

## SENUG COMMITTEE 2023-24

The committee and office holders were agreed at the SENUG AGM on Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> July 2023 as follows:

Dennis Fancett*	Chair
Andrew Carmichael	Deputy Chair
Ronald Hunt	Membership Secretary
Adrian King	Treasurer
(vacant)	Newsletter Editor
Reemer Bailey	Social Media Secretary
Sally Milner	Committee Member with no specific role
Geoff Stainthorpe	Committee Member with no specific role
Peter Strong *	Committee Member with no specific role
Gordon Summers	Committee Member with no specific role
Trevor Watson *	Committee Member with no specific role

*\* Peter Strong works in the rail industry, Dennis Fancett and Trevor Watson are committee members for Railfuture North East Branch, Dennis Fancett is a member of Railfuture's European Passenger Group.*

SENUG welcomes other members joining its committee. If interested, please contact the Chair. It is very unlikely there will be a contested vote and normally anyone who wants to join the committee may do so. The requirements for being a Committee Member are given below.

### Requirements of Committee Membership

1. You must be a member of SENUG and support its aims and objectives.
2. You must have access to email and a computer which can open and read documents produced in Word or Excel (this is because most of the committee work is done by email correspondence between members).
3. You must declare any actual or potential conflict of interests (for instance if you work in the rail industry, hold or are standing for office as an elected representative, or hold office within a Trade Union or political party). Such circumstances will not disqualify you and indeed your experience will be valuable, but we need to be aware so SENUG as a whole can be transparent and independent. Individual membership of a political party or trade union which does not involve holding a specific position of responsibility does not need to be declared.
4. You must consent to your name and any actual or potential conflicts of interest you have declared being included in the list of Committee Members published on the SENUG website.
5. Additionally, the Chair, Deputy Chair and Newsletter Editor must agree to their contact details (eg a phone number) being published on the SENUG website and other SENUG literature.

The minutes of SENUG's 2023 AGM follow on the next page.

## **DRAFT MINUTES OF SENRUG AGM 13<sup>th</sup> July 2023 (to be confirmed at 2024 AGM)**

24 attendees present

The Chair's Report, Membership Report, Accounts, Newsletter Editor's Report and Social Media Secretary's Report (see below) were all accepted without comment or question. Ronald Hunt encouraged any member who had not renewed their Membership subscription to do so.

Dennis Fancett said Dave Shaw was standing down from the committee and as Newsletter Editor for personal reasons, Dennis thanked Dave for his many years of work, both as Newsletter Editor and for other work, particularly liaison with Transport North East and the Joint Transport Committee, and for preparing responses to consultations. There was no new volunteer for Newsletter Editor so this position remains vacant.

Dennis also explained that Ryan Hogg had stood down as Social Media Secretary during the year and thanked Ryan for the work he had done in establishing SENRUG's social media channels. Reemer Bailey agreed to take on the role of Social Media Secretary, concentrating initially on Facebook.

Dennis added that the remaining committee members had all indicated their willingness to stand again. No further nominations for committee membership or for any of the formal committee positions had been received in advance of the meeting, and none were received during the meeting.

A proposal to re-elect the remaining existing committee members en bloc to continue for 2023/24 was proposed by Peter Stanners, and seconded by Simon Hadden, and passed unanimously.

A proposal to re-elect Dennis Fancett as Chair, Andrew Carmichael as Deputy Chair, Ronald Hunt as Membership Secretary, Adrian King as Treasurer, and to elect Reemer Bailey as Social Media Secretary was proposed by Sally Milner and seconded by Lyn Bickle, and passed unanimously.

### **Other Business**

#### **Aln Valley Model Railway Exhibition Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> / Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> September:**

Lyn Bickle and Peter Stanners agreed to cover Saturday morning (and take the exhibition up to the venue. Adrian King had already offered to cover Saturday afternoon. Dennis Fancett said he could cover Sunday afternoon. A volunteer is still required for Sunday morning.

