

POSITIVE PASSENGER SURVEY POINTS WAY FORWARD FOR ABT

Northumberland County Council is continuing to develop the case for re-establishing passenger services between Ashington, Blyth (Newsham) and Newcastle - with further stations provided at Woodhorn, Bebside, Bedlington, Seaton Delaval and Northumberland Park (for Metro connections). Park and ride facilities are being considered at Bebside and Woodhorn stations. The latter station will be located on the private railway currently owned by Rio Tinto Alcan.

The Council has recently received a consultancy report that examines the potential passenger use of the line. The study looked at existing travel patterns in South East Northumberland and used a transport demand model to assess how many existing trips would transfer from bus and car, and how many new journeys would be created as a result of

introducing a new and fast rail service to Newcastle that will connect to the entire UK rail network. The study concluded that around 250,000 rail journeys per year would be attracted to the new service, which is sufficient to regard the proposal as viable. County Council officers will brief key officers and members during June and July with a view to getting approval to commence the next stage of work in the Autumn - which will develop engineering designs and costs for the stations, track improvements and signalling upgrades required to accommodate passenger services. A stakeholder engagement group will be set up over the Summer, SENRUG

and Railfuture North East will be important invitees to that Group.

In parallel, the County Council is also looking at how Government money for the capital cost of introducing the new service can be sourced, in the context of the Coalition Government's stated desire to devolve funding decisions to regions, as defined by Local Enterprise Partnership areas. We are positioning the Ashington Blyth and Tyne Line as the number one investment priority for the North Eastern LEP area, and will garner support for this position amongst other local authorities during the summer.

For any further information, please contact Mike Scott at County Hall in Morpeth.

THE RAMP THAT WASN'T - A SLEDGEHAMMER TO CRACK A NUT?

By Trevor Watson

suitable for assisted wheelchairs and prams was removed in the late 1980s, by British Rail, as a consequence of their electrification and resignalling of the East Coast Main Line. No replacement facility was provided, so in the ensuing years the northbound

platform has been a no go area for wheelchair users and a struggle for those less able bodied and persons laden with luggage or users of prams and pushchairs. Two lifts are being provided to link both platforms to the existing subway,



Construction work started earlier this year to improve access between the platforms at Morpeth station. The former barrow crossing, that was

they will be monitored by CCTV. The lifts should be in operation by August this year and will help matters considerably for the aforementioned passengers. A lot of time and expense has gone into the provision of these lifts, an improved electric supply has been run from the Stobhill electric sub station to the railway station to supply the lift motors, a temporary portakabin city has been provided on site and a roadway constructed along the old sidings to the rear of the northbound platform to access the new lift shaft. Add to this a large amount of concrete

and steel, spoil removal, plant and machinery hire and specialist labour hire and you can appreciate how costly this scheme must be.

Was there an alternative less costly solution to this access problem? SENRUG had suggested in the past providing ramps, designed to the appropriate gradients to link both platforms to the subway.

Yes this would require the shortening of the overgrown weed infested hardly used sidings to the rear of the northbound platform, moving lineside cabling and provision of

materials for the construction of the ramps, this is hardly rocket science! One just has to look further south to Chester le Street station to see how simple ramp construction is. Ramps don't break down and require very little maintenance or electricity to run. Lifts which are the preferred choice of the Department of Transport in their specification to Network Rail for station access improvements may prove more problematic, only time will tell.

(Trevor is the local Chairman of Railfuture and a Committee Member)

EAST COAST SEES DOUBLE AT MORPETH

**By Karen Boswell,
Managing Director**

It's a busy summer so far at East Coast – we wouldn't want it any other way!

Just over a year since the biggest change to our timetable for a generation, passenger journey growth to and from Morpeth has more than doubled from 8% in May 2011 to 19% now.

Every four weeks, East Coast is carrying an extra 1,000 passengers to or from Morpeth, with our 09.40 arrival into London, using the 06.35 from Morpeth and changing at Newcastle to the 'Flying Scotsman', especially popular.

