



**RESPONSE TO  
PROPOSED DRAFT MAY 2022 EAST COAST MAIN LINE TIMETABLE**

**22<sup>nd</sup> July 2021**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

**1.1.** This is SENRUG's response to 4 separate consultations from each of LNER, CrossCountry, TransPennine Express and Northern Railways, to their draft May 2022 timetables. Each company requires responses by 5<sup>th</sup> August 2021.

**1.2.** SENRUG is taking the unusual step of issuing a single response to all 4 operators. This is partly because the timetables have been developed through cross-industry collaboration, and partly because several of the issues SENRUG has identified are industry wide and whilst suggested solutions are given in Section 5, SENRUG does not want to be overly prescriptive as to which operator should resolve them or how they should be fixed.

**1.3.** SENRUG is The South East Northumberland Rail User Group, an unincorporated voluntary pro-rail 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 209 individual and 13 corporate members including 5 Town or Parish Councils (as at end of June 2021), along with 1,546 Facebook, 293 Twitter and 52 Instagram followers (as at end of May 2021).

**2. FALSE STARTING PREMISE**

**2.1.** SENRUG believes the draft timetable has been constructed on the false premise that the overriding commercial imperative is to reduce overall journey times between London and Newcastle and London and Edinburgh. Whilst SENRUG accepts there is some advantage in journey time reductions, SENRUG does not accept they justify the significant disbenefits to northern economies that this draft timetable would create.

**2.2.** In particular, with modern onboard wifi, superior catering and first class offers, extra minutes on the train is **not** time lost to business. However, time lost in changing trains **is**

**most definitely** time lost to business, compromising a minimum 20 minutes non-productive time per change (5 minutes before arrival at connecting station to disconnect laptop or tablet and pack away, at least 10 minutes wait time - in practice likely to be more, plus 5 minutes to settle into a seat and re-boot on the next train). The draft timetable results in many journeys that can today be made by direct train requiring a change of trains in future.

**2.3.** Mention is made in LNER's presentation on the number of extra seats created. As far as SENRUG can tell, these numbers do not take into account seats lost due to other operators being obliged to withdraw or curtail routes to support additional LNER trains.

**2.4.** The draft proposals also assume that travel to / from London is of significantly greater benefit than travel between northern cities. For instance, whereas Newcastle currently has 2 trains per hour to London (for most of the day) and 2 trains per hour to Manchester, the draft timetable proposes Newcastle should have 3 trains per hour to London but only 1 train per hour to Manchester. SENRUG does not believe that is an acceptable trade-off. In any case, the 3<sup>rd</sup> LNER train per hour to / from Newcastle is of little practical benefit, leaving at virtually the same time as one of the other LNER services but simply taking longer. Furthermore, passengers from Cramlington (and to a lesser extent Morpeth) only get the choice of 1 train per hour to London since rail ticket booking software only permits travel on the first train that departs after the connecting local service arrives.

**2.5.** Therefore, SENRUG believes the draft timetable is London-centric, fails to "level up" and does not "build back better". As such, the timetable amendments and enhancements listed in Section 5 are required.

### **3. SPECIFIC PROBLEMS FOR NORTHUMBERLAND**

**3.1.** The proposals represent a drastic reduction and unacceptable worsening of services through Northumberland. Every station on the East Coast Main Line in Northumberland will receive a worse service than the December 2019 timetable. Berwick and Morpeth are particularly affected, with Morpeth losing approximately half of the services it was scheduled to have at December 2019. Alnmouth, Cramlington and Manors all have further minor losses, with Pegswood, Widdrington, Acklington and Chathill receiving an unfavourable timing change to their single evening northbound service.

**3.2.** The new timetable removes direct connections for dozens of journeys that can be made today, in particular Morpeth - Alnmouth (off-peak - passengers will have to travel to Berwick or Newcastle and then double back, but the rail industry does not set a fare for such a journey), Morpeth - Hexham, Morpeth - Peterborough (off peak), Morpeth - Manchester and Newcastle - Manchester Airport.

**3.3.** Anglo-Scottish economic interconnectivity is best served by local and semi-fast trains running across the border through Berwick, connecting smaller communities in north Northumberland and Scottish Borders, rather than faster journeys between London and Edinburgh.

