

## **SENRUG RESPONSE TO NORTHERN'S ANNOUNCEMENT OF INTENTION TO INTRODUCE CAR-PARKING CHARGES AT ALNMOUTH STATION**

**Text of Email from Dennis Fancett, Chair of SENRUG, to Simon Ashworth cc Matt Croasdale of Northern, dated 19 November 2023**

**[The announcement from Northern is below this email]**

Dear Simon

Thank you for your letter of 16<sup>th</sup> November forwarded by Matt, advising Northern are about to introduce car parking charges at Alnmouth.

In general, SENRUG is opposed to parking charges since we know it acts as a real deterrent to passengers travelling by rail. In the past, at Morpeth for instance, we used to promote rail travel by pointing out the rail fare from that station to Newcastle was cheaper than city centre parking. Now that charges at Morpeth have been introduced (and then very rapidly increased), that argument no longer holds good and that makes SENRUG's task of promoting use of your network that much harder.

The imposition of a £1.50 charge at Alnmouth increases the cost of reaching Newcastle by train by 12%, against a standard single fare to Newcastle of £12.60. This is an increase many regular daily commuters who have not seen a real terms wage increase for many years will not be able to afford, and will be on top of next year's rail fares increase.

We reject the argument that drivers are parking at Alnmouth station for non-rail use, due to the station's remote location, being neither near the town of Alnwick nor the village of Alnmouth. In short, there is nothing else there other than the station.

We understand that across the whole of Northern's network, income from parking charges accounts for less than 1% of total income, and that is before the cost of enforcing the charges is considered. We consider therefore that parking charges brings no real gain to Northern, whilst discouraging passengers from using the train.

We do concede however that in cases where car parks are at capacity, some management measures are needed to ration places. We also accept that Northern may have no incentive to provide free parking for passengers making longer and more expensive journeys with other operators, for instance to London. An initiative is needed where car parking continues to be offered free of charge to Northern's own regular passengers. We believe the obvious way of doing this is to offer free parking to those purchasing a monthly or maybe quarterly rail season ticket from Northern. This keeps Northern's own passengers on side, whilst managing capacity in respect of passengers taking longer journeys with other operators. We have mentioned this idea before, and

would be grateful to know if it has been seriously considered at stations where capacity is a problem.

We also note the anomaly, both at Alnmouth and Morpeth, where some of the parking capacity is provided by Northern and some is provided by the County Council. This makes the parking season ticket product non-viable, since passengers don't know which organisation's ticket to buy, not wanting to risk having to pay twice if they buy a ticket with say Northern, only to find your section of the parking is full, and they must use the Council parking which is not included in the Northern ticket. Again there is a simple solution to this, namely reciprocity, such that a Northern car parking season ticket is valid at the Council's car parks (at Alnmouth or Morpeth stations only), and vice versa.

Finally, and again I have discussed this with Matt, I believe all stations, but particularly Alnmouth and Morpeth which are within SENRUG's area, should have around 6 spaces reserved for free parking of up to 30 minutes, allowing drop-off and meet and greet (including going to the far platform to assist passengers with luggage), and in the case of Alnmouth and Morpeth, to allow rail ticket enquiries and purchases at the ticket office. The introduction of parking charges without free short term provision is yet another blow for those passengers who want, or need, to buy their ticket in person from the ticket office. It was my understanding Northern had taken on board the unprecedented level of feedback from the Transport Focus consultation on the need for ticket offices, so please don't try and run them down another way by making access to them chargeable through car parking charges. In the case of Morpeth, the existing free parking provision should be moved from the bus turning circle to the main bit of the car park, keeping the turning circle free for both public busses and rail replacement coaches (where these are sadly necessary) to manoeuvre.

I would be very happy to discuss these points with you constructively and trust your plans can be amended and introduction date deferred to take on board the comments we have made.

Best wishes

**Dennis Fancett**

Chair, SENRUG: The South East Northumberland Rail User Group

**Text of a Letter from Simon Ashworth at Northern Trains Ltd to All North East Stakeholders (including SENRUG) dated 16 November 2023**

Dear Stakeholder,

I am writing to give you advance notice that from week commencing 4 December 2023, Northern will be introducing car parking charges at Alnmouth and Wylam stations. We will undertake local publicity campaigns, including posters and flyers, to make users of the car parks aware of the new charges.

A daily parking charge of £1.50 at Alnmouth and £1.00 at Wylam will be made. In addition, we will offer 50p for a two hour stay.

We're introducing charges at these locations to maximise capacity at our car parks, ensuring they remain primarily available for rail users only. The introduction of car parking charges at these stations will help Northern to develop a sustainable revenue income, not dependent upon national or local subsidy and in doing so, provide value for the taxpayer.

The low level of daily charge has been determined through benchmarking with car parks in the local area and is, we believe, in line with locations across a wider area. In line with many councils and parking companies, our machines will be cashless. The RingGo pay by mobile service will be available for customers to use, and in addition customers will be able to purchase through ticket offices and, where applicable through ticket vending machines.

Rail users will also be able to purchase cashless daily, multi-day and weekly car park tickets from RingGo online, through the App and by phone and at ticket offices, where present.

Please contact me if you have any queries or require more information.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S. Ashworth". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'S'.

**Simon Ashworth**  
Car Parks Manager  
Northern Trains Limited