

Report on meeting with National Express, Newcastle, July 2009

Peter and I went to a splendid location on 12th floor of Vermont hotel. Excellent view point for "anoraks", better than the Keep! Susan Goldsmith, Managing Director gave a very good presentation of the state of play re Nat Xpress and HMG.

Last year passenger numbers had risen by 6%, but this year were static, but revenue had fallen owing to business travel going to cheaper fares. 50% of expenditure was direct HMG take and only 14% staff costs. No scope for reducing costs while revenue had not increased by the 7% required to fulfill the financial requirements set. Nat Xpress will run the service until December and then hand over to HMG if there has been no increase in revenue by then. Whatever happens service will continue with same staff as at present. This includes installing barriers about November at Newcastle. Points were raised about passengers arriving at the station who had been unable to purchase tickets on the train. She was sympathetic with our views and said discussions with Northern about these problems would be held. Several people asked why there were heavy discounted fares in the face of this revenue shortfall. She explained that 10% of seats were sold heavily discounted, while before the day of travel substantial discounts could be achieved with the full fare only at peak times and on day of travel. The formula used was a travel industry wide system. Concern was expressed that new trains in development might have higher head rests, smaller spaces and reduced windows. We need to look at the specifications and make suitable comments. (from TVRUG who only get very old cast offs all this is probably irrelevant!) Other changes are end of restaurant car with buffet meals served at seat, g first class, or carryout to your own seat at second class. seat reservations are free for cheap advance tickets and for first class where the price hike would reduce demand, but at other prices it is just a way at increasing income, but also reducing number of unused reserved seats on the train. No comment about whether this was actually happening. Requests for extra Nat Express stops for north of Newcastle were made but the response was luke warm

A very useful meeting with about 20 reps presents including faces I know but can't readily put names to.

Denis Peel