**3.4.** A station-by-station analysis is as follows:

### 3.4.1 Cramlington

- The popular return commuter service departing Newcastle at 17:17 will no longer call at Cramlington, Northumberland's largest town with a railway station with a population of 35,000.
- Services will no longer extend beyond Newcastle to MetroCentre and Hexham, causing difficulty for commuters working at MetroCentre, and disconnecting 2 important regional Northumberland towns.
- Some services will no longer call at Manors, including the late morning peak service departing Cramlington at 09:34. Manors serves a number of call centres and is a popular commuter destination as well as being adjacent to the Northumbria University campus.
- 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.

### 3.4.2 Morpeth

- **Complete withdrawal** of the hourly TPE services to Edinburgh (northbound) and Leeds, Manchester and Liverpool (southbound), introduced from December 2019. It is proposed these services will no longer run further north than Newcastle.
- **Complete withdrawal** of all LNER daytime 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. Much as the open access operator is welcomed, providing a choice of the quality / price matrix, SENRUG believes this is a disingenuous argument because open access services can be withdrawn or amended at any time without consultation, with no requirement on government to replace them. Moreover, these services 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. The operator will be using shorter 5 car trains; and their business case has demonstrated their passengers are expected to be new passengers won by the rail industry. Congestion could be expected if they now have to take passengers diverted from LNER services too.
- **Complete withdrawal** of off-peak services to Alnmouth (off-peak passengers will have to travel to Berwick or Newcastle and double back, but the rail industry does not set a fare for such journeys).
- **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.
- Reduced ability for commuters to Edinburgh to stagger working hours, due to withdrawal of hourly TPE services, no off-peak LNER daytime services; and CrossCountry services being mostly 2-hourly, but with some 3-hourly gaps.
- Reduced direct connectivity to York - the 2<sup>nd</sup> most popular destination (jointly with Edinburgh) from Morpeth after London, which outside of the early mornings and late evenings will now only be provided by CrossCountry services.
- 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 LNER London train will be an evening service departing 20:42 taking just under 4 hours and will not arrive until the early hours of Monday morning at 00:35!

- The last Saturday night LNER train from London will leave Kings Cross at 17:03 (currently 18:00), whereas conversely on Sundays there will be a later at 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.
- Local services will no longer extend beyond Newcastle to MetroCentre and Hexham, causing difficulty for commuters working at MetroCentre, and disconnecting 2 important regional Northumberland towns.
- Some local services will no longer call at Manors, including the late morning peak service departing Morpeth at 09:26. Manors serves a number of call centres and is a popular commuter destination as well as being adjacent to the Northumbria University campus.

### **3.4.3 Pegswood, Widdrington, Acklington, Chathill**

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

### **3.4.4 Alnmouth**

- CrossCountry services will be reduced by 1 northbound train.
- Complete withdrawal of off-peak services to Morpeth (off-peak passengers will have to travel to Berwick or Newcastle and double back, but the rail industry does not set a fare for such a journey).

### **3.4.5 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.

## **4. IDEAL SOLUTION**

We would have preferred the timetable to have been developed in conjunction with stakeholder groups so that the aspirations of various communities along the route could be understood. SENRUG recognises there is a requirement for some trains to run fast, even non-stop between Newcastle and Edinburgh, but believes it is possible to strike a reasonable balance between fast, semi-fast and stopping services. SENRUG's proposals for train path allocation between Newcastle and Edinburgh is set out in the following table:

**Table 1: SENRUG Proposal For Utilisation of Paths For Passenger Train Services Between Newcastle and Edinburgh (Not including freight or within Scotland services)**

<b>Operator</b>	<b>Section of Route</b>	<b>Trains Each Way Per Hour</b>	<b>Stopping Pattern</b>
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, plus 1 Scottish station (providing within Northumberland connectivity plus hourly service to Manchester & Liverpool)
Open Access Operator	Newcastle - Edinburgh	1	Commercial decision of operator
Northern	Newcastle (eventually extended south to Team Valley*) - Berwick	1	All Stations: Team Valley* Newcastle - Manors - Cramlington - Morpeth - Pegswood - Widdrington - Acklington - Alnmouth - Chathill - Belford* - Berwick
Northern	Newcastle - Morpeth	1	Carlisle - Bedlington service calling at stations on the Tyne Valley line as per current timetable, then Newcastle, Manors, Cramlington and Morpeth ( <i>eventually extended to Choppington* and Bedlington*</i> ).
Northern	Newcastle - Benton Junction	2	Newcastle - Manors ( <i>then all Northumberland Line stations</i> ).

