

# SENUG

Campaigning for Better Rail Services in Northumberland and Beyond

## Railfuture National AGM 2025

Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> July 2025 (Newcastle)



Dennis Fancett

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Campaigning for Better Rail Services in Northumberland and Beyond

## So You Want To Open A New Railway Line?

*You'll Need:*

- Members
- Stakeholders
- The Press
- Social Media



Northern Train at Morpeth.  
Photo credit: Geoff Stainthorpe

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## Campaigning for Better Rail Services in Northumberland and Beyond

### Members

- Not so much to do things
- Not for the membership income
- But to give credibility to your campaigning voice
- “The more people we speak for – the louder our voice is heard”
- This is why SENUG has kept its membership rate ridiculously low: £5.00 / £2.50 (*going up soon*)



SENUG's 2008 Charter Train crosses River Blyth.  
Photo credit: Northumbria Rail Ltd



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## Campaigning for Better Rail Services in Northumberland and Beyond

### Stakeholders

- Unlikely to be the Train Operating Company
- Some exceptions eg Bedlington – Morpeth
- Not Network Rail (*although they'll be difficult*)
- Local Authority - but which one?
- Mayoral Authorities make things easier
- Preserving political neutrality is essential
- Beware the politics within politics
- MPs probably have less influence than we think
- But the stars need to align



SENUG's NE Mayor Hustings event 24<sup>th</sup> April 2024.  
Left to right: Thom Campion (representing Aidan King) Lib-Dem, Jamie Driscoll (Independent), Dennis Fancett (SENUG Chair), Andrew Grey (Green), Guy Renner-Thompson (Conservative), Paul Donaghy (Reform UK).  
Photo credit: Reemer Bailey



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## Campaigning for Better Rail Services in Northumberland and Beyond

### The Press

- You ***must*** get beyond the railway press
- Local press, newsfeeds, national press
- The press need a story, not just information
- The press work to unmoveable deadlines
- Respond immediately – Become the “go to” person.
- Journalists are either incredibly busy or incredibly lazy
- Railfuture needs to look at its Branch press policy



TPE Train at Morpeth.  
Photo credit: Dave Shaw

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## Campaigning for Better Rail Services in Northumberland and Beyond

### Northumberland Line Business Case

- Serves former mining areas of South East Northumberland
- Rapid de-industrialisation since mines closed
- High incidence of economic deprivation
- Connects areas of economic need to areas of economic opportunity.
- Area becomes more attractive place to live
- Supports new housing development



SENUG's 2008 Charter Train passes through the disused and overgrown station at Bedlington. Photo credit: John Brierley

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## Campaigning for Better Rail Services in Northumberland and Beyond

### Campaign Timeline (1)

- **2005:** SENUG proposes re-opening
- **2007:** First Feasibility Study Commissioned
- **2007:** Petition to 10 Downing Street
- **2007:** Parliamentary (Adjournment) Debate
- **2008:** First study with Network Rail launched
- **2008:** SENUG organises Charter Train



SENUG's 2008 Charter Train reaches Ashington station.  
Photo credit: David Naden



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## Campaigning for Better Rail Services in Northumberland and Beyond

### Campaign Timeline (2)

- **2009:** ATOC gives rail industry support.
- **2010:** SENUG organises “hustings” meeting.
- **2012:** SENUG / AECOM / NCC present to DfT.
- **2014:** SENUG organises schools competition.
- **2015:** Funding allocated for Network Rail studies.
- **2018:** Chief Economist to Bank of England blogs.



Children from Hirst Park Middle School receive their award for winning SENUG's School's competition.  
Photo credit: News Post Leader



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## Campaigning for Better Rail Services in Northumberland and Beyond

### Campaign Timeline (3)

- **2019:** Council organise Charter Train
- **2020:** PM Boris Johnson informally commits
- **2020:** Covid: Promised announcement not made
- **2021:** Part funding allows initial work to start.
- **2021:** Public Enquiry (TWAQ) starts.
- **2022:** Public Enquiry complete.
- **2023:** Secretary of State announces Scheme



Secretary of State Mark Harper (front left) announces the re-opening with SENUG Chair Dennis Fancett (back right).  
Photo credit: Northumberland County Council



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## Campaigning for Better Rail Services in Northumberland and Beyond

### Campaign Timeline (4)

- 2024: (*just*) First phase opens
- 2025: Newsham added
- 2025: (*Sep ??*) Blyth Bebside added
- 20??: (*Dec ?????*) Bedlington & Northumberland Pk.
- 20??: Extensions (not signed off as yet)



Dennis Fancett and Northern's Regional Director Jason Wade shaking hands in front of the CIS Display on the Northumberland Line first day of service. Photo credit: Northern (edited)

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## Campaigning for Better Rail Services in Northumberland and Beyond

### The Outcome

- Campaign started in 2005
- Finally agreed by government in 2023
- 18 year campaign
- First phase opened December 2024
- Remaining stations expected during 2025
- Passenger numbers 5 x forecast (with caveats)
- The extensions and extras SENUG wanted now being actively considered



The map shows what is actually being delivered.  
Map credit: Northumberland County Council



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## Campaigning for Better Rail Services in Northumberland and Beyond

### Did We Get Everything We Want?

**No!**

- No Woodhorn / Newbiggin.
- No Station at Seghill.
- Bizarre station locations at:
  - Seaton Delaval
  - Bebside
  - Ashington
- No passive provision for:
  - Double tracking
  - Bi-directional signalling at Bedlington



Photo: Seghill Crossing.  
Photo credit: David Jensen

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## Campaigning for Better Rail Services in Northumberland and Beyond



What We Wanted  
Map credit: SENRUG



What We're Getting  
Map credit: NCC







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## Campaigning for Better Rail Services in Northumberland and Beyond

### Letter to the Rail Industry

- Dithering costs money
- Delay costs money
- Get smarter – or you'll all lose your jobs
- Don't gold plate everything
- Politicians need to deliver within their term of office
- 1892: Paddington – Bristol: 1 weekend
- 2023: Newcastle – Ashington: 2 years and counting



A Driver Training run (southbound)  
at Bedlington station on 9<sup>th</sup> August 2024.  
Photo credit Dennis Fancett

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## Campaigning for Better Rail Services in Northumberland and Beyond

### Letter to Other Campaigners

- Be patient
- Be resilient
- Be tenacious
- Be thick-skinned
- Be social media savvy
- Be content - don't expect an award / reward
- Be younger



SENUG's Charter Train - Destination Blind.  
Photo credit: John Brierley



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## Questions / Comments?

Dennis Fancett

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