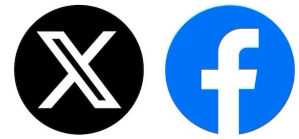


ABOUT US

NEPTUG campaigns for a better, integrated, publicly-accountable transport system connecting Tyne and Wear, Northumberland and County Durham. We also supports improvements for walking, wheeling and cycling which usually account for the 'first and last mile' of all public transport journeys.

If you are interested in public transport and would like to support or campaign for further improvements, why not come along to one of our friendly local meetings across the North East. Everyone is welcome! Visit our website for dates, times and more information: neptug.org.uk

Follow us on X (formerly Twitter): [@NorthEastPTUG](https://twitter.com/NorthEastPTUG)
Follow us on Facebook: facebook.com/NEPTUG



NEW METROS A STEP CLOSER TO PASSENGER SERVICE

Tyne and Wear Metro passengers have been getting their first chance to see the new trains out on the system as daytime testing is now well underway. Testing of the new Stadler Class 555 trains includes 90,000 individual checks before they can be signed off for passenger use.

Three of the nine new Metro trains delivered to the region so far have completed their kilometre accumulation. As that continues, the next step is the wider Metro driver training programme.

Stadler has now built more than half of the 46 new trains ordered. Two more are set to be delivered next month, with further scheduled to arrive in October and November.

A recent Chronicle article suggested that the first new trains are still on course to begin entering service before the end of 2024, however Nexus chiefs are reluctant to publicly announce a specific date at this time.

Passengers have been frustrated by repeated setbacks since the trains were meant to be in use from summer 2023. Traction system problems then emerged in January adding to delays.

Vicki Gilbert, NETPUG chair said, "Our members, like many Metro passengers, have had to deal with delays, cancellations and gaps in service due to the current ageing fleet becoming unreliable. We very much look forward to the new trains entering service and rebuilding confidence in the backbone of our public transport network".

Left: 555005 on test at Monument.
Photo by Dan Clarke.



A BRIDGE TOO FAR, AS COUNCIL CONDEMNS SAFE WALKING ROUTE

Leazes Footbridge in Durham has been closed to pedestrians for 12 months. Spanning the A690 on the approach to the city centre, the footbridge had been the safest passage for those walking, wheeling and cycling between Claypath and the city centre and riverside area.

However, in February 2024 following a routine inspection, Durham County Council announced they were condemning the bridge as it was no longer structurally safe to carry pedestrians, and that an at-grade pedestrian crossing would replace it.

Understandably, local residents didn't take too kindly to this announcement or the council's solution, and quickly formed an action group. Debbie, who is a regular pedestrian on the bridge said, "Leazes Footbridge is a vital safe walking route for locals, erected specifically because of accidents involving pedestrians on the road below. It crosses the A690 at its busiest point for traffic congestion and an area with serious air quality problems. Locally it's a bit of an iconic sight too, with a wonderful view of the Cathedral, but the Council announced in February they had condemned it, claiming it cannot be repaired". "Eventually via FOI, residents received the Report by Durham County Council's specialist bridge consultants, which suggested a series of repairs and maintenance could bring the bridge back into use".

"Residents have since commissioned their own Structural Engineering firm who uncovered, alarmingly, the Council's specialists had used the wrong steel strength in their calculations when

stating "that some elements have insufficient capacity to support live load". Therefore, they state the bridge is entirely safe to carry pedestrians, with repair. It doesn't require strengthening".

Debbie added, "Residents assumed that the Council would be delighted the bridge could be repaired at a fraction of their estimates, but that has not been the case. The Highway Officers decided *not* to look further into repairs, or get detailed costs. It is them [Durham County Council officers] who have condemned the bridge, not the qualified structural engineers".

"In May, again with no consultation, the Council work began on a new light-controlled Toucan crossing at the nearby Gilesgate roundabout, allegedly nothing to do with proposed demolition of the footbridge. During these works, peak time traffic to and from Durham has been congested".

"Despite being in the Gilesgate Conservation Area, the Council say no planning permission to demolish is required, so no opportunity for objections. The council ploughed on, with demolition prep starting 11th August, announcing road closures and siting the demolition team's site office. Residents, encouraged by the success of NEPTUG's work saving the Borough Bridge in North Shields, didn't give up. An appeal to the council's Review and Scrutiny process, with e-petition signed by 800 asking the Council to look into repairs, was accepted at the eleventh hour and demolition has been "paused". We very much hoped this review will yet see the bridge repaired and reopened".

NEPTUG North Tyneside continue to support the action group in Durham.



