



# NORTH EAST PUBLIC TRANSPORT USERS GROUP

Issue No 1 October 2023

## WHY WE WANT A FRANCHISED BUS SERVICE

Congratulations to the Members of the North East Joint Transport Committee and Jamie Driscoll Mayor for North of Tyne for having achieved a Devolved Agreement that will allow our councils to introduce franchise agreements with the bus service operators.



Unlike the unreliability and high costs of the present service, a franchised system would facilitate the following:

- Regular annual fares, bus times and routes fixed that will not be altered or cut at six weeks notice as at present and only altered after consultation with travellers.
- Smart ticketing that can be used across all services: buses, metros, Shields ferry and some trains instead of paying a fare on every service you use.
- Bus users will have a bigger say in how their services are run and which areas they service. Eg, onto local estates rather than just main roads.
- This will support a bus service similar to that which London Transport operate so successfully, with buses having identical livery.

With a franchised bus service we would have a legally binding and fixed contract between our representatives, the North East Councils, Nexus and the bus operators.

## THE NORTHUMBERLAND LINE

NEPTUG welcomes the decision to re-open the rail link between Ashington and Newcastle which is due to begin in August 2024. We also want to congratulate Dennis Fancett (Chair) and all at SENRUG (South East Northumberland Rail Users Group) on a lengthy (18 years) and successful campaign on behalf of the residents of South Northumberland. The proposed scheme will cost £166m which includes associated road improvements and station car parks but Northumberland Council estimate the projected benefits to the local economy to be around £470m.



As well as new stations at: Northumberland Park, Seaton Delaval, Newsham, Blyth Beside, Bedlington, Ashington. The Northumberland Line will also have 18 miles of track upgraded with several new crossings, passing loops and bridges. Northern who will operate the service and have already appointed a project manager, are expected to offer two trains per hour on weekdays and Saturdays between 6.am and 7.30pm, with an hourly service after 7.30pm and on Sundays. The journey time between Ashington and Newcastle should be around 35 minutes. For SENRUG the campaign doesn't stop here. They want to see extensions to the line to Woodhorn and Newbiggin; a line into the centre of Blyth that would provide a direct link to Newcastle Airport for the area; and an extension north from Ashington to link with the ECML; as well as zonal Metro ticketing amongst their other aims.

# PUBLIC TRANSPORT CAMPAIGNS DURING 2023

Bus services have been slashed with one in four routes withdrawn or amalgamated since 2019, leaving many parts of our region without a service anyone can rely upon. North Tyneside PTUG have collected over a thousand signatures against bus cuts. Please sign our petition:

<http://www.change.org/p/reverse-the-cuts-restore-north-east-s-lost-bus-services>

NTPTUG MEMBERS CAMPAIGNING AT NORTH SHIELDS



Hartlepool PTUG formed following a **summer campaign** against cuts in bus services, which involved local councilors and help from both NEPTUG and North East Pensioners Association (NEPA)

**In September** a campaign led by the National Pensioners Convention (NPC) and supported by DPAC and NEPTUG members was held at Sunderland against cuts in bus services despite private operators receiving millions of taxpayers money.

NEPTUG WITH NPC AND DPAC AT SUNDERLAND



DO YOU HAVE ANY TRANSPORT ISSUES YOU WANT TO RESOLVE: HIGH COSTS, PARKING ON YELLOW DOUBLE LINES, OBSTRUCTIONS ON PAVEMENTS, ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR ON METRO?  
DO YOU HAVE ANY COMPLIMENTS FOR THE TRANSPORT PROVIDERS? SEND THEM IN TO THE ADDRESS ON THE BACK PAGE.

**In February.** Borough Road footbridge and cycle path in North Shields was saved after a six year campaign by North Tyneside PTUG and where a Public Inquiry found in favour of ‘Save Our Bridge’ campaign.

NTPTUG AND RESIDENTS SAVE THE BRIDGE



**In September** Campaign for quality cycling and walking, led by ‘Street Life’ who have held regular family cycling events (Kiddimass) along the sea front and have learned North Tyneside Council is holding a further consultation with residents regarding Cullercoats section of the proposed cycle route. Kiddimass Photo credit to Michael Halliday



**July – September** Campaign to stop Ticket Office closures by private rail companies led by RMT Union and DPAC and supported by NEPTUG members who made a contribution to the 680,000 cards sent to Government in opposition to the decision to close the offices.

NEPTUG & DPAC AT TICKET OFFICE CLOSURE PROTEST



**Climate change** is one of the central reasons we were formed as we see public transport as a solution to getting the single motorist out of their car by sharing public transport. The latest Intergovernmental UN Report March 2023 gives a stark warning: In 2020 temperatures were 1.2 C degrees; by 2040, are likely to reach 1.5C degrees increase or even earlier. We have seen the impact of that in last few months. Transport is responsible for 30% of total carbon emissions; of which, 12% are from planes ie, people flying everywhere.

Elsewhere, 69% of people in the UK commute to work by car, with each motorist driving 1,008 miles per year, which is estimated to be responsible for creating a quarter of all carbon emissions that is destroying life on our planet.

