

Northumberland line champion named as Railfuture campaigner of the year

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SENUG – the group that campaigns for better rail services in South and East Northumberland – is delighted that its Chair Dennis Fancett has won the prestigious Railfuture Campaigner of the Year Award for 2020-21.

The award, given to the individual who, in the opinion of the judging panel, has made an outstanding contribution to campaigning for better rail services in their local area, in addition to supporting Railfuture's national campaign objectives, was announced at Railfuture's AGM in Birmingham last Saturday.

Wendy Thorne, Railfuture's Membership Director, said: "The judging panel felt this year's winner has shown remarkable persistence with over 15 years of campaigning, demonstrated the need to build a coalition of stakeholders, led a long-term campaign and enhanced the profile of Railfuture. But most of all he has achieved SUCCESS with the Ashington Blyth and Tyne Line (now the Northumberland Line)."

The award was presented by Railfuture's Passenger Group Chair and Director Allison Cosgrove at a smaller ceremony at Bedlington Station.

Dennis commented: "I am surprised and a little embarrassed to receive this award. We're standing here today in front of Bedlington North's signal box, and I now fully expect that in 2 or 3-years' time we'll be seeing passenger trains passing to and fro over the level crossing behind us. Getting this line re-opened has been a long, 15-year campaign, and whilst we're not quite there yet, it does look pretty certain the re-opening will go ahead.

"I'd like to thank whoever nominated me for this award, and of course our entire SENRUG membership, particularly our committee, whose constant support and encouragement has made it possible to continue, even at those points in the journey when the news has been less positive. But campaigning for the Northumberland Line is not all we do.

"Right now, we are fighting disastrous cuts to train services being proposed for Morpeth and Berwick from May 2022 as part of the new East Coast Main Line timetables.

"These changes, if implemented, will virtually wipe out every improvement we have secured for train services in our region, which have resulted in enormous growth in use of rail at Morpeth in particular, so we are not stepping back or standing down, but refocussing our campaigning efforts with renewed energy and vigour."

Dennis was presented with an inscribed glass paperweight to mark the award and a voucher for an afternoon tea experience for himself and his wife.

Photo credit: Railfuture