

FAR NORTH EXPRESS



Issue 70

January 2017

**FoFNL to be part of new
FNL Review Team - 3,6**



Orkney features - 26

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF THE FAR NORTH LINE

Cairdean Na Loine Tuath

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Convener:	Mike Lunan, Thurso	Newsletter Editor:	Ian Budd, Glasgow
Hon. Secretary:	Malcolm George Wood, Ardgay secretary@fofnl.org.uk	Committee Members:	Bob Barnes-Watts, Inverness

Articles in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of the committee.

Website: www.fofnl.org.uk

E-mail: editor@fofnl.org.uk

Editorial Address:

3 Villafield Loan,

Bishopbriggs,

Glasgow, G64 3NZ

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Cover photo:

Colas 37421 at the rear of a test train to Wick, waiting in platform 6 of Inverness Station with 37175 at the front, on 18 December 2016.

Photo: **Sandy Colley**

FOFNL MEMBERSHIP FORM

For an organisation such as ours, membership is vital both in terms of numbers, therefore influence, and to finance lobbying activities. If you would like to join The Friends of The Far North Line please download, print out and complete the application form from our website:

www.fofnl.org.uk/membership/memform.pdf

If you prefer, you can phone our Membership Secretary on +44 (0)1334 475311. Annual membership is only £15.00 (£12.00 by standing order) or £17 for organisations.

If you can think of anyone else who might be interested please mention FoFNL to them and encourage them to join!

REVIEW TEAM

Fergus Ewing's announcement on 16 December marks, surely, a turning point in the campaign to get the Lentrán Loop constructed. A decision to do so in CP6 (the five years starting in April 2019) has still several hurdles to be successfully overcome, but at least we are at the starting tape with our spikes on. He has instructed Transport Scotland to convene a Review Team to look at the Far North Line in detail and come up with a suite of actions to improve things. In the immediate - CP5 - term this will look at timetabling and minor infrastructure tweaks which can be delivered "using existing funds". I interpret this to mean things like improving line speeds at level crossings (and elsewhere, in loops perhaps) - there is, after all, a dedicated fund for LX work in CP5. Further ahead will come more substantial infrastructure enhancements like the Lentrán Loop. FoFNL will be well briefed in any discussion of this by the excellent detailed running statistics being collected each week by Malcolm Wood, illustrating the disastrous effect on the rest of the day's timetable by late-running of the first train from Caithness. Given that Network Rail has identified the usefulness of some degree of double-tracking "between Inverness and Dingwall" the idea

that this should be somewhere in the general area of Lentrán looks a likely solution. NR's Route Strategy has this pencilled in (not too strong an expression, I hope) for "CP6 or CP7" and Fergus said in his speech that he wanted to see "major changes and improvements in CP6"

REFLECT

While there is still much work to be done this does seem a good time to pause and reflect on what FoFNL has achieved. Thanks to the letters written by Members to MSPs, to the letters written by MSPs to Ministers, to the many articles banging the same old drum, to the doggedness of your Committee keeping this issue at the centre of everything we do we are, as I suggest, at the starting line. Or, to change the metaphor, we are at the negotiating table, along with ScotRail, Network Rail and HITRANS.

THANKS

I offer my sincere thanks to everyone who took the time to add their individual voice to the general clamour, in particular our two MSP Vice-Presidents who have nibbled the ears of Ministers. We're well on the way, but just in case there might be slippage...

...**THE LENTRÁN LOOP MUST BE BUILT**

Mike Lunan

FOFNL AGM

The AGM will be held at 11:00 on Friday 23 June 2017 in the Inverness Town House. As renovation works will still be taking place entry will be from Castle Street where there is lift just inside. Tea and coffee will be available beforehand.

The Annual Conference will start in the same venue at 11:45 when Fergus Ewing MSP, Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy and Connectivity, will give the Keynote Address. We will then break for lunch from 12:30 until 13:45 when the afternoon session will begin. The intention is to finish at around 15:30.

Members intending to be present should note that FoFNL will not be providing or facilitating lunch. There is a wide variety of eating places to suit all needs and purses within a few minutes' walk of the Town House.

