

## **SENRUG PRESS RELEASE 5<sup>th</sup> October 2020**

### **“WRONG DECISION ON RAILCARDS” SAYS SENRUG**

SENRUG - The group that campaigns for better rail services in South East Northumberland - has criticised the government decision not to offer refunds, extensions or any other goodwill gesture, to people who bought annual railcards entitling them to 33% off rail tickets, only to then be told by the rail industry not to travel.

SENRUG Chair Dennis Fancett, who himself has a railcard, says the decision is wrong both morally and strategically. “Morally, this seems wrong because those who purchased railcards were entitled to expect the service of discounted tickets to be offered for the full 12 months. Instead, we got the ‘essential travel only’ message. We have been unable to use our railcards, and want our money back.”

“More to the point” he continued, “this decision is flawed from a strategic point of view. The expectation is there will be a sharp decline in commuter passengers across the rail network as people are likely to be sticking with working from home for some time. So the industry needs to reach out to the leisure sector in order to help push fare revenue back to pre COVID levels. And there is no better time to do this. Everyone is thinking twice about holidays abroad. UK holidays and staycations - potentially including days out by train - are going to be the thing. So why break trust with the regular leisure traveller in this way? No-one will purchase another railcard if it will be useless in the event of more travel restrictions. And without that all important 33% discount, consumers might think of other things to do instead of travelling by train.”

“At the beginning of lockdown, the rail industry exceled itself with its no quibble policy on ticket refunds - even for restricted ‘advance’ tickets - not normally cancellable - and compared well with airlines, tour operators and hotel chains who tried to fend people off with vouchers or alternative dates. So why lose all that goodwill now? Other parts of the leisure sector which offer annual admission passes have pro-actively implemented validity

extensions to contemplate for the 6-month closure of their facilities - without even being asked - so the rail industry looks very poor by comparison in making no effort to welcome back its regular leisure travellers.”

“It’s true the government has financially supported the rail industry during lockdown. What we’re asking for now would surely be just a fraction of what’s already being spent. And is designed to help return us to the point where that financial support is no longer necessary, as quickly as possible, by encouraging customers back.”

SENUG is urging the government to think again about its surprising railcard policy. And also wants to remind everyone that rail travel remains as safe as any other form of leisure activity, if not more so.

**Ends (470 words)**

**Notes for Editors**

SENUG – The South East Northumberland Rail User Group - is a voluntary pro rail campaign group: contact Dennis Fancett, Chair, tel 01670 825500 or 07810 353651, e: [chair@senrug.co.uk](mailto:chair@senrug.co.uk). [www.senrug.co.uk](http://www.senrug.co.uk)

The group is particularly known for its 15-year campaign to re-open the Ashington Blyth & Tyne freight line for passenger services, its campaign for a local train service between Morpeth and Berwick, and its campaign to improve service frequency at Cramlington (see <https://www.senrug.co.uk/our-campaigns>). The group has achieved an astonishing increase in long distance train services at Morpeth, from 3 each way per day when it was first formed, to 28 each way per day now (prior to emergency COVID-19 timetables).

RAILCARDS are administered and sold by the Rail Delivery Group which is an association of UK rail operators. However SENUG understands the decision not to offer any form of compensation or validity extension to passengers has been taken by the Department For Transport (DfT). Most rail companies are now operating their train services under a service contract administered by the DfT and are thus obliged to follow DfT guidance on fares and prices.

**Rail Delivery Group Press Office:** Tel 020 7841 8020 or email [media@raildeliverygroup.com](mailto:media@raildeliverygroup.com)

**DfT Press Office:** See <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-transport/about/media-enquiries>

There are different types of railcards for different sections of the community, including under 30s, Disabled persons, Family & Friends, Senior Railcard (for over 60s), Two Together (for any 2 passengers travelling together) and the Network Railcard (for South East England).