



PASSENGER RAIL SERVICES IN NORTHUMBERLAND FROM MAY 2022

BRIEFING FROM SENUG

1. Introduction

The rail industry is proposing to introduce a new timetable for all train operators currently using the East Coast Main Line rail route. This runs through Northumberland from Newcastle to Berwick, and the Northumberland section is currently served by 4 rail operators. The new proposals are set out in consultation documents issued separately by all 4 companies, as follows:

- a) LNER Consultation on ECML (East Coast Main Line) May 2022 Timetable (***closes 5th August 2021***)
https://lner.citizenspace.com/user_uploads/lner-may-2022-timetable-change-consultation-document-final-version-1.pdf. (Draft timetables at https://lner.citizenspace.com/stakeholder-engagement/northumberland/user_uploads/consultation_timetable_a4_web--1-.pdf)
- b) TransPennine Express Consultation on ECML May 2022 Timetable (***closes 5th August 2021***)
<https://www.tpexpress.co.uk/about-us/our-plan/east-coast-mainline-consultation>
- c) CrossCountry Trains Consultation on the May 2022 ECML Timetable (***closes 5th August 2021***)
<https://www.crosscountrytrains.co.uk/travel-updates-information/consultation-may-2022>
- d) Northern Railway Consultation on the May 2022 ECML Timetable (***closes 5th August 2021***)
<https://www.northernrailway.co.uk/eastcoast22>

Other consultations have also been launched by the train companies operating on the southern sections of the East Coast Main Line. These are not discussed in this briefing. There is additionally a simultaneous consultation underway from Transport For the North on Decarbonising the North <https://transportforthenorth.com/decarbonisation/> (***closes 31st August 2021***), again not discussed in this briefing.

2. Impact of Proposals

The proposals represent a drastic reduction / worsening of services through Northumberland, as follows:

Cramlington

- The popular return commuter service departing Newcastle at 17:17 will no longer call at

Cramlington. Cramlington passengers will now have a wait between 16:43 and 17:47 for an evening train home.

- Services will no longer extend beyond Newcastle to MetroCentre and Hexham, causing difficulty for commuters working at MetroCentre.
- Some services will no longer call at Manors, including the late morning peak service departing Morpeth at 09:26 and Cramlington at 09:34. Manors serves a number of call centres and is a popular commuter destination, as well providing a Metro interchange to the Coast route, and serving the Quayside and Millennium Bridge areas of the city.
- There will still be no earlier morning services from Cramlington prior to the 08:00, arriving at Newcastle 08:13, which is full to standing before reaching Cramlington. SENRUG believes Cramlington needs at least one and possibly two trains before this.

Morpeth

- **Complete withdrawal** of the hourly TPE services to Edinburgh (northbound) and Leeds, Manchester and Liverpool (southbound), introduced thanks to SENRUG campaigning from December 2019. It is proposed this service will no longer run further north than Newcastle.
- **Complete withdrawal** of all LNER daytime services: LNER will only provide early morning and late evening services. LNER's consultation points out there will be a limited number of daytime services provided by the new open access operator East Coast Trains. However, because these will be provided by an open access operator on a commercial basis and not be subject to a contract with DfT, they can be withdrawn or amended at any time without consultation (as has happened to similar services to Wrexham and Blackpool). Moreover, they will not provide any connectivity to other Northumberland destinations, or key centres south of Newcastle such as Durham, York, Doncaster or Peterborough, or offer a first-class service, valued by business customers in the Morpeth area.
- Because all daytime LNER services are being withdrawn, there will be less connectivity between Morpeth and other Northumberland regional centres (Alnmouth, Berwick). Only CrossCountry trains will provide these services, but operate to a "skip-stop" pattern and will typically connect Morpeth with either Alnmouth or Berwick, but not both, and less frequently than the current combined LNER / CrossCountry service.
- **Withdrawal** of morning service to Aberdeen (the evening return service is retained). There is a strong flow of oil industry workers between Morpeth and Aberdeen.
- No ability for commuters to Edinburgh to stagger working hours, due to withdrawal of LNER daytime services; no northbound LNER service between 07:09 and 20:16, and no southbound LNER service from Edinburgh between 06:15 and 19:25. (CrossCountry will continue to run a limited service at approximately the same times as they do today, plus 1 additional southbound service).
- Significantly reduced direct connectivity to York - the 2nd most popular destination (jointly with Edinburgh) from Morpeth after London which outside of the early morning and late evening services will now only be provided by CrossCountry services.
- Passengers for Manchester Airport will need to change twice (at Newcastle and York) - this is at a time when low-cost carrier easyJet has pulled out of Newcastle airport meaning demand for travel to Manchester Airport can be expected to increase.
- The Monday to Friday evening service to London will depart later and take longer, not arriving in London until 00:35 (previous arrival 23:32) - too late for many hotel check-ins.
- **No LNER trains to London on Sundays**. The only London train will be an evening service which will take 5 hours for the 3 hour 15 minute journey and not arrive until the early hours of Monday morning!

