

Blyth Bebside Station Opens Restoring Rail Services After 60 Years

The long campaign by SENRUG and local partners delivers a new era of rail travel for South East Northumberland.

Passenger trains are once again stopping at Blyth Bebside, nearly 60 years after the last service departed in 1964. The opening of the brand-new Blyth Bebside Station marks a major step forward in the Northumberland Line project, reconnecting Blyth and surrounding communities to Newcastle and the wider rail network.

Although a station once stood nearby in the 19th and 20th centuries, today's station is a brand new structure and includes the new pedestrian footbridge across the A189. It is well positioned to serve the area's growing population and the opening symbolises both local determination and regional investment.

SENRUG has played a significant role in making this happen. For almost two decades, the group has campaigned for the reintroduction of passenger services, gathering evidence, engaging with transport authorities, and keeping the project in the public eye.

The restored rail link will shorten journey times, ease road congestion, and boost local business and education access. For Blyth and Bebside residents, it's a long-awaited return of something once thought lost - regular, reliable passenger trains serving the community once again.

As the first train departed on opening day, the message from campaigners and passengers alike was simple: rail has returned to Bebside and it's here to stay!



Blyth Bebside Station - Photo Credit: Northumberland County Council

ISSUE 44
AUTUMN 2025

This issue:

Blyth Bebside Opens

PAGE 1

SENRUG in Action

PAGE 2

Editorial

PAGE 3

Simon Walton - From
Borders to Blyth

PAGE 4

200 Years of Rail

PAGE 5

Northumberland Line
Update

PAGE 6

SENRUG - What Next?

PAGE 7

A Northern Journey
Morpeth - Settle

PAGE 8

JOIN US





SEN RUG in Action: Campaigning, connecting & keeping the pressure on for better rail services

Evening Car Parking Charges Slashed at Cramlington & Morpeth

Persistent lobbying by SEN RUG has paid off, with Northern now reducing evening parking charges at Cramlington and Morpeth stations.

After 16:00, parking costs just 60p at Cramlington and £1.10 at Morpeth until 08:00 the next day. These discounted rates may not be obvious from station signage but are available on Northern's RingGo app. SEN RUG welcomes the move as a step in the right direction, though continues to press for full free evening parking.

Morpeth passengers are reminded that Council parking across Coopies Lane remains free after 18:00, but SEN RUG is urging the Council to start that earlier to better align with evening train times.

No Concessions on New LNER Timetable.

Despite SEN RUG's strong representation, LNER has confirmed there will be no restoration of Morpeth's pre-cut services in the December timetable.

While Berwick receives a small improvement, Morpeth passengers lose the convenient 09:40 London arrival first achieved under SEN RUG's collaboration with East Coast Trains in 2011.

The meeting revealed worrying gaps in

LNER's understanding of Northumberland's travel needs - especially the limited local connections feeding their intercity services.

SEN RUG continues to challenge these decisions and calls for meaningful consultation ahead of future timetable changes, rather than a decade-long wait for progress.

Berwick Meeting Builds Momentum.

SEN RUG's recent public meeting in Berwick drew a strong turnout, with thanks to speakers from RAGES and Railfuture for their valuable insights.

Local councillors and residents engaged enthusiastically as SEN RUG outlined achievements to date, current campaigns and future goals for service improvements along the East Coast Main Line.

The lively discussion demonstrated clear community appetite for better rail connectivity and regular dialogue.

SEN RUG extends its thanks to Berwick Town Council for hosting and is already exploring opportunities for further meetings to maintain the growing momentum across Northumberland's northernmost communities.

Next SEN RUG Public Meeting Announced.

SEN RUG is pleased to confirm that our next public meeting will take place on Thursday 20th November at 19:30, in Morpeth Town Hall.

We're delighted to welcome Malcolm Knight, Head of Operational Planning, and Ed Turner, Senior Public Affairs Manager, both from LNER, as our guest speakers. They will provide an overview of developments within LNER, including details of the new December timetable.

