



Photo credit: John Williamson

# Ashington, Blyth and Tyne Update

A range of options are still being considered but will likely focus on the following:

- An hourly train service between Ashington and Newcastle increasing to every half hour during peak times;
- Intermediate station stops to cater for the communities including Bedlington and Blyth, with an additional stop at Northumberland Park providing opportunities for interchange and onward travel on the Tyne & Wear Metro system as well as access to key employment areas in North Tyneside;
- Park and Ride station adjacent to the A189 west of Blyth, with the option of extending to a second Park and Ride site at Woodhorn;
- Associated capacity, line speed and signalling improvements to support passenger services alongside forecast freight usage.

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

**SEN RUG's Dennis Fancett looks back on East Coast's historic locomotive naming event**

**Foreword:** There was some confusion over the summer months about the County Council's position on the Ashington Blyth & Tyne re-opening. To resolve this, SENRUG has asked the Council to directly contribute an article for our Newsletter giving the current status. In addition to the article below from Stuart McNaughton, Strategic Transport Manager, we also understand that Barry Rowland, Corporate Director of Local Services and Ian Lavery MP for Wansbeck met the Secretary of State for Transport on 4th September to discuss the scheme. As yet we have had no specific feedback from that meeting, though we look forward to the establishment of the Stakeholder Group as mentioned in Stuart's article. The failure of the County Council to obtain immediate prioritisation of the scheme from the regional Local Transport Board does seem to be a real setback; quite possibly the Council's efforts were hampered by the untimely re-opening of the debate re heavy rail or Metro solutions which seems to have been triggered by an unfortunate passing comment in Lord Adonis's recent report to the North East Local Enterprise Partnership. -Dennis Fancett, Chair of SENRUG

**Stuart McNaughton, Strategic Transport Manager, Northumberland County Council writes:**

IT has long been an aspiration of Northumberland County Council to reintroduce passenger services on the Ashington, Blyth and Tyne rail line whilst maintaining, and where possible improving, freight capacity. The introduction of passenger services would improve accessibility and economic linkages within the local area and with neighbouring Tyne and Wear, an important source of employment for residents of South East Northumberland. This remains the top priority of the authority and work is currently ongoing with Network Rail to develop the proposals further.

The authority has already commissioned studies to identify and evaluate potential options for the scheme. The initial business case work has predicted approximately 250,000 annual passenger journeys by 2025 and the financial appraisal suggests a declining subsidy requirement into the future.

Successful delivery of passenger services on the line is a major challenge and will require close coordination and the support of a wide group of stakeholders. Northumberland County Council is fully engaged with this process, having committed £750,000 of corporate funding to support scheme development over the next 2 years, and a clear forward programme is emerging to give the proposals every chance of success.

Ongoing liaison with Network Rail will be central to the successful delivery of the project and they have been commissioned to undertake the initial project development with a view to identifying a scheme development programme and associated scheme costs at which point a benefit to cost ratio will be defined. This process is still in its initial stages and detailed project timescales will emerge in early 2014 once Network Rail has completed the early feasibility work.

*Article continues on the next page...*

## Ashington, Blyth and Tyne Update

*Continued from previous page.*

Whilst Northumberland County Council are seeking the introduction of passenger services on the Ashington, Blyth and Tyne rail line, the line has for many years been used to successfully transport freight within the region. Going forward, the requirements for freight use will be an important component of the proposed development to ensure a solution is identified that best meets the needs of all interested parties and supports the local economy.

A critical element in the development of the scheme is to identify potential sources of funding to support the scheme. The authority will continue to progress the scheme through the North East Local Transport Board as part of the local major scheme prioritisation process. The scheme was not identified as an immediate priority for the first tranche of major scheme funding because of lack of clarity around delivery at this point in time. However, due to the regional significance of the scheme it will continue to be an aspiration and will be considered for later rounds of major scheme funding. Other sources of national and local funding, as well as private sector partners, are currently being explored.

Going forward, it is critical that the work programme pays due regard to other time constraints such as the specification for the next North of England passenger rail franchise. The new franchise is due to start in February 2016, so we are working to have the Ashington, Blyth and Tyne line included in the franchise specification as a “priced option” to ensure that the scheme can be considered as part of the refranchising process. In parallel, other delivery options such as community rail are also being investigated.

In the coming months, the authority is committed to monitoring and driving progress for the reintroduction of passenger services onto the Ashington, Blyth and Tyne rail line and has now established the governance arrangement and a stakeholder group to ensure that this scheme remains a top priority. ■

## 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](http://www.senrug.co.uk) ■



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

## Morpeth Subway Woes

By Trevor Watson



Photo credit: Trevor Watson

▲ Water ingress has added to the poor ambiance of Morpeth station's subway.

