

Northern & TPE Franchise Specifications Published

By Dennis Fancett, Chair of SENRUG

THE DfT has published its specification for the new franchises for Northern Rail and TransPennine Express, both of which will start from February 2016.

Three companies are bidding for Northern Rail (currently run by a joint venture of Serco and Abellio) and these are Abellio, Arriva and Govia

Three different companies are bidding for TPE, currently branded as First TransPennine Express but actually run by a joint venture between First Group and Keolis. The three companies are First Group, Keolis/Go Ahead and Stagecoach. It is interesting to note that First and Keolis are not working together but bidding against each other for the new franchise.

For Northern Rail, the new franchise requires the operator to run both an evening and Sunday service (but only 6 trains per Sunday) – both things that SENRUG has been campaigning for, but does not include the extension of service to Pegswood and Widdrington as SENRUG had requested. Neither are station facilities such as opening hours for the toilet and waiting room specified. But whoever wins the bid must set up a fund to improve facilities at smaller stations.

The TransPennine Express franchise specification is interesting. SENRUG had requested the DfT include the requirement to extend services to Cramlington and Morpeth, thus doubling service frequency at these stations to 2 an hour (combined with the existing Northern Rail service). Whilst this is not included in the specification, the DfT has asked bidders for priced



options (that is, the additional cost for extra to the basic requirements) for extending the service from Newcastle to Edinburgh. SENRUG has no interest in yet more trains flying through Morpeth without stopping and has written to all 3 bidders suggesting they consider either an extension to Cramlington and Morpeth only (which would not require more rolling stock), or if extending to Edinburgh, that each train calls at Cramlington, Morpeth, Alnmouth, Berwick & Dunbar. First Group have additionally met SENRUG and given us the opportunity to make this case directly. Arriva also met SENRUG to discuss our aspirations for the Northern Rail franchise. ■

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SENRUG Gets Funding For Bus Station Poster And Further Meetings

A FUNDER who wishes to remain anonymous has awarded SENRUG funding to display a poster at Morpeth Bus Station (which is already in place) and to hold a series of public meetings in locations outside Morpeth. It is expected these meetings will take place over the next 12 months. Please let us know what you think of the poster at the bus station, and if you wish to suggest an additional site for a poster (other than in Morpeth) please let us know. Contact chair@senrug.co.uk ■

Open Access Bid Could See More Inter City Trains At Morpeth

By Dennis Fancett



Photo credit: Peter Skuce

IN ADDITION to the possibility that the new TPE franchise starting in 2016 might deliver additional semi-fast services at Morpeth, and if SENRUG’s lobbying is successful, at Cramlington too, SENRUG has welcomed the news that First Group are bidding to run 5 train services per day from Morpeth to London and Edinburgh, as an Open Access Operator.

The proposed services will start from Edinburgh and only call at Morpeth and Newcastle (with some trains also serving Stevenage), and will be in competition to the franchised services run by Virgin Trains East Coast who took over the franchise from the beginning of this month. Open Access bids are subject to a determination by the Office of Rail Regulation (ORR) and the company wishing to operate the service has to demonstrate both that there is capacity on the network, and that the news service will not unduly extract revenue from the franchised operator.

In a statement to the press, SENRUG Chair Dennis Fancett said: “We have long argued that there is a strong commercial case for a regular inter-city service at Morpeth. Our aspiration is for a service every 2 hours in each direction. We acknowledge the peak hour provision is now reasonable, though more choice is always good, but we don’t have any off-peak services at all, and the new service proposed by First Group should address that.”

“We acknowledge the business case most likely focuses on the larger markets of Edinburgh and Newcastle, but what is particularly innovative about this proposal is that the trains will stop at Morpeth as well. That indicates that First Group recognise there is a large untapped market here. Not just for London, but

we believe there is a strong market between Morpeth and Edinburgh too, both for business and leisure, which is stifled by lack of sufficient suitable services.”

“We realise of course it is by no means certain that First Group’s application will be successful. We recognise that incumbent operators will object and that there will be a battle to demonstrate the necessary train paths are available. But First have considerable experience in the UK rail industry and we wish them well as they progress this application.”

“Even if the bid is not successful, First Group’s proposal certainly puts a stake in the ground and we hope it will encourage the existing operators, most of whose services run through Morpeth without stopping, to look more closely at the commercial case for providing a regular inter-city service here”. ■

Now Hear This! Morpeth Gets PA Announcements And CIS Screens Planned For Cramlington

THE INTRODUCTION of remote PA announcements at Morpeth (controlled from York) came about almost by accident. SENRUG had been asking for these for years (and at Cramlington too) but Northern Rail had been saying “no”. Then one day, an engineer turned up to service the system. “But we don’t have one” the ticket office staff at Morpeth replied. “Oh yes you do” said the engineer. A phone call to York quickly established that an employee had been making announcements for Morpeth for years – but no-one at Morpeth had been told, so never reported they could not be heard. And so, a flick of a few switches in the control box and Morpeth went live! Meanwhile, Northern Rail has told SENRUG that Cramlington is included in the next wave of stations to get CIS screens, though we still await an exact date. ■

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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. ■

SENRUG Deplores Parking Charges At Morpeth & Cramlington

by Dennis Fancett



Photo credit: Trevor Watson

BY THE time you read this, it is likely that Northern Rail will have introduced charges for car parking at Morpeth and Cramlington stations. These new charges mark the end of a 5 year battle in which SENRUG has opposed charges for parking at stations which have at various times been proposed by each of Northern Rail, Network Rail and the County Council. With no buses serving either station, SENRUG believes commuters in particular have no other viable means of reaching the station to get to work. SENRUG calculates that a £2 per day charge will increase the cost of getting to work in Newcastle by 30%

SENRUG was advised of the intention to introduce charges by Northern Rail before Easter. The reason given was that Northern Rail are now operating under a direct award – their franchise period having come to an end – and they claim their settlement with the DfT leaves them a funding gap that must now be addressed by introduction of parking charges.