A new East Coast timetable with minor changes to services begins on Sunday 25 June. It is very unlikely that there will be major changes to the timetable for the remainder of East Coast's franchise, currently scheduled to finish in December 2013.

However, with such evident support and growth in journeys to and from Morpeth, we will consider if further stops could be possible, and will keep working closely with SENRUG in the meantime and keep you informed of any developments.

The new-look London King's Cross Western Concourse is now open, following a £400 million investment. East Coast's new First Class Lounge is also a hit with passengers. The old concourse – now used for arrivals only – will be replaced next year by a new 7,000 square



metre open-air piazza.

On-board, we've introduced new summer menus to our First Class complimentary service, building on a 21% rise in First Class passenger journeys across the East Coast route between the end of May 2011 and May 2012.

I also enjoyed a great day this month at Newcastle Central Station, when loco number 91115 was named 'Blaydon Races' in honour of the famous North East song's 150th anniversary.

The loco was named by the Centenary 'Queen of the Blaydon Races', Sheila Shorrick-Dodds, still wearing the sash presented to her in 1962 when she won the title to mark the 100 year celebrations. Also there was former England and Newcastle United striker Alan Shearer, recognising the song's importance to North East football fans.

Another East Coast named locomotive, 'Battle of Britain Memorial Flight', is already turning heads since its unveiling by TV's Carol Vorderman in York on 2 June. Thank you for supporting our improvements to services, and for travelling with East Coast.

Photo: Sheila and Karen at the naming ceremony.

SENRUG IN HOT WATER AS IT LOOKS AT NORTH OF MORPETH SERVICE

SENRUG recently landed itself in hot water when it looked to see if the time of the single commuter service north of Morpeth could be improved to attract more passengers, as part of SENRUG's wider campaign to secure a full daytime local service on this route.

The evening train to Pegswood, Acklington, Widdrington and Chathill leaves Newcastle at 17.15 and SENRUG wondered if this was too early as many commuters can no longer be certain of being able to leave their place of work by 17.00.

SENRUG therefore wanted to know if transferring the service to the 17.38 departure from Newcastle would be more convenient, and whether it would attract more passengers. The move would also allow for a minor improvement to southbound times particularly for Cramlington. Northern Rail investigated the proposal and determined it was

technically viable and invited SENRUG to obtain views of the existing commuters.

But the passengers currently using the service made it quite clear they did not want to see any changes. Some even responded very angrily and wrote strong letters of protest, whilst others queried SENRUG's mandate to represent them.

So why did SENRUG take the initiative of looking at this issue?

Firstly, SENRUG believes that a key criterion for achieving an improvement in service is to get more passengers using the trains we already have. It is therefore legitimate to look at whether it is running at the most optimum time for the majority of potential users.

Secondly, SENRUG was alarmed at the few numbers of people using the current service, just 8 passengers north of Morpeth professing themselves to be regular daily commuters on the day of our survey, though obviously there would be others who for various reasons were not on the train on that particular day. SENRUG believes that urgent action is therefore needed to secure future sustainability of the service.

It is interesting to note the 2 parish councils that responded to the consultation both supported the proposed change, presumably because they believed it was in the best overall interest of their communities.

It must be said SENRUG was rather taken aback at the hostility it received; there was little appreciation of the work SENRUG is doing to improve rail services generally or in particular of our campaign to see a regular service north of Morpeth. It is difficult for SENRUG to represent those who choose not to join, but the membership fee has been set at just £5 per annum for employed individuals to avoid there being any financial barrier. SENRUG is not aware of any other group seeking to improve the local rail service north of Morpeth.

The consultation window has now closed and SENRUG has fed the results back to Northern Rail who will make the final decision taking into account both the consultation responses and other marketing information eg the impact of other potential passengers.



