

**SENRUG PRESS RELEASE 26<sup>th</sup> MAY 2016**

**DOUBLE FIRST FOR MORPETH AS YET MORE RAIL SERVICES ARE PROMISED**

SENRUG – The group that campaigns for better rail services in South East Northumberland – today welcomed the announcement that First Group will run 5 trains a day from Morpeth to London, starting from May 2021.

The services will form part of First's new London to Edinburgh service, and the company will act as an "Open Access" operator alongside the existing trains run by Virgin Trains East Coast.

Tim O'Toole, Chief Executive of First Group said: "Passengers will benefit from an average fare of less than £25 – half the price of today – free Wi-Fi and on-board catering, all offered in one high-quality class of travel. We will introduce a fleet of five brand-new electric intercity trains, offering an additional 1.5m seats on the route every year."

Dennis Fancett, Chair of SENRUG commented: "The unique thing about First's bid, which has just received the green light from the ORR – the industry regulatory body – is that all their services will call at Morpeth. Northbound, they will run non-stop from Morpeth to Edinburgh, and southbound the trains will call at Newcastle then fast to London, with some trains also serving Stevenage. In particular, First will provide an early morning service from London which will reach Morpeth by 10 am.

The news follows an earlier announcement that First will be extending their Liverpool – Manchester – Leeds – Newcastle trains onto Morpeth and Edinburgh as part of their TransPennine Express franchise from December 2019. These services will call at Morpeth hourly in each direction, making commuting to Edinburgh by train much more viable, improving current frequencies to Durham, York and Leeds and creating a new rail link to the north west.

“It’s going to be a frustratingly long wait to 2019 and then 2021” added Dennis, “but I think by the time all these services are on stream, Morpeth and South East Northumberland will at last be able to say it has the train service a town of this size deserves. We are extremely pleased that First have listened to the arguments and business case we have put forward for a better deal for Morpeth; it does make us feel the hours of voluntary effort we spend in rail campaigning is worth it and can achieve genuine game-changing results.”

SENRUG also expects improvements to Morpeth services from other rail companies too. Virgin Trains East Coast have indicated they will be making modest improvements from December this year, and the group have been in discussion with the Department For Transport about CrossCountry services who commence a new contract with the DfT from the same date.

People who support SENRUG’s objectives of improving rail services across South East Northumberland are encouraged to join the group. Application Forms are available from [www.senrug.co.uk](http://www.senrug.co.uk) and the membership rate is just £5 per year.

► A new bus service now serves Morpeth station bus turning circle. Route S1 operated by P C L Travel leaves Morpeth bus station Mondays to Saturdays at 07:30, 08:40, 11:35, 14:05, 17:05 and 18:00. From the railway station turning circle, busses to the town centre leave at 07:05, 09:50, 12:20, 14:50, 16:40 and 17:50. The same bus also connects the station with Clifton and Stannington.

## **Ends (525 Words)**

Notes for Editors

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