



Response To North East Draft Transport Plan Consultation

By email to transportplan@transportnortheast.gov.uk

13th January 2021

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This is SENRUG's response to the North East Joint Transport Committee / Transport North East Draft Transport Plan which is currently available on Transport North East's website at <https://www.transportnortheast.gov.uk/what-is-the-north-east-transport-plan/>. Responses are required by **14th January 2021**.
- 1.2 SENRUG is The South East Northumberland Rail User Group, an unincorporated voluntary organisation that promotes rail travel and campaigns for better rail services in, within, to, from and through South East and East Northumberland, representing the interests of both existing and potential rail travellers in the area. By 'potential', SENRUG means those who would use rail services if only the trains went where they want to go, at the time they want to go, at a price they can afford, and in a clean, safe, secure, accessible and easy to understand manner. SENRUG has 198 members and 13 corporate members that include both local businesses and 7 Town or Parish Councils (as at end of December 2020).
- 1.3 It therefore follows that SENRUG's response deals primarily with rail aspects of the plan (including Metro and light rail), though also comments on bus / rail integration, other means of access to railway stations, and integrated ticketing. SENRUG's response also include comments on the Metro route running just to the south of the Northumberland county boundary.
- 1.4 SENRUG extends a broad welcome to the plan which already includes a number of SENRUG's campaign aspirations, though in some cases SENRUG would like to give further specific detail or clarification, as well as highlighting those key priorities for South East Northumberland not yet included in the draft plan.

2. The Northumberland Line

2.1 Core Re-opening Plan

This response assumes that the plan to re-instate passenger services on the Ashington Blyth and Tyne freight line, as currently being progressed by Northumberland County Council and called "The Northumberland Line" will be delivered by 2023. This will achieve a new passenger railway between Newcastle and Ashington with intermediate stations at Northumberland Park

(interchanging with Metro), Seaton Delaval, Newsham, Bebside (which it appears Northumberland County Council propose to name “Blyth - Bebside”), Bedlington and Ashington. SENRUG wholeheartedly welcomes this development for which it has been campaigning for 15 years.

2.2 Further Enhancements and Extensions

However, once the core route is delivered, SENRUG believes there should then be a series of further extensions and enhancements, as follows:

2.2.1 Ashington - Woodhorn - Newbiggin: this section would continue along existing tracks (Network Rail as far as Woodhorn then privately owned) to just east of the A1889 Spine Road bridge, then branch off the freight line along the former alignment into Newbiggin. The station at Woodhorn would serve as a Park & Ride for the smaller communities to the north of Ashington as well as serving The Northumberland Museum of Mining and Northumberland Life, a major tourist attraction. Connecting Newbiggin to the rail network would permit regeneration of the town and increase leisure and tourism at this attractive seaside resort, assisting in the regeneration of the town and surrounding area.

2.2.2 Bedlington - Choppington - Morpeth: the existing track between Bedlington and Morpeth should be re-opened to passenger services, with an intermediate station at Choppington. This would reduce public transport time between Bedlington and Morpeth from the current 25 minutes by bus to just 7 minutes by rail. It should be achieved by extending the existing Hexham - Morpeth services on to Bedlington, connecting with Northumberland Line services. See section 3.2

2.2.3 Newsham - Blyth Town Centre: The existing alignment from Newsham into Blyth Town Centre, partly blocked by but easily divertable around the Blyth Sports Centre, should be brought into service so that central Blyth (population 36,000¹) is directly connected to the rail network rather than served only by out-of-town stations at Newsham and Bebside. There is unlikely to be capacity on the East Coast Main Line to run trains all the way into Newcastle, but rather than have a limited shuttle service just between Blyth and Newsham, trains should be extended to Northumberland Park and then along the Metro tracks to the Airport. This should be a Metro style service, electrified to Metro standards, with trains running on battery power on the heavy rail section between Northumberland Park and Newsham (approx 5.5 miles). It would also require passenger running lines through the Metro depot between Four Lane Ends and Regent’s Centre. Such a service would greatly regenerate Blyth and the A189 / A19 transport corridor by providing a direct public transport connection to the airport permitting access to airport related employment and better connecting businesses in the area

