

Get Ready For Massive Boost In Train Services

By Dennis Fancett

SEN RUG ARE DELIGHTED to announce that starting from 10th December, local residents will see a massive boost in rail services in the area. The three train companies will be adding extra services at Morpeth, whilst Cramlington will see the introduction of a new Sunday service

CrossCountry will increase the number of its services that call at Morpeth from 3 to 5 each way per day, making a total of 70 services per week. CrossCountry Managing Director, Andy Cooper, said: "We are delighted to be increasing the number of our trains that call at Morpeth in our December timetables. SEN RUG has been a strong advocate for an enhanced CrossCountry service for many years, and now their efforts have been rewarded with five of our trains each way every day, so Morpeth's rail users will have more of the country open for direct journeys. We look forward to working with SEN RUG and our other stakeholders to continue developing Britain's geographically largest rail franchise, and to encourage more people to travel by rail."

Virgin Trains will also be introducing extra Saturday trains at Morpeth. Their General Manager, Chris Cunningham, said: "After listening to feedback from stakeholders, including SEN RUG, we're delighted to bring three additional services to Morpeth on weekends. This follows the 26 additional services per week which Virgin Trains introduced last December, representing a major uplift and improvement in intercity connections to the town. And we're now just 12 months from the introduction of our new fleet of Virgin Azuma trains which will transform travel on



our east coast route, with more services, faster journeys and greater comfort for customers."

And Northern are introducing a Sunday service from Morpeth and Cramlington to Newcastle and Metrocentre, with the first train leaving Morpeth at 08:50.

Regional Director Mike Paterson, commented: "The improved services between Morpeth and Metrocentre will offer new weekend commuting possibilities and will also boost travel options for leisure travellers. These timetable enhancements mark an important step forward for our customers and are part of a wide-ranging modernisation programme that will see us add more than 2,000 extra services each week across the Northern network by 2020."

SEN RUG has now almost achieved our objective of an intercity service every 2 hours each way at Morpeth, which is a very different station now from when SEN RUG was formed. The single daily morning service to and evening from London per day has mushroomed into 153 intercity services per week. Of course, we are also delighted to welcome Northern's Sunday trains that at long last will provide a service at Cramlington too. SEN RUG is also keen to attract more support for our other campaigns – the Ashington Blyth & Tyne Re-opening, the North of Morpeth local service, and a doubling of service frequency at Cramlington. ■

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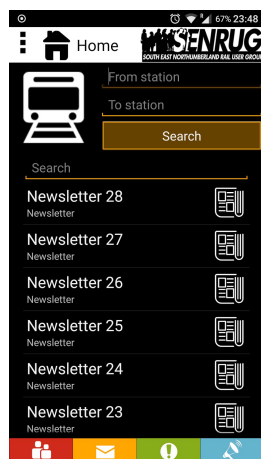
Linking up with University Students: SENRUG Smartphone App

By Daniel Nesbitt



SENRUG AND NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY linked up in 2016 to offer 2nd year Computing Science students the opportunity to develop a Smartphone App for SENRUG as part of their Software Engineering Team Project Module. The purpose of this module is for students to learn how to develop a professional piece of software, boost their team working skills and get real life experience with working with an external client.

Team 14 (pictured above) chose to develop an App for SENRUG, with the aim of simplifying how people engage with us. One area that was especially important to us was to allow users easy access to information on our campaigns and advice on where to report issues. The team developed a app (right) that fulfills and exceeds our requirements and offers push notifications to allow users to quickly see when we publish information on a new campaign and when a newsletter is available. The app can also show ticket price information as well. We will continue to work with the team with the aim of getting the app published.



We would like to thank the members of Team 14; Felix Bridault, Adam Byles, Long Ho, Hristo Hristov, Ellen Johnson, Valerija Medvedeva, Joshua Thacker, Steven Weston and Sebastian Wojtkowiak, for their excellent work in developing this App for us. ■



On Saturday 18th March, a small group of SENRUG members joined the Branch Line Society's special Virgin charity charter train "Bound for Craggy" which went round the Ashington Blyth & Tyne line as far as Bedlington, then on to the Choppington branch before continuing to Edinburgh and depot via Morpeth North junction. SENRUG Committee Member Peter Strong was the guard on the train north of Newcastle. Virgin East Coast MD David Horne made reference to SENRUG and its campaign to re-open the Ashington Blyth & Tyne line in his introductory comments in the Charter Programme. The charter raised over £43,000 for The Railway Children charity, and all Virgin staff on board worked for free. ■

Joining SENRUG Is Now Even Easier!

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.

You can now join us or renew your membership online using your debit card, credit card or PayPal:

www.senrug.co.uk/Join-Us.php

Or download a Membership Form from the same link above. ■

Government Paper And AB&T Update

By Dennis Fancett

ON WEDNESDAY 29th NOVEMBER The DfT launched a major paper on the future of the rail industry in the UK. Called

"Connecting People: a Strategic Vision for Rail", it's a longish people running to 43 pages. Our very own Ashington Blyth & Tyne Line gets a specific mention on page 25 (para 2.43), though sadly the accompanying DfT Press Release said Ashington is in County Durham. Nevertheless, my phone was ringing all day and I did a short telephone interview for Radio Newcastle that afternoon.



