

# FOCUS ON CRAMLINGTON



By Dennis Fancett

**SEN RUG'S** campaigns and aspirations for Cramlington have been stated in various different papers and responses over the years, but here SEN RUG Chair Dennis Fancett (for whom Cramlington is his local station) puts together in a single article a list of all our objectives that deliver improvements for passengers using this station.

## Rail Services

- Existing Cramlington service doubled to every half hour, with hourly evening and Sunday services added. SEN RUG believes there is a very real opportunity to achieve this from the start of the next franchise, by extending the current Liverpool / Manchester to Newcastle services (which wait idle at Newcastle station for 55 minutes before returning south) on to Cramlington & Morpeth, and has discussed the idea with First TransPennine Express who currently operate this service.
- Current MetroCentre to Morpeth via Cramlington service extended: alternate (i.e. 2-hourly) trains run on to Pegswood and Widdrington, and the other train extended to Choppington and Bedlington, connecting with the re-opened ABT.
- Feasibility Study in to extending the 2-hourly service to Widdrington on to Berwick via Ackington, Alnmouth, Chathill and re-opened stations at Belford and Beal. This would both create a Northumberland Coast service and give smaller communities access to jobs at Cramlington and Newcastle. (SEN RUG believes there is an opportunity to deliver this through liaison with Transport Scotland who are looking to introduce a new service between Edinburgh and Berwick with some local stations re-opened, but may

find it more commercially viable to extend it further south to Newcastle).

- Commitment to new rolling stock to replace the unpopular Pacer fleet on the current MetroCentre to Morpeth service during the life of the next franchise.

## Station Facilities

- CIS – that is “Customer Information System” – screens giving details of next train departure and whether on time should be installed at Cramlington. SEN RUG will lobby for it to be made a franchise commitment for the new local franchise holder from 2016 to install CIS at every station in their franchise area currently without it.

- SEN RUG is aware of a growing issue with parking at Cramlington station, worsened by some non-rail users now using the station car park, which needs to be resolved without introduction of charges for genuine rail travellers.

## Access to Station

- The bus that serves Nelson Village (currently 57 and 57a) should be extended to call additionally at the station turning circle.
- Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust has announced they will introduce a bus to link the new A&E hospital on the A189 with Cramlington Manor Walks. SEN RUG has written to them requesting the bus be extended to Cramlington Station – pointing out that as a “blue light A&E hospital only” serving victims of road traffic accidents on the A1 and A189, it is highly likely that any patients unfortunate enough to find themselves being treated in the hospital will be from outside the region. Hence visitors will be from outside the area and will need good rail access to the hospital. The NHS have responded, noting the point and saying it is under consideration.
- The footpath leading south from the station under the A1172 should be given improved street lighting and signposted / promoted as a walking / cycling route to Manor Walks Shopping Centre.

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## SENUG Awarded Highly Commended Status for Best Campaign Group

SENUG Press Release issued 2nd Jan 2014



**SENUG**, the group that campaigns for better rail transport in South East Northumberland, has stated it is delighted to have been awarded the “highly commended” category in the prestigious national Railfuture awards for the best local rail campaign group.

The award winners were announced at Railfuture's recent annual conference in Oxford by rail writer and Railfuture president Christian Wolmar, but as SENUG was unable to be present at Oxford, the Certificate was presented to SENUG by Trevor Watson, Chair of Railfuture North East branch, at a special ceremony at Morpeth Station on 22nd December 2013.

SENUG is perhaps best known for its tireless campaign to see passenger rail services re-introduced on the Ashington Blyth & Tyne line with a regular service from Woodhorn and Ashington to Newcastle, providing access to jobs and helping to re-invigorate the local economy. But it also campaigns on a number of other fronts and in recent years has secured an improvement to the peak hour inter-city services at Morpeth and an enhancement to facilities at the station such as the recently installed Customer Information Screens.

Dennis Fancett, Chair of SENUG, made the following comment on receiving the award: “We are delighted our campaigning efforts have been recognised and the award is a tribute to everyone on our committee who gives up hours of their time voluntarily to make our organisation the success it is. But we are not complacent. There is still so much to achieve. In addition to pushing harder for faster progress on the ABT re-opening, we want to see the local rail service to Cramlington and Morpeth doubled to every 30 minutes, with an evening and Sunday service added, we need a north of Morpeth local service initially to Pegswood and Widdrington, we need Customer Information Systems at every station along the line and more inter-city off-peak

services at Morpeth.”

Roger Blake, Railfuture Director and RUG Awards organiser said “The judging panel of four Railfuture Vice-Presidents wished to commend SENUG for their steadfast determination in pursuit of their vision. The award gives due recognition to the substantial progress made by one of the most effective of such locally-based campaigns.”