2.2.4 Seghill: A new station should be constructed at Seghill to serve this community. It is most unlikely Seghill residents will travel “back” to Seaton Delaval to travel onwards to Newcastle and the bus connection between Seghill and Seaton Delaval station is poor (requiring a change of busses). If the impact of the additional couple of minutes stopping time for through passengers from Ashington is deemed unacceptable, then at least the proposed Blyth - Airport Metro service (see section 2.2.3) should serve a station at Seghill.

2.2.5 Ashington - Butterwell: The privately owned but soon to be fully disused freight line between Ashington and Butterwell Junction on the East Coast Main Line should be acquired by the transport authorities and brought into regular service, along with construction of a new

north to east facing junction at Butterwell. This is primarily to provide a freight and diversionary route between Benton Junction and Butterwell Junction, which combined with quadruple tracking between Newcastle and Benton Junction (see section 3.4.1), and double tracking Northumberland Park and Newsham (see section 2.3.1) and this section of route between Ashington and Butterwell, could achieve a 4-line railway all the way from Newcastle to Butterwell (except the short section between Benton Junction and Northumberland Park) and solve many of the capacity problems developing on the southern sections of the East Coast Main Line. Whilst mainly justified by the alternative freight route, once the line exists, passenger services between Ashington, Alnmouth and Berwick could be established, providing access to Northumberland College and Wansbeck Hospital at Ashington to the north of the county. New stations for communities such as Linton should then be considered.

2.3 Infrastructure Improvements

To support the aspirations for further extensions and enhancements set out in section 2.2, and maximise the value of the significant investment being made for the core passenger service as described at section 2.1, the following further infrastructure investments in the line should be planned for and delivered within the lifetime of the Transport Plan.

2.3.1 Northumberland Park - Newsham Double Tracking: Whilst the core plan calls for some extension to the double tracking south of Newsham, and a further passing loop, it is evident that to support growth in the lines usage, the entire section between Northumberland Park and Newsham should be double tracked to allow for a more resilient system.

2.3.2 Physical Northumberland Line / Metro Connection at Northumberland Park: Infrastructure should be provided to allow trains to move between Northumberland Line and Metro tracks at Northumberland Park station. In particular, this is needed to support the proposed Blyth Town Centre - Airport service described at section 2.2.3

2.3.3 Benton - Northumberland Park Joint Running on Metro Tracks: Noting the Northumberland Line is only single track between a point east of Benton Junction to Northumberland Park (approx 1.5 miles), and space constraints would make it challenging to double track this section, provision should be made for joint running of Northumberland Line trains on the Metro tracks between Northumberland Park and Benton Junction, particularly in the westbound direction, with a new link from the westbound Metro track to the westbound Northumberland Line track at the dive-under just east of Benton Junction.

2.3.4 Re-establishing the Ashington – Butterwell Line Junction and New North to East Facing Junction on to ECML at Butterwell: The junction to the Butterwell Line at Ashington station, and a short section of track at the southern end of the Butterwell Line were removed a few years back. These would need to be re-instated along with provision of a new north to east facing junction onto the East Coast Main Line at Butterwell to provide the additional freight and diversionary capacity between Benton and Butterwell Junctions and possible passenger services between Ashington and North Northumberland as described at section 2.2.5.

3. East Coast Main Line

3.1 Newcastle - Berwick Local Service

3.1.1 Service Proposal: The draft plan calls for the development of local services along the

East Coast Main Line between Newcastle and Berwick. To be specific, SENRUG calls for a regular, minimum hourly in each direction, local service calling at all stations, with Belford station re-opened and further evaluation of re-opening stations at Beal (for Holy Island) and Warkworth for Amble., with first morning train offering an arrival into Newcastle before 08:30 am, and last evening train departing from Newcastle after 22:00.

