

**SENRUG STATEMENT TO MORPETH HERALD 24th MAY 2022
ON ALLEGED TICKET OFFICE CLOSURES AT MORPETH AND ALNMOUTH**

Dennis Fancett, chair of SENRUG - representing rail travellers in South East and East Northumberland commented "We have not been advised of any specific plans from Northern to reduce ticket office opening hours at Morpeth or Alnmouth and we should be careful not to react to unspecific speculation. But if indeed this is being considered we would be most concerned. At Morpeth, for instance, opening hours have only just been extended, following a massive £2.3m infrastructure investment in the station building, and it would be a real kick in the teeth to see this money wasted, and near on 2 years of construction work at Morpeth station go to waste.

It may well be the case that more passengers are buying tickets online and collecting them at machines. We don't deny that. SENRUG itself campaigned for the Morpeth ticket machine to be installed so that passengers in our local communities can benefit from this useful facility too.

But not everyone has the internet at home, and not everyone feels comfortable in using it. We should be careful not to discriminate against vulnerable travellers. Additionally, passengers want stations staffed. Closing the ticket office normally means de-staffing the station completely. Both Morpeth and Alnmouth are key regional stations with long-distance services to London, Edinburgh, Leeds, Birmingham and Penzance. Yet at Morpeth, when the ticket office is closed, the customer toilets and waiting room are locked up with it. These are facilities that passengers need - especially if a long-distance train is delayed by 40 minutes or so, as can occasionally happen. With a bewildering array of different ticket types for the same journey, many passengers need the advice of an actual person to help them understand the ticket which is right for them.

It comes down to a simple question: Does the government want people to travel on trains or not? On the one hand it offers a much welcomed special fares promotion to get us all back on to trains after Covid, yet on the other hand we are seeing increasing pressure to reduce train frequencies and to reduce the infrastructure that makes train travel attractive. We at SENRUG believe that rail travel is the safest, most comfortable and most environmentally friendly way to travel, and we need to make it more appealing to people to use, not less so."

Ends (389 words)