#### **Ticket Office Closures:**

Dennis Fancett said SENRUG intended to respond to the Northern consultations (for Morpeth and Alnmouth) and the LNER consultations (for Newcastle and Berwick). He stated his personal view, and the **provisional** SENRUG position (not yet debated or endorsed and therefore subject to amendment by the committee) was that:

1) Noting the changes in ticket retailing, with fewer sales made at ticket offices, and very few made by cash (meaning cash security is no longer an issue) we should not object to redeploying staff more

flexibly, subject to discussions as to the new role and confirmation staff could and would continue to be available to assist passengers with complex and forward dated ticket sales.

2) But we should oppose de-staffing or reducing staffed hours at stations, as indeed is being proposed for Morpeth.

There was general endorsement of this position, though Sally Milner pointed out that with a Ticket Office, at least a passenger knows where to find the staff member, whereas with the new “Journey Maker” role, this might not be the case.

Other issues raised, particular with reference to reducing staffing hours were:

- How will Disability Assistance be provided at unstaffed stations?
- How will access to the toilets and waiting room be maintained, particularly if (with reference to Morpeth) the café were to close
- The need for some people to have paper tickets
- Needs of disabled and vulnerable passengers and tourists.
- Fares simplification should have come first.
- There would need to be more TVMs at Morpeth. The proposals might not save money. Modelling should be provided comparing saving in staff costs versus loss of revenue to the rail network as lack of staff will cause some people to become disinclined to travel by train.

Dennis encouraged everyone to respond to the consultations individually, in a personal capacity, in addition to the SENRUG response.

Dennis Fancett thanked all SENRUG Members for their support during the year.

There was no further business so the meeting was then closed.

## **SENUG: ANNUAL REPORTS For 2022/23 (1<sup>st</sup> June 2022 to 31<sup>st</sup> May 2023)**

### **CHAIR'S REPORT For 2022/23 (From Dennis Fancett)**

#### **Northumberland Line**

The key achievement during the year was the announcement, in March 2023, of government support and the remaining funding package for the Northumberland Line, with final opening date given as August 2024. SENUG has campaigned for this for 18 years and we were pleased to be invited to the announcement ceremony with Secretary of State for Transport Mark Harper at Newsham.

#### **Re-instatement of Missing Cramlington Services**

A 2<sup>nd</sup> but less high profile highlight was the re-instatement post Covid of the missing trains in Northern's otherwise hourly timetable, from December 2022, meaning Cramlington once again has an hourly service throughout the day. Northern had shown no signs of doing this, despite repeated prompting from SENUG, and the result was achieved following escalation of the issue to Ian Levy MP for Blyth Valley.

#### **Strikes and Poor Service**

Sadly, these 2 highlights have been mitigated by a year of strikes, poor service and disruption which has made it difficult for SENUG, a pro-rail user group, to promote rail travel. It has reached the point where many would advise against travelling by train if it is absolutely essential you arrive on time – eg to catch a flight from an airport, for a wedding or funeral, a job interview or to give a public lecture. On one occasion (afternoon of Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> February 2023) - not a strike day - Northern cancelled every single service on the line, leaving Cramlington with no service whatsoever. Despite escalation, no explanation was received from Northern on the matter until once again, we asked Ian Levy MP to refer it to the DfT. This then produced a response assuring us procedures had been reviewed and new guidance put in place to ensure this would never happen again. But colleagues in the Saltburn Line User Group tell us that just a few weeks later the exact same thing happened on their line!

The government had proposed a Minimum Service Guarantee which would require a minimum service to be provided by unions during a strike. However, it seems we also need a minimum service guarantee for non-strike days to avoid this level of poor operational management from Northern.

#### **Farewell to TPE**

TPE's franchise was not renewed and the company's operations were taken into government ownership from the end of May 2023. There can be no doubt the level of cancellations on TPE had been appallingly and unacceptably high. They had turned the corner, and were getting better, though their recovery efforts were not fast enough, and were hampered by ongoing industrial action. Personally I'm sad to see TPE go. I can't justify their performance figures, but both TPE, their parent company First Group, and the other First Group subsidiaries, were good at listening. We made our case for Morpeth, and it is no coincidence that all the First operating companies were happy to stop

their trains here, fully understanding the commercial arguments SENRUG made about the Morpeth – Edinburgh market, and other aspects of their routes.