PLANNED CHANGES REVERSED FOLLOWING FEEDBACK

We were pleased to hear last month that the eastern section of bus routes 67 and 69 have been saved from cuts, thanks to Nexus pledging financial support.

These cross-town services connect Wardley in the east, and Metrocentre and Winlaton in the west to Gateshead's QE Hospital.

Residents raised concerns when it was proposed to cut the eastern sections of the two routes, and local councillors stepped in to ask public transport body Nexus to provide funding.

Cllr McElroy said, "Many of our residents either don't have a car, or have to manage on low incomes, so it's really important that we keep buses like this, both for patients and hospital visitors".

NEPTUG welcomes Mayor McGuinness' move to prepare a Bus Franchising Scheme Assessment (FSA).

Bus franchising will allow public control of our bus services, including setting their routes, timetables, and fares.

PASSENGERS LEFT IN THE DARK

A number of bus shelters along Askew Road West and Teams Street in Gateshead have been without working lights for a number of years now.

A member of NEPTUG Gateshead first started reporting the issue in 2021, and while a couple of shelters are now lit, others are still not.

In 2022 Nexus advised the power supply had been disconnected from three of the shelters, believed to have occurred during street lighting works by Gateshead Council, so they would raise it with them.

Unfortunately, some shelters remain unlit and whilst this does not affect as many passengers during the summer months, it will soon be autumn again and more passengers will find themselves in unwelcoming shelters in the darker mornings and evenings, unable to read the timetable without a torch or the light from their phone.



The overgrown tree canopy above isn't helping either as it blocks the street lights from illuminating the bus shelters and pavement below. Several low hanging branches also obstruct sight lines of approaching buses, eat into pedestrian headroom when walking to/from the bus stop, and also strike buses as they pull in.

It is important that bus passengers have safe, well-lit and accessible bus stops otherwise people will be discouraged from using public transport, especially those who may be more vulnerable.

NEPTUG, will raise these issues with Nexus and Gateshead Council again and ask for a resolution.

If you are having difficulties reporting issues or getting a resolution, let us know via the contact details at the end of this newsletter.

NEWCASTLE COAST ROAD BUS LANE SAGA CONTINUES

The 'will they, won't they?' saga of the Coast Road bus lane in Newcastle continues, with Newcastle City Council (NCC) confirming that they will not be building a bus priority lane into the city as part of the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) funding. A Coast Road bus lane from Benfield Road to Sandyford Road is one of numerous schemes listed as part of the £163.5 million North East BSIP bid but the city council has maintained that it has no obligation to build it.

Alistair Ford, chair of Newcastle branch of NEPTUG, expressed disappointment on behalf of bus passengers, saying "The long queues of private cars on the Coast Road have caused delays to buses for many years, making bus services slower, unreliable, and less attractive. They have also made this the spot with the highest air pollution in the city. We are trapped in a vicious spiral, with people less likely to use the bus because it is always late and using their cars instead, adding to the congestion and pollution. Why sit in a traffic queue on a bus when you can sit in a traffic queue in your own car?"

"We need to break this cycle and think differently. North East Public Transport Users Group fully supports the provision of dedicated bus lanes along the Coast Road, which would make a huge difference to the speed and reliability of bus services and to the lives of people who rely on them."



Left: A bus in congestion on the Coast Road. Photo courtesy of Reach PLC.

North Tyneside

FUNDING FINALLY SECURED FOR NEW FERRY TERMINAL

NEPTUG is relieved to hear that funding has finally been secured to replace the North Shields Ferry Terminal, allowing this vital cross-Tyne service to continue transporting residents, visitors and commuters between North and South Shields.

£14.6 million of funding has been announced to build the new landing at North Shields Fish Quay, as part of the Mayor's pledge to "greatly improve public transport across the region and invest in infrastructure that creates jobs and more opportunities for local people".

For years the ambition has been to build the replacement at North Shields Fish Quay as part of the wider town's regeneration work.

It is hoped construction of the new landing will start in 2026.

The nearby Tanners Bank Metro bridge replaced in 2002 means there is sufficient height clearance for better bus links to the Fish Quay and future ferry landing.



PUBLIC TRANSPORT USERS CAMPAIGNING FOR CHANGE

At a recent workshop on 'Transport in rural areas', NEPTUG members met Monica Menis who campaigns for improvements to public transport in Northumberland, as part of the voluntary group 'Greener Bewick'. Monica kindly provided the following update on the situation in Berwick.



Above: 1968: Berwick Bus Station. © Fred Kennington.



Above: 2024: Berwick's main bus stop, Golden Square.