While the timetable changes are disappointing, the session will offer valuable insight into the reasoning behind LNER's decisions and the wider challenges of timetable planning. As always, there will be ample opportunity for questions and comments from attendees following the presentation. All are welcome. Please join us for what promises to be an informative and engaging evening.

Last train to Ashington

Thanks to lobbying from SEN RUG and others, from the December 2025 timetable change, the last Monday to Saturday train from Newcastle on the Northumberland Line becomes the 23:21, rather than the current woefully inadequate 22:16. This means those going to evening sports events, theatre or music gigs or office parties can safely make it to the last train home.





Editorial: Milestones, Momentum and a New Identity for SENRUG

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the Autumn 2025 edition of the SENRUG Newsletter.

It's been quite a year for us at SENRUG and for rail in Northumberland.

First, let's celebrate a major achievement: the Northumberland Line has now carried more than 700,000 passenger journeys since its December 2024 reopening. What a statement of demand and public need. In response, Northern are adding longer trains/extra carriages to accommodate that surge.

Congratulations to everyone from campaigners to councils to volunteers. All who helped turn the proposal into real-life daily journeys.

Equally important are the opening of new stations: the launch of Newsham Station earlier this year and the recently opened Blyth Bebside Station are evidence that the vision is becoming bricks, mortar and schedules.

But let's not lens-wipe the view: behind the wins, there are still bumps. The timetable changes for December 2025 pose real concerns for users across Northumberland. The reduction of LNER services and direct trains from Morpeth and Cramlington to the Metrocentre and Hexham may be justified operationally, but from a local user perspective, it feels like two steps forward, one uncertain stride back.

We did our analysis and the logic doesn't fully stack when local feeder services remain thin or not aligned to the longer distance connections.

This is a warning that progress must be sustained, not just initiated.

That's why our upcoming Public Meeting on Thursday 20th November at 19:30 in Morpeth Town Hall is so important. We're delighted to welcome Malcolm Knight, Head of Operational Planning, and Ed Turner, Senior Public Affairs Manager, both from LNER. They'll present an overview of LNER's current operations and crucially, explain the rationale behind the new timetable.

This will be an invaluable opportunity for members and the public alike to hear directly from LNER and to have their say. As always, SENRUG will ensure your questions are asked, your concerns voiced, and your ideas heard.

Finally, a word on our new identity. Following the decision at our last AGM, the rebranding is now complete. We are no longer the South East Northumberland Rail User Group, but simply SENRUG – Campaigning for Better Rail Services in Northumberland and Beyond. A concise name for a broader mission.

So as we reflect on a year of milestones, let's channel that success into momentum. The journey doesn't stop here...it's only just gathering speed.

Marc Stewart, - Newsletter Editor

Competition Time!

Here's your chance to win 2 x Return First Class tickets from Morpeth to Edinburgh for the Edinburgh Christmas Market!

Also included is free luggage storage for 2 people at **Luggage-Point**, situated within Waverley Market Shopping Centre, adjoining Edinburgh Waverley Railway Station.

Travel will be booked once the winner selects their journey dates - which must be between 22nd November and 20th December 2025. Accommodation is not included.

Many thanks to Luggage-Point for the prize donation!

To be in with a chance of winning this fantastic prize, please answer this question and email your answer to editor@senrug.co.uk.

Closing Date: 20th November 2025

Question:

SENRUG recently successfully lobbied Northern to reduce evening car parking charges at which two stations?

From Borders to Blyth: Lessons in Rail Campaigning from Simon Walton

A visit to Morpeth by one of Britain's most seasoned rail advocates

When Simon Walton addressed members of SENUG at the recent AGM in Morpeth, it wasn't with slides or statistics, but with stories, scars and a simple, straight-talking message:

Campaigning works — but only if you keep going long after the ribbon is cut.

Simon knows this better than most. As former Chair of the Campaign for Borders Rail (CBR), as well as a corporate communications specialist and retail business analyst, he led the grassroots effort that helped re-establish passenger services between Edinburgh and Tweedbank, a landmark achievement in UK transport policy.

What began as a hopeful local movement became a persuasive political force, influencing investment decisions at the highest level.