- The last Saturday night LNER train from London will leave Kings Cross at 17:03 (currently 18:00), whereas bizarrely on Sundays there will be a train as late as 19:30.
- On Sundays, Morpeth will have no LNER trains from London before 17:03 then bizarrely 2 trains within 15 minutes (arriving Morpeth 22:13 then 22:25). Better distribution throughout the day is needed.
- There is a slightly better provision of early morning / late evening LNER services, and a marginally later return service from Edinburgh on Saturday nights (departing 20:20 instead of 20:00), but nothing like the late evening return from Edinburgh at 22:00 or 23:00 that SENRUG has been requesting.
- Local services will no longer extend beyond Newcastle to MetroCentre and Hexham, causing difficulty for commuters working at MetroCentre.
- Some local services will no longer call at Manors, including the late morning peak service departing Morpeth at 09:26 and Cramlington at 09:34.
- There will be no earlier local services for commuting to Newcastle. Commuters currently using the early LNER services will find difficulty due to LNER's compulsory seat reservation policy, which will drive commuters off their trains. The first local service from Morpeth will be at 07:52 (Newcastle arrival of 08:13).
- In summary the proposals represent **removal of virtually every improvement** to rail services at Morpeth that has been introduced as a result of SENRUG campaigning over the last 15 years.

Pegswood, Widdrington, Acklington, Chathill

- The single evening return train will leave Newcastle 30 minutes earlier, at 17:17 compared to 17:57 today, thus denying the opportunity to commute by train to those who work until 17:30. The morning train will run 7 minutes earlier.

Alnmouth

- CrossCountry services will be reduced by 1 northbound train.

Berwick

- LNER services will be reduced from 15 trains to 9 trains per day each way. CrossCountry will be adding an additional 3 services northbound and 4 southbound, meaning an overall loss of service for Berwick, and a significant loss of service to London.
- Like Morpeth, there is a slightly better provision of early morning / late evening LNER services, and a marginally later return service from Edinburgh on Saturday nights (departing 20:20 instead of 20:00), but nothing like the late evening return from Edinburgh at 22:00 or 23:00 that SENRUG has been requesting.
- There will be no improvements in the daytime connectivity to other Northumberland towns such as Morpeth. This is an opportunity lost.

3. Background: Why are DfT and LNER Proposing These Changes?

The DfT and LNER want to speed up train services between London and Edinburgh. The new timetable will reduce London - Edinburgh journey times by up to 15 minutes. However, in order to achieve this, a number of calls at intermediate stations served by Edinburgh trains will need to be dropped.

LNER currently run 2 trains per hour between London and Edinburgh. These will be "speeded up", having less stops, explaining some of the service reductions in Northumberland referred to above.

