

Reston Rejoices

Reston, a small village 9 miles north of Berwick has a new station making it possible to visit the area directly by TransPennine services from stations in Northumberland. The new station opened on May 23rd 2022 - the former station having closed in 1964. The station cost £20m and is magnificent. It has two platforms, each long enough to accommodate an Azuma train, with lifts and an overbridge allowing for easy access. The station isn't staffed but there are both passenger shelters and a ticket machine. The car park can accommodate 70 cars and 11 of the bays include charging facilities for electric vehicles. Cyclists are served by a covered rack that should allow, so long as they bring their own lock, for secure and dry storage of their bikes.



TransPennine have arrived at Reston. Photo by Dave Shaw

Reston Village has around 450 residents but the station will serve a much larger hinterland and there are already reports of developers wanting to build new houses in the area.

The station facilities will attract those who wish to 'Park and Ride' from a wider area but the rest of us, who may not have access to a car, haven't been forgotten. The two existing bus services (Berwick to Edinburgh and Berwick to Duns) already allow some access to the coast at Eyemouth from Reston Village, albeit only 4 times a day, and now call at the station itself – despite the ScotRail poster suggesting that you will have to take a short walk to the village and the nearest bus stop. Having said that, when SENRUG members took a trip to Reston on the opening day at least one of the services didn't divert into the station forecourt. These traditional bus services have been supplemented by a new type of service that could take the rail passenger directly from the station to a wide range of destinations including St Abbs, Cockburnspath, and Coldstream.

Borders Buses will be operating, under the brand name of 'Pingo', this "demand responsive" service seven days a week from 7am to 9pm. Your journey must be booked in advance through the 'Ride Pingo' app or by calling the Pingo line on 01289 385506. Be careful though - it is advisable to book well in advance but bookings only open 7 days before the date you wish to use the service and our experience is that it is better to use the phone line than the app.

We congratulate our colleagues from RAGES (Rail Action Group East of Scotland) for their campaigning achievement. RAGES and SENRUG have worked together to promote local services on the East Coast Main Line and provide new stations between Newcastle and Berwick and Berwick to Edinburgh. RAGES have achieved re-opening of Reston and work has started on a new station at East Linton. We continue our campaign for a local rail service on the ECML and new stations at Belford and Beal.

The Northumberland Line – an update.

Despite no formal final funding announcement at the time of going to press, construction work to upgrade the line to passenger standards is proceeding. The estimated total project cost is now £166m, but some of this will be recouped through Land Value Capture.

The 22.9-mile route runs between Newcastle and Ashington with intermediate stations at Northumberland Park (Metro connection), Seaton Delaval, Newsham, Bebside, and Bedlington. Services will start in early 2024 with trains running every 30 minutes from early morning until late evening. Fares will be integrated into the Metro zonal ticketing system.

Initial land clearance work is already underway as is track replacement. Planning permission for the new stations has already been obtained.

SENRUG are still campaigning to extend the line from Ashington to Newbiggin, develop a Morpeth to Bedlington service via a new station at Choppington, open a new Metro route from Blyth Town Centre to the Airport via Northumberland Park with a new station at Benton East to provide an interchange with local services on the East Coast Main Line, build a new station at Seghill, and re-open the former freight line from Ashington to Butterwell with a new junction at Butterwell to allow services to run to and from the north of Northumberland.

Morpeth Subway CIS

When Matt Croasdale started his new job as Stakeholder Relations Manager at Northern we



were quick to point out that the CIS screen in Morpeth's subway had been faulty for approaching two years! Matt took it on as a personal challenge to get this fixed. It wasn't as easy as it looked. However, after a few months of hard

work, Matt invited Dennis to meet him at Morpeth and demonstrated the CIS screen working once again. Thanks Matt, very much appreciated.

Land Value Capture: what is it and why does it matter?

Government investing in a new road or railway will always increase land values in the immediate area. In the past landowners have been the main beneficiaries of this increased value of their land. Land Value Capture is a way of ensuring that some of that benefit comes back into the public purse with money from what are known as “Contribution Agreements” used to part fund the new road or railway. A contribution agreement simply means that if land increases in value because of public investment, and is then developed, the developer agrees to return some of the increased land value to the public purse. The sums involved can be substantial. E-Rail, a consultancy firm who have been involved in developing the plans for the Northumberland Line, say that the contribution agreements they have negotiated with landowners along the route of the line will generate up to 30% of the cost of re-opening the line. So why should landowners be interested in sharing the increased value of their land? The justification is simple. If the scheme is agreed it makes it more likely that Government will agree to fund the initial investment – without which the land might not increase in value. The initial funding comes from the public sector but a share of the increased value resulting from a development comes back to the public sector and so lowers the long-term burden on the taxpayer. E-Rail say that this approach is a “win-win for everyone and helps to create new sources of investment for infrastructure in the UK”

Developments are already accompanied by what is known as a Section 106 agreement, where the developer agrees to pay for something that is of particular benefit to the local community. Examples have included new roads or community buildings. Contribution agreements don't stop the local communities from benefiting in this way – but the total paid by the developer can't exceed their agreed contribution. It is going to be interesting to see how this new source of funding works in practice.