## **Awards**

In July 2022 SENRUG was received the following awards from Railfuture, the national pro-rail group to which it is affiliated: (i) Joint Gold for Best Newsletter, (ii) Joint Silver for Best Website and (iii) Joint Silver for Best Campaign and (iv) Joint Silver to myself for Best Campaigner, following Rail Campaigner of the Year Award last year. A letter was received from Ian Lavery MP for Wansbeck in September congratulating us for these awards.

## **Public Meetings**

We held 3 public meetings during the year, with RAGES, Pete Myers (speaking in a personal capacity) and the Tweed Valley Rail Campaign. We were very disappointed the meeting with Northern on the Northumberland Line was cancelled at the last minute; this was mitigated by Pete Myers stepping in and sharing his personal reminisces of his career in rail, and Neil Blagburn from the Northumberland Line project team readily agreeing to speak at the July 2023 meeting.

## **Press Activity**

We have gradually started to increase our press activity with slightly more correspondence with local journalists, though it is still not as much as it used to be in the early stages of the Northumberland Line campaign. Chair Dennis Fancett was also interviewed by Sky News, speaking on behalf of Railfuture, on the TPE franchise withdrawal.

## **Future Campaigns**

Even with the Northumberland Line opening in August 2024, SENRUG's campaigning work will continue. We have crystallised our future campaign aspirations as follows:

- a) Extension of the Carlisle – Morpeth service to Choppington and Bedlington
- b) New local service, minimum hourly, between Newcastle and Berwick, calling at every station, and with flexibility to open more stations on the route (this would also provide a 2<sup>nd</sup> hourly service to Cramlington).
- c) Extension of the Northumberland Line from Ashington to Woodhorn and Newbiggin
- d) A new Metro service between Blyth Town Centre and the airport, re-opening the old alignment between Blyth Town Centre and Newsham, and with a new interconnection station with local services on the East Coast Main Line at Benton East.
- e) Re-opening the freight route between Ashington and Butterwell in conjunction with a new north to east junction with the East Coast Main Line at Butterwell, to provide additional capacity on the East Coast Main Line between Benton and Butterwell junctions.

Campaign work will also continue on fares simplification, bus / rail integration and station facilities.

So there is much to do and your ongoing support is most welcome and appreciated.

**FINANCE REPORT** (From Adrian King)

Our accounts for the year, signed off by our Independent Examiner, are below. Note the final balance includes £933.70 which is the remainder of funding received in 2019 to cover the costs of our newsletter printing and website for a 5-year period which ends in May 2024. This money cannot be spent on any other purpose. We once again thank Ashington, Blyth, Cramlington and West Bedlington Town Councils, East Bedlington and Pegswood Parish Councils and Seaton Valley Community Council for providing this funding.

<b>SENUG</b>		
<b>The South East Northumberland Rail Users' Group</b>		
Summary of Accounts for Period 1 June 2022 to 31 May 2023		
	This Year 2022-2023	Last Year 2021-2022
<b>INCOME</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
Balance at start of year	£7,368.08	£7,645.62
Petty cash fund (See below)*	£0.00	£0.00
Membership Subscriptions*	£794.67	£748.38
Other Donations *	£0.00	£0.00
Miscellaneous Income*	£44.51	£30.14
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£8,207.26</b>	<b>£8,424.14</b>
* NB - Total of * items	£839.18	£778.52
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>		
Multi Expenses	£149.69	£324.66
Miscellaneous Expenditure	£49.39	£30.00
Venue Hire	£252.00	£171.00
Postage	£11.40	£0.00
Website	£320.40	£320.40
Printing	£266.50	£210.00
Photo Copying	£0.00	£0.00
Stationery	£0.00	£0.00
Travelling Expenses	£0.00	£0.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£1,049.38</b>	<b>£1,056.06</b>
<b>Balance in hand at end of year</b>	<b>£7,157.88</b>	<b>£7,368.08</b>
<b>Independently Examined By:</b>	<b>Name</b>	R. Owen
	<b>Date</b>	16/6/23
	<b>Signature</b>	R. Owen
<b>Summary:-</b>		
TSB as at 31 May 2023	£7,059.27	£7,302.58
Petty Cash as at 31 May 2023	£98.61	£65.50
<b>TOTAL Balance in hand</b>	<b>£7,157.88</b>	<b>£7,368.08</b>

