



ASHINGTON BLYTH & TYNE RAIL RE-OPENING PROJECT

The Case For A Station at SEGHILL

1. Introduction

SENUG – The South East Northumberland Rail User Group – has been campaigning for the re-introduction of passenger services between Newcastle and Ashington and Woodhorn, on the existing Ashington Blyth & Tyne freight railway line, since 2004. More recently this campaign has been adopted by Northumberland County Council who, having completed Market Appraisal and Demand Assessment studies, is now proceeding through the Network Rail GRIP¹ process to achieve full re-opening.

The business case for re-opening the line is mainly to assist the economic regeneration of South East Northumberland by providing access to work; the majority of passengers on the line are thus expected to be commuters. The model being progressed envisages a half hourly peak service and hourly off peak service each way between Newcastle and Ashington / Woodhorn, every day of the week until late evening. All stations other than Newcastle would be unstaffed.

Earlier technical studies have confirmed that an hourly service each way can be delivered with the existing infrastructure, notwithstanding the single track section of line between Benton Junction and Newsham, and taking into account current freight services. However, to deliver the half hourly peak service would either require the freight operator to surrender a single freight train path, or would need the creation of a long passing loop, enabling trains to pass at speed, somewhere near Seghill.

SENUG has always envisaged that the new passenger route will include stations at (from south to north) Northumberland Park (providing a metro connection), Seghill, Seaton Delaval, Newsham for Blyth, Bebside, Bedlington, Ashington and Woodhorn. However, earlier Council papers referred to a station at either Seghill or Seaton Delaval, but not both, on grounds of cost, given the relatively small size of each community.

This paper sets out whilst SENUG believes a station at both Seghill and Seaton Delaval will be required and should therefore be provided.

2. SIZE OF COMMUNITIES

The population of Seaton Delaval is 7,721² whereas Seghill is 2,965². SENRUG thus acknowledges that Seaton Delaval is the larger community and if a station were to be provided at only one of these two localities, then Seaton Delaval would be the winner.

However, a station at Seaton Delaval would only serve Seaton Delaval. It would not be able serve both communities, for the reasons set out below.

3. ACCESS FROM SEGHELL TO SEATON DELAVAL (See also Annex 1)

3.1 Walking

Although the running distance by rail is only 0.93 miles, the walking distance from Seghill to Seaton Delaval is 1.1 miles from the nearest part of Seghill (Deneside)³ to 2.1 miles from the furthest part of Seghill (Reid's Lane)⁴ – see fig 1.

