

PROGRESS AT LAST!

by Dennis Fancett, chair of SENUG




Why are we waiting?

After being held in a state for 6 months, waiting for the Council to be commissioned to commission the GRIP 4 study, it is a relief that the plan has been agreed through an order of the Council's Executive Committee. SENUG is now waiting to see when the study will be commissioned.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Why are we waiting?
 Why Commissioning explains what the Council's Executive Committee has agreed to do.
 Why Commissioning explains what the Council's Executive Committee has agreed to do.

SENUG is delighted to report Northumberland County Council has finally commissioned the all

important GRIP Stages 1 – 3 Study from Network Rail, for the re-introduction of passenger services on the Ashington Blyth & Tyne Line.

Some people will think “why do we need yet another study? We’ve had several already!” But this is the important one. It’s impossible to re-introduce passenger rail services into the National Rail Network without going through the Network Rail procedure, and this is the first stage of their process (which is known as “GRIP” – standing for Governance for Rail Investment Projects).

After this, yet a further study – the GRIP 4 – will be needed, as Network Rail cost out the preferred solution. And then it will be down to the County Council to find the money to fund the scheme. We can expect them to be looking for funding support from a range of regional and national bodies as well as Northumberland’s own resources.

So, it’s an important and critical step, and we congratulate the County Council for taking it, and reaffirming the reopening is their top public transport priority. Yet SENUG still has concerns. Primarily there needs to be some kind of brake on Network Rail which checks them from over-engineering the scheme and coming up with a solution beyond what is necessary, in turn making it too expensive. Secondly SENUG is concerned about the

length of time it may take to complete the studies, and hopes this can be significantly reduced due to the volume and robustness of the earlier consultants’ studies.

SENUG has suggested the Council sets up a Stakeholder Liaison Group including all the interested stakeholder partners along with SENUG and there is every chance the Council will proceed with this suggestion.

SENUG wants to see this scheme shovel ready – fully costed and ready to go, so that the next time central government decides greater investment in infrastructure is needed to get the economy moving – particularly in the North East, they have a scheme ready to back.

Right at the moment for instance, the DfT has established a “new station” fund, and is receiving and approving bids for a range of locations in different local authority areas. There is money available for schemes that are costed and ready.

But the announcement from the County Council is good news, and along with the recently delivered lifts and CIS Screens at Morpeth and the drastically improved inter-city timetable from 2011, it is surely evidence that campaigning does reap benefits. SENUG continues to focus on winning both train service and station facility improvements at Cramlington, Pegswood and Widdrington.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

SENUG outlines its aspirations for the next Northern franchise.



A lone steam charter train travels through Seaton Delaval? Could it soon be joined by a regular passenger service?

Northern Franchise Aspirations

by Dennis Fancett



A Northern Rail train at Cramlington. Could service be doubled to every half hour?

WITH the extended Northern Rail franchise now expiring in February 2016, SENRUG expects the DfT to shortly commence a consultation asking Stakeholders what they want to see in the next franchise specification.

The new management arrangements for the next franchise are unclear. The DfT have been considering a number of arrangements. One option is that ongoing management of the franchise is devolved to a local body such as a consortium of North East local authorities. The TransPennine Express franchise expires at the same time so this could mean merging the two franchises then splitting them into smaller, geographic units.

Either way, SENRUG has decided its focus should be not on who manages the franchise but on ensuring its aspirations for South East Northumberland are fully considered. A summary of what SENRUG believes should be mandatory commitments of the new franchise holder are given below.

Train Services

- Re-introduction of Passenger Services on Ashington Blyth & Tyne Line.
- Service frequency of Newcastle – Cramlington – Morpeth service increased to half hourly, plus an evening and Sunday service. (This could be achieved by extending the TransPennine Express services from Liverpool on to Cramlington and Morpeth instead of letting the trains sit idle at Newcastle for 55 minutes before commencing their return journey).