\* new station proposed

+ new station re-opening as part of The Northumberland Line, planned 2023 or 2024

## 5. IMMEDIATE CHANGES REQUIRED TO DRAFT TIMETABLE

Given that the draft timetable appears to already be at an advanced stage of development, coupled with the complexity of timetable planning for a long route with various different operators sharing different parts of it, SENRUG recognises that scope for wholesale changes as suggested in Section 4 are sadly limited. This section therefore sets out the following achievable and essential changes that should be made co-incident with the introduction of the new timetable, either in May 2022 or shortly after if the launch date is deferred.

**5.1.** The hourly TransPennine Express services, scheduled to terminate at Newcastle under the draft proposals, should be re-instated to Edinburgh with an intelligent stopping pattern in Northumberland serving its key market towns, namely ***each of*** Morpeth, Alnmouth and Berwick (and in Scotland SENRUG suggests either Reston or Dunbar, to be

nominated by Transport Scotland).

- This service would provide the desperately needed hourly interconnectivity between Morpeth, Alnmouth & Berwick. Specifically, it would provide a Morpeth - Alnmouth service, whereas the current May 2022 draft timetable does not have any service between Morpeth and Alnmouth off peak, with passengers being obliged to travel via either Newcastle or Berwick and double back.
- It would also give each of these stations minimum hourly connectivity to Edinburgh, York, and Leeds, plus hourly connectivity to Manchester.
- It would retain service levels at Morpeth whereas the current draft May 2022 timetable results in a reduction of approximately 50% of trains at Morpeth compared to the December 2019 timetable.
- It would part compensate for the loss of some LNER services at Berwick, which are not being replaced by the same number of additional CrossCountry trains.
- There is capacity on the line for the services to run and they were in the December 2019 timetable, and a franchise commitment (although stopping only at Morpeth) between DfT and TPE. TPE already have the rolling stock to run the services.
- TPE's trains are maintained at Craightinny depot in Edinburgh, so trains have to get to Edinburgh for servicing and maintenance anyway. It is pointless terminating them at Newcastle.

**5.2.** At least 2 LNER off-peak services should be re-instated as stopping at Morpeth on Monday to Saturdays, in particular the morning service to Aberdeen. Specific proposals are:

Northbound: 09:14 approx (05:48 London to Aberdeen)  
                  12:14 approx (09:03 London to Edinburgh)  
Southbound 09:43 approx (08:30 Edinburgh to London)  
                  14:40 approx (13:30 Edinburgh to London)

- It would mean off-peak service between Morpeth and London would not be dependant on an open access operator who could withdraw service, change stopping patterns or fail financially at any time, with no requirement on government to find a replacement operator.
- It would retain connectivity to stations south of York such as Peterborough, being removed under the draft proposals.
- It would retain an off-peak first-class facility, much appreciated by the Morpeth business and premium leisure communities.
- It would ensure sufficient capacity is available for Morpeth passengers, noting that the open access operator's services will only be 5 coach units (rather than LNER's 9 coaches) and that the open access operator's business case demonstrated it would attract new passengers to rail, rather than to be a replacement for LNER passengers.
- It would retain the highly used morning Morpeth - Aberdeen service, noting there seems to be a strong flow of oil industry workers between Northumberland and Aberdeen. (The return evening service arriving Morpeth at 22:24 is retained in the new proposals.)

