our transport system be adapted to work properly for the passenger?

Imagine the Nightmare!

How would a Swiss passenger survive in Northumberland? Better provision must be made for tourists if the region is to thrive.

CONSIDER A Swiss tourist, used to a fully integrated transport system, visiting South East Northumberland. Arriving at Morpeth station with no customer information system, no café, and if unfortunate enough to arrive in the afternoon—no ticket office, waiting room or toilet. Station information notices in one language only (is Northumberland serious about international tourism?) and bus stops a considerable distance from the station itself. Once in the town, the X14 bus proudly announcing on its destination

blind it goes to Pegswood Rail Station (from where there are virtually no trains)—but failing (along with all other bus routes) to serve the bus turning circle at Morpeth station. And although we don't have any mountain railways, we do have a rail line along our beautiful coastline from Morpeth to Berwick—but no local trains travel on it. Public transport in Northumberland does not support the tourist industry at all; in Switzerland the economy depends on tourism and tourism depends on the trains. ●

PICTURED LEFT & BELOW: Grindelwald station in Switzerland, surrounded by stunning scenery. Trains are timed to arrive so that convenient connections may be made, and are run to a clockface timetable for the convenience of passengers. Below, the Interlaken train (right) connects seamlessly with the departure for Kleine Scheidegg and Jungfrauoch (left).

PHOTO: DENNIS FANCETT



A Blueprint for Northumberland

Could Northumberland really adopt the Swiss approach to transport? Dennis Fancett suggests a few quick fixes.

At County Level

- » Establish an Integrated Transport Co-ordination Committee consisting of the County Council, the three train operating companies that serve Northumberland, each of the bus companies, and user groups such as SENRUG.
- » Widen the scope of the North East Explorer ticket to include train services operated by Northern Rail, or set up an alternative ticket for Northumberland and Newcastle only, including Newcastle—Morpeth—Alnmouth—Berwick journeys on East Coast and CrossCountry trains, as well as Northern Rail services to Chathill and Morpeth, and along the Tyne Valley.
- » Allow local busses to sell through tickets to Newcastle Airport, including Metro travel from Regent's Centre.

At Morpeth

- » Extend the following buses from Morpeth Bus Station to Morpeth Railway Station: route 35 (from Newbiggin, Ashington & Pegswood) and route 144 (from Rothbury, Longhorsley & Lancaster Park entrance).
- » Divert following bus routes to serve Morpeth Railway Station: Route 2/2A (from Bedlington & Guide Post), route 518 (from Ashington & Stakeford), and M3 (from Lancaster Park).
- » Any valid rail ticket to Morpeth should include free bus travel between the rail and bus stations.
- » Include real time departure information for both busses and trains on Customer Information Systems at Morpeth Station.
- » At least one bus route from Morpeth should serve Newcastle's railway and coach stations. ●

What else could be done to better integrate transport systems in Northumberland? Email suggestions to enquiries@senrug.co.uk.

SENRUG on Full Alert as Alcan Closure Looks Certain

SENRUG, along with the rest of the community, is most concerned to hear the news that the Alcan plant, at the end of the Ashington Blyth & Tyne line, is now scheduled to close.

OUR PRIMARY concern is for the loss of jobs and manufacturing capacity in the UK. But SENRUG is also concerned that if both the smelter and the power station close, and freight traffic ceases on the northern part of the line, Network Rail would either close or mothball the line, making restoration of passenger services

much more costly. SENRUG has suggested the formation of a Development Trust, a charitable company with the power to attract funding and acquire ownership of the line, contracting directly with rail operators to run services. This would only work with full support from the council and would be similar to Durham

County Council's supported creation of the Weardale Railway Trust.

Conversely, if the power station remains open but converts to biomass, SENRUG is concerned that, should a significant increase in freight movements on the line be generated, the ability to reintroduce passenger services

without capacity upgrades would be jeopardised.

The County Council must progress its Network Rail GRIP 4 costing study with greater urgency so the requirement for passenger services is booked with Network Rail before any increase in freight, to avoid the public purse paying for the upgrade. ●

The Beautiful North

The line along the Northumbrian Coast between Morpeth and Berwick is one of the most beautiful in the country. But you'll struggle to catch a train along it, writes Dennis Fancett, SENRUG Chairman

PHOTO: STEVE MILLER



PICTURED: The line from Morpeth to Berwick offers exhilarating views of the Northumberland coast, but only one local train travels the line during the morning and evening peaks, as far as Chathill, pictured here passing the estuary at Alnmouth.

