

railfuture northeast

Minutes of the Branch Committee Meeting held on Thursday 15 July 2021, by Zoom, commencing at 1800 hrs. Notes by AW.

PRESENT: Dennis Fancett (DS), Christopher Hawkes (CH), Dave Shaw (DS), Keith Simpson (KS), Tony Walker (AW), Peter Walker (PJW) and Peter Wood (PRW)

Keith Simpson, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting. This was a first occasion for CH who had asked KS if he might attend. Amongst his railway interests are timetabling and ECML matters with particular reference to services at Darlington.

1 APOLOGIES: Allison Cosgrove and Ian Walker

2 NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING: The notes of the of the 18 May 2021 meeting had been previously circulated and were agreed to be a correct record.

3 MATTERS ARISING:

ECML Timetable issues: KS advised that the three TOC's primarily involved in the suggested changes in NE, namely LNER, X-Country and TPE, had each organised their own consultation procedures which meant the process was potentially quite cumbersome for those wishing to submit responses.

KS summarised the batch of services to be affected by the changes. For its part *railfuture* (national) was intending a cross-branch response to be organised by Andrew Dyson. CH and PJW likely to be the RFNE reps. Closing date for the response officially 5th August. SENRUG, Saltburn RUG and Coastliners each intending to respond in relation to relevant services within their respective catchment areas. Agreed that liaison between these different groups essential so as to avoid contradictory suggestions being sent to the TOC's.

DF had met with Anne-Marie Trevelyan MP and briefed her about how the timetable changes, if implemented, would impact on services in Northumberland. Ms Trevelyan recognised the importance of good local connections on the ECML. DF had also had contact with Ian Lavery MP who had hoped to instigate some discussion in Parliament.

DF said the SENRUG response would press the importance of maintaining the TPE service from Newcastle to Edinburgh. This is proposed for withdrawal. Not only does TPE provide an hourly service each way at Morpeth, but was capable of serving Alnmouth and Berwick also hourly with an additional call in Scotland. DF felt the proposals for revised calling patterns by X-Country trains were not a satisfactory replacement for what could be offered by TPE. He would also highlight the loss of connectivity between Morpeth and Hexham (this a *Northern* service) and press for sensible cross-city connections at Newcastle Central. The value of “through” trains was highlighted in that time spent on trains is not lost time, but that having to change trains did impact on passengers’ personal schedules.

KS read an extract from a paper he was sending to Andrew Dyson mostly concentrating on services between York and Newcastle. Among his suggestions was that the additional hourly Kings Cross to Newcastle service that LNER wanted to introduce might divert at Northallerton and access Newcastle via the Durham Coast Line. DF thought there might be an argument for continuing this particular train to Edinburgh with calls at Morpeth, Alnmouth, Berwick and one Scottish station though he observed that LNER probably didn’t have enough rolling stock to do this. Conversely TPE had already secured the required number of trains for its North of Newcastle services.

Mention made of the new First Group Open Access service King’s Cross to Edinburgh comprising five return trains per day due to start on 24th October calling at Newcastle and Morpeth. Will cause even more pressure on ECML capacity.

DS had attended recent meeting of the NE Rail & Metro Strategy Steering Group (he sits on this as the official RFNE rep). Basically, the view of Transport North East is that if the proposed ECML timetable changes are

being canvassed on the basis that there is insufficient capacity on ECML, then why not wait until the necessary infrastructure upgrades have been completed and then proceed with the timetable alterations? He sensed there was considerable support for this stance.

4 DRAFT PROPOSALS FROM NORTH EAST RAIL & METRO STRATEGY STEERING GROUP (NERMS). Here is a special summary note prepared by DS.

“An initial meeting had been held during which all participants had opportunity to offer opinions as to what they considered to be priorities. Prior to this meeting DS had asked members of the RFNE Committee for views and, following the meeting had circulated a paper that summarised what had been said. Transport NE had now produced an early draft of their proposals for comment. Whilst the draft was not for circulation it was evident that RFNE would welcome much of the content. We (RFNE) are now being asked for further comments. After discussion around a brief outline of the draft (provided by DS), the Committee agreed that further thought needed to be given to:

- Bus/train integration.
- Making use of Stillington line for passenger services.
- Future engagement with communities to further develop strategies and plans.
- Safety on the Metro and the possibility of introducing ‘conductors’ on the new stock to maximise revenue collection and provide re-assurance to passengers.
- Problems with using the ECML to provide a link to Newcastle Airport. Our preference would be for an East Benton Station to provide an interchange with Metro.
- Making use of the Bishop Auckland to Stanhope line for both tourism and day to day travel.
- Ensuring that links between the Tyne Valley and destinations on the ECML to the north of Newcastle were maintained.
- Possible extensions to the Northumberland Line including to Newbiggin-by-the-Sea and Cambois.
- Reminding the planners of the need to avoid, so far as was possible, the need to change trains on local journeys.

- Making more explicit the ideas in the document to integrate Metro and local Rail services and offering a clear ‘brand’ covering the totality of local services”.

DS told us that he also intended to comment on the fact that, in his opinion, the document was poorly presented and difficult to access. It used a small typeface and green ink – both of which could present problems for readers with visual impairments.

5 BRANCH MATTERS

- (i) **Next AGM.** KS advised that there had been a lack of response from NEXUS to the Branch secretary about supply of a speaker. Decision: KS and secretary would try and identify a suitable person to provide the keynote address. Provisionally AGM would take place in October – hopefully “actual” rather than virtual.
- (ii) **Next Committee Meeting:** Wednesday 22nd September at 6pm. “In person” if possible: venue suggested is Shakespeare Hall, North Road, Durham. Note taker to be IW.
(DF left meeting at this point).
- (iii) **Branch donation to DF’s Church in lieu of our recent use of its Zoom facility:** PRW proposed gift of £50, seconded by AW.
- (iv) **Campaigner of the year award:** DS announced that DF (who is Chair of SENRUG) had won the *Railfuture* “Campaigner of the Year” award in recognition of all that he and SENRUG had achieved over last fifteen years most notably in connection with the Northumberland Line and its future upgrading for a regular passenger service. DF was recently presented with his award by our good friend Allison Cosgrove. Many congratulations to Dennis!

Meeting ended at 1920 hrs.