"There's no magic formula," Simon said after his talk, "but if there's one constant in successful campaigning, it's persistence. You need credibility, a clear message, and you need to be visible. SENUG has all those ingredients, and then some."

In drawing parallels between SENUG and the CBR, Simon emphasised the shared DNA of grassroots origin, pragmatic ambition, and long-haul dedication. "We were never just about reopening a line. We were about connecting communities, opening up opportunity, and rebalancing transport policy in favour of the people it's meant to serve."

Much of Simon's insight centres on political engagement. He urges campaigners to speak in terms that resonate in Westminster, or Holyrood. He explains:

"You must connect your campaign to wider priorities,"

"Economic regeneration, social inclusion, environmental sustainability, these are the levers that matter. Saying

'we want a train' isn't enough. Saying 'we want our town to grow, thrive, and be connected to jobs and education', that's when you get traction."

That traction also came from building strong relationships, not rivalries.

"You don't win by shouting louder. You win by getting in the room with people you might not agree with and finding common cause"

We worked with every party in the Scottish Parliament. Campaigning is a team sport, even if you're not all wearing the same jersey."

Equally vital was involving the community, not just as supporters, but as storytellers. "We gave a voice to students, pensioners, families, all with lived experience of transport poverty. Those voices have power, especially when the debate is too often dominated by cost-benefit tables."

Business engagement was another pillar. CBR persuaded employers and developers to back the railway as part of wider economic strategy. Simon encouraged SENUG to make similar links, particularly with projects like the Blyth Energy Park and freight potential along the Northumberland Line.

But he offered a note of caution from experience. "Don't just campaign for what's winnable, campaign for what's needed. The Borders Railway reopened as single track, with too few passing loops. Now we're playing catch-up. Infrastructure is always cheaper before the concrete sets."

Looking ahead, Simon believes SENUG is well placed to shape the future, not only of the Northumberland Line, but of connected communities across the region. "The moment the train runs is not the end, it's the pivot. That's when the next campaign begins. Better services, more Sunday trains, new destinations, whatever comes next, SENUG is already on track."



AGM 2025: Looking Back, Moving Forward.

SENUG's 2025 AGM, held at Morpeth Town Hall on 8th July, reflected a year of landmark progress and forward planning. The meeting re-elected Dennis Fancett as Chair and confirmed the committee for the year ahead.

The Chairman's Report celebrated the opening of the Northumberland Line's first stages, including Newsham Station in March, marking the culmination of a 19-year campaign. Dennis expressed gratitude to politicians, rail professionals, and supporters whose efforts made the achievement possible. Attention now turns to completing the remaining stations and shaping future campaigns such as the Morpeth-Bedlington and Ashington-Newbiggin services.

Members also discussed the December 2025 East Coast Main Line timetable, reaffirming opposition to LNER's planned service reductions at Morpeth and Berwick.

Financially, SENUG reported a stable year thanks to generous grants from several town and parish councils, ensuring funding for newsletters and the website through to 2029. Long-serving Treasurer Adrian King announced his decision to step down after 14 years, staying on as a committee member.

Two motions passed: increased membership fees effective from August 2025, and the formal rebranding of the group to simply **SENUG**, with the strapline: **Campaigning for Better Rail Services in Northumberland and Beyond.**

200 Years of Rail: From Steam Beginnings to Sustainable Futures

Celebrating the Stockton & Darlington Railway bicentenary - and Northumberland's proud place in the story that started it all.



200 Years of the Railway - and Northumberland Was There at the Start. In September 1825 the world changed. The opening of the Stockton & Darlington Railway on 27th September 1825, is widely recognised as the birth of the modern railway: a public line, steam-hauled, carrying both goods and people and proving that rail could drive economic growth at scale.

In 2025, the UK celebrates a landmark year in rail history. It was on 27 September 1825 that the Stockton & Darlington Railway (S&DR) carried its first steam-hauled passenger service. A modest 26-mile journey between Shildon and Stockton that irrevocably changed how people and goods travelled. Since then, rail has underpinned Britain's industrial rise, shaped regional economies, and evolved into a vital component of modern mobility and sustainability. In recognition of this milestone the campaign Railway 200 has been launched - a year-long national celebration reflecting on rail's past, reaffirming its place today, and looking to its future.

