



Report of Town Clerk

Changes to Rail Services

Access Public

Summary

- Council has previously responded to consultations by stating that it wishes to see later services from Berwick to Newcastle and Edinburgh, and better local services to enable local residents to access work and services in Newcastle and Edinburgh.
- A consultation on changes to services in May 2022 is now available.

Background

1. There is no one unified body that controls all rail services, and, typically, the consultations on the 2022 timetable changes, which should take place in May 2022, have not all been released at the same time.
2. Officers have seen the proposals for LNER and Cross Country, who currently serve Berwick from the south. We have also seen documents which hint at a shuttle service between Newcastle and Berwick, provided by TransPennine Express, but which do not specify its frequency or stops. Provision is also being made, by these timetable changes, for a new open access service between London and Edinburgh, which will stop at Morpeth but not Berwick, and we have not seen evidence of any kind of consultation process for this change, which affects capacity on the line that serves Berwick.
3. There are two processes at work within these changes which affect Berwick services. The first is that the re-timetabling is part of an ongoing project to increase capacity by cutting journey times, reflecting improvements in rolling stock but also enabled by reducing train stops and dwell time at stations. Northumberland has been the subject of this type of change before, such as in 1982, when the delivery of the electrification and HST projects led to the loss of local trains that stopped at intermediate stations such as Cramlington and Widdrington from the East Coast Main Line, with just one local train each way, that terminates at Chathill, remaining beyond Morpeth.
4. The second process however is based on the desire of the TOCs and the ORR to maximize passenger numbers and revenue. For instance, one train that currently stops at Berwick is being altered so that it stops at Alnmouth instead to better reflect, according to LNER, the current demand for services.
5. In effect Berwick will switch from one LNER London service per hour each way to one every two hours during peak hours. Similarly, Morpeth will lose all daytime LNER services, but will gain the open access services to London referred to above.
6. The gain for Newcastle in all this is increased capacity and journey times reduced by 10 minutes; for Edinburgh, similarly, there will be increased capacity and journey times reduced by fifteen minutes. No evidence is proffered, as part of the consultation documents, that there is any consumer demand for these reductions in journey times. Neither does the consultation offer any worked examples of how much journey times will increase for those Berwick passengers who have to change trains

because of the reduction in services (although, to be fair, given that there is no timetable yet for the hinted at TPE shuttle service, that is understandable).

7. It would not be unfair to describe these changes as offering, on the London route, less capacity and choice for Berwick passengers to enable more capacity and choice for Newcastle and Edinburgh passengers, and a wider choice of operators for Morpeth passengers.
8. Cross Country Trains have described their proposed changes as follows:
 - The total number of southbound calls will increase by three per day whilst the number of northbound calls will increase by four per day.
 - The first southbound service will now depart Berwick at 06:44 (currently 06:50), providing through journeys to Newcastle, Leeds, Sheffield, the Midlands and the South West.
 - The first northbound service will depart Berwick at 08:26 (currently 08:20) providing a 09:07 arrival into Edinburgh.
 - The last southbound service will depart Edinburgh at 20:05 providing a 20:50 arrival into Berwick. Currently the last southbound service for Berwick is the 20:03 departure from Edinburgh providing a 20:48 arrival into Berwick.
 - The last northbound service will arrive into Berwick at 22:29 (currently 21:26).
9. In addition, many of the services will provide increased connectivity, with stops at either Alnmouth or Reston, but less stops on CrossCountry trains at Dunbar in order to provide services to Reston. The following table summarizes the changes to Cross Country services.

Station	Train Service Requirement	December 2019 total calls	May 2022 total calls
Morpeth (southbound)	6	6	7
Morpeth (northbound)	5	6	6
Alnmouth (southbound)	7	8	8
Alnmouth (northbound)	8	9	8
Berwick upon Tweed (southbound)	11	11	14
Berwick upon Tweed (northbound)	9	9	13
Reston (southbound)	n/a	n/a	3
Reston (northbound)	n/a	n/a	4
Dunbar (southbound)	8	8	1
Dunbar (northbound)	6	6	1

10. The issue of the as yet unexplained shuttle arises in the Cross Country document, which says, at some length:

The structure of the timetable means that CrossCountry trains can only make limited calls at either Dunbar or Reston and they cannot serve both stations. Even without moving the calls from Dunbar to Reston, the CrossCountry service to Dunbar will be less than it was in the Dec 2019 timetable pre-covid.

Consultees should be aware that discussions are continuing and to ensure Dunbar will receive the overall service level that was operating in Dec 19 two options are being developed:

The first option is for TPE to run some shuttles between Newcastle or Berwick-upon-Tweed to Edinburgh calling at Dunbar and Reston. These would then become the main provider for Reston and CrossCountry will no longer have to call at Reston.

The second option is for Scotrail to run some extra shuttles between Edinburgh and Dunbar in order to give more trains to Dunbar, though it is unlikely that resources to operate this can be found before May 2023. In this case the Reston calls would stay on the CrossCountry services.

Longer term for May 2023 we are investigating if an alternative plan might be better with a regular Edinburgh – Berwick-upon-Tweed shuttle every two hours, calling at both Dunbar and Reston, to be operated for Transport Scotland by one of the operators on the route.

We therefore invite consultees to provide any feedback they have on each scenario for Reston and Dunbar that will help inform ongoing discussions.

11. As your officers we are astonished that the impact on Berwick-upon-Tweed of these discussions is not highlighted more.
12. We note with interest the comments that Cllr Martin Gannon, chair of the North East Joint Transport Committee made in the wake of its meeting on 15th June, when he described these changes as a disaster for Northumberland. We are unable to comment upon his reasoning, since the papers for that meeting do not provide an analysis of the changes, since the proposed timetable was not available when the papers were prepared.
13. We note also the opinion of County Councillor Glen Sanderson, Leader of Northumberland County Council, who has criticised the proposed changes.
14. In the absence of written documents advising councillors we cannot offer a commentary on their objections. Similarly, in the absence of an explanation of the data that drives these changes, and the reasoning, as officers we are left with the perception that Berwick's connections to London are being downgraded in order to marginally reduce journey times between Newcastle and London and Edinburgh and London. No economic analysis is offered as to why this is either desirable, or value for money.
15. There are alternative ways of growing capacity on rail lines; typically they include adding sections of track, often at stations, to allow other services to pass through, or, in road users parlance, to overtake.
16. In the absence of a clear statement of purpose for Berwick-upon-Tweed station, it is impossible to test these proposed timetable changes for congruence with objectives. There appears to be a complete absence of data from this consultation, both in terms of what existing users want, and what other people who are not users want, but cannot get.
17. Officers invite members to note that the Joint North East Transport Committee has a scrutiny committee, with two members from Northumberland. This may be a route to obtain clarity about not just the so far unrevealed aspects of the 2022 proposed timetable (e.g the Shuttle Service) but also the extent to which there is a plan for rail that goes beyond the the needs of those who wish to travel to London, and which considers the needs of those making local and regional journeys.

Recommendations

1. That council instruct officers to write to the Joint North East Transport Committee Scrutiny Committee, asking it to take up its concerns, and
2. That council reiterate to all the current consultations its view that Berwick needs:
 - a. Better off peak, early morning and late night services to Newcastle and Edinburgh, and
 - b. A reliable clock face timed service for commuters wishing to work in Newcastle and Edinburgh.

Author	GD	Town Clerk sign off (if required)	GD
Checked by	SC	Finance Officer sign off (if required)	N/A