**SINCE** the new lifts came into operation at Morpeth station, I could not stop thinking the subway looked unfinished, in respect of the new cladding and water ingress. A trip I did in June to Llandudno involved a change of trains at Warrington Bank Quay station. Here I had to use the subway, which in the past had been rather dilapidated, a bit like Morpeth's subway. The transformation at Warrington was impressive, with full height panelling to the walls and stairs and ceiling cladding with bright lighting, this looked and felt like a properly designed scheme, compared with what we presently have at Morpeth. I suggested to Northern Rail management, that they ask the Network Rail design team responsible for the Morpeth situation to talk to the designers of the Warrington scheme to see if they could improve the situation at Morpeth. Returning to Morpeth from Holyhead on the last Sunday in September, I was pleased to see that some work has started on the stair walls and hope that the finished result is as good as the accompanying pictures of the subway at Warrington show what can be achieved. ■

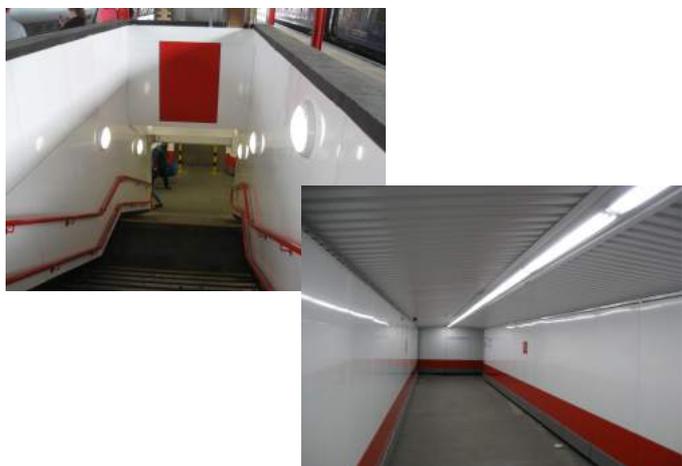


Photo credit: Trevor Watson

▲ The recent refurbishment work done at Warrington shows what can be achieved.

# Customer Information Screens – Room For Improvement

By Dennis Fancett



**The CIS system at Morpeth shows the 10.49 service is on time, despite it being 10 minutes past its scheduled departure time.**

**WHEN** is a late train not actually late? Here at Morpeth, where on Thursday 18th July, the newly installed CIS system proudly shows the 10.49 is still on time, despite it being 10 minutes past its scheduled departure time. This leaves bewildered customers wondering if the train has actually gone (did it pass through invisibly without us seeing it?) or is it late, and if so how late? Will I miss my connection at Newcastle? Should I abandon my journey altogether? If CIS is designed to provide answers to these kind of questions then sad to say in this case it failed miserably.

As it happened, the train was simply late, but the CIS served no useful purpose since it did not tell you how late it would be. All you could do was wait on the platform until the train arrived.

But it's not just Morpeth that has problems with its CIS. Here at Newcastle on Saturday 6th July 2013, the CIS at platform 4 advises passengers that the current train is the delayed 17.58 East Coast to London. It isn't. With the CrossCountry logo just visible in the photo, it is in fact the



equally delayed 17.44 to Bristol Temple Meads. On this occasion, a failed train at Berwick meant all southbound services from Scotland were running late, with an earlier East Coast train cancelled completely and the next carrying a double load of passengers. In such a scenario, we might have expected a full complement of station staff

on platforms 3 and 4 to assist confused and delayed passengers. But not one member of staff was visible. No-one to whom the incorrect CIS could be reported.

This isn't just poor Customer Service. It's poor operations. With any luck the train conductor was making on-train announcements that this was not the East Coast train. Some customers having boarded would then be turning round to get off, but finding their way blocked by yet more passengers getting on. It all adds extra delay minutes not just to this train but to the queue of delayed southbound trains now waiting outside the station. A slot missed, another train allowed to go in front – soon a further 5 or 10 minutes further delay is added. SENRUG's verdict? **"Must do better!"** ■

# SENRUG Announce Mobile App project with Newcastle University

By Daniel Nesbitt

**SENRUG** is delighted to announce its involvement in a Smartphone App project in partnership with the School of Computing Science at Newcastle University. A final year Computing Science undergraduate student will be collaborating with SENRUG to produce a Smartphone App that will enable SENRUG members, supporters and the general public to engage with SENRUG while on the go as well as getting the most out of their local rail services.