Across the UK there have been exhibitions, heritage journeys and special events that invite us to reflect on two centuries of engineering innovation and social change. SENRUG are proud to champion rail's role in our region.

By John M Scott

This year marks the 200th anniversary of the opening of the Stockton & Darlington Railway in 1825, with most attention being focused on the area between Shildon, Darlington and Stockton. However, the part that Northumberland played in this historic achievement, and in the future development of railways, is often overlooked. Because of space, this article can only scratch the surface.

Wylam Village – It is remarkable that a small village on the River Tyne, west of Newcastle, played such a large part in the story of railways. Wylam can justly claim that role.

George Stephenson was born in Wylam on 9 June 1781 and worked at the local colliery. Illiterate until the age of 18, he paid to attend night school to learn reading, writing and arithmetic. After working at different collieries around Northumberland and in Scotland, he moved to **Killingworth** with his son Robert. There he designed the miner's safety lamp, known as the “**Geordie Lamp**”, and experimented with wrought-iron, malleable rails to withstand the weight of the early steam locomotives he was designing at Killingworth Colliery. His first major railway project was the Hetton Colliery Railway from Hetton-le-Hole to the coal staithes on the River Wear at Sunderland. The next major project —

and the one that made him famous, was to survey and build the line from Shildon to Stockton on the Tees, now known as the Stockton & Darlington Railway.

Timothy Hackworth was born on 22nd November 1786 in Wylam and, like Stephenson, worked at Wylam Colliery. He became involved in the design of early steam locomotives and acted as relief manager at the Forth Street works of Robert Stephenson & Co. On George Stephenson's recommendation, Hackworth was appointed the first Locomotive Superintendent of the Stockton & Darlington Railway.

Newcastle upon Tyne – The world's first locomotive works were opened in 1823 on Forth Street in Newcastle as Robert Stephenson & Company. Here, Locomotion No. 1 was built for the Stockton & Darlington Railway and Rocket for the Liverpool & Manchester Railway — Rocket famously winning the Rainhill Trials.



Rocket at the NRM York, in October 2025



De Arend Engine in Utrecht. Photo from Hdekroon - Dutch Wikimedia Commons

Bedlington – The Bedlington Iron Works manufactured parts of George Stephenson's early locomotive Blücher. John Birkinshaw, an engineer at the works, developed and patented the malleable iron rails used on the S&DR and also for the first railway in Imperial Russia, from Tsarskoe Selo to St Petersburg.

Bedlington built the first locomotive for the railways of the Netherlands, De Arend (The Eagle - pictured), a replica of which is in the Dutch National Railway Museum in Utrecht. The first locomotive for the Kingdom of Naples (now part of Italy) was also built there. Bedlington was the birthplace of Sir Daniel Gooch who, after working for George and Robert Stephenson, became the first Chief Mechanical Engineer of the Great Western Railway. The first GWR locomotives were, fittingly, built back in Newcastle at Robert Stephenson's Forth Street works.

Northumberland Line Steams Ahead - A Triumph for the Region

Four stations open, passenger numbers soaring, and the final two stations nearing completion — the Northumberland Line is a story of persistence, partnership, and pride.



Less than a year since the first passenger train departed Ashington in December 2024, the Northumberland Line has already transformed travel across the county. What was once a campaigner's dream is now a thriving commuter link, expected to carry 1 million passenger journeys by the end of 2025, and smashing every forecast in the process.

Today, trains run half-hourly between Ashington, Seaton Delaval, Newsham, and the newly opened Blyth Bebside, connecting local communities to Newcastle in under 35 minutes. These four stations have already rewritten expectations of what a regional rail revival can achieve. Demand has been so strong that Northern has introduced longer trains to meet passenger growth - a sure sign that the public appetite for rail is alive and well.

The opening of Blyth Bebside Station on 19th October 2025 was another landmark moment. It marks the return of a railway connection after almost 60 years, and for Northumberland, another step towards completing a network that is reshaping how people live, work, and travel across the region.

