

On track to make history: AECOM and SLC Rail progress Northumberland Line to the next stage

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AECOM and SLC Rail have reached a major milestone in working with Northumberland County Council to reintroduce rail passenger services to an existing freight-only line. Following on from the successful completion of the Outline Business Case (OBC) and option selection stage of the scheme, AECOM and SLC Rail will work together to provide multidisciplinary project management, design, operations and advisory services to deliver the design phase of the Northumberland Line.

This announcement gives the green light for the project to progress, after a further £10m of funding was approved by the Council in February. With an additional six stations expected to be open in Northumberland Park, Newsham, Bedlington and Ashington, Seaton Delaval and Blyth Bebside – the new and improved route will link key towns and communities in the South East Northumberland corridor and the wider Tyne and Wear region, expecting to deliver economic benefits between £360m to £470m.

The scheme is currently the biggest rail upgrade in the UK promoted by a local authority and the biggest capital project Northumberland County Council has ever delivered. The project will help tackle

congestion and improve air quality by shifting journeys from road to rail. With improved transport connectivity, the region will also benefit from more job opportunities and better housing developments.

Simon Middleton, AECOM's Regional Director, Transportation, said: "This new scheme is central to the commitment AECOM is making to invest and develop the right infrastructure whilst meeting the needs of local communities. With better rail connections, the redevelopment of the Northumberland Line will no doubt boost the region's economy and create a number of opportunities for local residents who travel along this route.

"Having successfully delivered the first phase with Northumberland County Council and SLC Rail, this new trailblazing approach to delivering key strategic infrastructure rapidly and to budget via the Government's Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline (RNEP) has the potential to help regenerate other major cities across the UK and leave a lasting legacy for generations to come."

Ian Walters, Managing Director of SLC Rail said: "This is an extremely exciting project to be involved in, which will help regenerate a lost line and make a positive impact to the local region. If we can maintain the momentum and passion amongst the partner organisations working on this scheme, it could well be a game changer for rail in the UK and show that private and public sectors can work together successfully to deliver major third-party rail projects."

Councillor Peter Jackson, Leader of Northumberland County Council, said: "With the potential to make a huge impact on our local economy, this new project is key to the future of Northumberland. It is vital for us to work with partners who can support us in an innovative and collaborative way which will help accelerate the potential change we are seeking to bring. These include a number of benefits for our residents, commuters, visitors and local businesses. Working with AECOM and SLC Rail as well as Nexus, Network Rail and Department for Transport will help us shape the right outcomes. We are excited to be stepping through into the next stage of this exciting scheme."

This work continues the commission for AECOM as one of the founding shareholders of Perfect Circle; the partner appointed by Northumberland County Council procured via Scape Group's national Built Environment Consultancy Services (BECS) framework. Perfect Circle is a property, construction and infrastructure consultancy comprising Pick Everard, Gleeds and AECOM – leading innovative firms with expert industry knowledge and expertise, supported by an extensive local supply chain.

Since 2018, AECOM and SLC Rail have collaboratively worked with Northumberland County Council to develop the scheme. Various operations, delivery methods and funding alternatives have been explored to establish the best approach for this vital project. Project partners, Nexus and Network Rail, have supported the work to date and will continue to be involved as designs are developed and taken forward into the next stage of delivery.

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