



Response to

**Northumberland County Council
Alnwick, Hexham and Morpeth Town Centre Parking Study
Produced by WYG Transport Planning.**

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1. Introduction

1.1 This is SENUG's response to the above referenced car park study which is currently available on Northumberland County Council's website at: <http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Highways/Parking.aspx> (scroll down to 'Parking Studies'). Responses are required by Wednesday 31st January 2018.

1.2 This response is only concerned with issues surrounding car parking at Morpeth Railway Station.

1.3 SENUG is The South East Northumberland Rail User Group, an unincorporated voluntary organisation that promotes rail travel and campaigns for better rail services in, within, to, from and through South East Northumberland, representing the interests of both existing and potential rail travellers in the area. By 'potential', SENUG means those who would use rail services if only the trains went where they want to go, at the time they want to go, at a price they can afford, and in a clean, safe, secure, accessible and easy to understand manner.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 Given SENUG's known interest in the need to increase car parking provision at Morpeth Station, the fact that it has previously submitted proposals to Northumberland County Council as to how this could be done, and convened meetings between Northumberland County Council and the train operators, SENUG is very disappointed to discover it was not included in the list of known stakeholders for Morpeth who were consulted prior to the study's publication.

2.3 SENRUG does not believe the stakeholders who were consulted sufficiently represent the views of rail passengers needing parking facilities at the station, many of whom are drawn from a much wider area than Morpeth itself. As a result, SENRUG believes the Study as it stands has not sufficiently addressed the problems with car parking at Morpeth station, which are quite separate to the town centre's issues. SENRUG does not believe there is any significant cross-over between town centre or station parking (ie people parking in the town centre for the station, or at the station for the town centre) because of the distance and steep hill involved.

2.4 Accordingly, SENRUG is further disappointed that its own proposals to increase parking at Morpeth Station, first submitted in 2015 and available at <http://www.senrug.co.uk/widescope/resources/15-02-23-morpeth-station-car-parking-proposals.pdf> have not been taken into account.

3. Factual Issues with The Report

3.1 SENRUG notes that in Fig 10 (page 69) Car Park 19 – Railway Station West (Northern Rail) is shown in the wrong location. It is actually to the south of the railway line, accessed from Coopies Lane, the entrance being almost opposite the entrance to Car Park 18 (Railway Station East – NCC). Additionally, the operator is Northern, not Northern Rail, who lost the rail franchise from April 2016.

3.2 There is in fact a further car park, not mentioned in the study at all, at approximately the position where Car Park 19 is shown. This is accessed via Station Cottages / Bankside from the Mafeking round-a-bout. It has spaces for about 30 cars and is under-utilised during daytimes (see photo). The significance of this is the easy pedestrian access from the car park to the railway station subway. It therefore has the potential to be used as additional station car parking, and indeed has been so in the past.



Fig 1: car parking area to the north of the railway line, accessed from Bankside / Station Cottages.

3.3 However, the current status of the car park is unclear (which may be why its existence is excluded from the report). There is no longer any NCC signage there, and the access roads Bankside and Station Cottages (cul-de-sac) are marked “prohibited to motor vehicles except for access”. It is not clear whether use of the car park counts as access. Possibly local residents have asked NCC to withdraw this car park from public use. The significance of it is both the number of spaces it provides and the fact the space is very near to the access point to a much larger piece of land currently in Network Rail ownership which could be used to significantly enhance the amount of car parking spaces available at the station (the dis-used sidings and former platforms -see **7.4**)

3.4 There are additionally 14 car park spaces managed by Northern immediately outside the station ticket office, also not referenced in the Study. Sadly, these will be withdrawn from public use when the redevelopment of the station building goes ahead (expected start imminent). This will therefore mean a loss in current car park provision at Morpeth station.



Fig 2. Northern car park outside station buildings; to be lost to public use once the redevelopment of the derelict station buildings is completed.

4. Need to Increase Car Parking Capacity at Morpeth Station

4.1 SENRUG believes the car parking demand at Morpeth Rail Station has very little connection with town centre developments, but is linked to the level of train services provided at the station. This is demonstrated by Alnmouth station which has seen a steady improvement to its rail services in recent years. As a result, the original 76 space Northern car park needed to be supplemented by a new Northumberland

County Council 65 space car park on the west side of the station, which then had to be expanded by a further 37 spaces in April 2016. All car parks are full and overflowing at peak times.