Trevor Watson, Chair of Railfuture North East branch, added: “This is a well earned award for SENUG and it is particularly pleasing to see the efforts of groups in the north east of the country recognised in this way. I’m delighted their hard work came to the attention of the judging panel”.

SENUG invite those who support their efforts to join the group and applications forms can be downloaded from [www.senrug.co.uk](http://www.senrug.co.uk). The Certificate presented to SENUG is currently on display in the Ticket Office at Morpeth Station. ■

### Focus on Cramlington

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**The icing on the cake:** Has a golden opportunity has just been missed in as much that the recent re-development of Manor Walks and the replacement of the Beacon Hill footbridge was the obvious point to consider moving the entire station a few hundred metres to the south, so that it would be located immediately to the west of Manor Walks Shopping Centre and connected by the subway under Westmoreland Way? The town has developed in such a way that the station now finds itself located in an inaccessible corner away from the town centre and main shopping area. Subject to feasibility the new site would have provided a much more integrated station perhaps with a new adjacent bus station as well. It is worth noting the stations at Morpeth and Newcastle are both some distance from the main shopping areas and this would have given Cramlington an advantage over its neighbours. Manor Walks owners might have contributed to the cost. Come on Council Planners – think big and grasp opportunities! ■

### Calling All Schools

**SENUG** is planning a competition for all schools in the region to mark the 50th Anniversary of the ABT Closure. Student teams are being asked to produce a short DVD to demonstrate the business case for re-opening the line. There is a cash prize for the winning school, and the student team and teacher will be invited to the Houses of Parliament to present their DVD to their MP. Schools should receive full details in March; if not please contact [enquiries@senrug.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@senrug.co.uk) ■



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## View from East Coast



Neal Smith, East Coast's Head of Communications updates us on Newcastle Central Station's refurbishment and other news from East Coast.

Photo credit: East Coast trains

**RECENT** years have seen somewhat of a renaissance in railway stations. This was led by the restoration of London St Pancras station, after the building was happily saved from demolition. On the East Coast Main Line our own London terminus at King's Cross has been completely transformed, with its striking domed departures concourse. When the green canopy at the front of the station was torn down last year, it revealed the original Victorian facade for the first time in forty years.

This renaissance reflects the importance of train stations as gateways to our town and cities. As rail travel continues to grow, the station will provide that key first impression for many visitors. Equally, regular travellers now want more comfort and choices as they start and finish their journeys.

The North East rightly expects that its stations will provide the best first impression and a welcoming environment for its passengers. That's why East Coast has led the project to transform Newcastle Central station.

Newcastle station is one of only six Grade One listed stations still in use in England. It was opened in 1850 by Queen Victoria, featuring the pioneering train shed design with three arched spans by North Shields-born architect John Dobson. The station sits next to Robert Stephenson's High Level Bridge, which provided its first connection to the main line.

The heritage of the station meant that any changes, to meet the needs of modern passengers, must also enhance the original design. East Coast and its partner Network Rail worked closely with English Heritage and local civic bodies to ensure that the transformation of the station reflects its history. This included seeking to simplify the layout of the station, so that the sightlines of the roof curvature and local landmarks like the Castle Keep are improved.

The new-look Central station is now starting to emerge from behind the hoardings and netting. The modern, fully accessible travel centre has been serving customers since last autumn. There'll be improved passenger facilities such as new toilets, exciting new retailers and a more than doubling of the cycle storage. Most prominently, the iconic station portico will shortly open as a new public and retail space, following its pedestrianisation and glazing. This new space is in fact a completely self-contained glazed box, so the work has not affected the original portico structure.

East Coast is looking forward to the completion of the £8.6 million project in April. The investment, funded by the Department for Transport, complements the work being carried out by Newcastle City Council and NEI in the area surrounding the station. Earlier this year NEXUS also announced plans for an £8 million improvement to the adjoining Metro station, to begin next year.

Further south on the East Coast Main Line, customers at Peterborough are enjoying the £3.3 million new-look concourse that was completed in 2012. Network Rail is currently carrying out a much wider, £43 million project around the station which will improve signalling and extend platforms to increase capacity at what is a key hub on the rail network.

This project necessitated the first blockade of the East Coast Main Line in East Coast's history, spanning Christmas Day, Boxing Day and 27 December, when services would normally run. The blockade between Grantham and Huntingdon, was the subject of significant customer care preparations by East Coast, Network Rail and other train operators. At both stations, as well as Peterborough, East Coast provided scores of shuttle coaches connecting passengers to onward trains. As well as heated temporary structures – each big enough to accommodate more than 1,200 people in relative comfort – and even the Great Northern Hotel at Peterborough – as additional waiting areas for customers.



