

More Trains At Morpeth As SENRUG Campaigns Succeed

MORPETH IS set to enjoy a massive boost to its rail service over the next few years, thanks to diligent campaigning by SENRUG.

Starting December this year, Virgin are introducing two new weekday services each way. Weekday trains leaving London at 09:30 and 13:30 will call at Morpeth at 12:57 and 16:57, providing new services to Edinburgh at these times.

Travelling to London, trains departing Edinburgh at 14:00 and 18:30 will stop at Morpeth at 15:15 and 19:56, reversing last May's withdrawal of the 18:30 from Edinburgh which SENRUG pointed out was particularly convenient for both commuters and leisure travellers.

Virgin are also introducing a 22:01 service from Edinburgh on Friday nights only, arriving Morpeth 23.34 and continuing to Newcastle, plus some extra Sunday services.

Following SENRUG's earlier response to the DfT's consultation on CrossCountry services, two further CrossCountry services will be added at Morpeth each way from December 2017. It has not as yet been determined which services these will be. Also in December 2017, Northern are due to add evening and Sunday services, though at SENRUG's recent public meeting, Regional Director Mike Paterson mentioned there was some uncertainty about the exact date. December 2019 will be the next major boost when the TransPennine Express services extend to Edinburgh calling at Morpeth.



These trains will run hourly throughout the day, providing connections to the Scottish Capital, as well as Durham, York, Leeds, Manchester and Liverpool.

Finally, from December 2021, the First open access service between Edinburgh and London commences, stopping only at Morpeth and Newcastle (some trains also serving Stevenage). This will give Morpeth five new additional trains to and from London and five more services to and from Edinburgh per day.

So, by 2021 Morpeth will be a bustling inter-city station with nine London trains each way per day, up to five trains to and from Birmingham and trains to Edinburgh, Durham, York, Leeds, Manchester and Liverpool at least hourly. By then, the Greater Morpeth Development Trust's renovation of the derelict station buildings should be complete giving the station a bistro style café (SENRUG wants an ATM as well). Northern are looking at significantly increasing the staffed presence at the station though no guarantees as yet. But more parking provision is also urgently required (SENRUG's proposals for an extra 66 spaces were submitted in February 2015) as well as regular bus service to the station, not just from the town centre, but from outlying areas such as Kirkhill, Lancaster Park and Guide Post. ■

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Ashington, Blyth & Tyne Update



NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY Council has now received the GRIP 2 Report from Network Rail on the re-introduction of passenger trains to Ashington. The Report was commissioned in October 2015 and originally promised for Spring 2016.

An hourly service each way off peak and half hourly peak is planned from Newcastle to Woodhorn with intermediate stations at Northumberland Park (Metro connection), Seaton Delaval, Newsham for Blyth, Bebside, Bedlington and Ashington. The possibility of a 30-minute service throughout the day is also considered.

But the plan excludes a station at Seghill, which SENRUG continues to lobby for, and suggests different names for some of the stations such as South Blyth instead of Newsham - disappointing but not critical.

Estimated cost is £191m, but this includes a 40% contingency plus things like signalling upgrades which must be done whether passenger services are re-introduced or not. Excluding these, SENRUG estimates the true cost for re-introducing passenger trains is nearer to the £50m it has consistently estimated.

The Council hopes to commissioning the GRIP 3 by December 2016, the GRIP 4 by October 2018, start construction in February 2019 and have trains running by 2021! SENRUG applauds this positive schedule but notes the GRIP 1 and 2 reports both

took longer to commission and longer to complete than scheduled, and trusts further delays will be eliminated as the project gains momentum.

Contrary to widespread press reports back in July, trains to Ashington will be heavy rail (as per the SENRUG campaign) not Metro, though a physical connection between the 2 systems is planned at Northumberland Park, which SENRUG welcomes. ■

GET TO GRIPS WITH NETWORK RAIL

- GRIP 1:** Output definition - **completed**
- GRIP 2:** Feasibility - **completed**
- GRIP 3:** Option selection
- GRIP 4:** Single option development

(Sponsoring local authority makes final decision to proceed at this point)

- GRIP 5:** Detailed design
- GRIP 6:** Build, test and commission
- GRIP 7:** Scheme hand back
- GRIP 8:** Trains running

GRIP is an internal Network Rail acronym for "Governance in Rail Investment Programmes")

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 pa. We also welcome membership from Town and Parish Councils, local businesses, trade union branches, and other organisations and groups; the corporate rate is £10 pa. Download a Membership Form from www.senrug.co.uk ■

Next Public Meeting

When: Monday 12th December 2016
Where: Morpeth Town Hall, 19:30.
Speaker: Neal Smith, Virgin Trains ■



Join our Facebook group:
facebook.com/SENRUG

North Sea Coast Local Rail Service Campaign

SENUG IS increasing the focus on its campaign for a local service north of Morpeth by producing a new campaign leaflet, which has been sent to the region's MPs, and Town and Parish Councils along the route.

SENUG wants to see an hourly service each way throughout the day, stopping at Pegswood, Widdrington, Alnmouth, Chathill and with new stations re-opened at Belford and Beal for Holy Island and then to Berwick. A regular train service will re-invigorate these local communities creating access to jobs through simpler commuting, and boosting the tourism and leisure industry.