3.1.2 Service Justification: The current timetable provides residents of Pegswood, Widdrington, Acklington and Chathill with just one morning commuter train and one evening return train. This is wholly inadequate and has not allowed a market to develop and therefore precludes rail as a means of commuting or access to Newcastle. The new service would re-invigorate these communities by providing access to employment, education and leisure. The extension north of Chathill would provide a link into Berwick and support the tourism and leisure industry in north Northumberland. This section of the line runs parallel with and close to the coast overlooking glorious sea views, yet no local trains run over it. It would connect various locations on the Northumberland Coast Path and Cycle Path and serve St Cuthbert's Way (a long-distance path) at both Belford and Beal. Good public transport links would make north Northumberland a more attractive holiday destination and increase inward investment. Given the probable increase in 'staycations' following the current COVID pandemic the case for such an investment must be much more attractive. SENRUG is receiving strong expressions of support for its proposals from Parish Councils and other community groups in mid and North Northumberland.

3.1.3 Feasibility of Provision: Northumberland County Council, Northern and SENRUG have already jointly commissioned a Feasibility Study (from Systra) which concluded there are sufficient paths on the East Coast Main Line for such a service to run, without additional passing loops, provided it is operated by electric trains. Given the abundance of suitable "off-lease" electric multiple units (EMUs), some of which are directly owned by DfT who have invited expressions of interest, SENRUG believes this new service should be instigated straight away, in advance of and independent to the new station construction at Belford and possibly other places. In particular, the new service should commence, and paths be reserved for it, prior to any further call on paths for this section of the East Coast Main Line, ie the local service as described should be given higher priority than any further London - Edinburgh services (beyond those already committed to the open access operator starting in 2021).

3.1.4 Two Local Services Per Hour Newcastle - Morpeth: Although the Feasibility Study presumed the service would be provided by extending the current Newcastle - Morpeth service on to Berwick, ie utilising the existing Newcastle - Morpeth local path, in order to increase service frequency at Cramlington (see 3.3), SENRUG believes the new electric service Newcastle - Berwick should be provided *in addition* to the existing Hexham - Morpeth service (see 3.2), to provide two trains each way per hour through Cramlington, and to preserve the connection from Morpeth and Cramlington to MetroCentre and Hexham, which could not be achieved using electric trains (unless they also had significant additional battery capability).

3.1.5 Southern Extension to Team Valley (Low Fell): Noting there is an aspiration to provide a rail link between Team Valley and Newcastle, SENRUG notes the best way of achieving this would be to extend the Newcastle - Berwick electric service south along the East Coast Main Line to a new station at Team Valley. Further extensions to the south beyond this should also be considered.

3.1.6 Northern Extension to Connect with Scotrail Berwick - Edinburgh Service: The draft

Transport Plan makes reference to needing to build connections to neighbouring areas. A Northumberland Coast Local Service could also contribute to achieving this objective by working collaboratively with Transport Scotland who are investigating a local service from Edinburgh to Berwick with re-opened stations at East Linton and Reston. Linking the two proposed services (to form a single local service stopping at all stations between Newcastle and Edinburgh) would permit cross border travel between communities to both north and south of Berwick as well as facilitating commuting, access to education and leisure from north Northumberland to Edinburgh and Scottish Borders to Newcastle. It would also avoid potential congestion of train holding / reversing movements at Berwick which may arise from a desire to have local trains terminate there from both north and south.

3.2 Hexham - Newcastle - Morpeth - Bedlington Service

The direct link from Morpeth and Cramlington to MetroCentre and Hexham is greatly valued and utilised by passengers in south East Northumberland, and this service should be retained in addition to the new Newcastle - Berwick service described in 3.1. Additionally, the service should be extended beyond Morpeth to Bedlington, connecting with the Northumberland Line and serving a new station at Choppington. This simple extension on an existing freight line would give passengers from Bedlington direct access to MetroCentre (important for employment) as well as easier interchange onto the East Coast Main Line going north, through changing at Morpeth rather than travelling via Newcastle. It would also significantly assist the regeneration of Choppington and the Scotland Gate area, which includes some of the Northumberland's wards with the highest index of economic deprivation. The Morpeth - Bedlington extension is also specified in section 2.2.2.