"Our public transport situation in Berwick-upon-Tweed is not ideal. Our bus provision makes it challenging to use public transport for either commuting or tourism purposes due to the infrequency and/or timing of various routes. 'Pingo', our pilot Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) for the Borders & Berwick area, partially filled this gap for a few very happy users, but the trial has since ended and it's replacement, Berwickshire Taxi Bus Service, does not serve Berwick or Eyemouth, except in the evenings".

"However, there are bright spots!

1. Transport within Berwick has some good news:

Borders Buses has extended their evening service on the B1 Berwick Town Service. For timetable and route information visit: bordersbuses.co.uk/services

Woody's Taxis is once again running our seasonal Berwick shuttle, "the Hoppa". Their timetable can be found online at: berwickupontweedtaxi.co.uk/berwick-hoppa

2. **Greener Berwick** (greenerberwick.org.uk), our local climate action group, is working with Northumberland County Council (NCC) to get correct timetables posted at bus stops throughout the town. Two of our members have recently attended meetings of Berwick Town Council's Communities & Local Services Committee and Planning Committee to present a project proposal

requesting real-time passenger information (RTPI) boards at our Golden Square main stops (photo above) and at the railway station. Councillors expressed their support for this project and intend to include it in their submission for possible funding under the 'NCC Local Transport Plan Capital Programme'.

3. One of our members is looking into re-starting the car club, possibly with help from Michael Marston at Derwent Valley Car Club. We have identified a spot where an electric charger might be put in, as well as possibly parking an electric car. Anybody interested in possibly using a car club, please contact: cianmch@gmail.com

4. Richard Froggatt, Transport Officer for the North Northumberland Voluntary Forum has successfully launched a pilot service for a new town shuttle in Wooler, "the Wooler Hoppa". He is happy to share his experience on how he did it and what worked or didn't work. Richard can be contacted at: richardfroggatt.communitytransport@hotmail.com

5. Northumberland County Council have provided a cargo bike for community use in Berwick. It is parked at the YHA can be booked for hire provided the user has completed a safety training session. It carries 80 kg in the front carrier and an additional 20kg in the rear carrier. For further information and to book a training session please contact the Cycling Instructor, Steve Douglas, at: promanfriday@hotmail.co.uk

6. TransPennine Express put on additional trains from Newcastle to Edinburgh in both directions to support the Edinburgh Festival and Fringe. This is stupendous! We can only hope for superb take-up which might inspire this to continue at other times of the year”.

mediacentre.tpexpress.co.uk/news/tpe-to-run-extra-services-for-customers-travelling-from-edinburgh-fringe-festival

“Various other ideas have been floated, including but not limited to:

- an informal Facebook page with offers or requests for lifts, using existing buses and vans from Border Buses or Woody’s Taxis as night-time shuttles or intra-day DRT

- a cargo bike delivery service within greater Berwick,
- a park-and-ride to reduce congestion in town”.

“If anyone has additional ideas or suggestions or would like to help develop, or would personally use or benefit from a particular concept, please email me at menism@yahoo.com as we’re keen to hear from you. Thanks!”

- Monica Menis.



ASHINGTON STATION READY FOR PASSENGER SERVICES

Ashington’s new station, sited a stones throw from the original, has recently been completed ahead of passenger services returning to the town later this year.

It will be the northern terminus of the ‘Northumberland Line’, which will reconnect Ashington by rail to Newcastle, calling at Bedlington, Blyth Bebside, Newsham, Seaton Delaval, Northumberland Park, Manors and Newcastle Central.

Due to construction delays however, Bedlington, Blyth Bebside and Northumberland Park will not open this year, with services initially skipping these stations.

Northumberland County Council say the line is set to transform accessibility to employment, training and leisure for residents in south east Northumberland.

Journeys between Ashington and Newcastle Central are said to take around 35 minutes.

Nexus and Northumberland County Council announced that fares on the Northumberland Line

will be integrated with Metro’s, allowing customers to use their Pop cards just as they would on Metro, Ferry and Bus.

Young people aged 21 and under using ‘Pop Blue’ cards will have access to single trips priced at £1 for travel anywhere on the Northumberland Line and Metro System with daily caps of £1.70 for children under 16, and £2.20 for young people aged 21 and under.

All Pop cards are available from the Nexus website: nexus.org.uk

Operator, Northern Trains, has confirmed a full range of rail-only tickets will also be available.

It is anticipated trains will run from 6am – 11pm, (twice an hour Mon-Sat 6am-7.30pm and once an hour after 7.30pm and on Sundays).

The line will reduce journey times, improve air quality through reduced car use, attract visitors and provide a real incentive for potential employers to relocate to and invest in the area.

Below: Ashington’s new station, with a train on staff training duties. Photo by Charlie Care.