## **MEMBERSHIP REPORT (From Ronald and Elena Hunt)**

### STATUS JUNE 2022

The status of the membership as of 30 June 2022 was:  
187 memberships and of these  
13 were corporate members  
214 individual members

### STATUS JUNE 2023

**The status of the membership as of 30 June 2023 was:**  
**169 memberships and of these**  
**15 were corporate members**  
**188 individual members**

#### Changes

Memberships = minus 18

Individual members = minus 26

We note that the total memberships have declined during 2022-2023. Whilst during the year we have had 10 new members join we have 28 who have not renewed their membership in that period. We have contacted all on the list after their subscription expired for more than 12 months.

Members are kindly asked to check their subscription status. We believe that those who have not renewed could be encouraged to re-join. All members who have provided e-mail addresses have been sent reminders, however, we have four members without an email address.

The membership secretary thanks all members for their continued assistance and communications sent to us during the past twelve months.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA REPORT (From Dennis Fancett in the absence of a current Social Media Secretary)**

Ryan Hogg our former Social Media Secretary has done a marvellous job of creating and increasing our social media presence. Unfortunately, during the year, a number of policy differences emerged between him and the rest of the committee, and it was therefore agreed by mutual consent that we would give up this role and stand down from the committee. We extend a massive "thank you" to Ryan for everything he achieved whilst acting as our Social Media Secretary.

As of 12<sup>th</sup> January 2023 (the last report we had from Ryan) we had:

**Facebook:** 1.5k (1500) likes (approximately) and 1678 followers. Geographic spread of followers is Morpeth (15%), Blyth (12%), Ashington (11%) and Bedlington (8%).

**Twitter:** 382 followers. Steady response rate to tweets but a platform in a bit of turmoil and possibly falling, due to controversies surrounding the public policies and statements of its new owner. Ryan was about to start investigating an alternative “Mastodon” at the time he stood down.

**YouTube:** Ryan was keen to for SENRUG to start using this more and to be posting regular video comments, pointing out it is the 2nd most visited website worldwide and gives us a potentially huge audience.

We are now very keen to find a new Social Media Secretary. You don't have to do as much as Ryan did, but even someone to look after our Facebook site would be a huge help. Please get in touch if it is something you could do.

#### **NEWSLETTER EDITOR'S REPORT** (From Dennis Fancett in the absence of a current Newsletter Editor)

We issued 3 Newsletters during the year: An 8-page letter (no 38) in June 2022, then a 4-page one (no 39) in December 2022 and finally a special edition 4-page newsletter (no 40) in March 2023 dedicated to our success in achieving the Northumberland Line re-opening formal announcement. We took the step of printing 200 copies of the re-opening announcement Newsletter, and with text and design already prepared, were able to get it printed within a few days of the announcement itself.

The printed versions of our Newsletter have continued to be of high quality and won Railfuture's joint Gold award for Best Rail User Group Newsletter. Almost all members receive their Newsletter by email, the printed versions being mainly designed to showcase SENRUG and attract new members. But with fewer places to leave printed copies for passers-by, achieving this objective is becoming more difficult. If any member is aware of places that printed copies can be left, please get in touch.

As Dave Shaw has indicated he wishes to stand down as Newsletter Editor, we're now looking for someone else to take on the role. You won't be expected to achieve the same high standard of design as Dave has. If you are interested in having a go please get in touch. Our Newsletters are currently designed in Microsoft Word, but other software packages including Publisher could also be used.

We place on record our huge thanks to Dave, not just for his Newsletter Editorship but also for considerable additional SENRUG work in drafting responses to consultations and liaising with various other groups and professionals.

#### **End of Reports**