Further details, including a formal Notice of the AGM, will appear in *FNE 71* in May.

2016 has been a memorable year and, in terms of politics and world affairs, one we may wish to forget as soon as we can. For FoFNL however it has been a good year (not in terms of the performance of the Far North Line which has been stubbornly disastrous all year).

Autumn 2016 was a particularly fruitful period for FoFNL's long-running campaign to achieve serious improvement to the Far North Line infrastructure.

HIGHLAND SURVIVOR

On 21 September David Spaven's book *Highland Survivor* (reviewed on page 21) was published. With a very effective press release much of the media picked up on some of David's conclusions about the future of the line, prompting assurances from ScotRail that, far from considering closure, much money is being spent on maintenance and some improvements. Whilst these were very welcome they fell far short of what is required to put the railway into the position to provide the service needed and to develop the line towards its full potential. Future signs are promising though.

Members of FoFNL, as well as other regular readers are well aware of the dire need for at least two extra passing places to break up the impractically long single-track sections on the line.

HERALD VIEW

Extensive press coverage of *Highland Survivor* in Scotland included not only the newspapers in the north of the country but also, rather gratifyingly, in *The Herald* on 26 September, both an article and the editorial. This may be the first time the FNL has been featured in *Herald View*, which opened with

The railway line between Inverness and Caithness was one of the lucky ones in the 1960s when it escaped the infamous Beeching cuts. But more than 50 years after being spared the axe, could it be suffering a worse fate: slow death by neglect?

and concluded with

ScotRail says it is investing in the line, but Scotland's transport network continues to suffer from a culture in which obligations are met (often over deadline and budget) but rarely exceeded. Why not extend

the Borders Railway? Why not do the same for Edinburgh's trams? And why not invest in Scotland's Far North Line to create a more efficient, modern and exciting service? Passenger numbers on the line are dropping – but it can be turned around.

Coverage continued into October when BBC Scotland featured an interview with David Spaven about his book and the state of the FNL.

REPORT

The second major event for us in the autumn was the publication on 16 October of a report by rail consultant Tony Glazebrook. The story of how this came about is quite unusual: back in the 60s Tony and I were teenage violinists playing together in various amateur and youth orchestras in North London then Tony went into the railways and I became a professional musician, which Tony could easily have done if he'd wanted to. We lost touch completely and it was only after Tony had emailed the RSNO, having attended one of our concerts, feeling sure that there was only one viola player called Ian Budd that we managed to meet up. It turned out that he had been living in Glasgow for over 20 years already!

Naturally we compared notes - he was very keen to find out what he'd missed by not becoming a professional musician, and I was as keen the other way round. Unsurprisingly I told him of my involvement with FoFNL and began to give him the newsletter to read each time it was published. The more he read, the more he wanted to see for himself with his rail consultant's hat on. Last summer he offered his professional services to FoFNL on a voluntary basis - something we could not have afforded to commission.

Tony explained that his *modus operandi* would be to ride the whole route in the cab and to have discussions with as many of the people doing the job of running the Far North Line and others directly involved in various capacities as possible. Permission had to be sought from the ScotRail/Network Rail Alliance and was readily given, along with full co-operation.

Tony had preliminary meetings with Mike Lunan (our Convener), Frank Roach of HITRANS and John

Yellowlees, Community Liaison Manager, ScotRail. In the course of his time on the railway he had discussions with Alex Campbell (Mobile Ops Manager, Network Rail), Derek Glasgow (Fleet Manager, Inverness), Stephen Muirhead (Route Asset Manager [Signalling], ScotRail), Michelle Mullen (Route Asset manager [Track], ScotRail), Gerry Scott (Area Manager [North], ScotRail) and driver during his cab-ride, Ronnie Payne.

Tony concluded his report as follows:

"An intensely positive attitude, unparalleled commitment and boundless patience were very evident qualities in everyone that I was fortunate to meet. The FNL exists because of them."