3.3 Service Frequency at Cramlington

3.3.1 Need to Improve Service: Cramlington currently has a population of 35,000, making it Northumberland's largest town with a rail station, and with significant further population growth to 45,000 planned, it will soon overtake Blyth and become Northumberland's largest town overall. It has over 100,000 people living within a 15-minute drive of the station. It is Northumberland's only town with an indoor shopping centre and has a number of industrial estates round its outskirts supporting a range of industries including chemicals, light engineering and renewables. It also has Northumberland's largest and newest hospital which is additionally the only Specialist Accident and Emergency hospital in England. Cramlington has the misfortune to sit on the East Coast Main Line, where rail planners have long prioritised long-distance services that pass through the station without stopping, rather than the needs of the local economy. Cramlington currently does not have a commuter service into Newcastle that arrives before 08:20, and this first train (from Chathill) is full to standing before reaching Cramlington, meaning the earliest arrival in Newcastle for Cramlington passengers needing a seat is 09:20. It is therefore entirely evident that Cramlington requires a significant service improvement.

3.3.2 Proposal for Increasing Service: Service frequencies at Cramlington could be improved either by arranging for one of the long-distance operators passing through the station (such as TPE) to stop there, or by having a second local service per hour. Whilst either solution would be acceptable, SENRUG notes that having a different operator serve the station would make it difficult to achieve an even service pattern, as the long-distance operator would be constrained by pathing considerations elsewhere on its route. This could result in Cramlington getting 2 trains within 10 minutes then nothing for 50 minutes. Furthermore, it is unlikely a long-distance

operator would also serve Manors, an important commuter destination. Accordingly, SENRUG's preferred option is to have a second local service each hour, the first being the Newcastle - Berwick electric service as described in section 3.1, and the second being the existing Hexham - Morpeth service, then extended on to Bedlington, as described in 3.2. These proposals would provide access to employment opportunities as well as the shopping and leisure facilities at Cramlington from north Northumberland, Choppington and Bedlington.

3.3.3 Earlier Morning Service: In addition, Cramlington needs an earlier morning service. SENRUG has calculated a path is available a full hour earlier, which would give a 07:09 (approx) departure from Cramlington with an 07:22 (approx) arrival at Newcastle. SENRUG is not clear as to why Northern, the current operator, always prioritises available rolling stock onto different routes serving towns with significantly smaller populations. SENRUG believes the commuter market at Cramlington has been artificially constrained from developing because of unacceptably poor service now dating back for several decades.

3.4 ECML Infrastructure Interventions

3.4.1 Newcastle - Benton Junction: SENRUG is concerned that, with the addition of twice hourly Northumberland Line trains between Newcastle and Benton Junction, capacity constraints will develop on this section of the ECML route. The section has 3 running lines for most of its length, and also two adjacent sidings at Heaton depot. SENRUG believes consideration should be given to quadrupling the entire section of route between Newcastle and Benton Junction, also providing extra capacity and reducing conflict between local and fast services.

3.4.2 Platforms at Manors: All running lines through Manors station should have a platform, avoiding the need for southbound trains on the eastmost line (likely to be used by Northumberland line trains) to switch onto the reversible track to serve the station, which is an important commuter station. If a fourth running line through the station is built as proposed at section 3.4.1, the new platform should be an island one serving both lines. Further comments on the redevelopment of Manors station are given at section 4.1.2

3.4.3 Extra Running Line(s) through Newcastle Station: Another developing pinch point could be capacity for through trains at Newcastle Station. At the next station remodelling, consideration should be given to joining platform 1 (and possibly a new platform to the west of the current platform 1) to either of platforms 9, 10 or 11 to provide extra capacity through the station.

