



Response To
Northumberland County Council's
Consultation on Plans to Re-introduce Passenger Train Services on
The Northumberland Line between Ashington and Newcastle

Previously referred to by SENUG as
The Ashington Blyth & Tyne Line

The consultation is based on the information shown on the County Council's website
<https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Highways/Transport-policy/Projects.aspx>
as of 8th October 2019.

Date of Response: 14th October 2019
Method of Response: Email to Stuart McNaughton, Northumberland County Council
Consultation Ends: 18th October 2019.

General Comments

- SENRUG has campaigned for passenger services to be re-introduced on this route for 15 years (campaign first started in 2005) and is 100% supportive of the Council's plans to now do so.
- SENRUG notes that the Council intends to introduce passenger service in phases, in order to align with the funding opportunities available, and that Phase 1 won't include all of the intermediate stations the Council originally intended. For clarification, SENRUG understands Phase 1 will include the stations at Northumberland Park, Newsham for Blyth, Bedlington and Ashington. Whilst SENRUG is disappointed the entire scheme won't be delivered in entirety in Phase 1, it pragmatically accepts the phased approach proposed by Northumberland County Council is the best way forward and gives the possibility of passenger train services running to the aforementioned stations by 2022 or 2023.
- SENRUG has some comments, concerns and suggestions with the possible station designs as set out in the Consultation, and these are listed in station order south to north below. Not all the stations mentioned are Phase 1 stations.
- SENRUG's comments are primarily concerned with future-proofing for further extensions and capacity enhancements and customer interface issues. None of SENRUG's comments are considered to be "showstoppers" requiring serious modifications to the Council's plans, but SENRUG's comments should be noted at tweaking / fine-tuning stage and SENRUG requests the Council and its consultants advising on station design should have direct dialogue with SENRUG at the appropriate time, and prior to the designs being finalised.

Northumberland Park

- SENRUG believes the proposed station entrance via lift and stairs from Algernon Drive is acceptable.
- SENRUG believes there should be a canopy creating a covered walkway linking the lift and stairs to the Northumberland Line with the existing Metro ticket foyer, a few yards to the south on Algernon Drive, to unite the two platform entrances into the feel of a single station. However, such a canopy could easily be added later, and would not be expensive.
- SENRUG believes there should be a single ticket foyer, ie the Ticket Vending Machines (TVMs) for National Rail services via the Northumberland Line should be co-located next to the Metro TVMs, rather than each system having their own TVMs at the head of the stairs to their respective platform. However, SENRUG recognises this is essentially a matter for the operators (Nexus for the Metro and Northern for The Northumberland Line) and feeds into wider issues such as whether a single TVM can sell both system's tickets, integrated ticketing and inter-acceptability of Nexus and National Rail tickets for journeys such as Northumberland Park to Newcastle.
- SENRUG is surprised the western entrances (from the west side of the A186 and new housing estate to the west of the A186) to the Northumberland Line platform are proposed but acknowledges these are a good idea. SENRUG presumes these entrances are being funded by an external party. If not, the cost of these additional entrances could possibly be better utilised elsewhere. Care should be taken to ensure these station entrances do not prejudice the ability to double-track The Northumberland Line's western approaches to Northumberland Park station at a later point.
- SENRUG's key concern is future-proofing of the line through Northumberland Park to permit eventual double-tracking. Other than the concern about western entrances to the platform, SENRUG notes the current design does not preclude this more than other viable designs would. SENRUG also notes that greater integration with the Metro running tracks between Benton Junction and Northumberland Park might offer a better alternative to future double tracking.

Seaton Delaval

- SENRUG wants the platform to be located as close as possible to the highway overbridge to avoid the station being isolated down an alley and passengers, particularly in the evening, feeling vulnerable.
- SENRUG understands that its own preferred platform location, to the north of the Co-op car park, has been ruled out on structural grounds due to mine working underneath.
- The location of the proposed car park is not identifiable from the Council's plans as presented.
- The proximity of the station entrance to the bus stops on the A192 overbridge is critical since this station will be the closest to, and (unlike Cramlington station) will enjoy direct bus connections with the Northumberland Emergency Care Hospital in East Cramlington.

Blyth Newsham and Blyth Bebside

- No comments, other than to note SENRUG's recommended names are "Newsham for Blyth" and "Bebside", thus avoiding confusion arising from having stations with names that do not reflect their actual locality, and permitting the eventual opening of a station named "Blyth" if the spur from Newsham to Blyth Town Centre is constructed at a later date.

Bedlington

- SENRUG is concerned the northern end of the southbound platform appears to extend slightly

beyond the switch toes of the points controlling the line from Morpeth. This creates the danger of a wide gap between the train door and platform for any train arriving from Morpeth. This may happen either if the Bedlington - Morpeth line is re-opened at a later date, or during emergency or diversionary workings before this time. SENRUG presumes the obvious solution of moving the platform a few yards to the south has been rejected on technical grounds relating to the distance between the stop signal controlling Bedlington South level crossing and the level crossing itself. However, moving both the signal and the platform a few yards to the south might be a safer, even if non-compliant solution. SENRUG would like to know the overall platform length proposed (not possible to identify from the plan drawings which don't have a scale or a key), to see how this compares with rolling stock and train length envisaged, to fully appreciate the extent to which the currently proposed design presents a problem.

- A pedestrian footpath access is needed from the southbound platform to the highway at Clayton Street / Station Road (to the east of Bedlington South level crossing) to create an easier ability to move from one platform to another which would become crucial if the Bedlington - Morpeth spur is subsequently re-opened and trains run to Newcastle from both platforms. However, the required pedestrian connection could easily be added later, and would not be expensive.
- SENRUG notes that access to the northbound platform appears to require demolition of an existing (but empty) retail unit in Station Road, immediately to the north of the Bedlington South level crossing. SENRUG presumes that the possibility of siting the northbound platform on the other side of the highway, to the south of the signal box, and adjacent to the existing Council car park, has been considered and rejected on technical grounds, as this option would appear to save the cost of acquisition and demolition of the retail unit, and similarly save the cost of the creation of a new station car park adjacent to the southbound platform accessed from Park Terrace.

Ashington

- SENRUG acknowledges that its original plan of utilising the existing northbound and southbound platforms and having a reversing / stabling siding on the alignment of the former Butterwell branch would not meet current Network Rail design standards, and that the junction onto the Butterwell line (Ashington Junction) cannot simply be re-established 'as was'.
- However, clarification should be sought at this stage as to how Network Rail would require the junction to be re-instated, to ensure that the design chosen now for Ashington station would not prohibit introduction of passenger trains between Ashington and Alnmouth and the North via the Butterwell line at a later date.
- Notwithstanding the constraint of being unable to re-create Ashington Junction, SENRUG feels the construction of a 3rd platform (the bay platform) to be used for passenger services seems a very expensive solution to the problem, particularly as the new platform would then be abandoned if a further extension to Woodhorn is constructed at a later stage. SENRUG asks whether it would be cheaper or as cheap to create the stabling and reversing siding / bay platform at Woodhorn rather than Ashington at this initial stage, thereby allowing the extension of passenger services to Woodhorn to be effectively included within the same total project cost.
- With the design as it stands, SENRUG believes a crossover would be needed immediately to the south of the entrance to the bay platform, otherwise trains returning south would be obliged to run "wrong way" on the northbound line to the next crossover point which is at Marchey's House. (If the creation of a siding and bay platform were moved to Woodhorn, then the crossover would be required to the west of the Woodhorn platform instead).

End