Tony's report, which I urge you to read, is available online at www.fofnl.org.uk/archives/Aliona-FoFNL-study-16.10.16.pdf

The report covers every aspect of the operation of the FNL in great detail, listing problems and suggesting remedies. It provides FoFNL and the politicians who oversee the provision of rail transport, with the information needed to work for improvements. Phil Verster, Managing Director, ScotRail Alliance, responded immediately to the report and asked his teams to action specific issues that arose.

In the report's summary Tony Glazebrook lists the problems and recommends solutions. Among many other issues, he identifies a key cause of the chronic paralysis that affects the FNL in addressing problems:

Management: There is no clarity on who has the authority to make things actually happen. Indeed, despite the frequent discussions on everything that already is known to cause the never-ending FNL problems, there is very little to show for it. If anything, performance is declining still further. There is a lot of good work and analysis ongoing but no apparent focus to bring the system under control, let alone to improve it. This needs urgent attention.

Recommendation: For clarity to be brought to the identity of the action leader at least at local level and for that role to be afforded the necessary authority.

ScotRail has already made a start on this by giving Derek Glasgow overall responsibility for the running of the Far North Line.

Among other memorable quotes are these:

Timetable: It is disadvantageous to FNL economics that end-to-end journey times in the current timetable are some 30 minutes longer than in around 2000! The train from Inverness to Thurso takes between 3¾ and 4 hours, and to Wick between 4¼ and 4½ hours. Even with 11 stops, the X99 bus service takes only 3 hours from Inverness to Thurso or Wick, whilst driving the same route takes only 2½ hours to Thurso or 2¼ to Wick.

Recommendation: For a single individual to be charged with the task of leading the drive for route improvements that aims, at the very least, within the next 5 years to restore end-to-end FNL journey times to their level in the year 2000.

The reason for the apparently high costs for railway infrastructure changes and investment is worthy of examination and justification, especially in areas where the 'fare box' revenue cannot cover those costs. It is unclear how the costs are built up and only a critical examination of such would enable a reasonable balance to be achieved between cost and available resource.

Recommendation: For NR to choose a sample project from each of the Signalling and Track disciplines and provide a breakdown showing how the apparently high costs are derived.

An indication of the success of recent campaigning and publicity is Fergus Ewing's announcement on 16 December of the setting up of a "Review Team" comprising Abellio ScotRail, Network Rail, HITRANS and FoFNL with immediate and longer term outputs to improve performance now and plan ahead for major changes. Fergus Ewing is the Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy and Connectivity in the Scottish Government.

In the latter part of 2016 railways have been in the news more than usual. Often the discourse has descended into political point-scoring, which sensible observers will ignore, but in most ways greater publicity helps to fuel awareness and eventual action by politicians and industry decision-makers.

Ian Budd

FOUR MEETINGS AND A RESULT!

Report of four meetings attended on 15 and 16 December 2016

1 **With Humza Yousaf MSP, Minister of Transport.** (Also there, Bob Barnes-Watts of FoFNL and Rose Tweedale of Transport Scotland [TS].) We gave the Minister a copy of a document entitled The Lenran Loop (see p9) which he welcomed. He agreed to write officially to The Highland Council and to HITRANS pressing them to look seriously at the case, including a STAG appraisal - this was "the best way forward". He accepted that making a business case is beyond the competence of FoFNL. He assured us that he had "a sympathetic ear", and was pleased that FoFNL had cross-party support from MSPs.

2 **With Bill Reeve, Head of Rail at TS.** He

Fergus Ewing announces Review Team for FNL - ScotRail, Network Rail, HITRANS and FoFNL

explained a great deal of what was going on in the e-ticketing area. He told us that FoFNL "punched above [our] weight" and acknowledged the strength of our cross-party support among our VPs. My idea of bolting on an order for new DMUs to the order placed by Northern Rail would apparently be illegal, so I shall stop banging that particular drum. However he was "not against" more new DMUs "in due course". This is a big step forward from the prevailing view in the industry that no-one would manufacture new diesel kit at an affordable price. (We should not read any degree of "soon" into this, however - the 158s will be our stock on the FNL for a decade or more.) He asked us about freight possibilities, but apart from the timber traffic it is hard to see where any southbound load will emerge. He noted that, whereas summer passenger numbers rose significantly on the Kyle line and the Oban/Fo William/Mallaig services, this did not happen on

the FNL. Why not? I suggested tapping into the Scrabster cruise ships with a nice steam train to Wick and back, with a bus to John o'Groats. (I will talk to Scrabster to see whether this might fly, or whether it is just pie in the sky.)