**Air Pollution** is very high in parts of our region and caused by unregulated diesel vehicles which emit dangerous particles, especially for young children that lodge in the brain etc. Early and unnecessary deaths in the UK are recorded as being over 40,000 people dieing ten years earlier due to air pollution linked illnesses. Sadly, Newcastle City Council's attempt to regulate traffic and limit pollution in the Jesmond and Elswick areas of the city, like North Tyneside Council's planned seaside cycle way have both met with much public opposition.

**The Pensioner Concessionary Travel Pass** in England requires to be brought in line with that operating in the rest of the UK in Scotland, Wales and N. Ireland, it is age: 60; in England, it is not until age: 67. Hopefully this could lead to an increase in the use of bus services.

**Council Transport Forums.** North Tyneside has one which is run jointly with PTUG and meets three times each year. They are open to the public and attended by councilors, Nexus staff and transport operators from bus and rail industries. We need open transport forums in every borough.

**The Lifts At Central Station, Newcastle** have been out of use since April 2023. This effectively makes access to the Metro service impossible for disabled and people with prams or heavy luggage. Following campaign by DPAC, NEPTUG and 'Cities for People' Nexus have advised us that KONE are the company responsible for maintaining them; and although they were not fully working in September, they are now working at present.

**The Waiting Room and Toilets** at Blenheim St Coach Station have been closed by the private operator which leaves travellers arriving or departing without any facilities. There is a need for a campaign for more toilet facilities linked with our metro and bus services like those at Wallsend Interchange and the new North and South Shields Bus Hubs.

**Uneven Pavements.** A region wide campaign is needed on the state of the uneven and damaged pavements which cause trips and falls particularly to elderly, disabled and vulnerable adults. We need to recognise that local councils no longer have the fiscal resources to act upon this. You need to target government and your local MP's for that money.

The Government in Wales is to reduce road **speed limits to 20 MPH** on urban roads to limit accidents and air pollution. PM Sunak is in favour of abolishing some clean air zones, defending motorists and at the same time, has reduced air passenger tax to encourage more people to fly. This is all relevant as their own Climate Change Committee has recommended an independent Road Review. We wonder to what end?

Over 6000 workers are expected in 2027 to require transport to reach their place of employment at the new HMRC offices being built on Pilgrim St, Newcastle. Nexus is co-ordinating preparations with transport operators and HMRC. At present we are advised there will only be parking facilities for the disabled travellers. More in next issue.

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## BUS SERVICES

The single fare £2.00 to rise to £2.50 in October 2023.

A new Bus Hub was opened at North Shields next to Metro Station in September.

THE NEW BUS HUB AT NORTH SHIELDS



Latest figures for UK. A quarter of all households do not own or have access to private transport and therefore need a reliable public transport service which NEPTUG campaigns for.

Labour claims it will rescind the 2017 legislation (The 2017 Bus Act) to give back local authorities the powers to own and provide public transport services known as 'municipal' services. They also claim they will make the introduction of franchised bus services for local authorities easier to achieve.

## TYNE & WEAR METRO

The new metro trains are due to start arriving on Tyneside at end of 2023 and due to commence service during 2024.

Repairs are on-going to coast metro stations: Cullercoats (footbridge closed); Whitley Bay, (roof) and Monkseaton (roof) are still open.

Positive news re, security on metro trains and stations. Nexus has hired a private security firm which has placed two officers on 'zero hour contracts' on each train after 7pm, for the past six months. This has reduced the high rate of anti social behaviour from 105 to 56 recorded incidents between May and June this year.

In another positive initiative, young people aged 21 or under in the NECA area: Tyne &

Wear, Northumberland and Durham can now travel on the Metro blue Pop card for a £1 single or £2.20 all-day rover, thanks to the launch of a new ticket by Nexus.

## RAIL

Reported that the Government plan to reduce maintenance spending on the rail network by 15%. This will result in further chaos and delays for rail travellers throughout UK.

The Charity, 'Campaign for Better Transport' has suggested that switching half of domestic and near-Europe flight journeys to rail, would save 409,598 tonnes of carbon in a year; the equivalent of taking 283,000 cars off the road. At the same time it is reported that Europeans are starting to switch some of their local flights to rail travel.

**Rail privatisation failure.** Four rail companies have gone bust and been taken back into public ownership and placed under a government department called the 'Office of Last Resort'. We, you and I, have bailed them out again. The cost to the British taxpayers since rail privatisation in 1993, has been an **extra £64billion. Where Has It Gone?**

## WALKING & CYCLING

The Government have also cut spending on these pursuits and despite repeated claims from the NHS that these are vital for good public health and for cutting health costs.

**Some good news to end.** A North Tyneside Council initiative created an agreement for each new estate house buyer to receive a free one month public transport travel pass to encourage drivers to leave their cars behind. However, residents are still waiting for their pass to arrive.

CONTACT DETAILS FOR MEETINGS,  
INFORMATION AND LETTERS.

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