- Alternate Northern Rail services to Morpeth extended to Pegswood and Widdrington (giving a 2 hourly service throughout the day to these stations, improving the choice for commuters and meeting the public transport demands for the Blue Sky Forest Leisure and Housing development at Widdrington).
- Alternate Northern Rail services to Morpeth extended to Choppington and Bedlington (giving a 2 hourly service to a new station at Choppington and connecting to the re-opened Ashington Blyth & Tyne line service at Bedlington).
- Commitment to carry out full feasibility and costing study on a Northumberland Coast service, extending the 2 hourly service to Widdrington on to Acklington, Alnmouth for Alnwick, Chathill, re-opened stations at Belford and Beal then Berwick. (This would open up the north of the county for tourism and leisure, providing access from the densely populated south.)

Stations

- All stations should have level access to all platforms, waiting shelters on all platforms and some means of advising passengers of live train running information, such as Customer Information Screens. This would require the franchise operator to provide level access at Manors and CIS Screens (or alternative solution) at Manors, Cramlington, Pegswood, Widdrington, Acklington & Chathill.
- All stations which also serve inter-city trains should additionally have a staffed ticket office, customer toilet facilities and customer waiting room which should all be open for 8 hours a day on Mondays to Saturdays. (This would require the franchise holder to retain and extend the opening hours for Morpeth’s Ticket Office.

Rolling Stock

- Replacement of the Pacers with quieter, more comfortable and disabled friendly trains during the life of the franchise period.

If other stakeholders such as the County, Town and Parish Councils and other Rail User Groups all support these aspirations and make similar responses to the DfT there is every chance we could see the introduction of a much improved rail service in the County.

Join SENRUG

If you support our work, please join us. The more people we speak for the louder our voice is heard. Annual Rates are £5 individual or couple, £2.50 concession or £10 corporate. Send a cheque payable to SENRUG with your name, full address including postcode and email address (if you have one) to SENRUG Membership Secretary, PO Box 75, Morpeth NE61 2WG. Or to pay by standing order download a Membership Form from www.senrug.co.uk

Ticket Machine Fault?

By Dennis Fancett

SENRUG has asked the Train Companies for guidance as to what passengers should do if they arrive at Morpeth Station to collect a pre-paid ticket prior to travel, and find that the single ticket machine is out of service.

Each of Northern Rail, East Coast and CrossCountry responded to our request and the consensus answer is that if the Ticket Office is open you should report your difficulty there (*but make sure you do not buy a replacement ticket and end up paying twice - DF*).

Failing that, board the train on which you are scheduled to travel and explain the position to the conductor, who should then use their discretion to permit travel. (SENRUG recommends you always take your booking confirmation with you, either as a hard copy printout or electronically on your mobile phone). Note that train conductors do have the ability to phone their control centres to verify the machine is indeed out of service.

You should then collect your tickets at the next available opportunity, ie if changing at Newcastle, from a machine there. Even if your ticket was ordered to be collected from Morpeth station, it can still apparently be collected from other stations should that be necessary. If you are not changing en route, collect your ticket from the machine at your arrival station (especially if you booked a return journey).



A lift is now available to long-distance passengers using Morpeth's northbound platform

If any SENRUG member experiences difficulty on a journey, please let us know.

Finally – allow plenty of time before travel to collect your ticket bearing in mind there might be a queue. Also, it has been noticed that sometimes when the machine is saying “out of service” it is simply re-booting itself – check again 5 minutes later and it might be working.

LET'S CELEBRATE!

By Dennis Fancett



Our regular passenger from Morpeth to Aberdeen discovers the lifts are now working!

CAMPAIGNERS have been calling for level access to Morpeth's platforms for 25 years – long before the formation of SENRUG. And at last we have it.

Not just the lifts, but the new CIS Screens, the subway cladding, ticket machine and car park extension.

OK, some things still need a bit of tweaking or are yet to be finished, but the last 12 months has seen a significant improvement to the station facilities, thanks to campaigning by SENRUG.