Two stations - Bedlington and Northumberland Park, are now in the final stages of construction and approval, with both expected to open in early 2026. Once they do, the full six-station service will stretch from the heart of Ashington to the Tyne and Wear Metro, creating one of the most connected regional corridors in the

North East. Local leaders say this will open new opportunities for jobs, education, tourism, and investment - and provide a genuine alternative to driving for thousands of residents.

Yet behind every headline and ribbon-cutting lies nearly two decades of unwavering campaigning. The Northumberland Line would not exist without the determination and persistence of SENRUG - then the South East Northumberland Rail User Group, who championed the line long before it was politically fashionable to talk about "reversing Beeching."

Since 2005, SENRUG members have written reports, held public meetings, and presented compelling economic arguments showing how a reopened railway could unlock growth and restore social mobility. Their constant engagement with MPs, councils, and transport bodies kept the idea alive through years of shifting priorities. That dogged determination finally paid off. As SENRUG Chair Dennis Fancett reflected at the group's recent AGM:

"We are grateful to everyone who has stood with us during our 19 year campaign. Without the support of our members and others, there would be no SENRUG, and there can be no doubt that without SENRUG, there would be no Northumberland Line."

Now that the line is up and running, SENRUG's attention is turning to what comes next - campaigning for Sunday

services to call at Manors, an extension to Woodhorn and Newbiggin, a station at Seghill, and Newcastle to Morpeth trains extended to Bedlington.

The Northumberland Line is already a success story - not just for rail users, but for everyone who believes in the power of persistence. It stands as proof that community voices, when united and consistent, can achieve lasting change.

From the first idea in 2005 to 700,000 journeys in 2025, the message is clear: SENRUG helped make it happen — and the journey has only just begun.

While the Northumberland Line has exceeded every expectation, one challenge remains - integrating bus services with the new stations. Passengers have praised the train's speed but criticised the lack of direct local bus links, particularly for those living just outside walking distance of the stations.

In many cases, buses stop on nearby main roads rather than entering station turning circles and timetables are not synchronised with train departures. This disconnect can make what should be a seamless door-to-door journey frustratingly disjointed.

SENRUG calls for a co-ordinated transport approach: bus routes that serve station forecourts, shared ticketing between Northern and bus operators, and integrated timetable planning through local authorities. Better bus links would turn a great railway into a complete network, connecting every community and not just every station.

SEN RUG: From Reopening to Reimagining Northumberland's Rail Future

The Northumberland Line is only the beginning. SEN RUG's vision now spans new routes, new stations, and a truly integrated county-wide network.



After nearly two decades of tireless advocacy, the reopening of the Northumberland Line stands as one of the most successful community-led rail campaigns in the UK. But for SEN RUG, success has never meant stopping. With four stations now open and the final two nearing completion, the group has turned its energy to a bold new question: what comes next?

The answer lies in a clear and ambitious plan — one that aims not just to restore rail, but to reimagine how the entire region travels. SEN RUG's latest campaign roadmap, set out in its "What Next?" strategy, defines a vision stretching from short-term fixes to transformative long-term projects.

SEN RUG's record with the Northumberland Line proves that focused, evidence-based campaigning works.

Some changes could happen almost immediately. SEN RUG is calling for Metro POP zones to be extended to Morpeth and Cramlington, giving passengers the same simple, low-cost zonal fares available elsewhere in the region. They're also pressing for the 777 Airport Bus to extend its hourly service to the forecourt at Morpeth Station, creating a long-missing rail-air link for North Northumberland.

SEN RUG also wants TransPennine Express trains to serve Cramlington, Northumberland's largest town, which currently has only an hourly Northern service. This single change would improve hospital access and widen employment opportunities.

And in the city, the group insists that all Northumberland Line trains should stop at Manors, including on Sundays - something they describe as "nonsensical not to do" given the station's proximity to student housing, call centres, and cultural attractions.

