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MAY 2022 RAIL TIMETABLE DISASTROUS FOR NORTHUMBERLAND SAYS SENUG

The new May 2022 rail timetable proposed for all four train companies carrying passengers along the East Coast Main Line will be a disaster for Northumberland.

That's the verdict of SENUG - the voluntary group that campaigns for better rail services in the South and East of the county.

Chair Dennis Fancett said "we've analysed these proposals in depth and have found that every single station in Northumberland will receive a worse service than it does today. Morpeth and Berwick will be particularly hard hit. Morpeth will see the complete withdrawal of its new TransPennine Express trains, introduced just before the start of the Covid pandemic, giving the town hourly links to both Edinburgh and Leeds and Manchester. It will also see the withdrawal of all daytime LNER services, and LNER services to London on Sundays. Berwick sees a reduction from 15 to 9 LNER services per day, part mitigated by an additional 3 or 4 CrossCountry trains, but still an overall loss of service and a significant reduction for people to travelling to London or Peterborough".

LNER point to the fact that a new open access operator will start a service at Morpeth later this year, which they say means their trains no longer need to serve the station. But Dennis notes this is a disingenuous argument because open access services can be withdrawn or modified at any time without consultation as they are not under any contract or obligation to government. Additionally the service will not provide connectivity to other Northumberland locations or to key centres such as Durham, York or Peterborough, and will not offer first class facilities which are appreciated by the business community.

"These changes are all for the sake of cutting 15 minutes off the journey time between London and Edinburgh" added Dennis. "But journey time is now less critical with in train wifi and superior on-board comfort and catering. Time on the train is no longer time lost to business. Whilst we have no objection to journey time to Edinburgh being improved, it

should not be at the expense of loss of service in Northumberland and connectivity between northern towns and cities. Overall, this proposal is London-centric and does not “level up”, or “build back better”, and fails to address the needs of the north. If implemented, it would undo all the improvements SENRUG has campaigned for and seen achieved incrementally over the last 15 years in a single stroke”.

The group has produced a briefing paper available on its website detailing the service reductions station by station and key changes to the proposals they want to see implemented to protect Northumberland services. They are urging the County Council, the regions MPs, the North of Tyne Mayor and other stakeholders to make urgent representations to the DfT and LNER to ensure these changes are incorporated. Those who support SENRUG’s campaigning activities can also join the group to help it be more effective - details at www.senrug.co.uk.

Ends (494 words)

Notes for Editors

SENRUG – The South East Northumberland Rail User Group - is a voluntary pro rail campaign group: contact Dennis Fancett, Chair, tel 07810 353651, e: chair@senrug.co.uk. www.senrug.co.uk

SENRUG’s detailed briefing paper is on its website at <https://www.senrug.co.uk/blog/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/21-06-ECML-Rail-Consultations-for-May-22-Timetable.pdf>. The timetable proposals are set out in four different consultation documents, one for each of the companies operating along the route, and details are given in Section 1 of SENRUG’s briefing paper.