THE EAST Coast Main Line offers unrivalled views of Alnmouth, Holy Island and the spectacular Northumberland coastline. A tourism goldmine, one might think.

Unfortunately, the local service run by Northern Rail offers just one train in the morning and evening peaks. Not only is this too early for tourists and holiday makers (the train leaves Morpeth at 6.15am), but the service terminates at Chathill, thereby excluding beautiful stretches of the coast between that station and Berwick.

Although there are inter-city services run by East Coast and CrossCountry, the skip-stop pattern favoured by these operators means trains that stop at one mid-Northumberland station don't stop at the others. So travelling from Morpeth to, say, Berwick is very difficult, unless making the journey very early in the morning.

Additionally, the advance purchase ticket regime operated by inter-city operators means that for an impulse decision, the cost of a ticket bought on the day is prohibitively expensive for the leisure traveller. Although good deals can be booked three months in advance, who can tell if it will be ideal walking, cycling or even view-gazing weather that far in the future?

Imagine there was a local stopping service, running hourly from Newcastle to Berwick with former stations at places such as Beal and Belford re-opened. Fancy a walk or leisurely bike ride across the causeway to Holy Island? Simple. Get the train to Beal (checking the tide times first!). Or a walk along St Cuthbert's Way? No problem. Take the train to Belford. Or does a walk around the town ramparts at Berwick interest you? The train is your answer.

If a regular local train service actually existed, there is much SENRUG and other in rail user groups in the county could do to promote the line. Guides to walks, bike rides and country pubs from each station, or even "real ale" or "jazz" trains.

In other parts of the country, be it the Settle to Carlisle line, the Cumbrian Coast, the Cornish branches or the Heart of Wales, the lines themselves act as a tourist attraction. People choose

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save money even if travelling on a direct train, by booking separate tickets for Morpeth to Newcastle and Newcastle to York.

SENRUG argues there should be just three fares per class for any rail journey:

- » Red: booked train only.
- » Amber: limited range of trains, limited operators, limited range of dates.
- » Green: any train, any operator, any date (within validity period of ticket).

This is better than the current range of ticket names because, crucially, SENRUG argues there should only be one fare for each journey. Train companies currently have several different fares for the same advance ticket, and as different priced tickets sell out at different rates, it is sometimes possible to find a first class advance ticket at a lower price than the cheapest standard class ticket.

SENRUG also believes there should be a number of "fare guarantee" rules. If you buy a ticket and find the operator has broken the rules, you should get an instant refund.

- » All tickets to be sold as singles, which should be half the return fare.
- » It should never be cheaper to buy two tickets for a journey on a single train.
- » It should never be cheaper to buy a ticket for beyond the station you are travelling to and get off at an earlier stop.
- » Maximum of three fares per class for any journey.
- » Railcard discounts must be available on all fares, subject only to minimum ticket price. ●

More details of SENRUG's campaign and some of the bizarre fare anomalies they want to see eliminated are at www.senrug.co.uk/campaigns/108.

to holiday in these areas just to travel on the scenic routes. Northumberland misses out on inward investment and increased tourism by not offering a reasonable service along its very own Northumbrian Coast line.

But there hope on the horizon. Transport Scotland and Scotrail have commissioned consultants to examine the feasibility of a new Edinburgh to Newcastle service. Initial findings were not positive, though SENRUG believes the consultants did not adequately consider a full local service including stations at the more rural communities. In the worst case they may recommend no new service at all. But pressure in Scotland to re-open smaller stations such as Reston might give weight to the argument to re-open Beal and Belford with a local service.

Northumberland stakeholders should be calling for a proper local service throughout the county when the DfT consultation on the next Northern Rail franchise starts—probably next year—prior to the new franchise commencing in 2013. ●

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

Chairman: Dennis Fancett enquiries@senrug.co.uk
Membership: Ronald Hunt membership@senrug.co.uk
Editor: Richard Hilton newsletter@senrug.co.uk

» www.senrug.co.uk » 01670 825 500 (chairman)