So what does the paper say? A key point is a plan to increasingly integrate Network Rail's responsibilities for track maintenance and upgrades into the company that runs the trains. However, this will be done by evolution, not revolution, basically happening as each franchise is next re-let, starting with Govia Thameslink in 2021 and Great Western in 2022.

The exception to this is the East Coast Main Line, where the new arrangements will start from 2020, 3 years before the current franchise with Virgin is scheduled to end. This has led some to speculate that the DfT had some bad news to bury and that Virgin, known to be in financial difficulties, were about to hand the keys back. If that had been the case they would have been the 3rd franchise operator in a row on the East Coast Main Line to fail, surely calling into question the entire principle of franchising.

The DfT seems to be recognising that Network Rail's costs at present are way too high, and believes the best way of bringing these down to reasonable levels is to merge responsibilities for their activities into the commercial company running the trains. We certainly agree with the bit about Network Rail's costs being excessive. It is this which is crippling our progress on re-opening Ashington Blyth & Tyne. The elongated

elapse of time between the Council receiving one GRIP study back and commissioning the next is because they have to negotiate down the cost. At the end of the day the Council has a responsibility to achieve value for money for its Council tax payers, both for each successive GRIP study and for the eventual re-opening cost itself.

So SENUG agrees that a new approach is necessary, and costs need to be brought down sharply. But will these new arrangements work any better? It depends on who you ask. For the dominant operator along the line it is clearly going to be an advantage. But secondary and would-be open access operators may feel uncomfortable being placed at the mercy of companies they see as their competitor, especially when asking for extra capacity. And it is not clear to me as yet who will maintain freight lines, important chords, curves and junctions between key routes, diversionary routes and so on. It is difficult to think of a single franchisee who has their tracks all to themselves. In the UK we have a rail network, not a series of point to point routes.

As for Ashington, the paper states these new arrangements will make re-openings such as this easier. Stakeholders such as our County Council, working with Northern, the operator, can just get on and do stuff where both parties want to, without having to pay Network Rail to do a study to prove you really do want what you're asking them to do. But I'm puzzled about the timescales. The Northern franchise is not due for renewal until 2025. I was expecting trains to Ashington would actually be running by then. Whilst the new process, when it starts, may indeed be easier, we certainly don't want everything to be put on hold until these new arrangements come in. We need to keep cracking on with the plan as it stands at the moment and get trains running as quickly as possible, and my understanding is that this is exactly what the Council are doing. ■



The Bus Turning Circle at Morpeth Station (left) is finally back in use, with PCL Travel providing services S1 (Morpeth to Stannington) and T1C (shuttle service to and from Morpeth Bus Station).

North of Morpeth Local Service

By Dennis Fancett

OUR CAMPAIGN for our North of Morpeth service is going from strength to strength. First launched in September 2016, people



are starting to realise the potential benefits this proposed new service could bring. A number of Parish Councils in the north of the County are either joining SENUG or writing to us to express their support. Both Northern and Northumberland County Council are very keen to see something established, though obviously Northern have to prioritise on the enhancements they are contractually committed to in their franchise agreement.

SENUG believes the service should be at least hourly in each direction, with the first train from Berwick arriving into Newcastle by 08:45, and the last leaving Newcastle after 19:00. Stations at Belford and Beal, and possibly Warkworth for Amble, should be re-opened, re-invigorating these communities and helping tourism.

Most likely however the service would start serving only the existing stations, nevertheless bringing real benefits to Pegswood, Widdrington and Chathill. It seems it's easier to get funding to re-open a station with the train service already running through it, than to get the new service off the ground and re-open stations simultaneously, so SENUG pragmatically accepts this may be the best way forward.

North of the border, our sister group RAGES are likewise campaigning for a local service from Berwick to Edinburgh with reston and East Linton re-opened and there is no reason why the two services should not be linked together with joint operation as a single through route, especially if it turns out there is not the capacity at Berwick for trains from north and south to terminate and reverse there. ■

SENUG Receives Award For Website



WE WERE honored to receive Railfuture's, Highly Commended Award for Best Website 2017. Allison Cosgrove, one of Railfuture's Directors presents the award to Dennis Fancett, Chair of SENUG (left). We are always looking for comments and feedback on our website, as well as our campaign work, and

would be delighted to hear your comments. You can leave your comments on our contact us page:

www.senrug.co.uk/Contact.php ■

Have you seen our new Campaign Leaflet?

Are you able to display copies of our leaflet titled "North Sea Coast Local Rail Service" in libraries or in community centres in the north of the County? Have you asked your County Councillor if he / she is supporting the scheme? Please contact chair@senrug.co.uk for more information. ■



Join our Facebook group:
facebook.com/SENUG



On behalf of SENUG, we wish
all our readers a Merry
Christmas and a happy new
year.

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