The project aims to develop an App that will:

- Enable users to quickly find out their nearest rail station in South East Northumberland.
- Find out live train arrivals/departures from their local station.
- Find out about SENRUG campaigns in the station's locality.
- Offer easy access to the SENRUG newsletters and other information such as how to join SENRUG.

The project is in its initial stages, however we will keep our readers up to date with all of the latest information on the development of the App as the project continues throughout the next year.

For further information or enquiries regarding the App project, please email Daniel Nesbitt at [daniel.nesbitt@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:daniel.nesbitt@ncl.ac.uk) ■

*The Android robot is reproduced or modified from work created and shared by Google and used according to terms described in the Creative Commons 3.0 Attribution License.*

## Durham Cathedral Loco Naming Event

By Dennis Fancett

**EAST** Coast Trains invited SENRUG Chair Dennis Fancett to their formal Loco Naming Ceremony at Newcastle station on 3rd July, in which one of their locomotives was named “The Durham Cathedral” commemorating the temporary return of the Lindisfarne Gospels to Durham.

A number of East Coast’s stakeholders were present including SENRUG Committee member Trevor Watson in his capacity of Chair of RailFuture North East branch, and former committee member Richard Hilton, part of the delegation from Durham Cathedral.

The arrival of the set into Newcastle Station with its special Durham Cathedral / Lindisfarne Gospels livery was met with gasps of approval from the assembled stakeholders. There was a short naming ceremony in which the The Railway Chaplain was invited to “bless” the loco, commenting he had been advised to make sure his holy water did not touch the overhead electric wires!



SENRUG member Richard Hilton, representing Durham Cathedral, stands with a replica of the Lindisfarne Gospels next to the train. Photo credit: David Hilton

After the loco naming, East Coast then invited their stakeholders to join them for a complimentary journey on the train during which their Managing Director Karen Boswell and other members of their senior management team made themselves available to listen to stakeholders’ concerns and discuss service issues. Dennis was able to talk to Karen about the viability of Morpeth calls for additional East Coast services (especially off peak), then separately discuss the redevelopment of Newcastle Station with East Coast Property Director Tim Hedley-Jones, requesting that sufficient customer seating be provided to deal with the number of passengers affected by at least one significantly delayed train.

These events are more than East Coast seeking to put pride back into railway operations by returning to the practice of naming locomotives, welcome though that is. They serve as an extremely innovative and useful stakeholder event in which East Coast's senior managers genuinely listen to suggestions and concerns. SENRUG finds them most useful and is pleased to be invited. ■

## Delightful Destinations 4: A Grand Day Out

By Daniel Nesbitt



Photo credit: JThomas, released under CC BY-SA 2.0

**FOR** a day out with a difference, getting a Tyne & Tees Day Ranger is an excellent choice. Costing just £20 for adults, £10 for children and £13.20 for railcard holders (prices correct at 27/10/13), it also offers outstanding value for money too.

The Tyne & Tees day ranger is valid on most services in the North East; from Morpeth, across to Hexham and down to Northallerton via Eaglescliffe. The ranger also enables you to make an unlimited number of trips in the area covered – perfect for those who enjoy hopping on and off the train.

The North East has some fantastic places to visit, here are just a few you can reach with the Tyne & Tees ranger:

**Saltburn:** A lovely Victorian seaside resort. Be sure to check out its Victorian cliff lift and pier (pictured above). For good food, I recommend Signals Bistro next to the Station and Vista Mar next to the pier.

**Shildon:** The railway museum Locomotion is a short walk from the station. Locomotion offers a large variety of trains on public display and has free entry too.

**Whitby:** A historic and vibrant seaside town, the boat trips are one of my favourites. The Esk Valley Line to Whitby offers stunning scenery and is a marked contrast to the equally stunning countryside typically seen when going by car.

**Hexham and the Tyne Valley:** The Tyne Valley is synonymous with Hadrian's Wall, however the historic market town of Hexham also has a lot to offer with its Abbey and Gaol.

To find out more about the Tyne & Tees Day Ranger, as well as other Day Rangers in the North East, check out Northern Rail's North East Rangers website:

<http://www.northernrail.org/tickets/dayrangers/Explore+the+North+East> ■

**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:** Daniel Nesbitt danielnez1@gmail.com  
[www.senrug.co.uk](http://www.senrug.co.uk) - [facebook.com/SENRUG](https://www.facebook.com/SENRUG)