NB: If you experience difficulty in using the lift or notice they are out of service for an extended period of time, please report to Northern Rail and if not resolved swiftly, advise SENRUG as well.

Join our Facebook group:
[facebook.com/SENRUG](https://www.facebook.com/SENRUG)

Delightful Destinations 3: The Isle of Wight

by Daniel Nesbitt



DESPITE being 148 sq Miles in size, the Isle of Wight offers a huge variety of things to see and do. From the beautiful thatched cottages in Shanklin's old village, stunning coastline around the south of the Island, the majestic hills in the centre through to the fantastic beaches and parks to explore. It's not just the natural beauty that is impressive, there is of course Osborne House which was Queen Victoria's favourite residence, the cosmopolitan town of Newport and the Riviera feel of Fishbourne and Yarmouth with their marinas. Best of all, the island still retains its 1930s postcard feel of what a warm traditional British resort would have been in the heyday of the seaside resorts, something that is sadly lacking in so many resort towns these days. But of course the best thing (*well from my point of view anyway!*) about the Isle of Wight is the trains.



Just like the island itself, the remaining railways on the Isle of Wight are also unique. The "National Rail" or *Island Line* portion of the railway uses old London Underground tube stock dating back to 1938. The trains still retain most of their wooden panels and their comfortable sprung seating. Many of the stations retain a lot of their original features, particularly Ryde St. Johns Road and Brading. For those who prefer steam, the Isle of Wight Steam Railway operates between part of the old line from Newport to

Smallbrook Junction and offers convenient interchange with the main service at its Smallbrook Junction terminus.

Travel is either via East Coast to London Kings Cross, then London Underground to Waterloo and then South West Trains to Portsmouth Harbour for the ferry to Ryde Pier Head connecting seamlessly with Island Line trains to Ryde Esplanade or stations to Shanklin. Or, for those that do not wish to cross London by underground, travel via CrossCountry from Newcastle to Winchester then South West Trains to Portsmouth Harbour. An alternative route to Yarmouth is also available either via London Kings Cross, then South West Trains from Waterloo to Brockenhurst, South West Trains to Lymington Pier then Ferry to Yarmouth or again via CrossCountry from Newcastle to Oxford then a 2nd CrossCountry train from Oxford to Brockenhurst. The rather less crowded ferry crossing from Lymington takes you to the east of the island but does not connect with Island Line trains (but through rail tickets to Yarmouth are still available). For those not wishing to cross London by underground, remember to type in "via Birmingham" to get the CrossCountry route to the ferry terminals. Once on the island, a large variety of tickets is available, ranging from standard singles and returns through to integrated tickets that are valid on the steam railway, travel on the train, ferry or hovercraft and even tickets valid on the Stagecoach bus services on the mainland.

Public Meeting and AGM

SENUG's next Public Meeting will be on Wednesday 10th July 2013 at Morpeth Town Hall, from 19.30 with guest speaker Richard Allan, Area Director of Northern Rail. Come and hear what Richard has to say and take your opportunity to put questions to a senior manager of one of the rail companies serving this area (we will limit questions to those relevant to Northern Rail). Refreshments are available, and you don't have to be a SENUG member to come to the meeting. We look forward to seeing you.

This meeting will also be our AGM. This is an opportunity for SENUG members to comment on how well you think your organisation is being run. If you are interested in joining our committee, please let us know. As we don't have a maximum number for our committee and are always keen to receive fresh input, it is unlikely your request will be put to a vote. If you would like to stand for any of our specific positions such as Chair, Deputy Chair, Treasurer, Secretary, Membership Secretary or Newsletter Editor, please email enquiries@senrug.co.uk before the meeting.

What would you like to see in the SENUG 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: Daniel Nesbitt danielhez1@gmail.com
www.senrug.co.uk - [facebook.com/SENUG](https://www.facebook.com/SENUG)