Campaigning for Better Rail Services in Northumberland and Beyond

Railfuture National AGM 2025

Saturday 5th 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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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 SENRUG has kept its membership rate ridiculously low: £5.00 / £2.50 (going up soon)



SENRUG's 2008 Charter Train crosses River Blyth.

Photo credit: Northumbria Rail Ltd



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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 then we think
- But the stars need to align



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



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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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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



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



Campaigning for Better Rail Services in Northumberland and Beyond

Campaign Timeline (1)

- 2005: SENRUG 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: SENRUG organises Charter Train



SENRUG's 2008 Charter Train reaches Ashington station.

Photo credit: David Naden



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Campaign Timeline (2)

- 2009: ATOC gives rail industry support.
- 2010: SENRUG organises "hustings" meeting.
- 2012: SENRUG / AECOM / NCC present to DfT.
- 2014: SENRUG 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 SENRUG's School's competition.

Photo credit: News Post Leader



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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 (TWAO) starts.
- 2022: Public Enquiry complete.
- 2023: Secretary of State announces Scheme



Secretary of State Mark Harper (front left) announces the re-opening with SENRUG Chair Dennis Fancett (back right).

Photo credit: Northumberland County Council



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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)



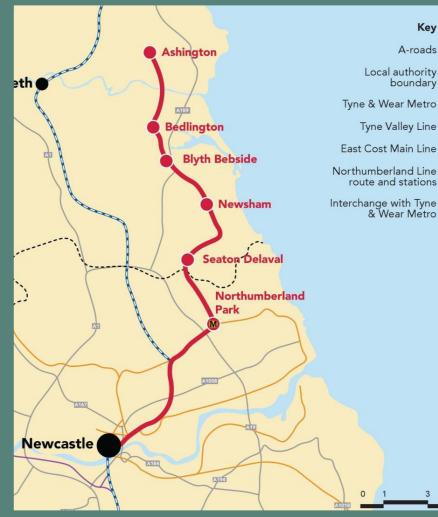
Dennis Fancett and Northern's Regional Director Jason Wade shaking hands in front of the CIS Display on the Northumberland Line first day of service. Photo credit: Northern (edited)



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 SENRUG wanted now being actively considered



The map shows what is actually being delivered.

Map credit: Northumberland County Council

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Did We Get Everything We Want?

No!

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



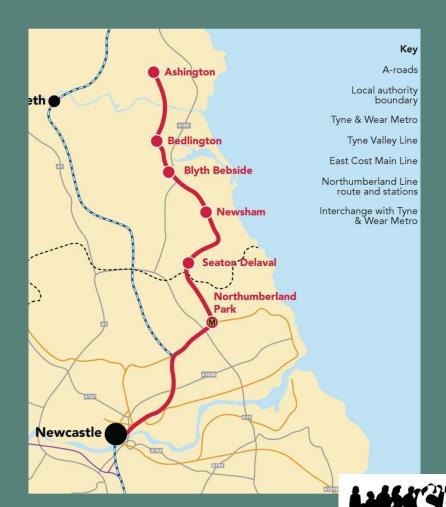
Photo: Seghill Crossing.
Photo credit: David Jensen



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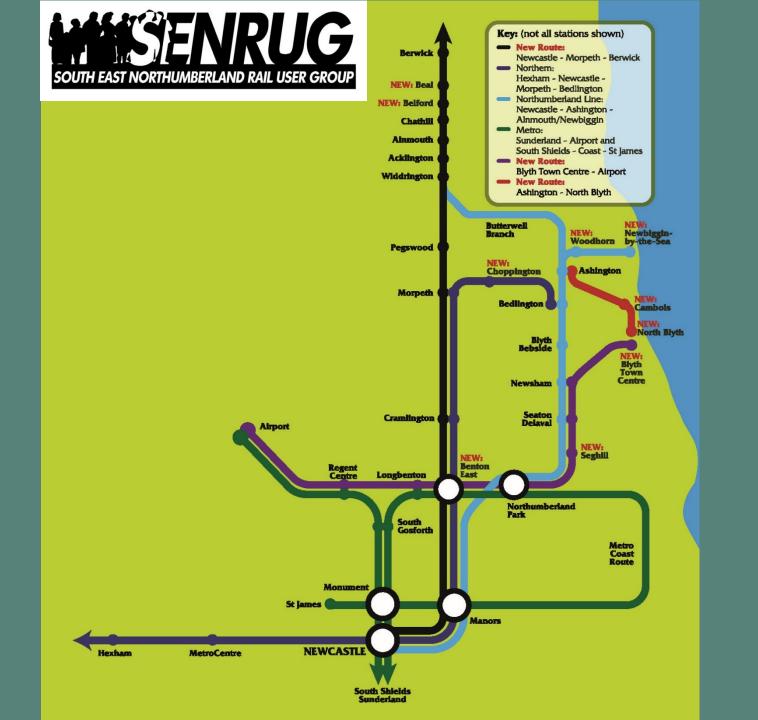


What We Wanted Map credit: SENRUG



IN NORTHUMBERLAND AND BEYOND

What We're Getting Map credit: NCC



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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 9th August 2024.
Photo credit Dennis Fancett



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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



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



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Questions / Comments?

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