

## **Email to Transport Focus re Response to Consultation on Proposals to Reduce Opening Hours of Ticket Office at Berwick-Upon-Tweed Railway Station**

From: Dennis Fancett chair@senrug.co.uk  
To: schedule17@transportfocus.org.uk  
Subject: Response to Consultation on Proposals to Reduce Opening Hours of Ticket Office at Berwick-Upon-Tweed Railway Station  
Date: 10<sup>th</sup> Sep 2021 @ 21:53  
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Dear Sir or Madam

I am writing on behalf of **SENUG** to express our opposition to and concern regarding LNER's plan to reduce the opening hours of the ticket office at Berwick-Upon-Tweed railway station. SENUG has noted that under the National Rail Ticketing and Settlement Arrangement, passengers with comments should respond to Transport Focus, and that responses are required by **21st September 2021**.

SENUG 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 (The Northumberland Coast), representing the interests of both existing and potential rail travellers in the area. By 'potential', SENUG 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. SENUG has 215 individual and 13 corporate members including 5 Town or Parish Councils, along with 1,565 Facebook, 302 Twitter and 53 Instagram followers (as at end of August 2021).

SENUG believes the plans, which appear to be based on commercial justification arising from an analysis of ticket sales, do not adequately reflect the social necessity of having a staffed presence in an identifiable location (namely, the ticket office) at a key intercity station served by multiple operators, nor take into account Berwick's strategic importance as a market town acting as a gateway to both north Northumberland and the Scottish Borders.

Whilst we acknowledge that LNER's proposals may be based on pre COVID ticket sales data, and appreciate that to have taken mid-pandemic data would have been unacceptably misleading, it also follows that the data would not reflect the post pandemic surge in UK holidays and rail leisure travel, which several train operators have reported is now exceeding pre-pandemic levels, and which Berwick, as a major tourist gateway for North Northumberland and Scottish Borders, should benefit from. We also note the plan was developed prior to last week's announcement of 5 new trains each way per day to serve Berwick station, starting from this December. Therefore, we believe the plan should be reviewed in the light of the increased numbers of rail passengers these developments will create.

Additionally, SENUG believes there must be further clarification and adequate assurances and safeguards on the following points, before any reduction in ticket office opening hours is permitted to proceed:

a) Whether the station will still be staffed when the ticket office is closed (and if so, how passengers can locate staff members should they require assistance), or whether it will then be

completely unstaffed.

b) Whether the customer toilet will still be available / unlocked when the ticket office is closed.

c) Whether the waiting room will still be available / unlocked when the ticket office is closed

d) The ability of vulnerable passengers and passengers with disabilities to purchase tickets for immediate travel when the ticket office is closed.

e) The ability of passengers without smartphones or without the LNER app to make a last minute reservation on a train (for instance if a CrossCountry train is running late and a passenger wants to transfer to the next train which would be LNER), given LNER have promoted that they require all passengers to have a seat reservation before travelling on their services.

f) Rescue arrangements / response times and base location of maintenance company for passengers trapped in the lift should the lift break down with passengers inside when the ticket office is closed. Berwick does not level access to any of its platforms other than through use of the lift.

I would be grateful if you could acknowledge safe receipt of this consultation response and that the points raised will be taken into account prior to any final decision being taken.

Kindest regards

**Dennis Fancett**

Chair, SENRUG: The South East Northumberland Rail User Group

Railfuture: Press Spokesperson for North East branch and Member, European Passenger Group

**Winner, Railfuture National Rail Campaigner of the Year Award, 2021**

Tel [mobile] 07810 353651

Email: [chair@senrug.co.uk](mailto:chair@senrug.co.uk)

[www.senrug.co.uk](http://www.senrug.co.uk)

### **Re-open the Ashington Blyth & Tyne Line**

Hirst Park Middle School in Ashington won SENRUG's Schools' competition to create a 7-10 minute DVD setting out their reasons for re-opening the line. See their winning DVD here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FThHXmIO6S0&list=UUhvolzTGcXIU-o62euglwSg>