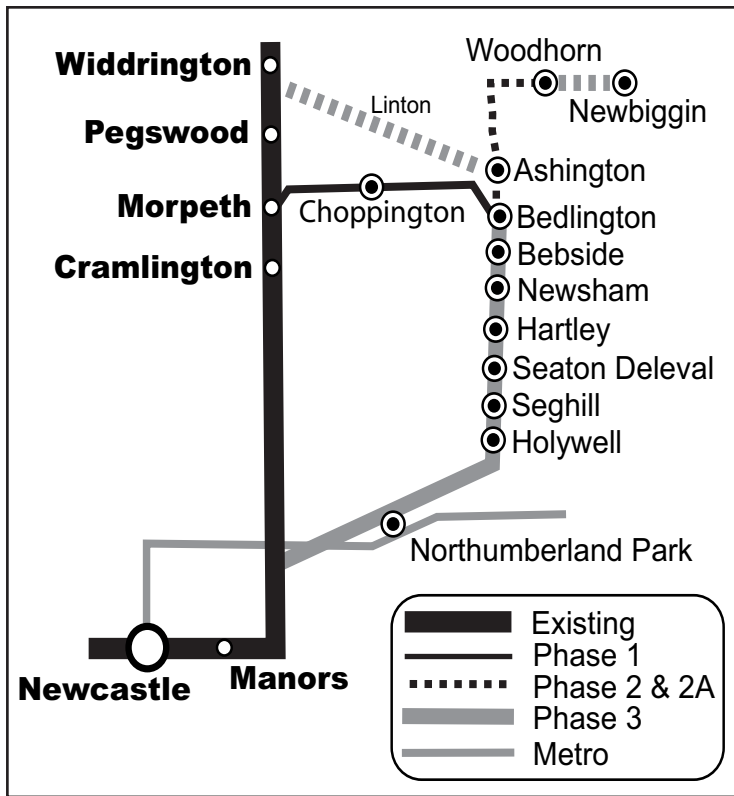


Ashington campaign



By Peter Kenyon

peterkenyon@yahoo.com

The recent reopening of the Vale of Glamorgan line at a cost of £17million has encouraged the lively and active South East Northumberland Rail Users Group in its campaign for the reopening for passenger use of a similar length of track north of Newcastle upon Tyne, which is at present used by freight trains.

The first proposal: Phase One would see existing trains which lay over at Morpeth, extending their route from Newcastle to Choppington and Bedlington.

Bedlington station is almost intact but Choppington would need a new station.

This plan, the subject of a feasibility study commissioned by the North East Assembly, is supported by local MPs and both the present district and county councils.

Phase Two would see the trains reversing at Bedlington and proceeding on to Ashington, another virtually intact station in a prime town centre position.

Journey times from Newcastle, with intermediate stops, would be: Choppington 25 minutes, Bedlington 28 minutes and Ashington 36 minutes. An additional train unit and crew would be required for this extension.

Phase 2A would require a new station for an extension to Woodhorn, the site of a newly developed Mining Museum and the County Record Office.

It would also provide rail passenger access to the large Wansbeck Hospital which serves much of the present county area.

Phase 3, the subject of a feasibility study by Nexus, the Tyne and

Wear Passenger Transport Executive, would require significant engineering work and rebuilding of stations to adapt the freight line for passenger trains.

It would, however, give more direct access to Ashington, serve the intermediate communities and connect with the Tyne-Wear Metro system at the recently opened Northumberland Park interchange.

Other possible developments would be an extension to a rejuvenated Newbiggin-by-the-Sea and use of the private coal line between Ashington and Linton.

These extensions would not only serve the area but take traffic off the East Coast main line.

A specially chartered train is planned in June 2008 to make three trips round the line.

Each trip will cover access to Ashington from Newcastle via the Morpeth-Bedlington and Northumberland Park-Beside sections of the line.

The operation aims to create the atmosphere of a regular train service rather than a one-off charter. The train, named The Ashington Future, and sponsored by Go Wansbeck, part of Wansbeck District Council, is to carry invited representatives of stakeholder organisations, statutory authorities, redevelopment agencies, MPs and the press on the first journey. The other two trips are open to the public.

The on-line petition to 10 Downing Street about re-opening the line achieved an impressive result of 1,292 signatures.

For further information visit the Senrug website: www.senrug.co.uk

North West

LOCAL ACTION

By Trevor Bishop

trevor.bishop0@btinternet.com

■ ■ Liverpool to Glasgow to start in December?

Renaissance trains, one of the companies involved with the recent new service from Wrexham to London, is pressing ahead with plans to run a new Liverpool to Glasgow service from the December 2008 timetable change. The service originally proposed was Glasgow to Liverpool and Nottingham, with the trains joining and dividing at Preston and the Nottingham portion going via Manchester.

But the submission to the Rail Regulator included some input from stakeholders which resulted in a better business case being made for the Glasgow-Nottingham service if it was routed via the Settle-Carlisle line. The original proposal was for the portion to Liverpool to run to Blackpool on summer Saturdays, though it is not clear whether that was instead of travelling to Liverpool.

■ ■ Olive Mount chord works under way

The restoration of the Olive Mount East Chord in Liverpool back to the network moved closer with the appointment of First Engineering as construction contractor by Merseytravel. Work is expected to be well underway by the time this *Railwatch* is published.

The project is needed to help freight trains avoid reversal at Edge Hill while accessing the Bootle Docks branch. The £7.9million cost is being split between Merseytravel, Network Rail, the North West Regional Development Agency, Merseyside's district councils and the European Regional Development Fund. Railfuture North West branch has been pressing for this much-needed restoration. The works also include improving clearances on the Bootle branch.

■ ■ Heswall gets a refit

Pressure from Wirral Transport Users Association for improvements to Heswall station on the Bidston-Wrexham line has paid off. Following a question at a Travelwatch meeting, Neil Scales, chief executive of Merseytravel, has written to the group outlining plans by Network Rail to proceed with works on the station.

The works will include:

- Platforms and access ramps to have existing defective timber decking removed and replaced with fibre reinforced plastic modular anti-slip decking panels. This includes integral tactile paving and white lining

- Rear of platform fencing to be replaced to suit existing timber and galvanised steel weld mesh panels

- Isolated repairs to platform structure as required

- Remove temporary scaffolding and supports.

Subject to access, work is

expected to be under way by July 2008. Network Rail has said all its works will be co-ordinated with Arriva Trains Wales plans for the replacement of the current modular waiting shelters. Meanwhile Merseytravel are in discussion with Arriva over what works might be needed to achieve secure station status.

