

# SENUG's seven point plan to save county's train services

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SENUG – the group that campaigns for better rail services in South and East Northumberland – has come up with a seven-point plan to save rail services along Northumberland's East Coast, which are threatened with drastic cuts following the release of draft timetables for May 2022.

SENUG has now issued its final response to the timetable consultation, and says that while cutting overall journey time from London to Edinburgh is of some benefit to London passengers, it does not justify the huge reductions in service proposed for Northumberland, including withdrawal of all TransPennine Express trains and all off-peak LNER services at Morpeth, and a significant reduction in the number of trains serving Berwick.

SENUG Chair Dennis Fancett said: "Our argument is that an extra few minutes on the train is not time lost to business. Modern trains have high quality on-board wifi and comfortable seating, with many long-distance services have a great catering offer too. But the time spent in changing trains is most definitely time lost to business. The new timetables will result in many journeys that can be made on a direct train today no longer being possible without changing. This includes Morpeth to MetroCentre and Hexham, Morpeth to Manchester, and off-peak, Morpeth to Alnmouth (where passengers will be expected to travel

to Berwick and come back), and Morpeth to Peterborough. Newcastle will also lose its direct service to Manchester Airport. As such, we find the proposed timetables to be London-centric. They fail to “level-up” and certainly do not ‘build back better’”.

Cramlington will also see cuts under the new timetable with a key evening commuter train no longer stopping at the station, but going straight to Morpeth before proceeding on to Chathill. “That’s not good enough, says Dennis. “Cramlington is the largest town in Northumberland served by rail with a population of 35,000. It needs a better train service, not a worse one”.

SENUG has therefore proposed seven key amendments to the draft timetables. These include TransPennine Express services continuing north of Newcastle, calling at each of Morpeth, Alnmouth and Berwick, providing the crucial connectivity needed between these stations. It also says 2 LNER trains per day each way should continue to call at Morpeth off peak, in particular the morning Aberdeen service which is heavily used. It also wants Northern services to continue beyond Newcastle to MetroCentre, Hexham and Carlisle, and points out that all our local trains terminating at Newcastle would be a deterrent to those looking for jobs at MetroCentre and needing to commute by train.

“There is no real reason why faster LNER trains stop our local services connecting across Newcastle” says Dennis. “This seems to be designed for the operational convenience of timetable planners, not with customers’ interests in mind. It certainly won’t help Northern to promote leisure journeys either.”

The other points in SENUG’s consultation response concern the need to have earlier commuter trains from Cramlington, to retain all local trains calling at Manors, and to have some LNER services from Morpeth to London on Sundays, which the draft timetables are proposing to remove. Also, SENUG says now is the time to create the paths required for the Northumberland Line trains, due to open in 2023, and indeed for the new local Newcastle – Berwick service calling at all stations that the group has been campaigning for.

SENUG’s full response can be seen on its website under the “Documents We’ve Issued” section, and SENUG is encouraging those who support their opposition to the proposed changes to join their group, which costs £5 a year. Individuals may also respond to the timetable consultations directly, until

5<sup>th</sup> August.

*Photo credit: Dave Shaw*