3 **Frank Roach's second Points North conference.** This had a truly excellent line-up of speakers - chosen by Frank to explain specific aspects of FNL performance. First was Alex Sharkey, the top NR man in our area. He gave a very instructive presentation about what NR plans to do in the balance of CP5 (up to March 2019) - most of which will be wholly invisible to passengers of course. All the more reason for our knowing about it. Derek Glasgow referred to Tony Glazebrook's consultancy report and spoke about the 158 refurbishment programme, which will be complete in July 2017. Once the EGIP EMUs are up and running the plan is that the Inverness fleet of 158s will never travel south of Inverness (except towards Aberdeen/Montrose). Ian Whiteley went into detail about the RETB improvements (which seem to me, on the basis of two journeys, to allow late-running to be recovered more quickly: 9 minutes late at Tain becoming on-time at Inverness). Phil

Verster said that HLOS will focus on outcomes, and reduced end-to-end timings on the FNL ought to be part of this. There was a team working on speeds within loops. Simon Constable (the safety and LX king) told us of increased line-speeds at 4 LXs, but said that speed might have to be reduced at 2 others because of increased road traffic. He outlined planned changes at Delny and in Dingwall (see p10). This was the most useful two hours I have spent at a railway conference in the 17-odd years I have been attending them.

4 **The Rail Stakeholder Conference.** Cabinet Secretary Fergus Ewing MSP was the main speaker. He announced that he was setting up a "Review Team" (not, he said, a Task Force) to consider the FNL. It would have immediate and longer term outputs. In the short term how to improve performance, in the longer term seeking major changes and improvements. He noted that NR's

Route Strategy had some double tracking between Inverness and Dingwall suggested for CP6 or CP7 and said that "capital investment, more medium and long term, should be in CP6". He announced that the Review Team would comprise Abellio, NR, HITRANS - and FoFNL. Frazer Henderson (Head of Rail Policy at TS) outlined the TS Consultation on the HLOS process (about which the Dingwall seminar, reported on p8, had been involved). Several points were clarified. We then heard about progress on the Aberdeen-Inverness and HML enhancements. We were told that the May 2017 timetable for the FNL/Kyle lines would "stabilize" and set performance "to acceptable levels". Difficult word acceptable: it certainly won't see a return to 2000 timings, some 30 minutes faster than they are now. This is a murky area, and exploring it for solutions will doubtless be a major part of the "immediate" task of the Review Team. One of the twinkles in Frank's eyes - a depot at Elgin - seems to be on stream

for December 2018. The first ex-GWR HST will arrive for driver training in 2017, and the first refurbished set will be delivered in "spring 2018". On being pressed about delays in releasing the sets following the electrification fiasco on the GWR the reply was "we have a contract". It will be interesting to see whether the contract is delivered according to the letter, or if DfT and TS come to an agreement. If there is to be a delay there must be compensation - £1 million a day seems sufficiently punishing to focus minds. Peter Strachan showed us pictures, taken only the day before, of his new Sleeper trains being built in Spain (see back cover). The interior fitment is not just a step up from the existing kit (itself nicer, and better cared-for, than it used to be), but a whole flight of stairs better. It will be interesting to see the use made of the double bed. (Perhaps I might rephrase that). To round off the day we saw plans for the upgrade of Inverness Station.

Mike Lunan

EMAIL CHATTER, CONTINUED FROM LAST ISSUE

These are some jottings which Richard Arden has sent round the FoFNL committee in the last while. He has focused on instances of extreme lateness at Helmsdale and of the 06:18 Wick to Inverness. They are another example of the continuous observation that is being done by FoFNL members.