Photo credit: East Coast Trains

Artists' impression of the new look portico at Newcastle Central Station.

These preparations at the stations were complemented by intense communications to customers ahead of the event. On the day even our Social Media team decamped to Grantham to tweet live from the station keeping customers up to date with events. This will now be the benchmark for managing similar events in the rail industry.

The latter part of 2013 had been challenging, with some difficult days in the run up to Christmas due to strong winds and earlier overhead line problems in the autumn. East Coast was very pleased therefore that this operation of 27 December was delivered smoothly, with the line possession completed on time by Network Rail, and with the minimal disruption to customers.

There was more welcome news in the latest results of the National Rail Passenger Survey, with fieldwork carried out in autumn 2013. East Coast achieved an overall satisfaction rating of 91%. This was three percentage points higher than the 88% average for all long distance train operators in the survey.

There is, of course, more still to do and punctuality and reliability of East Coast services remains a high priority. The Company is working closely with Network Rail to encourage continued investment in track, signals and overhead power lines. External factors remain the biggest cause of delays, predominantly signalling faults and speed restrictions due to high winds in recent months. More unusually in February, the overhead lines near St Neots were affected by a child's metal balloon!

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# Ashington, Blyth and Tyne Update

By Stuart McNaughton, Strategic Transport Manager, Northumberland County Council.



Photo credit: David Naden

**REOPENING** the Ashington, Blyth and Tyne railway line to passenger services remains the top priority of Northumberland County Council. This will ensure improved 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.

We have recently met with Network Rail to discuss progress on the early feasibility work they have been doing on the scheme design. Their initial findings will be completed in March 2014, which will give us greater understanding on the cost of the scheme and the proposed timeline to completion. We will also take this opportunity to start consulting with stakeholders to ensure that everybody remains fully involved with progress going forward.

Work has now commenced to bring together private sector funding needed for the scheme. In addition, we continue to lobby to ensure that the scheme is identified in the North East Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) as a key priority for the region. The Strategic Economic Plan will be the source of major scheme funding in the North East in the future and the identification of Ashington, Blyth and Tyne within this document will be a key step forward in ensuring funding in the future.

We have already commissioned studies into initial business case work which predicted approximately 250,000 annual passenger journeys by 2025 and reduced requirements for subsidy into the future. This will be updated to reflect developments in the study since the initial work was completed. The overall business case will not only draw upon the value for money case for the scheme, but will also use a wide range of resources to ensure that we develop the strongest case possible for reopening Ashington, Blyth and Tyne to passenger services, which fully reflects the current and future needs of the area. The regeneration proposals for South East Northumberland will be fundamental to establishing the business case and we will work closely with Arch, established to look after development and regeneration across the county, to further enhance the business case.

Future decisions on franchising remains something we are acutely aware of going forward. The current Northern Rail franchise ends next year and the Department for Transport

are currently negotiating a single tender agreement which will extend the franchise to 2016. To be included in the Northern Rail franchise post 2016, we need to ensure that the scheme is sufficiently developed such that it can be included in the franchise specification as a “priced option” and is sufficiently attractive to bidders for them to offer good value prices for running the passenger services we want along the line. We will be presenting our case to the DfT over the coming months to ensure this happens.

We remain committed to driving forward the reintroduction of passenger services onto the Ashington, Blyth and Tyne rail line. As more information becomes available on the feasibility work and scheme design, we will communicate this to stakeholders. ■

## View from East Coast

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More generally, East Coast expects that over the coming months customers will see further improvements to its service. The on-board and station teams have new uniforms for 2014, there’s a new investment of £2.4 million to further upgrade the on-board Wi-Fi – and to prepare the fleet for 4G connectivity; the rolling stock is being given a dirt-resistant treatment and an internal refresh. More than 2,000 seats cover have already been replaced, and 1.5 miles of new train carpet laid.

Finally, if your knowledge is being tested on trying to recall those five other Grade I listed stations, they are of course: Bristol Temple Meads, Huddersfield, London King’s Cross, London Paddington and London St Pancras. East Coast hopes that within a few weeks the ‘new’ Newcastle station will stand out amongst them. There’s a welcome waiting for you on your next visit. ■

## New ABT Petition

**ASHINGTON** Community Organisers have launched a new petition calling for the ABT Re-opening. Sign up at <http://tinyurl.com/nsr4hdc> or to obtain paper copies phone Karen Stuart on 07739 195000 or call in to the Deputy Kist (old Co-op building) in Ashington. ■

## 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) ■

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