A passenger stands by one of the new coachboards, a positive improvement by Senrug meaning that checking a reservation is easy. To join us, go to www.senrug.co.uk

It's Official - Almost!

Senrug understands Network Rail has confirmed that they will be upgrading Morpeth Station to Category D status. This means that it is less likely that the Booking Office will be shut, and it may mean that facilities are improved.

SENRUG SETS OUT RAIL STRATEGY FOR NORTHUMBERLAND

At its public meeting on 18th April 2012 at Morpeth Town Hall, SENRUG set out its rail strategy for the whole of Northumberland:

1. The existing Newcastle to Morpeth service should be upgraded to half-hourly frequency, along with an evening and Sunday service added, as currently enjoyed by the Tyne Valley line. The key date for action would be when government requests input on the Northern and Transpennine Express franchise renewals.
2. There should be a regular daytime local service north of Morpeth, eventually extending all the way to Berwick and with Belford and Beal stations reopened. Besides helping commuters in communities such as Widdrington, this would also open up tourism and leisure opportunities in the north of the county. The line could be marketed as “The Northumbrian Coast Line”. A station at Beal for instance could be complemented by an adjoining cycle hire facility offering biking opportunities across the flat causeway to Holy Island or around Budle Bay.
3. The Ashington Blyth & Tyne should be reopened for passenger use to provide eventually a half-hourly service between Newcastle and Ashington with a metro interchange at Northumberland Park and stations at Seaton Delaval, Newsham for Blyth, Bebside and Bedlington. The service should also extend beyond Ashington to a new station at Woodhorn that would create an off-peak flow to the Woodhorn exhibition as well as serving as a Park and Ride facility. Ultimately, it may be possible to extend to Newbiggin.
4. On the main line, alternate MetroCentre - Newcastle – Cramlington – Morpeth services should be extended with an hourly service going on to a reopened Choppington and Bedlington and the other service extending northwards to Berwick as previously mentioned.
5. Once the new (Aln Valley) line is open to Alnwick there will be a demand for through services from Newcastle. But it is likely there will be capacity constraints on the East Coast Main Line, so SENRUG suggests the existing mineral line from Ashington to Butterwell should be earmarked. The key opportunity for this route will be at the end of opencast operations, when UK Coal looks to hand the land back to the community.
6. For Blyth, it should be possible to devise a route using older lines into or around the town centre. A shuttle service between Blyth and Newsham stations could be extended to Northumberland Park initially. Longer term, if the shuttle were provided by Metro, services from Blyth could extend along Metro tracks using the service route between Four Lane Ends and Regent Centre to form a link to the Airport, providing better access to jobs for people in Blyth.
7. The former trackbed from Airport to Ponteland remains intact with the exception of over-building at the Airport roundabout. This link could be reopened thus providing a Metro style service between Blyth via Northumberland Park and Airport to Ponteland.

SENRUG’s strategy is very much visionary with core short term objectives being re-opening the ABT as far as Woodhorn and doubling the frequency of the Morpeth service. The other proposals are longer term objectives, but SENRUG requests the Council to use its powers to prevent any further over-building of earmarked routes and to monitor opportunities such as the new Transport Scotland study and the end of opencasting on the Butterwell route.

SENRUG has offered to present its strategy to the full Council or to the Council Executive. The Council has also created its own Public Transport Strategy looking at mainly complementary objectives such as integrated ticketing and bus / rail interchanges, although a comprehensive Rail Strategy is not on offer at present. But SENRUG is pleased to note the Council document also includes the desire to provide a north of Morpeth local service, as well as re-affirming its commitment to the reopening of the Ashington Blyth & Tyne line

SHOW YOUR SUPPORT FOR A REAL FUTURE FOR RAIL IN NORTHUMBERLAND- COME ALONG TO THE AGM ON WEDNESDAY JULY 11th AT 7.30pm IN THE TOWN HALL MORPETH!

Join us at www.Senrug.co.uk