SEN RUG's short-term priorities focus on connecting the missing pieces. Campaigns include a new Morpeth-Bedlington service, linking those towns directly into the Northumberland Line, and an extension of trains beyond Ashington to Newbiggin-by-the-Sea — requiring less than a mile of new track. Another major aim is an hourly Newcastle-Berwick local service, calling at every station along the route. This would transform access to smaller communities such as Pegswood, Widdrington, Acklington and Chathill, and better connect the market towns of Morpeth, Alnmouth for Alnwick and Berwick - creating fast, reliable regional mobility.

Medium-term ambitions include a full review of the East Coast Main Line timetable, which SEN RUG argues has unfairly penalised Northumberland stations since the 2025 changes. They also want the Morpeth-Hexham through service reinstated, restoring the

vital cross-county link. New stations at Belford, Choppington and Seghill are also proposed - each designed to spark local regeneration, reconnecting communities long left behind.

SEN RUG's long-term aspirations are nothing short of visionary. They include:

- Upgrading the Butterwell Line to create a new Ashington-Alnmouth-Berwick route for freight and passengers.
- A new Metro line from Blyth Town Centre to the Airport, running on Northumberland Line tracks under battery power between Newsham and Northumberland Park.
- Double-tracking the single track sections of the Northumberland Line to increase capacity.
- Major redevelopments at Manors and Newcastle stations to improve flow and accessibility.
- New stations at Team Valley, Benton East, and Beal, each opening new connections for work, tourism, and education.

The moment the train runs isn't the end - it's the pivot. SEN RUG's next campaign is not just about trains, but about building a connected, sustainable Northumberland for the next generation.



Photo Credit: Northumberland County Council

A Northern Adventure: From Morpeth to the Settle–Carlisle Line

A scenic journey that shows just how far the North's rail connections can take you - and why we must protect them.

It's always inspiring to hear from members who take the spirit of rail travel to heart. Recently, two SENRUG members, Ronald and Elena Hunt, embarked on a long-planned journey from Morpeth to Settle, travelling entirely by Northern trains, an impressive round trip of nearly 300 miles through some of Britain's most spectacular landscapes.

Their route took them from Morpeth's familiar platforms to Carlisle - where the onward connection to the world-famous Settle–Carlisle Railway was effortless - just a short walk across the adjacent platform. From there, the journey wound through the Yorkshire Dales, past stone-built stations and rolling moorland, crossing the awe-inspiring Ribbleshead Viaduct, before arriving in the bustling market town of Settle.

They stayed at the Station Inn at Ribbleshead and later the Falcon Manor Hotel in Settle, both perfectly placed for exploring the National Park. Though a few showers swept through the Dales, nothing could spoil the experience. "The scenery was absolutely stunning," they wrote. "Every station between Carlisle and Settle is beautifully maintained, and the architecture alone is worth the trip."

Throughout their travels, Northern's service was excellent, including all of the friendly staff, helpful announcements, and an on-board refreshment trolley that made the long journey comfortable and relaxed. Despite the absence of seat reservations, they had no trouble finding a seat; perhaps proof that sometimes the best adventures are those taken at an easy pace.

Practical notes emerged too: hotels were busy, so early booking is advised, and taxis in Settle are best arranged online. The station itself, however, was well staffed, with ticketing assistance and a warm welcome for visitors.

Their verdict? "A must-do for anyone who loves rail travel." They encourage fellow members to follow in their footsteps, not only for the scenery but to celebrate and support regional rail links. The fact that this journey can still be made directly from Morpeth to Carlisle* is a reminder of the value of our cross-country routes, and why SENRUG continues to campaign to retain and strengthen them.

So, if you're looking for your next railway adventure, why not take the same trip? Pack your walking boots, bring a camera, and experience the wild beauty of the Dales by train. After all, the journey itself, as this story proves, is every bit as memorable as the destination.



Ribbleshead Viaduct - Photo Credit - Kreuzschnabel/Wikimedia Commons



An illustrated route map commissioned by the historic [Settle to Carlisle Railway](http://www.settle-carlisle.co.uk).

*Direct services between Morpeth and Carlisle are being withdrawn from December 2025, but SENRUG is campaigning for them to be re-instated