

A signal from the north



A midsummer event in the far north that provided an indication of the industry's future was the Friends of the Far North Line (FoFNL) AGM in Brora. This line was a Beeching survivor that has seen its passenger numbers double over the last fifteen years.

The meeting heard proposals for an overnight train from Edinburgh and Glasgow to Thurso and a shuttle service between Thurso and Wick operated by Vivarail's battery train. There were also presentations from Network Rail's chairman, Sir Peter Hendy, and Transport Scotland's director of rail Bill Reeve, both of whom considered the line's services and gave their perspective on wider industry issues.

Sir Peter reflected on his time running Transport for London (TfL) where, unlike at Network Rail, he was in charge of everything and so could ensure that service improvement investments were the best mix of rolling stock and infrastructure. He liked the way the railway is run in Scotland, which he felt was not unlike what he had at TfL as, in Transport Scotland, there is an intelligent client delivering the Scottish Government's objectives for a competitive railway that supports the economy.

Both he and Andrew Haines are committed to putting passengers and freight customers first. Hendy explained this needs a regional organisation that gives people sufficiently far down the organisation the empowerment and resources they need. He advised that midsummer weekend was auspicious, as it saw Network Rail's regional organisations going live.

Bill Reeve welcomed this new organisation which brings together previously geographically spread departments so that all those responsible for the delivery of the Scottish High-Level Output Statement (HLOS) were now working for one Network Rail organisation. He felt that the detailed requirements of the HLOS could be summarised as the ABC of Alignment, Building on success and a Competitive railway.

As an example of alignment, he cited Network Rail's £1.6 million investment to improve the train service by providing a wheel lathe at ScotRail's Inverness depot. Reeve felt it was critical that everyone within Network Rail had a shared idea of "what good is". In his experience, the lack of alignment in delivering a railway that customers want has been a significant problem.

Reeve is proud of what has been achieved in Scotland. He is also passionate about having a railway that provides attractive services for passengers and freight companies in an efficient manner. Such a competitive railway, he felt, was well placed to deliver social inclusion and climate change objectives.

Hendy noted how last year's timetable debacle highlighted how it was wrong for the Secretary of State to be the only person responsible for the whole railway and, as a result, the DfT is an

extraordinary centralised department. This led to the independent review by Keith Williams, which is to report in the Autumn. Hendy and Reeve are clearly aligned in their thinking and have been closely involved in this review. Although neither can predict the review's conclusions, it would be surprising if these did not reflect their views.

Midsummer also saw the installation of the first ElectroLogIXS electronic signal interlocking at Feltham. Paul Darlington explains why this new type of interlocking will bring significant capital and operational savings, in part by dramatically reducing the number of relays required and halving the lineside equipment locations.

This summer also saw a new 1.4 km loop brought into service on the single-line Felixstowe branch which carries the UK's highest rail freight tonnage. As David Bickell describes, this involved significant signalling works with four level crossings upgraded and six closed requiring the provision of a bridgeway bridge.

Earthing such signalling equipment whilst ensuring continuity of power supplies is a complex issue, especially as some legacy power supplies did not meet current legislative standards. Our feature explains Network Rail's strategy for ensuring compliance.

Peter Stanton was at a recent joint RIA/IMEchE seminar to rebuild confidence in electrification. His report explains how this made the case for electrification and showed how recent successful schemes which have incorporated lessons from previous problematic projects.

Following the introduction of Hitachi's Azuma trains on the East Coast main line, Stuart Marsh describes how these trains are maintained at the new £80 million Doncaster Carr depot. New types of trains are not always greeted with acclaim, due to complaints about hard seats. An RSSB research project is addressing this issue by developing objective seat comfort criteria, as our article describes.

New trains also put new demands on wheel slide protection (WSP) systems which, for 30 years, have been evaluated by WSPER (WSP evaluation rig). Malcom Dobell was invited to Derby to see WSPER in its new laboratory and explains how new developments are being incorporated into this complex test rig.

As Nigel Wordsworth describes, a huge amount of construction plant was on display at Plantworx and Railworx, with almost 500 exhibitors' displays spread out over the 140,000 square metres of the East of England Arena.

For ten years the Rail Partnership Awards have celebrated and showcased the achievements of Network Rail's supply chain which, as our feature shows, includes great examples of collaborative working. This would seem to contrast with the need for better alignment between Government and the different parts of the rail industry. ●

RAIL ENGINEER EDITOR