3.4.4 Power Supply Upgrade: It is lamentable that hybrid electric trains are obliged to switch back to diesel power north of Morpeth because the power supply is insufficient for the number of electric traction trains using the line, and there must be an immediate and significant power capacity enhancement to cover both existing electric services, the new Newcastle - Berwick local service proposed at section 3.1, and other rolling stock upgrades that may result in further diesel services being replaced by electric trains.

4. Stations

4.1 Station Improvements

4.1.1 Cramlington: SENRUG notes the draft plan calls for improvements at Cramlington

station, though the exact nature of these improvements is unspecified. However, improving the station at its existing site, whilst welcome, will not in itself overcome the problem of its isolated “out of town” location, difficult vehicle access, insufficient car parking and lack of bus connections. SENRUG therefore believes the entire station should be moved 200 metres to the south, adjacent to the pedestrian subway under the A1171 Westmoreland Way into the Manor Walks Shopping Centre, making use of the existing pedestrian footbridge with ramp access over the railway at this point which would then serve as the level access connection between the new station entrance and the northbound platform. The land between the railway line and the A1171 Westmoreland Way should then be used to provide an integrated bus station for Cramlington, which would be connected to Manor Walks Shopping Centre via the existing pedestrian subway, and adjacent to and integrated with the railway station. In addition, there would be space to create an expanded, dedicated car park for rail users. The new station site adjacent to the bus station is also likely to justify commercial provision of station facilities such as taxi office, retail and catering outlets and bank machine. The whole scheme could be part financed by release of land at the existing station site for housing development and Section 106 Contributions from developers of land adjacent to the new station site. This proposal would give Cramlington an integrated train / bus / taxi station with road free access to Manor Walks shopping centre from the western entrance.

4.1.2 Manors: The heavy rail and Metro stations at Manors are totally unconnected, with a poor and unsignposted walking route between the 2 stations, despite the heavy rail station, which does not currently have level access, being virtually directly above the Metro platforms. The potential for heavy rail - Metro interconnection here is thus totally unexploited. Changing from the East Coast Main Line at Newcastle then requires a further change at Monument to reach the Metro Coast southern route. Manors also now serves a major university campus, and is adjacent to the large Manors multi-storey car park (whereas Newcastle station itself is constrained in the ability to add further parking). Manors serves the Quayside, Millennium Bridge and Baltic Centre areas of Newcastle / Gateshead and the multi-storey car park also gives access to high-level pedestrian walkways across the central motorway to the city centre (albeit currently without level access at the city end). Finally, of the 3 running lines through Manors station, only 2 have platforms. This is likely to make it difficult for trains on the Northumberland Line to serve Manors, without crossing the East Coast Main Line fast lines, conflicting with long-distance train movements. Taking all these points together, SENRUG believes a major modernisation and upgrade of Manors station is needed to provide:

- A fourth running line through the station, part of a more ambitious project to add a fourth running line all the way from Newcastle to Benton Junction (see 3.4.1)
- A second platform, so that all 4 running lines are served by a platform, allowing local trains on any track to serve the station
- A new overbridge between the platforms, with level access via ramps to both platforms, street level (station entrance), via a lift to the Metro platforms beneath, and continuing across to the Manors multi-storey car park, joining it at the same level which also gives access to the high-level pedestrian walkway to the city centre.
- Level access via ramps or a lift at the city end of the pedestrian walkways, near John Dobson Street, central Library, local bus stops and Megabus stop.

4.1.3 Northumberland Park: The current design for the Northumberland Line station at Northumberland Park leaves it physically disconnected from the Metro platforms with interconnection being via the road overbridge. To make the two stations appear more integrated, and noting the public highway on the overbridge has been closed to vehicle traffic

for some time, and that this appears permanent, the two stations could be connected by building a joint station entrance canopy so that there is a weather protected passenger route between the two sets of platforms and that passengers do not feel they are leaving one station to walk along the road to enter the adjacent one.