The Station Builders



Morgan Sindall Infrastructure has been awarded the contract to construct the six new stations and bridges for the Northumberland Line. Recently appointed to advise the company on Community Engagement is

Reemer Bailey (pictured above). Reemer is well used to working with local communities and is also a committee member of SENRUG. One of her interests is the idea that all of us should be included in a project like this, as well as in the wider economy. Inclusion in the wider economy, she says, means access for us all to good quality education, employment, and community opportunities – opportunities that include train travel. Included in this philosophy is the idea that businesses need to give something back to the communities in which they operate. As a company Morgan Sindall is serious about adding value to local communities. Amongst other ways of showing this they have reached the Platinum standard for Investors in People and have clear policies that will take them towards net-zero emissions.

The team, Reemer tells us, are a group of extremely talented professionals who are very dedicated to doing the best job possible and are very switched on to the ideas of community engagement and social value.

So, what will this commitment to social value mean in practice? Morgan Sindall want to explore ways to create opportunities and support local people through local jobs and apprenticeships in a wide range of fields. They will offer targeted work placements and work experience for school and college students. In addition, there will be workshops with local schools focussing on STEM subjects, environmental issues and piloting the 'Innovation Flywheel' – a method which develops creative problem solving. Careers information sessions will be on offer as well as training in a range of Health, Safety and Wellbeing topics. Help will be on offer with projects encompassing heritage, arts, events, and wellbeing. Finally, providing a partnership can be agreed with local schools and colleges,

access could be offered to the Morgan Sindall online training academy.

The company wants to work in partnership with the community and has sustainability at the heart of what they do. They want to add value to what's already there, and what's already happening, wherever possible.

Local businesses will also benefit, with a 'local first' approach to the procurement of services and supplies. Mentoring and support will be on offer to Small and Medium Enterprises. Morgan Sindall will be working with their supply chain to support their development, with a particular emphasis on sustainability issues. Their Supply Chain Sustainability School will give access to thousands of training courses to help local businesses become more sustainable and can be accessed at supplychainschool.co.uk

The Morgan Sindall team have already been in touch with local community centres and both Town and Parish Councils, and are looking into possible heritage projects and other opportunities that they might be able to be part of. Their aim is to leave, once the work is complete, a legacy that is sustainable and useful to the area. The team are finalising a set of frequently asked questions to make sure that people working on the sites will have the information they need when asked questions by members of the public. The Morgan Sindall team will be at local career fairs and working with all the people that have expressed an interest in being a Rail Champion. These Champions are volunteers who will play a key part in promoting the line, helping passengers, and doing other activities for the benefit of the areas near the stations.

You can keep up to date about project progress and feedback opportunities via the on the [project page](#) on the County Council website where you can also subscribe to the project newsletter. If you have any questions, please get in touch with the Council by phone on 0345 600 6400, or email at rail@northumberland.gov.uk

Community engagement enquiries can be sent to: Reemer.bailey@morgansindall.com

Planning the Future of Rail Services in Northumberland

Local Government plans matter, despite usually including the caveat that what is proposed will only happen if funding is available, and the consultation process prior to the final plan allows us to say what we want to see happening and ask that the plans be changed.

Public Transport planning for the whole of the North East is the responsibility of the North East Joint Transport Committee (NEJTC) - a grouping of councillors from Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, and County Durham. This committee should be able to plan the whole of our rail system, including the Metro, as one network and then integrate it with bus services. The North East Transport Plan, a plan that would have achieved these aims, was agreed in March 2021 but that isn't the end of the story. The next step was to flesh out the detail in the plan through both a Bus Services Improvement Plan and a North East Rail and Metro Strategy. The SENRUG response to the draft North East Rail and Metro strategy is available on our [website](#). The final strategy will be agreed at the June meeting of the NEJTC and will be published on the Transport North East website.

The draft strategy and associated plans covered two time periods. Up to 2029 and then from 2029 to 2035. During the first period the plan we should see the Northumberland Line opened, a local service between Newcastle and Berwick, together with earlier and later local rail services that match working patterns and leisure needs. There will be more Community Stations as well as the regeneration of some stations as community hubs. A new station will open at Belford.