SENRUG is not convinced parking charges will in fact increase revenue as the additional income might be offset by passengers, particularly commuters, who decide they can no longer afford to travel to work by train. Alternative options such as parking in Newcastle or at Regent Centre or Four Lane Ends then taking the Metro might now be cheaper. SENRUG asked Northern Rail for evidence of their business case, but no response has been received.

SENRUG is however aware of the extreme congestion in the car parks at both Morpeth and Cramlington. At

Morpeth, SENRUG has put forward plans showing how an additional 80 spaces could be created on a mixture of nearby redundant railway and council land, increasing the parking capacity by 40%, whereas at Cramlington, Northern Rail had assured us they would ask British Transport Police to take action against those parking at the station car park who do not travel by train, such as employees of the Royal Mail Delivery Office next door. Both SENRUG's plans for additional spaces at Morpeth, and its letter to Royal Mail are on the SENUG website under "Documents We've Issued".

SENRUG has also asked Northern Rail to ensure that at Morpeth, the ticket machines allow overnight parking for people who travel to London one day and return the next, whilst at Cramlington, SENRUG has suggested charges should be delayed until the new Customer Information System screens are introduced. Commuters at Cramlington have seen no investment in either their station or their services for decades, so need to see they are getting something for their money. Once again, no response from Northern Rail on these constructive suggestions and SENRUG has also taken them up with Transport Focus. ■



▲ Scrap trains lie alongside the Jakarta to Bandung line in Indonesia, spotted by SENRUG Chair Dennis Fancett last year. Many passengers hope the new Northern Rail franchise will deliver the same fate to our local Pacers.



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

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Delightful destinations 7: German Rail Adventure

In the first of a two part report, SENRUG member Richard Hilton shares his experiences and photos of his most recent visit to Germany and it's rail system.



IT WAS Michael Portillo's "Great Continental Railway Journeys" that provided the inspiration to undertake my own railway adventure down the entire length of Germany

in March 2014. The prospect of being conveyed at high speed between the great Hanseatic city of Hamburg in the north and Munich in the south – with stops at Cologne, Baden-Baden and Heidelberg – was compelling, but what awaited in Hamburg would turn out to be the highlight of the trip.

Aside from Munich, I had never previously visited any of the cities on my itinerary. Hamburg, I assumed, would be thriving but grubby port city with very little of interest to the tourist. How wrong I was. It is Germany's second largest city and its wealthiest. Hamburg took the opportunity to reinvent its architecture after the war, rather than dutifully rebuilding what was previously there. The architecture – between the Altstadt and docklands, at least – is tastefully modern and not in the least bit overbearing.

My arrival (by air) in the late afternoon allowed for some twilight roaming around the Altstadt before dinner. The Rathaus, like so many in Germany, is a splendid neo-Gothic edifice surrounded by plazas and waterways. Lit up at night it is a gorgeous sight. The following morning after breakfast I slowly meandered between the city's stunning buildings towards the quayside, home of the Miniature Wunderland, the largest model railway in the world.

Miniature Wunderland has to be seen to be believed. Several layouts – all interconnected – over two floors of a warehouse depict Germany, Switzerland, Scandinavia and the USA in miraculous miniature detail. Aside from a huge variety of rolling stock, there are burning buildings with attendant fire crews, radio-controlled ferries, cable cars, illuminated petrol-station price boards which automatically update the prices daily from the internet, and a fully operational airport with aeroplanes which actually take off and land.

On the lower floor of the exhibition is a series of tableaux depicting the various phases of the Berlin Wall in OO-scale detail, providing a poignant reminder of how recently Europe was divided, both physically and economically. Four hours really isn't enough to take in this wondrous feat of modelling, especially if, like me, you pre-book a guided behind-the-scenes tour. Hamburg is definitely a city that requires a return visit.

Leaving Hamburg from its spectacular station I was intrigued to see posters on each platform depicting the formation of every train due to call at that platform. Given that German trains have much more variety in formation than our own trains, this is a particularly useful innovation, facilitating the easy location of the necessary coach.

The 4 hour IC (InterCity) service to Cologne was delayed and turned into a 5 hour journey, but I was quickly appeased with a glass or two of Weißbier. First class tickets in Germany cost very little more than a standard ticket when buying in advance (usually a €10 or €15 supplement per journey), and it is well worth paying the extra for the benefit of comforts that we are unable to enjoy on our railway network, such as a compartment (even better if you have it to yourself!).

There was one reason only for my visit to Cologne: the single building in the city left standing after the war was the magnificent cathedral,



begun in the thirteenth century and only completed a few decades before WWII. Said to be home to the relics of the three wise men, its soaring Gothic architecture, sullied only by the blackening of the stone, perches majestically above the railway station. When the railway bridge was built, its alignment was deliberately set straight towards the east end of the cathedral, and so Germany's train drivers are amongst a privileged few to enjoy the cathedral from such a magnificent vantage point.

Aside from the cathedral there is very little to do in Cologne, so my two days there were spent on the river and in the cafes of the city with friends. But the cathedral itself makes the trip worthwhile, if ecclesiastical architecture is your thing. ■

Richard's report will conclude in our next Newsletter...