



A small but satisfying victory....

We have argued for many years that Cramlington should have a much better rail service. People from Cramlington travel to Newcastle for work and leisure, and many people from other areas use the wide range of services provided in Cramlington – services that include the main emergency hospital and the largest shopping centre in Northumberland.

When COVID arrived and took its toll on both railway workers and the numbers travelling, the hourly service was cut and replaced with a train every two hours. The promise was that once COVID was over the service would be restored but when it was some two-hour gaps were left. We did get some relief from a limited number of southbound services on the new TransPennine service between Edinburgh and Newcastle that stop at Cramlington to give us an earlier arrival in Newcastle than had been provided in recent years.

SEN RUG wasn't going to take the cut in services lying down. We lobbied the local MP as well as making our views very clear to Northern. The good



Photo: Dave Shaw
The 1209 to Morpeth on 17 October sees 3 passengers alighting at Cramlington. The 1204 to Newcastle had seen 12 passengers joining the train.

news is that the new December timetable has restored the hourly service and maintained the link to the Tyne Valley. However, like many campaigns we are not stopping there. We will continue to campaign for a new Newcastle to Berwick service that would stop at all stations, run every hour, and provide many new journey possibilities for both residents of Northumberland and visitors.

Big works on the Northumberland Line



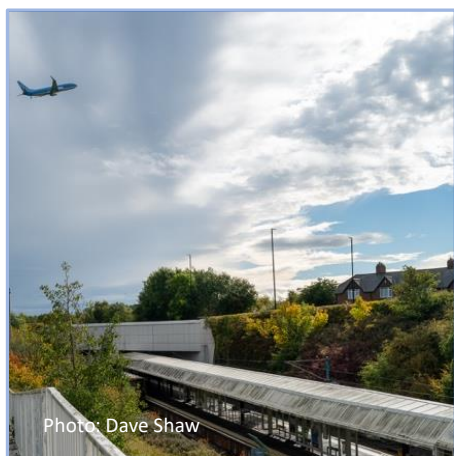
Photo: Dave Shaw
A class 158 on a recent tour on the line crosses over a new underpass on the line between Backworth and Seghill.

Some of the major work required to allow the Northumberland Line to be used for passenger services has started. At station sites barriers have been erected and heavy machinery has arrived. Groundworks have started to ensure that the new buildings and bridges are constructed on firm foundations, an especially important issue given the number of former mine workings in the area. But it isn't just the stations and new bridges that need attention. Faster trains require better track and, in some places, new trackbeds. This has led to extensive work being carried out to re-lay track and rebuild some of the embankments. We are also seeing new underpasses that will be welcomed by walkers who often found the old underpasses, usually both cramped and dripping with water, intimidating. The embankment works should

help to give us a better service and the new underpasses will be welcomed by the many who walk along this section of the Tyne and Wear Heritage Way and other paths around the line.

Come fly with me ...

We should all know that train is best, but sometimes we just need to fly. Planeloads of holidaymakers use Newcastle Airport every few



minutes in peak season - and fly over the Metro Station. Many of them will have left vehicles in costly car parks or taken a taxi to the airport. How do we persuade them

to leave their cars at home and use public transport, with the aim of both saving money and minimising the impact on the environment caused by their well-deserved break?

At present Metro operates a service to the Airport that runs to and from South Hylton in Sunderland via Newcastle. For many years there have been suggestions about the need for a heavy rail service connecting the Airport to the East Coast Mainline (ECML). Such a service has now been proposed, albeit without any detail of how it would work in practice, as part of the North East Rail and Metro Strategy (NERMS). SENRUG thinks that such a line could well be expensive, wouldn't save much time on most journeys, and wouldn't do much to make passengers leave their cars at home. Crucially, from our perspective, it wouldn't help to make the airport more accessible to folk that live in North and East Northumberland or North Tyneside.

Travellers from the North of Northumberland would still have to catch a train to Newcastle and change to the Metro or catch one of a limited number of heavy rail services that would take them back north to Benton Junction and then, unless a new (and very expensive) direct link from the ECML to the Airport is built, via the current Metro line to the Airport (using the depot avoiding line). Travellers from the Northumberland Line could change to the Metro at Northumberland Park but then be faced with another change of train, a change that involves

carrying their bags across the bridge, at South Gosforth. Neither journey is likely to entice car users to leave their cars at home.

There is a better solution. SENRUG are proposing a new Metro Service between the Airport and Blyth - running on the current Metro line to Northumberland Park and then, using battery power, to Blyth via the new Northumberland Line and the alignment of the former branch from Newsham into Blyth town centre. This service would also provide an easy cross platform connection at Northumberland Park for passengers to the Airport from the Coast, removing their need to climb over the bridge at South Gosforth with bags and bairns.

Combined with this new link we also want to see a new station at Benton East. This station would have platforms on both Metro and the ECML - linked by escalators. Add to this our proposed local service between Newcastle and Berwick and you can see that access to the airport within the region could be transformed.

The heavy rail solution proposed in NERMS would also mean that that extra services would need to operate on the East Coast Main Line tracks, at least as far as Benton Junction, making it more difficult to find paths for local services between Newcastle and Berwick. Only our solution, using real integration between systems, is going to provide a frequent service to the airport and offer all of us in much better access to what is, after all, advertised as "Your Airport".



A Happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year to one and all.