Information facilities should improve and it will be easier to access accurate public transport information – information that will be in 'real time'. Cycling and walking routes to stations will be improved and there will be new Park and Ride facilities. A "single smart multimodal transport payment system" is proposed to cover Metro, buses, and rail services. Diesel multiple units should be replaced by electric trains using both OHL and battery power and, in some

places, by hydrogen powered units. There will be small-scale schemes aimed at improving local rail reliability.

Between 2029 – 2035 a link from the ECML to the Airport is proposed together with some unspecified extensions to the Northumberland Line. Improvements are planned for Cramlington Station to allow for more frequent services and better station facilities.

SENRUG has spent some time looking at the whole plan, particularly the parts relating to Northumberland. Our response re-iterates our own "Rail Vision for Northumberland", namely that the Northumberland Line should be extended to Woodhorn and Newbiggin-by-the-Sea, the Carlisle to Morpeth service should be extended to Choppington and Bedlington, and that there should be a new rail link from Blyth Town Centre to Newsham, continuing via Northumberland Park and the existing Metro tracks to Airport. We don't see the point of a new heavy rail link from Newcastle to the Airport, but instead propose a new interchange station at Benton East, allowing passengers to change from local and regional services on the East Coast Main Line from either north or south onto Metro services to the Airport. We also want to see Cramlington station relocated to a position adjacent to Cramlington Retail Park and Manor Walks Shopping Centre. We want to see a new link from Ashington, via the existing, private mineral line to the East Coast Main Line at Butterwell Junction for both freight and passenger services. Finally, our response calls for much better integration with the bus network, covering fares, routes, and timetables with buses actually calling at all stations.

SENRUG Public Meeting. Tuesday 5th July. Morpeth Town Hall at 19:30.

Tom Dickson, Tom Thorburn, and Barrie Forrest from Rail Action Group East of Scotland will tell us about the Campaign for Reston and the other work they are doing to improve services in South East Scotland.



The East Coast Mainline needs to find space for intercity services, local services, and freight. Photos by Dave Shaw

Bus integration will, almost certainly, be dependent on the recently developed Bus Services Improvement plan. The total cost of implementing the plan over Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, and County Durham was estimated at £804m but the recent government grant for this purpose was limited to £163m. How this sum is to be spent is still to be decided.

There are parts of the transport network that cannot be locally controlled, including the East Coast Mainline with its many long-distance services. SENRUG has argued for a timetable for these services that includes calls at local stations, so adding to the number of destinations that can be reached without the need to change trains at Newcastle. We've achieved many of our aims but a proposed new timetable for May 2022 would have rolled back the clock in many respects. This timetable would have increased the number of LNER services running through the region but reduced the number of local stops in the interests of speeding up the London to Edinburgh service. We would also have lost one of the TransPennine Express services that connect us to Yorkshire and the North West of England. The direct link from Morpeth to Hexham and Carlisle would have been cut with a return to the old system where we'd have to change trains in Newcastle – with no guarantee of a convenient connection being available.

The proposals would have affected the whole region and so SENRUG sat down with other rail user groups (RUGs) to submit a single unified response to the timetable proposals.

The consensus reached by the RUGs was that the existing pattern of services should be

maintained whilst the infrastructure was developed to allow an increase in the number of trains on the network. It is important that Government don't just concentrate on the London to Edinburgh service but recognise the need to improve local and regional services as well as links to other parts of the UK. The full response is available on the [SENRUG](#) website.

All the RUGs acknowledge the value of having one LNER train each hour to operate between London and Edinburgh in the fastest possible time, and so only stopping at York and Newcastle, but say the second LNER service each hour should then serve Darlington, Durham, and Newcastle together with two of Morpeth, Alnmouth, and Berwick in an alternating pattern so that Morpeth retains some off-peak LNER services. As for the proposal to run a third LNER service this should not happen until there is sufficient capacity on the line to do so without impacting on current services or taking up the paths required for a new Northumberland local service. This new local service, operated by electrical multiple units, should serve all stations between Newcastle and Berwick. Along with the current service to Morpeth, we would then have a 2 trains per hour service between Cramlington and Newcastle. Additionally, one of the TransPennine services that now terminate in Newcastle should be extended to Edinburgh providing an hourly service linking Morpeth, Alnmouth, and Berwick with some of these services calling at Cramlington. Local services that run through Newcastle should continue to run as through trains and not require a change of trains at Newcastle.

