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29th May 2017

Cllr Peter Jackson
Leader of the Council
Northumberland County Council
County Hall
Morpeth
Northumberland, NE61 2EF

Dear Cllr Jackson

I am writing to congratulate you on being appointed Leader of the Council and to introduce you to the work of SENRUG, a voluntary non-politically aligned pro-rail campaign group, seeking to improve rail services particularly in the south east of Northumberland for the benefit of residents and industry.

Over the last few years SENRUG has established itself as a highly respected rail campaign group and now has excellent relationships with all the key train companies serving this region, as well as various other stakeholders such as the DfT. We are regularly quoted in local media and increasingly in national newspapers, rail industry periodicals and on TV, and have won national awards for the best rail campaign group and similar.

The enclosed leaflets give an introduction to our work and campaigns, and I briefly summarising below where we are currently up to on some of our key initiatives. More information on each and on our other work is on our website.

Re-Open Ashington Blyth & Tyne Line

SENRUG has been campaigning to re-introduce passenger train services between Newcastle and Ashington and Woodhorn since 2004, in order to assist the regeneration of South East Northumberland and provide access to employment in Cobalt, Newcastle and beyond. We have met with both the Chief Executive of Rail North and the Director of Rail at NECA to explain the campaign and have taken them on tours of the line and gained their full support. The re-opening

is now being progressed by the Council through the Network Rail process (which is lamentably slow and overly expensive) although there are some differences between SENRUG's campaign and the plan the Council is now progressing. We very much hope your administration will continue this work and would welcome your assurance on this point. We would also welcome a much more collaborative relationship between the Council and SENRUG to better utilise our experience, as enjoyed by rail campaign groups in other parts of the country.

North of Morpeth Local Service

We launched our campaign to see a regular, hourly, local service between Morpeth and Berwick, calling at all stations with some additional ones re-opened, in Autumn 2016. Sadly, the NCC Chief Executive did not reply to our letter of 8th September 2016 introducing the campaign, though we did receive a letter confirming support from Ann-Marie Trevelyn MP. A separate leaflet on this campaign is enclosed. It compliments a similar service proposed north of the border between Berwick and Edinburgh, where the Scottish Government has already allocated money for re-opening stations at communities of similar size to Belford and Beal in Northumberland. SENRUG are now in the process of applying to Northern Railway for funding for an initial feasibility study into the proposed service and we trust we will receive the Council's strong support as the campaign develops.

Cramlington

Our plan for Cramlington, Northumberland's biggest commercial centre, is twofold. First, we believe train frequency must be doubled to 2 trains per hour each way, and second we want the entire station re-located to the point where the railway line runs adjacent to Manor Walks Shopping Centre. This location already has a pedestrian overbridge with level access and subway into Manor Walks and our suggestion is for an integrated bus / rail station with taxi rank and car parking, all of which could be accommodated on publicly owned land. The 2 aspects of our campaign go together, as it is unlikely train operators can be persuaded to stop more trains there unless the station is re-located, and similarly unlikely the cost of moving the station could be justified unless train service frequency is improved. We are however in discussion with TransPennine Express about stopping their hourly services (commencing 2019) at Cramlington, supplementing the existing service from Northern. Our original proposal was that the cost of re-locating the station would be largely met through Section 106 Contributions from the adjacent housing developers and also from Manor Walks which would be a significant beneficiary of the increased footfall the new transport interchange would provide, although subsequently, and as you are aware, Manor Walks was itself purchased by ARCH.

Inter-City Services At Morpeth

Our campaign to significantly boost the number of inter-city trains calling at Morpeth, increasing the town's connectivity to other key commercial centres, will be fully fulfilled within the next few years. When SENRUG started campaigning, Morpeth had just one service to and from London per day, and no CrossCountry services. Thanks to SENRUG lobbying, there are now 4 trains each way to London, and by December this year there will be 5 CrossCountry trains each way serving cities such as Sheffield and Birmingham. In 2019 an hourly service from Edinburgh, calling at Morpeth and then to Leeds, Manchester and Liverpool will be added. And by 2021 the 4 Virgin trains to London will be supplemented by a further 5 "open access" trains provided by First Group, running non-stop to London from Newcastle.

Station Facilities At Morpeth

We have lobbied tirelessly for improved station facilities at Morpeth and welcome the plan to renovate the derelict station buildings being progressed by the Greater Morpeth Develop Trust. To compliment this, SENRUG is working with Northern Railway who are developing a business case to increase staffing at the station from first train until last. SENRUG has also submitted plans for increased parking at the station, and is in dialogue with Arriva Bus about getting an every 30 minutes bus service into the station turning circle.

Overall Vision

SENRUG has developed a "Rail Vision for Northumberland" which demonstrates how our various plans fit together and complement each other. The purpose of the Vision is not necessarily to request capital expenditure at the present time which we appreciate is difficult in the current economic climate, but to ensure opportunities are protected from prejudicial development and thus safeguarded for future generations.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to present our vision, talk about some of our campaigns in more detail and to discuss how the Council and SENRUG can develop a positive collaborative relationship. We are willing to visit County Hall in office hours and I trust you will find a meeting beneficial, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Kindest Regards

Dennis Fancett

Dennis Fancett

Chair, SENRUG: The South East Northumberland Rail User Group

Campaigning for better rail services in South East Northumberland
www.senrug.co.uk