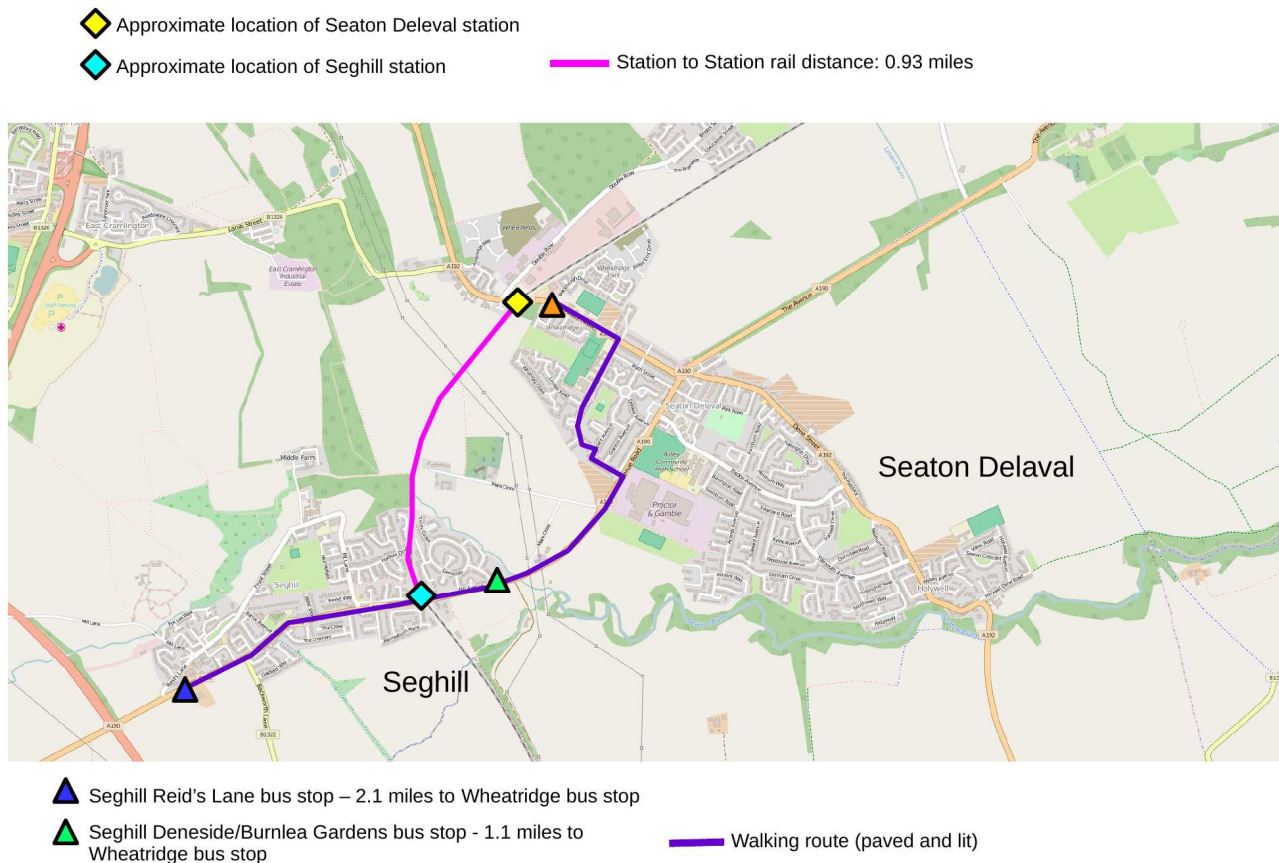


Fig 1: Rail route and walking routes: Seghill to Seaton Delaval

The walking route from Reid's Lane can be reduced to 1.9 miles if an unlit / unpaved footpath is used⁵. The muddy nature of this footpath means it would be unsuitable for commuters who need to look smart in the office, and due to its isolated location it would be potentially dangerous, particularly during winter months when both morning and evening commuter journeys would be in the dark. Therefore, this route should be dis-regarded.

Thus walking distances are 1.1 to 2.1 miles on safe and comfortable routes. But research⁶ indicates passengers will not walk more than 0.5 miles to access rail services. Residents of Seghill would therefore not walk to Seaton Delaval station to catch a train.

3.2 Bus

Bus journey times from Seghill to Seaton Delaval are 11 to 15 minutes (route X7) with a £4.20 return fare, and 30-minute frequency (peak hours)

The additional cost of bus will almost double the likely stand-alone rail fare from Seghill station to Newcastle estimated at £5 (currently £6 for Newcastle – Cramlington). Additionally, the time penalty of 11-15 minutes plus an optimistic minimum of 10 minutes waiting at the station (assuming bus times could be co-ordinated to connect with train times, which is by no means certain) would add at least 20 minutes to the overall journey time.

Additionally, there is resistance to passengers taking a bus north when their intended direction of travel is south and then returning through their starting point non-stop, as would be the case for Seghill commuters travelling to Newcastle.

SENUG submits that the additional bus journey times, coupled with what may not be optimum bus arrival and train departure connection times, and the additional fares means that bus access from Seghill to a station at Seaton Delaval would not be feasible for regular commuting.

3.3 Car

The option of driving to the station is not available at all to those without access to a car. Although most households do have a car, many households have more people in work or seeking work than there are cars in the household. Therefore, to achieve the desired economic regeneration benefits, use of the railway line should be accessible to those without a car.

Even for those with a car, there is resistance to driving north in order to catch a train south, such people are therefore likely to continue using Northumberland Park metro station, rather than Seaton Delaval.

In addition, station car parking facilities at Seaton Delaval are likely to be constrained and only sufficient for residents of Seaton Delaval itself. To manage parking through the introduction of charges would be counterproductive and again increase the cost of getting to work, and additional vehicle traffic from Seghill to Seaton Delaval would create peak hour traffic congestion in Seaton Delaval village centre.

4. ACCESS FROM SEGHELL TO OTHER RAIL SERVICES (See also Annex 1)

4.1 Walking

The nearest alternative rail service to Seghill other than the proposed Seaton Delaval station is West Monkseaton Metro station but the walking distance is 3.8 to 4.9 miles (from the nearest and furthest points in Seghill respectively). These distances are too long for people to walk.

4.2 Bus

Whilst there is currently a bus, route 57A, from Seghill to West Monkseaton, the service is hourly only and does not run in the evening. (An hourly evening service funded by Seaton Valley Community Council is about to be re-introduced for a one year trial, but there is no guarantee it will be continued after that). The return fare is £5.90 and the journey takes 16-21 minutes.

