

## **SENRUG PRESS RELEASE 15<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER 2024**

### **SENRUG “ABSOLUTELY DELIGHTED” AS FIRST TRAIN IN 60 YEARS DEPARTS FOR ASHINGTON.**

“Absolutely delighted” was the phrase used by Dennis Fancett, Chair of the voluntary pro-rail campaign group SENRUG, as the first passenger train to Ashington for 60 years departed from Newcastle station at 07:57 on Sunday morning, 15<sup>th</sup> December, 2025.

Speaking aboard Northern’s 2-coach service, Dennis said this major milestone in the 19-year campaign to bring passenger services back to the working freight line was a “truly momentous occasion”.

“It’s been a long campaign, and many, many people just laughed at us when we first proposed it and said it could or would never happen. But here we are on board the train, and this is a good opportunity to thank all those who have helped us along the way, many of whom have now moved on from the positions they held several years ago. Particular thanks however are due to the team in place today at County Hall who’ve faced an astonishing array of unexpected technical issues during the construction phase over the last 2 years but have driven the project through. And of course, we want to thank our SENRUG members, without whose support this campaign group could not have continued to exist. I think most people would acknowledge that if there had been no SENRUG, there would be no opening today”.

The line connects Ashington, a former mining town in South East Northumberland with the city of Newcastle, and opens access to jobs, education, health facilities and leisure. At the moment, there is one intermediate station at Seaton Delaval, but other stations at Bedlington, Blyth-Beside, Newsham and the all-important metro interchange at Northumberland Park are under construction and will be added progressively during 2025.

Even when the line is open in full, SENRUG’s campaign work will continue. “It has always been our aspiration to extend on to Woodhorn and Newbiggin” said Dennis, “and we are heartened that both the Conservative leader of Northumberland County Council Glen Sanderson, and the

Labour North East Mayor Kim McGuinness mentioned the same in their opening speeches last Thursday. Our other campaigns include a rail link from Blyth Town Centre to Newcastle Airport via Northumberland Park, and for an hourly local stopping service between Newcastle and Berwick along the East Coast Main line.”

“But today is a day of celebration. We expect this line to be well used and to transform local economies along the South East Northumberland corridor that it serves. We are delighted to be here, welcoming this first train of the new service”.

**Ends** (413 words)

#### **Notes for Editors**

SENUG – The South East Northumberland Rail User Group - is a voluntary pro rail campaign group: contact Dennis Fancett, Chair, tel 07810 353651, e: [chair@senrug.co.uk](mailto:chair@senrug.co.uk). [www.senrug.co.uk](http://www.senrug.co.uk)

Chronological history of the 19-year campaign [here](#)

Photos: Suggested captions:

- 1) Dennis Fancett on board the first Northumberland Line train. Photo credit Andrew Carmichael.
- 2) Dennis Fancett and Northern’s Regional Director Jason Wade in front of the CIS Display at Newcastle. Photo credit: Northern (edited).
- 3) Crowds boarding a train at Ashington station. Photo credit Jerry Alderson.

(photos on next page)