4.2 Over the last few years, thanks to SENRUG campaigning, there has been a significant increase in the number of train services serving Morpeth. Whereas 10 years ago Morpeth had just one train service to, and one return from London per weekday (2 returns on Fridays), there are now 4 daily services to London, and 5 returns per day, and a total of 22 intercity type services (including those not to / from London, per weekday). There is a high incidence of both regular and occasional travel to Edinburgh, just 1 hour 20 minutes by train, for commuting, occasional business trips and leisure, now made possible by these services.

4.3 Regular commuting to Newcastle by train is now more attractive following infrastructure improvements at Morpeth Station and minor timetable adjustments. From May 2018 a local evening service will be added, given more possibilities for return journeys, and rolling stock will shortly be replaced by more comfortable, higher capacity trains, making commuting even more attractive.

4.4 There will be significant additional train services provided at Morpeth from both December 2019 and December 2021, as follows:

- **December 2019:** Introduction of new, hourly Liverpool – Edinburgh service throughout the day, to be provided by TransPennine Express. This will virtually double the number of train services calling at Morpeth, significantly increase connectivity to Edinburgh, Newcastle, Durham, York and Leeds, and provide new direct rail opportunities to Manchester and Liverpool.
- **December 2021:** Introduction of 5 open-access services each way between Edinburgh and London, to be provided by First Group, with the southbound services running non-stop between Newcastle and London. This will provide yet more connectivity at Morpeth to both Edinburgh and London, and will increase pressure on parking at Morpeth Station yet further.

4.5 These extra rail services, both those provided in the last few years and those due to come on stream from May 2018, December 2019 and December 2021, have been largely achieved through SENRUG's campaigning and lobbying efforts. If parking provision at Morpeth Station does not keep up, there is a risk these services might become unprofitable for operators who might drop them, or in cases they are franchise protected, seek to have them removed from existing or new franchise commitments.

4.6 The December 2021 enhancement is "open access" which means it can be withdrawn at any time by the operator without consultation. The business plan of non-stop after Newcastle rail service to London is based on tempting users from a wide area of South East Northumberland away from the current Newcastle – London flight option, thus involves bringing new passengers to Morpeth station who will

need adequate parking facilities. Morpeth has a population of approximately 195,000 within an 8-mile catchment radius of the station. Parking provision must be made for the additional passengers this new service will bring. There are plenty of other towns between Edinburgh and Newcastle which could argue they are a worthier candidate for this service, if the infrastructure at Morpeth is not provided.

4.7 Furthermore, (as stated at **3.4**) there are currently 14 spaces immediately outside the station ticket office which are to be made over to the commercial occupants of the re-developed station building. These spaces will thus be lost to general parking over the next 12 months.

5. Urgency

There is a need to significantly increase the car parking provision at Morpeth Station, separate to the town centre, prior to the next significant boost to rail services which will be in **December 2019**. Otherwise, SENRUG's work in securing more train services to Morpeth which is significantly helping the growth and prosperity of the town, will be jeopardised.

6. SENRUG Activity to Date

This has included:

6.1 Submitting its own proposals for extending car parking provision at Morpeth Station to NCC in February 2015 (see **2.4**). No action has been taken on this so far.

6.2 Organising a meeting between NCC and the train operators to agree action in December 2016. The meeting was held in early 2017, however SENRUG itself was unable to be present. It is understood the meeting agreed to pursue the option listed at **7.4**. Subsequently however SENRUG has been advised work has stopped awaiting the outcome of this Study.

6.3 Seeking to negotiate with the Arriva Bus company to provide a regular bus service into Morpeth Station Bus Turning Circle, so far without success.

7. Action Plan

7.1 SENRUG notes that Action Plan Point 1 (Para 5.7.85) states "Provide more parking capacity at Morpeth Railway Station" but does not set out how it should be done. The proposed multi-storey car parks at Allery Banks and Mafeking roundabout (Para 5.7.27) are considered too far away from the railway station, to address the needs of rail passengers, also because of the steep hill from the Mafeking roundabout to the station itself, thus wouldn't provide a solution to the station car parking problem.