An alternative route to Northumberland Park Metro station is available but this requires a change of busses, namely route 57A to Holywell then route 19 to Northumberland Park. Evening service is similarly dependant on the future re-instatement and continuation of the 57A. The return fare is £10.60 and the journey takes 25 mins. The two bus routes are run by different companies (57A by Arriva and 19 by Go North East) limiting the scope for reducing the total fare by through ticketing.

As with the bus route to Seaton Delaval, SENRUG submits that the additional bus journey times, coupled with what may not be optimum bus arrival and train departure connection times, the additional fares and the uncertainty over the evening service means that bus access from Seghill to West Monkseaton or Northumberland Park would not be feasible for regular commuting.

4.3 Car

Residents of Seghill currently driving to Northumberland Park Metro station would be able to continue to do so. But in this scenario the re-opening of the Ashington Blyth & Tyne line would only divert some passengers from Metro at Northumberland Park to the heavy rail route. It would not generate more passengers or revenue or achieve any economic benefits.

5. TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The railway line at Seghill is currently subject to a 30 mph speed limit. Opportunities to upgrade the line speed are limited due to the level crossing with the public highway which is the main road through Seghill, and the bend in the railway line immediately to the north of the crossing, limiting the forward view of drivers of southbound trains.

Additionally, as mentioned in the introduction, it is likely that to achieve the required service levels on the line, a passing loop must be created somewhere near Seghill. This needs to be a "dynamic" loop, which means a long loop (typically quarter to half a mile) allowing trains to pass at full line speed without slowing down. However, if the station were located on the loop, the length of loop required would be much shorter. The savings in having a shorter loop could defray the cost of building the station.

6. CONCLUSION

SENRUG's conclusion is that residents of Seghill would not be served by and would not use the Seaton Delaval station. The Seghill community requires a station in its own right if Seghill residents are to use the line.

7. ADDENDUM

As argued in this paper, SENRUG believes there is a strong case for building a station at both Seaton Delaval and Seghill. If however, the decision of the County Council, notwithstanding the

strength of this argument, is to proceed with a station at Seaton Delaval only, SENRUG strongly requests that passive provision is made for a station at Seghill to be built at a later date. Ideally, the required passing loop at Seghill should be located either side of the highway with space left to insert platforms with access from the highway later.

Notes

1 GRIP is an internal Network Rail acronym for Governance in Rail Investment Projects.

See <http://www.networkrail.co.uk/asp/4171.aspx>

2. <http://www.citypopulation.de/php/uk-england-northeastengland.php> (June 2014 estimates)

3. <https://goo.gl/maps/HzmdppMb68F2> Google Map

4. <https://goo.gl/maps/faNC3XfJSGo> Google Map

5. <https://goo.gl/maps/Hd7ccBSgGTD2> Google Map

6. Chartered Institute of Highways and Transportation: "Planning For Walking" April 2015 page 30.

See www.ciht.org.uk/download.cfm/docid/082BEF1B-0FD2-44F4-90A0B31EB937899A

ANNEX 1: WALING AND BUS DISTANCES: SEGHILL TO OTHER RAIL HEADS

Seghill Population: 2,965 ²	Nearest Point to Seaton Delaval stn (Point A)	Furthest Point to Seaton Delaval stn (Point B)
Location (longitude, latitude)	55.064626,-1.538367	55.060233,-1.56123
Nearest bus stop	Seghill Deneside	Seghill Reid's Lane
Travel to Seaton Delaval Station		
Walking distance (via road)	1.1 miles	2.1 miles
Walking (via unlit footpath)	1.3 miles	1.9 miles
Bus route	X7	X7
Bus journey time	11 mins	15 mins
Bus frequency (Mon – Fri peaks)	30 mins	30 mins
Bus fare (return)	£4.20	£4.20
Travel to West Monkseaton Metro		
Walking distance (via road)	3.8 miles	4.9 miles
Bus route	57A	57A
Bus journey time	16 mins	21 mins
Bus frequency (Mon – Fri peaks)	60 mins	60 mins
Bus fare (return)	£5.90	£5.90
Travel to Northumberland Pk Stn		
Walking distance (via road)	4.3 miles	5.4 miles
Walking distance (unlit footpath)	3.0 miles	3.0 miles
Bus route	57A to Holywell then 19	57A to Holywell then 19
Bus journey time	25 mins	25 mins
Bus frequency (Mon – Fri peaks)	Hourly (routes 19 and 57A)	Hourly (routes 19 and 57A)
Bus fare (return)	£10.60	£10.60