However, in order to continue to provide service to a number of destinations south of Newcastle, LNER wish to provide a 3rd train per hour between London and Newcastle, calling at some of the smaller stations the Edinburgh trains will no longer serve.

As there isn't sufficient track capacity between York and Newcastle for this 3rd train, in order to accommodate it, the 2nd TransPennine Express service to Newcastle will be withdrawn and terminated at York. Newcastle will thus have 3 trains per hour to London but only 1 to Manchester, whereas the current provision is 2 trains per hour to London and 2 to Manchester.

Because one of the TransPennine Express services is now being terminated at York, it will not reach Newcastle and can not proceed beyond Newcastle via Morpeth to Edinburgh, as introduced from the December 2019 timetable. It is not immediately clear to SENRUG why the single TransPennine Express service per hour that will reach Newcastle can not continue on to Edinburgh as per the December 2019 timetable, other than a general desire from DfT / LNER to clear the main line for unimpeded use by LNER services. Not permitting TPE services to run north of Newcastle seems particularly bizarre as they are maintained at Craigentenny depot in Edinburgh. Therefore, there will need to be some (for example 2 per day) "empty stock" movements along the line to get trains to and from the depot. The possibility is mentioned these might be made into passenger trains to serve a new station at Reston being opened by Transport Scotland. If this happens, these trains at least could serve Northumberland stations, although that is not proposed at present.

The recast of the timetable for long-distance services inevitably means some changes to local train times as these need to fit in around when the long-distance services are passing through Newcastle. However it is not clear why the linking of local services through Newcastle (eg Morpeth to Hexham or Carlisle) should be severed as part of this process. Northern have referenced timekeeping problems and have said their services would be more reliable as problems at one end of their network would then not affect another part of their network. This however is not an acceptable reason to de-link the services and to omit important calls at Cramlington and Manors.

4. SENRUG's Response

SENRUG does not accept there is a need to improve journey times between London and Edinburgh by 15 minutes. Overall journey time is less critical with superior on train comfort, catering and on-board wifi. Time on board the train is no longer time lost to business. Whilst we have no objection to journey time being improved, it should not be at the expense of loss of service at smaller northern towns and connectivity between northern towns and cities. Overall the proposal is London-centric and does not "level up", or "build back better", failing to address the needs of the north.

SENRUG therefore believes the proposed timetables must be amended as follows.

4.1 LNER services must continue to call at Morpeth during the day at roughly the same times as they do now, namely northbound at approximately 09:00, 13:00, and 17:00 and southbound at 15:15 and 20:00. The argument that these are no longer needed because Morpeth will be served by the open access operator is disingenuous because open access services can be withdrawn or modified at any time without consultation, and the service will not provide connectivity to other Northumberland locations or to key centres such as Durham, York or Peterborough.

4.2 In particular the morning LNER train to Aberdeen should continue to serve Morpeth (as will the evening return), due to the strong flow of oil workers between Morpeth and Aberdeen. Under the new timetable this train will pass through Morpeth at approximately 09:15.

4.3 Service levels at Berwick must be maintained. Reducing LNER services by 6 trains per day, but only increasing CrossCountry services by 3 is not acceptable and represents a loss of connectivity to London.

4.4 The hourly TPE service from Liverpool to Newcastle should be extended to Edinburgh (noting that the trains are maintained at Edinburgh anyway so need to reach there) calling at each of Morpeth, Alnmouth and Berwick, providing connectivity between these stations, plus an hourly service from each to Edinburgh, York, Leeds and Manchester. There should be further consideration of swapping round the western ends of the 2 TPE hourly services so they run Liverpool - York and Manchester Airport - Edinburgh, because there is likely to be stronger demand from Northumberland to Manchester Airport than to Liverpool.

4.5 There should be two earlier morning local southbound services from Morpeth to Newcastle, giving commuters at Cramlington opportunity to reach Newcastle before 08:13 (a train which prior to COVID was always full to standing before even reaching Cramlington). These should depart Morpeth at approximately 06:22 and 07:22, ie 30 and 90 minutes prior to the existing first service.