**5.3.** On Sundays, there should be a morning LNER from London to Morpeth, and 2 southbound services to London. Specific proposals are:

Northbound 12:14 approx (09:03 London to Edinburgh)  
Southbound 10:43 approx (09:30 Edinburgh to London)  
14:40 approx (13:30 Edinburgh to London)

- Essential Sunday services at Morpeth would not be dependent on an open access operator who could withdraw service, change stopping patterns or fail financially at any time, with no requirement on government to find a replacement operator.
- Under the current draft May 2022 proposals, the first LNER service from London to Morpeth departs London at 17:03. An earlier service is required, particular for those who have simply visited London for the Saturday night, and who wish to travel first class, or might be returning from Peterborough (facilities not provided by the open access operator).
- Under the current draft May 2022 proposals, the **only** Sunday LNER service from Morpeth to London is at 20:42, and does not arrive until 00:35 on Monday morning, taking just under 4 hours, in contradiction to LNER's statements that the new timetable gives Morpeth a better weekend service and faster journey times.
- Business passengers often wish to travel Sunday afternoons or early evening, in preparation for a business meeting on Monday morning, and arrive in London in time for a hotel check-in.
- The proposed southbound services would permit direct Sunday travel to destinations south of York such as Peterborough.

**5.4.** Northern services should continue to run through Newcastle, rather than requiring through passengers needing to change. Thus, direct hourly trains from Morpeth to Carlisle throughout the day in both directions should continue.

- This would preserve access from Morpeth and Cramlington to jobs at MetroCentre
- It would retain direct connections between the key Northumberland market towns of Cramlington, Morpeth and Hexham.
- SENRUG does not accept the argument that faster LNER services through Newcastle impede the ability of Northern to connect together trains on the different local lines radiating out from Newcastle station. If necessary, through Morpeth - Carlisle services can reverse at Newcastle and leave the station via the High Level Bridge, passing under the ECML south of the River Tyne and not conflicting with LNER trains passing through platforms 2, 3 and 4 at Newcastle and using the King Edward Bridge.
- It would avoid needless changes of trains at Newcastle for through passengers, particularly between platforms 1 and 5-6-7-8, and decreases station congestion.
- The proposal seems to be for the operational convenience of Northern rather than with passenger needs in mind, and is contrary to the government's stated intention to "Build Back Better"

**5.5.** Opportunity should be taken to create and protect the hourly path in each direction for an all-stations electric local service between Newcastle and Berwick, as per Northumberland County Council's "Restoring Your Railway" application. At the same time, the 2 per hour paths for Northumberland Line services (opening 2023/24) between

Newcastle and Benton Junction should be identified and protected.

- A Feasibility Study has already concluded that the desired electric local service between Newcastle and Berwick, stopping at all stations and with capacity to call at additional stations as they are re-opened would be both technically (train paths available) and commercially viable.
- It is important the East Coast Main line is also used to provide vital local services to help regenerate the local economy and “level up”, and not used virtually exclusively for fast trains passing through the county.
- The Northumberland Line is scheduled to open in 2023 or 2024 and this is the opportunity to identify the paths the half-hourly service will use for the short section on the ECML between Newcastle and Benton Junction.

**5.6.** All local Northern services between Morpeth and Newcastle should stop at Cramlington and Manors. Some trains missing out these stations is unacceptable. In particular, the call at Cramlington must be re-instated on the 17:19 northbound service from Newcastle to Morpeth.

- Cramlington is Northumberland’s largest town with a railway station (population 35,000) and withdrawing the call on the 17:19 departure from Newcastle evening commuter service from Newcastle is unacceptable.
- Manors is also an important commuter station, serving the call centre district of Newcastle where many employees work part time. The new Northumbria University campus is outside the station, making it an important transport link for students, again travelling throughout the day.
- Manors additionally has unexploited potential for an interchange with the Metro station underneath it for passengers on the Coast route (travelling via Newcastle requires a further Metro change at Monument).

**5.7.** Paths should be created for 2 Northern services from Morpeth to Newcastle prior to the current first train at 07:51 from Morpeth, 08:00 from Cramlington, arrives Newcastle 08:13.

- Cramlington passengers currently have no service to Newcastle before 08:00, and this train is full to standing before reaching Cramlington (pre COVID). Earlier services are needed, to reduce crowding and to provide an arrival in Newcastle prior to 08:13.
- Currently, Morpeth commuters use the 06:38 and 07:12 (being retimed to 07:34) LNER services. Use of these services by commuters will now become difficult with LNER’s compulsory reservations policy, strengthening the requirement for additional early morning commuter services from Morpeth.
- Morpeth commuters reserving seats on the 06:38 and 07:34 LNER services will deny LNER the opportunity to sell such seats to occasional Scotland - London passengers. Yet Morpeth commuters currently have no other service to use.

**End**