

## **Harrogate Line Supporters Group Bulletin No 31**

### **AZUMA TRAIN LAUNCH – Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2019**

As the former Chief Executive of Harrogate Chamber of Trade & Commerce I have been campaigning actively to achieve more direct services between Harrogate and London since 2008. That was when National Express and First Group's Hull Trains both proposed operating a more frequent direct service between Harrogate and Kings Cross. However the ORR only approved the National Express bid and rejected the First Group's bid. In the event National Express decided not to proceed and they then lost the East Coast franchise.

So I teamed up with Mark Leving, the MD of Hull Trains, to research the possibilities and we produced a comprehensive report entitled "Why Harrogate Trains?" which was first published in 2010.

Richard Flinton, the CEO of NYCC wrote to the DfT - *I can assure you that North Yorkshire County Council fully supports this initiative, and the document from the Chamber makes a very good case for this. We believe that the local Harrogate and District economy would benefit from more direct rail links with the capital.*

We successfully campaigned for an evening return service from Kings Cross to Harrogate when Elaine Holt was Chairman of East Coast. This began in May 2011 and demonstrated the demand for more London-Harrogate services.

In December 2014 the DfT awarded the East Coast franchise to a Virgin & Stagecoach consortium and after lobbying by our group, they proposed operating two-hourly direct services between Harrogate and London from 2019. There was some concern when the Government relieved them of the franchise last year, but the new LNER team have confirmed their commitment to the Harrogate Line and services are due to begin Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> December.

Today we celebrate the imminent start of six trains per day each way between Harrogate and London Kings Cross. They will be ideal for business travellers, leisure visitors and commuters living and working along the whole East Coast mainline. We welcome the new AZUMA trains and their LNER crews and management. They will improve services for passengers, develop new markets like Harrogate and Lincoln and transform rail travel along the East Coast. They will stimulate enhanced business connections between Harrogate and London.

Congratulations to David Horne and his team at LNER for delivering this tremendous improvement in the quantity and quality of direct services between Harrogate and London Kings Cross. Thank you very much.

Brian L Dunsby, OBE

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