4.6 The northbound weekday Northern service from Newcastle at 17:17 should also call at Cramlington. Removing Cramlington from this service is ridiculous and will make commuting from Northumberland's largest town virtually impossible, with hardly any peak time services.

4.7 Connections on local trains through Newcastle should be retained with Morpeth trains running to / from Carlisle throughout the day. With the extra timetabling space created by faster LNER and TPE trains on the ECML, there is no need to sever these through connections which create attractive leisure propositions and connections to the West Coast Main Line. As a very minimum, through service from Morpeth and Cramlington to MetroCentre must be maintained for the benefit of MetroCentre workers and shoppers.

4.8 All local services throughout the day should continue to call at Manors, recognising its importance as a commuter destination serving a number of call centres, the fact it is adjacent to Northumbria University campus, and is more attractive for leisure passengers visiting the Quayside, Millennium Bridge, Biscuit Factory and so on.

4.9 From a regional perspective. SENRUG believes the interest of Newcastle and its hinterlands are best served by terminating the 3rd LNER train per hour at York rather than Newcastle and instead extending the 2nd TPE train per hour from York to Newcastle, leaving Newcastle with 2 trains per hour to London and 2 to Manchester (as it has now), rather than 3 trains to London and 1 to Manchester (as is proposed).

4.10 Opportunity should be taken as part of the timetable recast to create the path for a new local electric hourly service between Newcastle and Berwick, calling at **all** stations, and with the station at Belford re-opened. This new service could also be extended south from Newcastle to a new station at Team Valley (Low Fell) as this would be the simplest way to meet to fulfil the requirement for a station there, and create access to jobs in Team Valley from Northumberland

locations. This new service (Newcastle - Berwick) section has already been the subject of a Feasibility Study conducted by Systra, jointly funded by Northern Railway, Northumberland County Council and SENRUG, which demonstrated the service would be both commercially and technically viable (ie there is capacity on the network for it). Prior to the hourly Berwick service being introduced, there should be a 2nd, later, evening return service to Chathill for the benefit of those unable to catch the retimed earlier train. SENRUG believes the new hourly local electric service from Newcastle to Berwick should be **in addition to** the existing service from Carlisle to Morpeth (which should be extended on to Bedlington) and the semi-fast service operated by TransPennine Express as referenced in 4.4. SENRUG's view on the allocation of hourly train paths on the East Coast Main Line between Newcastle and Berwick is set out in Annex 1.

End

Annex 1

SENRUG Proposal For Utilisation of Paths For Passenger Train Services Between Newcastle and Edinburgh

Not including freight or within Scotland services

Operator	Section of Route	Trains Each Way Per Hour	Stopping Pattern
LNER	Newcastle - Edinburgh	1	Non-stop
LNER	Newcastle - Edinburgh	1	2 of Morpeth, Alnmouth, Berwick, Dunbar
CrossCountry	Newcastle - Edinburgh	1	2 of Morpeth, Alnmouth, Berwick, Dunbar (alternating with LNER above)
TransPennine Express	Newcastle - Edinburgh	1	All of Morpeth, Alnmouth, Berwick, Dunbar (providing within Northumberland connectivity plus hourly service to Manchester & Liverpool)
Open Access Operator	Newcastle - Edinburgh	1	Commercial decision of operator
Northern	Team Valley - Berwick	1	All Stations: Team Valley* Newcastle - Manors - Cramlington - Morpeth - Pegswood - Widdrington - Acklington - Alnmouth - Chathill - Belford* - Berwick
Northern	Carlisle - Bedlington	1	All Stations: Newcastle - Manors - Cramlington - Morpeth - Choppington* - Bedlington*.
Northern	Newcastle - Benton Junction	2	Newcastle - Manors

* new station proposed; + new station e-opening as part of The Northumberland Line proposal

End of Annex 1