4.2 Specification of Minimum Station Facilities

SENUG requests that Transport North East establishes a minimum set of facilities that operators must provide for all stations across its network, coupled with a compliance and reporting regime designed to ensure train operators resolve faults promptly and do not neglect items that are key passenger requirements, as happened at Morpeth where the CIS system was allowed to remain faulty for a year with little evidence of any internal management escalation to resolve. The suggested minimum station facilities by class of station (Metro and heavy rail) are as follows:

4.2.1 All Stations:

- Step free access to all platforms
- Signage showing which platforms are for which destinations
- Customer Information Screens
- Tannoy Announcements
- Visual display of timetables and routes (ie Timetable Posters or for Metro service frequency posters)
- Help Point
- Waiting shelters on all platforms (unless underground)
- Seating on all platforms

4.2.2 Interchange & Town Centre Stations:

(Eg Ashington, Newsham, Northumberland Park, Cramlington, Manors)

All of the above, and

- Ticket purchasing facilities
- National Rail stations should also have a pre-paid ticket collection facility
- ATM
- Kiosk or coffee cart

4.2.3 Stations Also Serving Long Distance Trains:

(Eg Berwick, Alnmouth, Morpeth)

All of the above, and

- Ticket Office staffed 07:00 to 18:00 daily as a minimum
- Toilet and babychange facility open to passengers 07:00 to 18:00 daily as a minimum
- Internal Waiting Room available to passengers 07:00 to 18:00 daily as a minimum
- Disabled assistance to board / alight trains 07:00 to 18:00 daily as a minimum
- Buffet or café facility

In particular, it should not be necessary to require a passenger to use his or her mobile phone to obtain train running information, at any station.

5. Metro Extensions

5.1. New Airport Routes

SENUG notes and welcomes the draft Plan contains the twin aspirations to introduce a new Metro service from Airport to Coast, and additionally to create a new Metro route between Northumberland Park and Percy Main, on the existing alignment, to serve Cobalt and Silverlink. Both of these proposals are welcome. SENUG also wants to see a new route from Blyth Town Centre to Airport as described in section 2.2.3. Accordingly, SENUG proposes 2 new Metro routes from Airport, which will need passenger running tracks through the depot between Regent's Centre and Four Lane Ends, as follows:

5.1.1 Route 1 - Airport - Blyth Town Centre: It is envisaged this route, from airport via Regent's Centre - Four Lane Ends - Northumberland Park - Newsham to Blyth Town Centre would be served by Metro trains, using battery power on the Network rail section between Northumberland Park and Newsham, and the new line from Newsham into Blyth Town Centre built and electrified to Metro standards

5.1.2 Route 2 - Airport - Tynemouth: This route, from Airport via Regent's Centre - Four Lane Ends - Northumberland Park - Cobalt - Silverlink - Percy Main to Tynemouth would leave the existing Metro line east of Northumberland Park station to join the existing alignment through Cobalt and Silverlink. It would then require a new chord allowing the alignment to join the existing Metro route where the disused alignment crosses it west of Percy Main station. There is plenty of capacity at Tynemouth to build a new bay platform here for reversing and terminating trains from the Airport. Alternatively, the route could proceed on from Tynemouth, either terminating at Monkseaton where again there is capacity for a reversing siding, or continuing back to airport via Northumberland Park to form an Airport - Cobalt - Airport loop, or continue through to South Shields via a new Tyne crossing as proposed in section 8.1.

5.2 Problems With Blyth - Cobalt Direct

It is tempting to consider a solution of an Airport - Whitley Bay route and a Blyth - Cobalt - Percy Main route. The problem with this is that the Blyth - Percy Main section would not serve Northumberland Park station (without a complex reversing out manoeuvre, or without building a second station to the east, with a long walking connection from the current Northumberland Park station.) It is imperative that all routes from the point where the north-south and west-east alignments cross, just east of Northumberland Park station, serve Northumberland Park station itself, which will increase in its strategic importance as an interchange hub.

5.3 Ponteland

Consideration should be given to extending the Metro from its current terminus at Airport, along the old rail alignment, to Ponteland., bringing rail services to this Northumberland town.