The line is one of the most scenic lines in the country, rivalling only the Settle Carlisle line and the South West route along the sea wall at Dawlish.

North of the border, our sister group RAGES are campaigning for a local service between Berwick and Edinburgh. By joining the two services together, local cross-border journeys become simpler, and residents both north and south will have the ability to commute to either Newcastle or Edinburgh.



With modern, electric, local trains able to run at speeds of 100 miles per hour, local trains could run at line speed for a large proportion of the route. However, because of the time taken to stop at the local stations, the local trains would need to be overtaken by the non-stop services which may require additional passing loops.

Leaflets are available from Morpeth or Alnmouth stations, or contact SENUG. Please send one to your County and Parish or Town Councillor, local businesses or other interested groups and ask them to support this campaign. ■

The Case For Cramlington

ALTHOUGH SENUG has been delighted at recent announcements about more train services at Morpeth being delivered progressively over the next 5 years, neighbouring Cramlington, set to be Northumberland's largest town and busiest shopping centre, and already the site of the County's largest cinema, has not been forgotten.

SENUG' approach to Cramlington is two-fold: First we want to see service frequency doubled to 2 trains per hour. We believe the best way to do this is to persuade First TransPennine Express to include Cramlington calls on all of their new Liverpool – Newcastle – Edinburgh trains which will start from December 2019.

Second, we want to move the entire station away from its current difficult to reach location in Nelson Village and place it next to Manor Walks Shopping Centre, underneath the existing Beaconhill footbridge (which has level access), adjacent to the underpass into Manor Walks itself. The new station would then be bang in the centre of the town, and the site would allow for an integrated bus / train station with parking and a taxi rank serving the thriving town centre.

This, combined with the evening and Sunday service to be introduced by Northern in 2017, will give Cramlington the facilities it deserves. The 2 projects are linked. It might not be worth the capital investment of moving the station if the train service frequency cannot be improved. Equally, it is a more attractive proposition for First TPE to stop their trains at Cramlington if the station has a prime town centre position right next to the shopping centre.

SENUG wants Northumberland County Council to take a strong lead on both projects, and we understand that's what they intend to do. In a surprise move, the County Council has just purchased the shopping centre from Hammerson so now has a strong commercial interest in improving rail access to it. ■

What would you like to see in the SENUG Newsletter? Would you like to contribute to the next issue?
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UK Railways: Have we never had it so good?

Editor's note: Given all of the recent controversy on the UK railways, I thought I would include extracts from Dennis' Delightful Destination article available on our website at <http://www.senrug.co.uk/More.php>

IT'S EASY enough to find out the train schedules on the AMTRAK website and indeed you can book online, but we wanted some further information such as whether reserved seats would be upstairs or downstairs and if they could be requested for the west side of the train (for coastal views). Any online enquiry on Amtrak's website failed to answer the question but produced a response telling you to phone their toll-free number which of course is not free from the UK – making the online enquiry service itself rather pointless. Fortunately, plenty of UK travel agencies can book Amtrak journeys.



TripAdvisor warns of appalling service with comments such as “Anyone who has travelled by long distance train in Europe is going to be in for a rude shock”. Sadly, the reviews were correct; the indifferent service mainly becoming obvious at meal times. One or two individuals did excel, but in general staff were rude and the food unappetising with no flexibility.

Apparently, Amtrak has no ability to offer complimentary food outside of the times it is expected you would be on the train. So, if you are due in to your departure station at 16:00, but are running 6 hours late and don't arrive until 22:00, you won't get dinner because you weren't supposed to be there at dinner time! It seems a strange way to treat first class passengers. I can see the logistical

difficulties which give rise to such a policy – problems with food quantities on board etc but I can also see the obvious solution of being able to take on more fresh food en route.

The problem is, with so few long distance trains running – typically 1 per day on each route, I guess they can't see the point of putting in the infrastructure to make it work.

On-board train cleaners are another thing the Americans have apparently not yet thought of. TripAdvisor tells us that those using shared toilet facilities find they are pretty yukkie by the end of a 3-day trip. Again, not our experience fortunately as we didn't stay on the same train for 3 days, but on-board cleaners were certainly absent.

The complete lack of station facilities was notable. Seattle had nothing. Despite the spacious concourse it was necessary to leave the station and walk round the corner to a coffee shop – perfectly possible once you had checked in your luggage albeit there was some confusion as to what time we needed to be back to board. Emeryville fared a little better. There was a compact coffee kiosk also selling croissants, crisps and sweets. Unbeknown to us, it turned out there was a slightly better range of savoury snacks hidden away in a closed fridge, but with no menus in sight you needed the American confidence of walking up to the fridge and opening it to see what else was for sale. Emeryville also had a CIS system, initially causing some alarm as our train wasn't listed, but in fact the indicators only display the commuter services. So staff walked up and down the platform shouting out things like “The Coast Starlight is 10 minutes late” and guiding passengers individually as to where to stand for their particular coach.



Safety, or lack of it, was another thing that amazed me. Station footbridges don't really exist, or where they did, they

served no point, as everyone seemed completely relaxed about passengers wandering across the tracks in front of an oncoming train. Not something to be tried at home! ■