NEW BUS 599 CONNECTS MAJOR EMPLOYMENT SITES

New bus route 599 recently commenced operation, improving public transport between several major employment centres and the local communities surrounding them.

The joint project by Nexus and the North East Combined Authority is funded by the Government as part of the North East's Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP).

The 599 will help improve connectivity between South Tyneside and Sunderland, linking up Jarrow, Hebburn, the Nissan plant, the International Advanced Manufacturing Park (IAMP), Castletown, Sunderland Royal Hospital and Sunderland Interchange.

New local bus company, Northstar operates the service. Timetables are available at nexus.org.uk/bus



BUSINESS CASE TO EXTEND METRO TO WASHINGTON

In July, Mayor McGuinness announced £8.6 million is to be allocated to develop business cases to reopen the Leamside Line.

The reopening of the Leamside Line is being planned in three phases:

- the **'Washington Metro Loop'** - using the northern section of the Leamside Line to bring the Metro from Gateshead to Washington, connecting with South Hylton
- **'Leamside South'** - the southern section of the line connecting Washington and Sunderland to the East Coast Main Line (ECML) rail link
- and **Ferryhill Station** in County Durham - which would connect on to Teesside.

NEPTUG believes reopening this line will be transformative for the communities in the area who deserve good public transport connectivity and the opportunities it provides.

NEPTUG would also like to congratulate the Mayor on her swift action to date on this vital transport project.



Above: Mayor McGuinness & Cllr Gannon on the disused Leamside Line. Photo courtesy of North East Combined Authority.

NEW NEPTUG GROUP COMMENCES IN SUNDERLAND

NEPTUG now has a Sunderland group, in addition to the groups already meeting in Newcastle, North Tyneside and Gateshead.

The Sunderland group currently meet in the Sunderland Fan Museum, the former Monkwearmouth Railway Station, with their next meeting scheduled for Wednesday 18th September.

Visit neptug.org.uk for details of all our group meetings.

One issue the group is looking at is the disparity in concessionary travel across the UK, as in the North East pensioners cannot get their concessionary travel passes until they reach the state age of retirement, 67, however other areas like Merseyside and Wales see their residents get their passes at 60.

Also, the travel curfew for concessionary travel means that passes cannot be used on Buses or Metro until 9:30am, however some services see low passenger numbers once school students are dropped off at their schools prior to 9am.

The group agreed to raise this issue and others at the 'Bus Board for Sunderland', and with North East Mayor, Kim McGuinness.

For more information on the Sunderland group, email sunderland@neptug.org.uk or visit neptug.org.uk

NEPTUG

NORTH EAST PUBLIC TRANSPORT USERS GROUP

Want better public transport?

NEPTUG campaigns for an integrated, publicly-accountable transport system connecting Tyne & Wear, Northumberland and County Durham.

We also support improvements for walking, wheeling & cycling.

For more information, or to join, visit:

neptug.org.uk



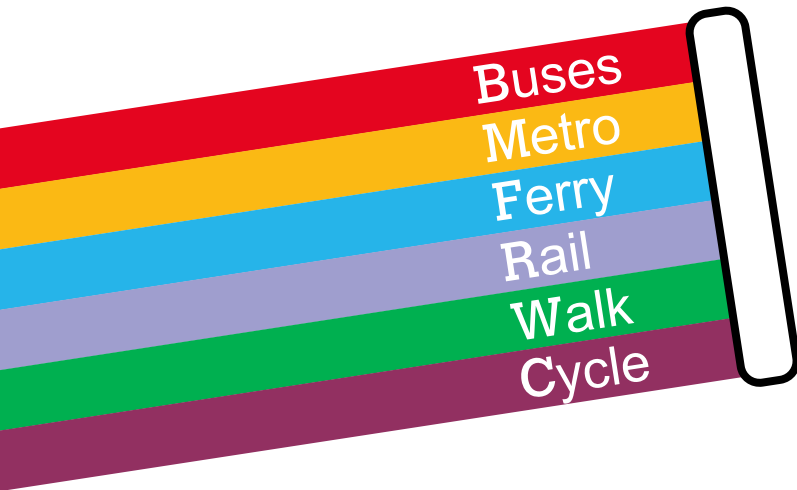
@NorthEastPTUG



facebook.com/NEPTUG



admin@neptug.org.uk



All day, anywhere.

For just **£6.80** you can travel
across Northumberland, Tyne and
Wear and County Durham **on...**

Any bus + Tyne and Wear Metro + Shields Ferry



Find out more at
northeast-ca.gov.uk

NE North East
Combined
Authority

Funded by
UK Government