Cramlington Rail Services

When Cramlington Station was opened in 1847 the world was very different. From the station we would have had a clear view over the fields to Cramlington Village. We don't know what the timetable was but we can be reasonably sure that not many services stopped at the new station. But times have changed and Cramlington is now the largest town in Northumberland. Many of the green fields are in the past, replaced by a large shopping centre and an emergency hospital that serves all of Northumberland. But the rail service hasn't kept up with the times. Cramlington used to have an hourly service, with evening and Sunday services only introduced a few years back.



The Morning Rush at Cramlington. Photo by Gordon Summers

Whilst an earlier morning TransPennine Express service has recently been introduced leaving the station at 07:03, Covid saw Northern's services being cut back. We had hoped to see the May 2022 timetable at least restoring services to the pre-Covid hourly level; however, this hasn't happened and there remains a couple of 2-hour gaps throughout the day. There are further suggestions that, instead of allowing travel through to the MetroCentre and Carlisle, the service might soon terminate at Newcastle with 'connections' to the Tyne Valley only available by changing trains.

It isn't just the lack of services that are the problem. Buses don't serve the turning circle at the Station, leaving a walk to the main road to

catch a bus on to your final destination. Walking or cycling to the station, now called 'active travel', isn't easy either given the poor state of footpaths and cycle paths

But it isn't all bad news. There are proposals to make some improvements to the existing station that would include a lift to improve access and make it easier to move from platform to platform. Whilst SENRUG welcomes any station improvements we say that it would be better to build a new station some 200 metres to the south that would offer easy step free, road free access to Manor Walks as well as allowing for better integration with bus services.

Once the Northumberland Line opens it will make rail services more accessible to the residents of South East Cramlington but much more needs to happen. SENRUG want to see a half hourly service with a new local service between Newcastle and Berwick being added to the current Tyne Valley - Morpeth service. A regular service that stops at all stations on the ECML in Northumberland would open up many new employment opportunities for local people. It will also make it easier for folk who don't live in Cramlington to shop at Manor Walks, visit patients at the hospital whose catchment area covers most of Northumberland, or attend the outpatient's clinic in the shopping centre. We'd also like to see the service that currently terminates at Morpeth extended to Bedlington on the new Northumberland line and the proposed local Newcastle – Berwick stopping service extended to a new Station at Team Valley.

Cramlington should become a stop on all the TransPennine Services between Newcastle and Edinburgh. It also needs a timetable that allows access to jobs that don't fit into a 9 – 5 day and permits access to leisure facilities in Newcastle.

Bus services need to be better co-ordinated with the railway timetable and Cramlington should be added, as is already being proposed for stations on the Northumberland Line, to the Metro Zonal Fare system to make fares more reasonable and allow for easy transfer to Metro services at Manors or Newcastle Central.

Another New Railway Line in the Borders?

The SENRUG Newsletter for Summer 2021 (Issue 36) Included an article by David McClymont,



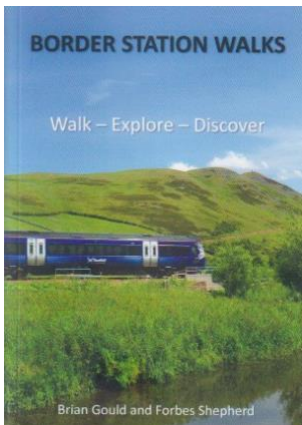
Melrose Station - still standing despite the road having encroached on the trackbed. Maybe one day we will be able to get a train directly from the ECML to visit the beauty of Melrose Abbey again. Photo by Dave Shaw

advocating the re-opening of the Tweed Valley route between St. Boswells and Tweedmouth.

The Northumberland Gazette has recently reported that the Tweed Valley Railway Campaign have received a Scottish Borders

Council Community Grant of £2,500 and are looking to get interested members of the public involved. The Campaign is quoted as saying that “Rather than simply looking to reinstate the old Victorian railway line, the Tweed Valley Railway Campaign seeks to explore the best creative options using 21st century engineering technology to reconnect the ECML with the Borders Railway up the Tweed Valley”. One of the first steps would be to develop a feasibility study that would also look at where to link with the ECML including the options of the current Berwick station, Tweedmouth, or “further south as somewhere like Belford”. Support appears to be growing for the project with at least one Northumberland County Councillor being quoted as backing the campaign. The campaign website is up and running, anyone interested in becoming a member of the Tweed Valley Railway Campaign should make their interest known by emailing info@tweedvalleyrailway.co.uk or using the link from the website which is at <http://www.tweedvalleyrailway.co.uk/>

