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SENRUG WELCOMES NEW RAIL SERVICE DESPITE LONG TERM CAUTIONS

SENRUG - The group that campaigns for better rail services in South East and East Northumberland, has responded positively to today's announcement that TransPennine Express will be launching a new service of 5 trains per day each way through Northumberland, starting this December.

The development follows SENRUG's criticism of the proposed May 2022 timetables for the East Coast Mainline, which brought into focus the lack of rail connectivity between the key Northumberland towns of Morpeth, Alnmouth and Berwick, which the new service will now address.

The new service will also increase the number of trains calling at Cramlington and Widdrington, as well as introducing other improvements in the Scottish Borders.

But the group do have some concerns as to the long-term strategy. SENRUG Chair Dennis Fancett said "This is an excellent initiative representing a useful compromise or stepping stone between what we have today and where we aspire to be. Most importantly, it can be implemented quickly, from this December. It utilises otherwise empty stock movements since TPE trains, currently terminating at Newcastle, are in fact maintained at Edinburgh."

But he continued "Welcome though it is, it is not however the long-term solution, and is essentially two halves of entirely separate good initiatives that SENRUG is campaigning for, joined together to create a useful though not entirely logical solution. In particular, these TPE trains will not join on to their Newcastle - Liverpool service, so are not providing any direct connectivity between Northumberland stations and Durham, York, Leeds and Manchester. Neither is the service hourly, as originally promised for the December 2019 launch. Nor will it easily facilitate further smaller stations along the East Coast Mainline route such as Belford to be opened. It is however, a good way of tiding us over until we get the new services we need organised properly, which could take 2-3 years of further

planning. I want to place on record our thanks to each of The Rail North Partnership, Transport Scotland and TransPennine Express for swiftly concluding these negotiations which make this new service possible, with a start date less than 3 months away.”

“Longer term though, we want to see the Transpennine Express service as a true “semi-fast”, running hourly in each direction, including weekends, continuing on through Newcastle to either Manchester or Liverpool. Stops would be most likely limited to the key market towns of Morpeth, Alnmouth, Berwick, and 1 station in Scottish Borders.

“This therefore needs to be augmented by realisation of Northumberland County Council’s “Restoring Your Railways” bid for a full electric local stopping service, again hourly in each direction, 7 days a week, which would also serve Pegswood, Acklington and Chathill, and would have capacity for further new or re-opened stations to be added. The case for Belford is already developed. Other possibilities include Beal and Warkworth and to the south, SENRUG envisages a new interchange station with Metro at Benton East, once a through Metro service between Airport and Northumberland Park is running, to give simple single station interchange between Airport and Cramlington, Morpeth and North Northumberland. Plus an extension beyond Newcastle to a new station at Team Valley (Low Fell).”

“So there is a lot to continue to campaign for, but today’s announcement represents a very welcome step in the right direction, for which we are most grateful. We are certain this new service will help re-invigorate our local economy, creating easier access to jobs from Cramlington and Widdrington, and enhancing the tourist potential of towns like Berwick which will now be so much better connected to both north and south.”

SENRUG encourages both individuals and organisations that support its campaign objectives to join the group - details are available on its website.

Ends (617 words)

Notes for Editors

Attached Photo suggested caption: Transpennine Express will provide an improved service at Morpeth from December 2021 - Photo credit Dave Shaw.

SENUG – 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

This story has been issued by SENUG. However, journalists wishing to contact TransPennine Express for further background may wish to know their press office details are: tpexpress.office@tpexpress.co.uk or call 0330 095 4034