6. Heavy Rail to Newcastle Airport and Paths on the ECML

6.1 Assumed Routing

SENUG notes the proposal to establish a heavy rail link to the Airport, although no further

detail is given as to the route, or the stations to be served by the link. Assuming that the plan is to re-open the south to west curve at Benton and route trains via the East Coast Main Line and then onto Metro tracks to the airport, whilst it would result in a faster journey from Newcastle Centre to the Airport, SENRUG has the following concerns about the plan.

6.1.1: Lack of Paths: The additional services on the East Coast Main Line between Newcastle and Benton Junction would utilise train paths that may be required for other aspirations which SENRUG considers have higher priority, namely the Northumberland Line Services and the second local hourly service on the East Coast Main Line to permit both Hexham - Morpeth - Bedlington and Newcastle - Berwick (see sections 2 and 3.1).

6.1.2: No Connectivity with North Northumberland: The service would not improve the connectivity between the Airport and stations on the north of the East Coast Main Line, eg at Cramlington, Morpeth and stations to Berwick. Such passengers would still need to travel into Newcastle and back out.

6.1.3: Constraints of Faster Heavy Rail Trains Using Metro Route: The heavy rail trains to Airport would need to interweave with high frequency stopping Metro services from Benton Junction, cross the junction between Four Lane Ends and Regent's Centre, and then interweave further with Metro trains joining the airport route between Gosforth and Regent's Centre.

6.2 Alternative Proposals

Therefore, SENRUG suggests that the following alternative proposal be considered:

6.2.1: New Heavy Rail / Metro Connection Station at East Benton: Consideration should be given to constructing a new heavy rail / Metro interchange station at East Benton where the two systems cross, permitting passengers to transfer from the local services on the East Coast Main Line route to the Metro services on the new Airport - Blyth and Airport - Coast routes (see sections 2.2.3 and 5.1).

6.2.2: New Heavy Rail Route to Airport From Killingworth. A new branch from the East Coast Main Line from Killingworth, along a former wagonway alignment to the airport could be constructed, giving a heavy rail route into the Airport entirely independent of the Metro. This should be combined with a new station on the East Coast Main line at Killingworth, which would provide an interconnection to the airport to both north and south on the East Coast Main Line, by the two local hourly services proposed by SENRUG (see sections 3.1 and 3.2) as well as serving the community of Killingworth itself. However, this proposal should be considered in conjunction with the earlier proposals for quadrupling the East Coast Main Line between Newcastle and Killingworth / Benton Junction (see section 3.4.1) to avoid pathing difficulties on this section, and to provide a four-track railway from Newcastle to Butterwell Junction (see section 2.2.5).

7. Heavy Rail / Metro / Bus Interconnections

SENRUG welcomes the emphasis in the plan of integration between Rail, Metro and Bus Services. SENRUG believes that integration should be achieved on a number of levels, as follows:

7.1 Physical Interconnections of Metro and Heavy Rail Tracks

This should take place at Northumberland Park, as described at section 2.2.3, and just east of Benton junction, as described at section 2.3.3. The heavy rail track between Northumberland Park and Newsham should be engineered and signalled to take Metro trains under battery traction, on the Airport - Blyth Town centre route.

7.2 Integration of stations

This is required at Northumberland Park (see section 4.1.3) and Manors (see section 4.1.2)

7.3 Buses to Serve Railway Stations

7.3.1 Morpeth: Morpeth has a bus turning circle, but only a very limited bus service. With its 56 long-distance trains a day, there should be a regular 15-minute bus service into the station turning circle, giving direct access to Morpeth residential communities such as Kirkhill and Lancaster Park, and serving the town centre bus station.

7.3.2 Cramlington: Cramlington also has a bus turning circle which is currently not served by any busses. The hourly bus through Nelson Village does not make the short detour into the station, leaving the nearest bus stops some 200 yards walk away. It is particularly unacceptable there is no bus to the new Northumberland Specialist Accident and Emergency Hospital. Taking into account other bus needs in the Cramlington area, SENRUG believes a new bus route should be introduced as follows: Bedlington - Bog Houses - East Hartford – Nelson Village - Cramlington Station Bus Turning Circle – Cramlington Dudley Lane Shops – Cramlington Hospital – Seaton Delaval Station (to be re-opened as part of the Northumberland Line) – Seaton Delaval Hall – Seaton Sluice – Whitley Bay. Once the new integrated train and bus station is introduced as proposed at section 4.1.1, this route would go directly from Nelson Village to the bus station.

