

Email to Matt Croasdale. Northern Trains, dated 10<sup>th</sup> April 2023  
Copied to Northumberland County Council

**Subject: Formal Request for Carlisle - Morpeth Trains To Be Extended to Bedlington**

Hi Matt

I am writing to formally request Northern extend their Carlisle to Morpeth train service onto Bedlington effective from the **December 2024** timetable change. As you know, the route from Morpeth to Bedlington is a fully operational and maintained freight line, cleared as a diversionary route for long distance trains and LNER Azumas, and also carries the Royal Train from time to time. There is no reason why a regular passenger service could not be introduced on this route.

Northern trains currently wait in the siding at Morpeth for between 22 and 37 minutes before starting their return journey to Carlisle. During this time, the trains could easily proceed on to Bedlington and back (a 6 minute run each way or 15 minute round trip including the reversing time at Bedlington).

I was somewhat taken aback to be advised at our meeting with your timetable planners last Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> April that the aspiration for this service has never been formally lodged with Northern. It is my perception that we have requested this at virtually every meeting we have had. It has also featured in all our consultation responses, and I understand that Northumberland County Council have been asking for it too. But regardless of whatever might have happened to our earlier requests. I now wish to correct the situation and ask you take this email as a formal timetable enhancement request. Please confirm it is now lodged on your system and the service will be implemented as requested, or if not give me the reasons why it cannot be, which can then form the basis of further dialogue.

**Advantages to Northern**

a) *“Sweat the Assets”*. Rather than having empty stock sitting idle in the Coopies Lane siding for 37 minutes per train movement, and paying staff to read the Metro, Northern could turn this time into a productive, revenue generating train movement, saving tax payers money.

b) *“Mitigate Customer Complaints”*. Northern have received a number of complaints from residents of Green Lane, Morpeth, who have objected to the train which terminates at Morpeth standing idle with its engine running emitting diesel fumes for up to 37 minutes every hour. It has proved difficult to resolve these complaints without upsetting another set of residents. By allowing the train to run on to Bedlington, Northern overcomes these complaints and benefits from increased customer goodwill.

c) “Operational Flexibility”. Use of the route for regular passenger services will give Northern increased operational flexibility in times of disruption, allowing it to re-route trains to avoid blocked lines. We also recommend Northern trains its drivers to operate on the Morpeth North curve as well, allowing the Chathill service to route via Bedlington and the Northumberland Line should that ever prove necessary.

### **Advantages for Passengers**

a) Residents of Bedlington Station would benefit from significantly reduced travel times to Morpeth (8 minutes by train compared to 33 minutes by bus, and enjoy a direct link to Cramlington (16 minutes by train), compared to the current journey times of 50 minutes requiring a change of busses at Bedlington Front Street or Cowpen Asda. The Newcastle hospitals (RVI and Freeman) now have a major outpatients clinic at Cramlington Manor Walks Shopping Centre which would then easily be able to be reached via this new train service.

b) Residents of Cramlington and Morpeth will be able to access the significant additional employment opportunities being created at Cambois through the Recharge Industries giga-factory and associated companies expected to move in to adjacent sites, through onward bus connections from Bedlington.

c) Both the Bedlington station area and Choppington (should a station subsequently be opened at this location – see below) include some of the Lower Super-Economic Output Areas (LSOSs) with the highest indexes for multiple social-economic deprivation in both Northumberland and England as a whole, and the new train service will significantly assist the economic regeneration of these areas.

### **Cost Implications**

The service extension would make use of existing stock currently standing idle, and existing crews waiting in the idling train, so there would be no additional staff or rolling stock or crew costs. Additionally, as trains currently stand idle in the Coopies Lane siding with their engine running, no significant increase in fuel costs are envisaged. We believe the additional fuel cost of trains running at line speed rather than stationary with engine running is negligible and could easily be absorbed by Northern.

### **Commencement Date**

Whilst we would ideally like the service introduced earlier, even we at SENRUG acknowledge that to try to introduce it prior to the Northumberland Line and Bedlington station becoming operational would be complex and create an unhelpful diversion of focus from on time completion of the Northumberland line itself. So we say the **December 2024** timetable change as this will be the next change after the Northumberland line’s commencement date of Summer 2024. We are aware

however of the long gestation period for rail service improvements, and accordingly request that planning starts **now**, for implementation immediately after the Northumberland Line core route opens, rather than do nothing until 2024 and start planning then.

### **Level Crossings**

For information, the route includes 2 public highway level crossings, 2 private farm user worked crossings and 3 pedestrian footpath crossings. These are listed below with the Network Rail reference number. I do not believe increasing train movements by 2 trains per hour on any of these crossings will present any problems at all. The busiest of these is likely to be Choppington Lane. It so happens I have the Highways Agency data for road vehicle movements over that crossing, and can supply if requested.

#### *Public Highways*

5076: Hescot Lane (automatic half barriers)

5073: Choppington Road (automatic half barriers)

#### *Others*

5076: Park House Farm (private user worked crossing)

5074: Choppington (public footpath crossing)

5071: Coatsworth Farm 2 (private user worked crossing)

5070: Coatsworth Farm 1 (public footpath)

5069: Bedlington North (public footpath with manned gates) – NB This is not the **road** crossing which is on the Northumberland Line route.

### **Future Enhancements**

I anticipate that once the service is operational, there will be 2 further enhancements as follows:

a) Northumberland County Council are likely to want an intermediate station at Choppington. This would be a simple, single platform station with minimal infrastructure. I envisage NCC will begin the process of confirming the business case and seeking funding streams as soon as Northern is able to confirm the service will start running.

b) I believe either Network Rail or Northern should initiate a project to introduce bi-directional signalling on the approx 700 metres of track from where the single line becomes dual, just north west of Bedlington station, into the station's northbound platform. This would allow trains from Carlisle via Morpeth to enter the station on the northbound platform and leave for their return journey from the same platform, without needing to cross Bedlington South level crossing and enter the reversing siding, then come back out. This will save Northern precious operational minutes per journey,

avoid 2 level crossing closures per train movement, and mean Carlisle – Morpeth – Bedlington trains will not conflict with any southbound Northumberland Line or freight trains at Bedlington at all.

However, we believe the Carlisle – Morpeth service should be extended to Bedlington as an immediate (December 2024) project, without these additional enhancements which could be delivered later, if necessary.

### **Summary**

I hope everything in this email is clear, but I am available to provide any further assistance I can to your timetable planners. I am also sure the County Council and East Bedlington Parish Council would be willing to provide letters of support if so required.

Can we please keep the proposal under regular review as I would not like it to simply get lost within Northern's organisation, which I fear has happened before.

Kindest regards

### **Dennis Fancett**

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**Campaigning for The Northumberland Line (previously known as Ashington Blyth & Tyne Line) since March 2005**

See our campaign chronology [here](#)