Travel by Train – and then enjoy a great walk



Being given directions about the best way to walk to the next station is often bad news. It normally means that some sort of disruption has halted rail services, and that there is no replacement bus available. A new book “Border Station Walks”

brings us much better news. Brian Gould and Forbes Shepherd live beside the Borders Line [Edinburgh to Tweedbank] and their book gives us directions for 30 walks that explore the countryside and towns along the railway. Some of the walks take you from station to station, returning to your starting point by rail, whilst others allow you to enjoy a circular walk from Stow, Galashiels, or Tweedbank. The book is much more than a series of directions. It also offers a short history of the area and draws our attention to the many interesting historical

buildings and artefacts to which you will pass on each walk. But what of the walks and the directions? Each walk is graded with a good description of the type of terrain covered and has, from my own experience of completing 3 of their routes, an accurate estimate of the time you’ll need to complete the walk. The directions are clear and are accompanied by an extract from the relevant Ordnance Survey map, but it might help to take the actual map with you and so get a better understanding of the surrounding countryside. The book also has many helpful photographs that should remind you to take camera and binoculars with you. “Border Station Walks” costs £7.99 plus p&p from either Amazon or from their own [online shop](#).

Brian and Forbes are now working on a further book of walks from a selection of Midlothian Stations. Reading this book makes me realise that we need to look at producing similar publications for both the Northumberland Line and, once the local service is established, for the ECML in Northumberland and the Borders.

A grand day out: by train to Alnmouth

The new TransPennine service has made it much easier to travel up and down the East Coast Mainline within Northumberland. In 1889 the Monthly Chronicle of North-Country Lore and Legend wrote of Alnmouth that it had azure skies and was “the prettiest watering-place on the Coast of Northumberland”. One hundred and thirty-three years later is this a description that today’s visitor would still recognise? Let’s take to the train and find out for ourselves.



Alnmouth from the West. Photo by Dave Shaw.

Alnmouth has a significant place in the history of Northumberland. Once an important port with its own shipbuilding industry it was, in the 14th Century, attacked and largely destroyed by the Scots and, if that wasn’t enough, the area was then hit by the Black Death. By the 17th century the port had recovered and was exporting large amounts of grain from as far away as Hexham. Some of the granaries still survive in Prospect Place and Northumberland Street, now converted into houses or used as the village hall. By the 19th century the corn trade was decreasing but was still important, along with the trade in wool, eggs, and pork – and a small amount of fishing. The next big change came with the opening, in 1847, of the railway and the arrival of tourism. A new road from the station was built with a new bridge, funded by the Countess of Northumberland, across the river Aln. Hotels were modernised with the Schooner Inn installing a hot and cold bath, supplied with salt or fresh water, and available at a ‘moderate’ cost. The Schooner is also famous for its association with both smugglers and ghosts. A club and reading room opened as did the golf course, and the broad sandy beach became famous. Gentrification arrived with the

development of new villas – and the growth of second homes. Other old buildings tell us more of the story. The hut by the river used by the former ferryman is now a museum and the guano hut, used to store bird droppings imported from Peru to fertilise the land, still stands in a field to the west of Church Hill

Refreshment can be found in one of the many cafes or licensed premises - but if you want to do something more active, and see the wider area, there are many options open to you. On your way down to the village from Alnmouth Station you will find a signed footpath off to your right. The clear track takes you under the railway and along the edges of fields to Wooden Gate Farm. A stroll down the road takes you back to the railway line, and then across the road and a foot path that will take you back to the road in to Alnmouth. Alternatively, you can head down to the beach and then walk north to visit Church Hill. Church Hill was the site of an Anglo-Saxon religious community – a community driven out by the Vikings. They re-established themselves on the same site and have left the remains of a church for us to visit. Until 1806 the path led directly into Alnmouth but a storm on Christmas Day changed the course of the river and isolated the hill from the main part of the village.

The changed course of the river allowed a saltmarsh to develop – a marsh that is home to a wide range of plants and has become the perfect habitat for many wading birds. Take your binoculars with you to make the most of this natural wonder.

For a longer walk take the Northumberland Coast Path to Boulmer and catch the 418 bus service back to Alnmouth Station at 16:35 or 18:35. This service runs on weekdays and Saturdays – but not on Sundays. If you have the energy, walk on to Sugar Sands and Cullernose Point stopping at some of the beautiful beaches that can only be reached on foot. Follow the farm road from Sugar Sands Bay and catch the X18 bus back to the station from Longhoughton. Always check the bus timetables on the [Nexus](#) website before travelling.

Next time: We walk along the Berwickshire coast after catching the bus from Reston.