7.2 The creation of additional car parking spaces in the landscaped area to the south of Coopies Lane, opposite the station buildings, (Para 5.7.36) is supported. This is

initiative “E” of SENRUG’s proposals (see **2.4**), and SENRUG estimates 40 spaces could be provided, of which it requests 6 be designated “short stay”. SENRUG requests work on this starts right away, in time for a December 2019 completion.

7.3 SENRUG also requests creation of additional spaces in the NCC car park in Coopies Lane (Fig 10 - car park 18), as per initiatives “A” and “C” of SENRUG’s proposals (see **2.4**), which SENRUG estimates a combined total of 30 spaces could be provided. Again, SENRUG requests work on this starts right away, in time for a December 2019 completion.

7.4 SENRUG requests a task force be set up between Northumberland County Council, Network Rail, Northern, SENRUG and possibly other train operators serving Morpeth, to progress release of Network Rail land on the old sidings to the north of the railway line from operational use, and transfer of that land into ownership of a body willing to convert it into a car park. SENRUG estimates this would provide 100 parking spaces or 200 spaces if a double deck option is pursued as the topography is suitable for this. The car park could have direct level access to the northbound platform. SENRUG estimates 100 spaces plus could be provided. SENRUG requests the task force be established right way and notes with concern (given the Network Rail process to be completed) that it may not be possible to achieve the work by December 2019. Hopefully however, the December 2021 date can be achieved.

7.5 SENRUG suggests the 2 disabled spaces in the NCC car park (Fig 10 car park 18), which are too far from the station entrance to be of use to those with mobility difficulties, be converted into regular spaces in exchange for 2 spaces in the Northern car park (Fig 10 - car park 19) adjacent to the station entrance being converted to disabled spaces.

7.6 Enhanced car parking spaces alone is not going to fully solve Morpeth station’s access problems and SENRUG also wants to see a 30-minute bus service into the station turning circle. Whilst a limited service now exists, it is not even hourly and is totally unpromoted, with no bus stops or timetables at the station. The bus service needs to serve not just Morpeth town centre but the wider area from which rail passengers are currently driving to the station. SENRUG suggests either Arriva bus service 2 (3 per hour) or bus service 43 (one per hour) be diverted away from the Stobhill Estate and into the Morpeth rail station bus turning circle. Arriva currently operate 5 busses per hour round the Stobhill estate, but 3 of them (43, 44 and one of the 3 journeys on route 2) run round the estate within 2 minutes of each other, which seems pointless. This of course depends on the willingness of the bus operator, Arriva, (who also own 2 of the train companies currently serving Morpeth station) to co-operate. Such co-operation has not so far been forthcoming, but no work on additional car parking spaces should jeopardise the existence of the bus station turning circle, or the ability of busses to use it for turning. In other words, the turning circle should not be permitted to become a short-term car parking facility.

7.7 It is hoped the redevelopment of the station building will see the re-emergence of a taxi cab facility at the station; the taxis being able to use some of the parking spaces now allocated to the station development.

8. Financing

SENUG believes it is appropriate for rail operators serving the station to contribute to, or take full responsibility for the costs of increasing parking provision at the station. Rail operators do have funds set aside for this kind of purpose. This is another reason why Morpeth Station parking should be considered separately from town centre parking, and fast-tracked. However, there are 3 (soon to be 5) train operators at Morpeth Station. The Station Facility Operator (SFO) is Northern, but by December 2019 they will not be the dominant operator at the station, nor the operator who will gain the most commercial benefit from the increased passenger footfall pulled in by the additional trains. Therefore, leadership is needed from NCC to agree who is going to do what and solicit appropriate funding from each player.

9. Charging

9.1 Historically, SENUG has been opposed to car park charges at Morpeth station, and objected vigorously when these were introduced by Northern Rail. Currently, charges apply to the Northern section of the station car park but not the NCC section.

9.2 SENUG's objection arises from a time when rail services at the station were poor and underutilised. However, by December 2019 Morpeth will have a significantly improved range of train services and additionally be functioning as a medium sized intercity type station. Therefore, once all or at least some of the interventions listed in Section 7 are completed and there is a regular bus service into the station, SENUG could remove its objection to parking charges. But SENUG would expect any charges to be kept at a modest level with significant reductions for regular commuters eg season ticket holders. SENUG would want the ability for overnight parking (for 2 or 3-day trips to London), and a few free short-term bays (for pre-purchase of tickets and drop-off / pick-up) to be retained.

End