

SENRUG Press Release: 10th September 2011

McNulty MisGuided Says SENRUG

SENRUG, the group that campaigns for better rail transport in South East Northumberland, claims the McNulty Report that recommends ticket offices at train stations such as Morpeth should be closed, has been read too fast, both by people in the rail industry, and by journalists.

SENRUG Chair Dennis Fancett points out that whilst it's true that McNulty recommends closure of all Category E station ticket offices (including Morpeth, Alnmouth and Berwick), McNulty also states a pre-requisite for this is "the installation of sufficient modern and easy-to-use TVMs (Ticket Vending Machines) and provision of adequate information for passengers"¹

And there's the problem. Inter-city operators such as the government owned East Coast tell us they can not install a Fastticket machine at Morpeth because ... the station is unstaffed part of the day! There would be no member of staff on hand to assist if the machine failed to print a pre-purchased ticket.

So McNulty is imposing a condition that can not be met, as far as inter-city travellers are concerned, claims SENRUG. "I suppose they could introduce the simpler machines that only sell tickets to local stations such as Newcastle, but these tickets can be bought on the train anyway", argues Dennis.

“It’s mainly the inter-city tickets that people need to buy at the station. At other locations such as Newcastle, the train companies are spending thousands of pounds installing barrier gates to ensure you can only get on or off the train if you have a ticket.”

“What’s the point of that, if you could simply get on or off at Morpeth instead? It’s a licence to fare-dodgers coupled with a withdrawal of service to those who actually want to buy a ticket, but need a bit of help to do so.”

“Our conclusion is that a station with 15 inter-city services per day such as Morpeth should not in fact be classed as Category E in the first place. When was the station categorisation last reviewed? Has it taken into account the significant increase in inter-city services here that SENRUG has successfully campaigned for?” he continued.

“Another pre-condition stated by McNulty is “provision of adequate information for passengers”¹. At Morpeth, we are now expecting Northern Rail to introduce Customer Information Screens at the station towards the back end of the year. At present, there is no passenger information whatsoever available once the ticket office is closed. But our Ticket Office also provides access to the toilet and a customer waiting area. We believe it is essential an alternative method of access to these facilities be provided, if the ticket office is closed. We believe there should be waiting facilities and toilets at all stations served by inter-city long distance trains.”

“A further pre-requisite condition stated by McNulty is that before closure, the rail companies should develop “additional retail outlets, such as newsagents and convenience stores, to sell a limited range of tickets”¹. What serious consideration has there been to leasing the premises at Morpeth’s grade 1 listed building to a coffee shop or convenience store, a children’s nursery or a laundry or ironing drop-off point, which would also sell travel tickets and be able to provide up to the minute train running information, through the standard national rail systems? Not only could that reduce costs for the station operator, it would enhance the facilities available to passengers waiting at the station. Whereas if the station buildings at Morpeth were just boarded up, the rail industry would still have to pay for its upkeep as it is Grade 1 listed.

“Finally, McNulty states in his report that the reasons why regional rail services cost more per mile than inter-city and suburban trains is that less people use them². We entirely agree”, says Dennis.

“That is why this group actively campaigns to get more people using our train services. If we increase passengers, then cost per passenger mile goes down. But who wants to turn up at an empty station with no facilities? Applying the recommendations of this report to stations with significant inter-city services would be like driving a train down a single track line in the wrong direction – precisely the opposite to what we need to do to secure a long term rail future.”

“It just doesn’t make sense to make a lot of railway staff redundant then pay them to be on the dole instead” says Dennis. “Is there a

realistic chance they could find other jobs? This has echoes of the Bombardier decision all over again!”

“There are many valid points within the McNulty Report and we agree costs need to be taken out of the rail industry. But the real savings come from re-vamping the franchising regime and addressing the key infrastructure problems within the industry, not simply the quick fix of withdrawing further services to passengers.”

Ends (800 words)

Notes For Editors

SENUG is The South East Northumberland Rail User Group, a pro-rail campaign group that campaigns for better rail services for existing and potential passengers in South East Northumberland.

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SENUG’S Comments are based on the “[Realising the Potential of GB Rail - Detailed Report - Final Independent Report of the Rail Value for Money Study](#)” by Sir Roy McNulty, available on the ORR website at <http://www.rail-reg.gov.uk/server/show/ConWebDoc.10401>

ORR [Office of Rail Regulation] Press Office Tel 020 7282 2094 [Mon-Fri 9am to 5:30pm]

¹Section 12.1.6 Sub-section Retail (Page 244 in online MS-Word version),

²Section 19.1.1. (Page 318 in online MS-Word version)