



SPECIAL: The 'Ashington Future' chartered train passes through the disused platform at Bedlington Station

Picture: JOHN BRIERLEY

The campaign to see passenger services restored on the freight only Ashington Blyth and Tyne Railway took a significant step forward in June when the Railfuture-affiliated local rail user group SENRUG chartered a special train to run round the line.

Chartered from Northern Rail through sponsorship from Wansbeck District Council, the train made three separate trips round the line, with each trip including both the Morpeth-Choppington-Bedlington and the Northumberland Park-Newsham-Bedlington-

Ashington sections, both of which have been the subject of recent re-opening studies. Tickets on the second and third trip were sold to members of the public and were completely sold out within days of release, indicating the high level of local support for the scheme. Tickets on the first trip were reserved for local stakeholders and this train included over 130 representatives from 11 councils and official bodies.

Significant press coverage was achieved with the trip being highlighted on TV and radio. Dennis Fancett, chairman of SENRUG, said: "This was

not a heritage or nostalgic trip. We deliberately chartered a standard two-coach train from Northern Rail, exactly the kind of stock that would be used if the line is indeed reopened, and we set the fares for the trains open to members of the public at the kind of level they are likely to be once the line is reopened, rather than charge a premium."

SENRUG produced a colour brochure detailing their re-opening campaign. For more details of the campaign or to obtain a campaign brochure visit www.senrug.co.uk.

High-speed rail and electrification

The Government is being urged to "act immediately" on two key Railfuture campaign aims.

Electrification and high-speed rail are two issues which the Government has so far ducked, according to a House of Commons transport committee in a report.

The committee of MPs said: "Hesitation over high-speed rail now will mean years of avoidable misery and overcrowding."

The MPs say the Government's rail strategy lacks ambition and should go back to the drawing board.

The committee, now chaired by Liverpool Riverside MP Louise Ellman, advised: "After years of sustained growth in rail patronage, we urge the Government to be bolder in its vision and to set out a proper long-term strategy."

It warned that investment decisions were based on assumptions that oil prices would remain low.

Network Rail is now conducting an investigation into high-speed rail and the MPs' committee urged the Government to act immedi-

ately once the feasibility study is completed next year.

The Office of Rail Regulation urged the rail industry in July to step up the pace of its planning.

Last year's White Paper envisaged a railway capable of handling double today's level of passengers and freight traffic.

Currently northern England, Wales and Scotland are missing out on the advantages of the growing European high-speed rail network.

Lindsay Hoyle, MP for Chorley, has tabled a Commons motion calling for the Government to review its "abandonment of direct regional Eurostar to Paris".

The motion calls on the Government to recognise that all the advantages of the original proposals remain and that much of the cost of the service has been incurred already.

Support for high-speed rail in the UK is growing fast. A study by Steer Davies and Gleave for Birmingham City Council and Greengauge 21 has shown that investment in High

Speed 2 would generate a benefit to the economy of £23 billion over a 60-year appraisal period.

The report was presented at the Railway Forum conference in Birmingham in June.

High-speed rail needs a champion at the highest levels of Government if Britain is to benefit from its substantial economic development and regeneration potential.

The support of both Michael Heseltine and John Prescott was crucial to the completion of High Speed 1.

Jim Steer of Greengauge 21 stated high speed rail would reduce carbon emissions, citing the Eddington Study which showed that replacing short haul air with high speed rail could deliver massive carbon emission savings.

The case for High Speed 2 rests on the wider arguments of benefits to the whole transport system.

Following the conference Network Rail announced it was investigating the need for new capacity on five of the busiest rail corridors, the Great Western main line to Bristol

and Cardiff, the Chiltern line, the West Coast main line, Midland main line and the East Coast main line.

In May, Arup published a proposal for improving Heathrow airport by extending High Speed 1 from St Pancras to run parallel with the Great Western main line out of Paddington.

Support for high speed has been growing, while opposition to short haul air flights has been getting stronger.

The 2M Group, an alliance of local authorities concerned at the environmental impact of Heathrow expansion, has published a new study looking at how a new high speed rail network could link major cities throughout the UK and provide direct routes to Europe.

The proposals would join Heathrow to this new rail network, removing the need for most domestic flights.

The study by Colin Eliffe is based on a single spine high-speed line running parallel to the M1 with branches to major cities.