

**NEW FEARS FOR NORTHUMBERLAND TRAIN SERVICE REDUCTIONS**

SENUG - The group that campaigns for better rail services in South East and East Northumberland, is once again alerting the community to the disastrous East Coast Main Line rail timetable, proposed for implementation from December 2024, which will reduce train services along Northumberland's east coast.

Dennis Fancett, Chair of the group explained: "whilst we haven't been given details of the new timetable, we've been told that as far as Morpeth and Alnmouth are concerned, there are no substantive changes to the proposals put forward in 2021, which were roundly condemned by local stakeholders including politicians of all parties."

This means Morpeth will lose all its off-peak LNER services and local services from Northern will terminate at Newcastle instead of running on to Hexham and Carlisle. Neither will Morpeth see the re-instatement of direct services to Manchester, which were promised for and introduced briefly at December 2019, but never re-instated by the government after the Covid pandemic.

"Whilst we support the government's objective of wanting to increase rail capacity between London and Edinburgh, this can be done in such a way as to not reduce services here in Northumberland," continued Dennis. "For instance, with good wifi on board the train, it is no longer imperative to cut 2 or 3 minutes off the total journey time. Whereas avoiding the need to change for journeys such as Morpeth to Peterborough, Hexham or Manchester is far more important, since time changing trains is time lost to business."

"Rather than investing in our rail infrastructure here in Northumberland to allow even more trains to run, we understand that Network Rail are actually cutting back on some planned infrastructure investments such as power supply upgrades, which makes it more difficult to run more electric trains or add more coaches to the ones running already. It will also make it harder to introduce the hourly all-station local service between Newcastle and Berwick, desperately needed for communities such as Widdrington and Chathill."

We reject the notion that organisations based in Leeds and Manchester know what is best for Northumberland and the North East and we urge the decision makers at the Department for Transport, Network Rail and LNER to listen to stakeholders based in this region, who understand better what our local economies need to thrive and prosper. Otherwise, we have a “levelling down” timetable, prioritising the needs of the booming big cities at each end of the line, above the needs of the regional economies and market town businesses through which the route passes.

SENUG is urging those who oppose the new timetable to contact their local Councillor, their MP, Rail North and Transport for the North, and of course to join SENUG at <https://www.senrug.co.uk/join>, to allow the group to campaign more effectively on this and other issues. Many of our local politicians are of course already working very hard to reverse the proposals, but will find it useful to know how many of their constituents support them.

**Ends** (493 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](mailto:chair@senrug.co.uk). [www.senrug.co.uk](http://www.senrug.co.uk)

SENUG’s objections to the 2021 draft timetable, originally proposed for introduction in summer 2022 but hastily withdrawn after a huge public outcry can be seen [here](https://www.senrug.co.uk/blog/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/ECML-Draft-May-2022-Timetable-Final-Response.pdf) - (<https://www.senrug.co.uk/blog/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/ECML-Draft-May-2022-Timetable-Final-Response.pdf>). SENUG understands there is no substantive change to the plans for Morpeth and Alnmouth stations in the latest proposals.

Attached Photo (below): Suggested Caption: “An LNER train pulls into Morpeth. But will their off-peak services be withdrawn in future?” Credit Geoff Stainthorpe.