Is the car killing our beautiful countryside

The Northumberland Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) runs from Berwick to Amble. People come to visit a wide range of visitor attractions or just to enjoy the beautiful landscape. 86% of visitors arrive in the area by car and this, coupled with more people coming every year, has resulted in problems that include pollution, congestion, and shortage of parking spaces. More cars, and more car parks, can spoil the beauty of the area and make it much less attractive to cyclists and walkers - to say nothing of the impact on the lives of residents who are often unable to park in their own village or in local towns that they depend on for services. Not only that but 31% of households in the North East don't have access to a car and an increasing proportion of young adults are not learning to drive and so don't find it easy to visit the area. Finally, it is clear that if we want to manage global warming and reduce air pollution there will have to be a major shift away from car-based travel to more sustainable forms of transport.



It says "Chathill for Seahouses" but there are only two trains a day between Newcastle and Chathill - and no bus service connecting to Chathill to Seahouses.

A recent report produced by independent consultants for Northumberland County Council

concludes that we that we must both manage problems caused by cars **and** improve public transport - marketing the area as one that we can all enjoy, even without a car.

Rail should be a key part in any strategy to improve public transport in the area for both residents and visitors. A separate consultant's report told us that an hourly service between Newcastle and Berwick, stopping at all stations, including a re-opened Belford, could be both practical and profitable. It would need to generate income from both visitors and residents - with the latter needing much better transport links to allow them to access services, jobs, and leisure facilities outside of the immediate area. Revitalised local stations could also support new businesses. The trains used on any new service need to carry both foot passengers and cyclists - maybe following the example of the West Highland line with additional space allocated to allow for cycles to be safely stored. We also need a competitive fare structure and bus integration if we are to tempt people to leave their car at home. We might even be radical and restore the rail link from Chathill to Seahouses, possibly as a tramway straight to the heart of the village to connect with trains provided by our proposed hourly local service on the ECML (see page 2). In the interim we should also look at open top buses (don't laugh because we know that these are a great success in the much rainier Lake District) as well as "demand responsive services" aimed directly at walkers who want to travel by train and then move on to see some of the more isolated and beautiful beaches in the AONB.

SENUG will be meeting the authors of the report to impress on them the fact that the answers to the problem are just staring them in the face. Better rail services, combined with bus integration, will improve the lot of both visitors and residents.



There is much more to a rail journey than the comfort of the train and its ability to keep to the timetable. Time spent waiting at stations needs to be made as safe, comfortable, and enjoyable as possible. In this context it is great news that the café at Morpeth station has now opened with a wide selection of drinks and snacks and is open from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Our next job? We need to make sure that ticket offices remain open to help ensure that tickets and information are available from a real person, and not just from your computer at home or one of the, often faulty, display screens at the station. A properly staffed station will be much more welcoming to passengers and much safer for us all to use.

Fair fares – they'd be just the ticket!

The Northumberland Line is going to re-open – but many important decisions are still to be made before the first train runs. At some point a draft timetable will be produced and, as well as setting out details of train times, it should also explain how bus services will integrate with the new rail services. The other big issue relates to fares. How much will it cost to travel on the line and will we need to buy more than one ticket for a journey that could easily involve bus, rail, and Metro?

When Metro first opened a “zone system” was introduced together with “transfares” that allowed you to buy a just one ticket to use on both systems within Tyne and

Wear. The “Network One” pass then added the rail service between Blaydon and Sunderland to the system and is available as a weekly, four weekly, or annual pass for as many zones as you need.

The Northumberland Line will link into the Metro system at Northumberland Park and Newcastle Central, and we’ve always understood that a new zone would be added to the Metro map to allow use of a single ticket from stations on the line to stations in the Metro system. Will this give us access to the same system that is enjoyed within Tyne and Wear?

We asked Transport North East for an update and they told us that their plan is “to produce an integrated rail and Metro fares and ticketing offer on the Northumberland Line and Tyne and Wear Metro but we are still working through the details.” In the longer term they want to “build on the work of the Bus Service Improvement Plan and the Northumberland Line to develop a true multi modal offer for public transport in the North East but this

will take some time to deliver as we adopt a staged approach to meet the challenging delivery timescales of both funded projects.” It looks like we may get an initial offer of a single ticket covering both rail and metro, but that any bus journey required at the start or end of a journey will still require a separate ticket. “Network One” for Northumberland may be some time away.

SENBUG welcomes this initial proposal but will continue to campaign to ensure that details of the scheme work for us all.

There is still one major gap in the current proposal. Seaton Delaval Station will have a large car park and will offer a ‘Park and Ride’ facility that should be attractive to passengers from the nearby Cramlington. These passengers will be able to

take advantage of the new

integrated fare system. Passengers without cars who continue to use Cramlington would still need to pay rail fares to Newcastle and then buy a separate Metro or bus ticket to complete their journey. This seems unfair to us and we are arguing that the new Metro zone needs to be extended to include local rail services running between Newcastle and Morpeth.



Thanks to NEXUS for permission to reproduce the current zone map

SENBUG isn't just interested in the fares charged in our local area. We say that the industry would benefit greatly if they were to provide more “Rover” tickets to encourage days out. We want to see the validity of the existing Hadrian’s Wall Country Line Tyne Valley and North East Round Robin Rover Tickets extended to include Cramlington and Morpeth and stations up to Ashington, and a new “Borders” Rover ticket introduced for the area bounded by Newcastle, Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Carlisle.

SENBUG, along with most Rail User Groups, is affiliated to Railfuture, the national organisation that campaigns for improvements to the rail system. Each year Railfuture looks at the activities of the user groups and makes awards that recognise exceptional work. This year SENBUG received a Gold Award for this newsletter and our Chair, Dennis Fancett, a Silver Award for his campaigning activities. This second award followed on from a Gold Award in the previous year.