7.3.3 Newcastle and Haymarket Bus Stations: Given that busses from Northumberland do not serve Newcastle Station, it is deplorable there is no direct bus connection between Haymarket Bus station and Newcastle Rail Station. Using the Metro for such a short journey can be difficult and requires 2 sets of stairs or lifts at either end. One of the easy access Quay Link Bus Routes should be amended (or a new route introduced) to provide a direct connection, and should also extend on to Newcastle Coach station, which remains in a public transport desert and is unmentioned in the draft plan. Additionally, a selection of busses from key Northumberland towns should continue beyond Haymarket to Newcastle station.

7.4 Ticket Integration

Ticket integration across heavy rail, Metro and bus is required, and should deliver the following benefits:

7.4.1 Change mode without paying twice: It should be possible for a passenger to travel in one direction by train on a return ticket, but then return by bus (for instance because the hourly train is cancelled or has been missed) without having to pay again. A smartcard system such as London's Oyster Card is envisaged.

7.4.2 Northumberland Park - Newcastle: There must be inter-acceptability of Metro and National Rail tickets between Northumberland Park and Newcastle, as already exists between

Newcastle and Sunderland. The ability of the Northumberland Line to relieve Metro congestion on the core route from Gosforth to Newcastle must be recognised, and the two systems not permitted to compete with each other through separate tickets.

7.4.3 Explorer North East and Rail Rover Tickets: Local rail services between Newcastle and Morpeth (and Berwick once services are extended here), and Newcastle - Ashington (once Northumberland Line is opened) should be included in the Explorer North East ticket, and Northern's Day Ranger tickets Tyne Valley Day Ranger and North East Round Robin.

7.4.4 Explorer North East - Ability to Purchase: It should be possible to buy Explorer North East tickets at Metro stations for passengers wanting to make integrated Metro then bus journeys, particularly at Airport, Newcastle and Sunderland stations, but there is no reason why they should not be obtainable from any Metro ticket machine.

7.4.5 Cramlington Plusbus: Once bus services are introduced at Cramlington station, Plusbus should be introduced, covering as a minimum the Northumberland Specialist Accident and Emergency Hospital and Northumberlandia.

8. Blue Sky Thinking

The draft Plan envisages a number of new road builds, regardless of the near certainty the new roads don't just make it easier for existing road users but also act as generators of extra traffic – resulting in demand for yet more roads and the ongoing destruction of public transport. Whilst there is a place for some new roads, and in any case trunk road policy seems to be driven by government policy and the needs of other areas, there is space for some genuine blue sky thinking for rail transport that enhance regeneration and greatly improve accessibility. SENRUG's suggestions for ambitious new rail developments are as follows:

8.1 New Tyne Crossing Between North and South Shields.

A new crossing linking North Shields and South Shields would permit the new Airport - Tynemouth service (see section 5.1.2) to continue on to North Shields, then South Shields, extending on to Pelaw or Heworth or perhaps linking back all the way to the city centre.

8.2 River Blyth Crossing Between Blyth Town Centre and North Blyth / Cambois.

A tunnel between Blyth and North Blyth would allow the new Airport - Blyth service (see sections 2.2.3 and 5.1.1) to continue from Blyth to North Blyth, then on the existing freight tracks to Marchey's House and Ashington, with new stations at North Blyth and Cambois, the latter serving the new Britishvolt factory, expected to create 8,000 jobs, then via Marchey's house Junction and onto Ashington. The bay platform being created at Ashington as part of the current Northumberland line proposal, but which would not be needed once trains are extended on to Newbiggin (see section 2.2.1), could then be used for trains on this route.

End