

SENUG PRESS RELEASE 23rd JULY 2023

“STATIONS NEED STAFF” DECLARES SENUG

SENUG - The group that campaigns for better rail services in South East and East Northumberland, has issued its formal response to the proposed closure of station ticket offices at Morpeth, Alnmouth and Berwick, and indeed throughout the country, declaring that “Stations Need Staff”.

SENUG Chair Dennis Fancett said “Whilst we are not completely opposed to restructuring the role, perhaps having a staff member sitting at a more open-plan style desk, available to help customers with other tasks besides ticket retailing, we strongly oppose the proposed reduction in staffing hours at Morpeth and Alnmouth. And for all 3 stations, passengers need to know exactly where to find staff, they need to be in a designated spot, and they need to be able to advise on the best ticket, and accept cash for ticket sales.”

“There are all sorts of people, from the vulnerable and disabled to teenagers without credit cards, and foreign tourists unfamiliar with the system who need to buy their ticket from a person, and more importantly, be given the correct advice on what ticket to buy. Plus, we know the presence of staff helps people feel safer when travelling on the rail network. Far from saving money, the present proposals seem a concerted attempt to drive people back to their cars”, he continued.

“Our stations in Northumberland serve long-distance trains, running to London, Birmingham, Bristol, Plymouth, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and other places. There is a bewildering array of tickets for sale and a hopelessly over-complicated fares structure. Such stations need staffed ticket offices; indeed, we believe the opening hours should be extended to be from the first long-distance train to last, every day of the week, including Sundays.”

SENUG says it has not seen, and suspects there has not been any research or modelling comparing the loss of rail ticket revenue arising from people being less willing or able to

travel by train, versus any potential savings in operating cost. There has been no serious attempt to reduce costs by multi-purposing stations. Stations could act as community Post Offices, convenience stores, tourist information points, internet access hot desk points, Council Customer Service points, Amazon or other courier pick-up lockers, laundry, dry-cleaning or ironing service drop-off and pick-up point to name just a few suggestions. There appears to have been no innovative thinking around the role of staffed stations in rural and mid-sized market town communities.

SENUG's full response to the consultation is available on its website. SENUG has concerns the consultation itself might be a sham, with many essential details not being made available by the rail industry. It is also encouraging people who object to the closures to respond personally to the consultations, and of course, those who support SENUG's objectives are encouraged to join the group at <https://www.senrug.co.uk/join>.

Ends (463 words)

Notes for Editors

SENUG – The South East Northumberland Rail User Group - is a voluntary pro rail campaign group: contact Dennis Fancett, Chair, tel 07810 353651, e: chair@senrug.co.uk. www.senrug.co.uk

SENUG's full response to the Ticket Office Closure Consultations can be found on its website at: <https://www.senrug.co.uk/blog/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/23-07-22-SENUG-Response-to-Transport-Focus-Ticket-Office-Closure-Consultations.pdf>

Attached Photo: Suggested Caption: Unhelpful CIS. Is the 14:50 from Morpeth to Edinburgh cancelled completely, or just a minute late? Only staff can tell you. Credit SENUG

Departures

14:49 Metrocentre

On time

Plat 1

14:50 Edinburgh

Cancelled

14:50 Edinburgh

Expt 14:51

Plat

15:49 Metrocentre

On time

Plat 1

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