Extra long endurance waits:

Helmsdale northbound

10:38 Inverness to Wick

31 August arrived Helmsdale 20 minutes late and left 68 late (20/68)

10 September 35/68

28 September 27/67

27 October 18/68

15 November 27/68

07:02 Inverness to Wick

10 September 35/68

14:00 Inverness to Wick

13 September 19/82 - an extreme 65 minute wait!

28 October 12/70 - almost a 60 minute wait.

05 November 30/69

06:18 Wick to Inverness southbound

17 December held at Muir of Ord (MOO) arrived Muir of Ord 35 late and departed 68 late.

Very unfortunate as it would have been full of pre-Christmas Saturday shoppers.

19 December 06:18 also continuously lost time and was eventually cancelled at Lairg "due to a problem with the traction equipment".

Interesting that my notes show only one delay at MOO. They mostly reflect dire need for a loop at Kinbrace.

Richard mentioned that these were only a few observations, far from being a complete picture.

Meanwhile, our Secretary, Malcolm Wood, has been compiling spreadsheets of late-running and cancellations.

Report of meeting held by Transport Scotland in Dingwall on 6 December 2016 to discuss their *Consultation on Scotland's Rail Infrastructure Strategy from 2019* document.

The meeting was led by Steven McMahon, Head of Rail Strategy & Funding at TS. He gave us an overview of the timetable for the CP6 process. Scottish Ministers will produce their HLOS "by June 2017" and NR responds to it before ORR makes a final determination towards the end of 2018. CP6 starts on 1 April 2019. NR has already produced its Scotland Route Study which sets out a long list of things they believe it useful to do...by 2043. Some of these are on the FNL, but they will not necessarily make it to the final list for CP6 or even later 5-year Control Periods. FoFNL has been campaigning vigorously for the Lentrans Loop to appear in CP6, and these efforts will continue right up to the HLOS. Ministers make the final decision, but they are necessarily guided by officials in prioritizing competing parcels of infrastructure spending.

The HLOS process is likely to be different this time round. TS is keen to adopt what it calls a "pipeline" approach whereby "a decision to commit to a specific enhancement project will be taken when the business case is clear and both price and affordability are certain". This makes sense provided the new process doesn't incorporate systemic delays - these have been the bane of planned enhancements for many years. I was left with the clear impression that Ministers are well aware of the need to spread investment across the whole of Scotland, and that the natural tendency of the Benthamite bums-on-seats argument to concentrate spending in the populous Central Belt will be resisted. Social inclusion remains a central policy. Indeed it is very helpful that the Cabinet Secretary with overall charge of the railway also has Connectivity as part of his portfolio, and that the Minister with daily responsibility for the railway also has The Islands as part of his. Remoteness will therefore be uppermost in ministerial minds as the HLOS process continues.

It was gratifying to be told that Steven McMahon was well aware of pressure from many sides to build the Lentrans Loop. However that fact is not of course enough to get it done: the argument still has to be made formally. Responses to the Consultation are due by mid-February and FoFNL's Response will appear in the May *FNE*. It is made clear that TS does *not* want "views on the day-to-day operation of services...[or on] priority investment schemes, whether proposed upgrades...or new routes". FoFNL will heed this advice, and make the case for those upgrades elsewhere.

I found this meeting extremely useful - it's always nice to visit Ross County's ground - and it will inform our Response in due course.

MJL 7/12/16

EDITOR'S APOLOGY

In the last issue of *FNE* we published a photo of Phil Verster, Mike Lunan and Frank Roach at Thurso station but omitted to mention the name of the train conductor, standing on the right, who was **Ewan Anderson**



Contents

Until it was singled by BR 50 years ago that part of the FNL immediately to the north of the Clachnaharry Swing Bridge was double track for six miles. The solum is still extant. FoFNL is calling for some degree of infrastructure enhancement in this location. The bridge carrying the A862 over the railway some 4 miles from the Swing Bridge prevents double track there. The settlement at Lentrán is roughly half-way between Inverness and Muir of Ord, now the first place north of Inverness where trains may pass (13 miles, usually taking 21 minutes to traverse). Were trains able to pass in this neighbourhood late-running southbound trains would have a significantly reduced impact on the delivery of the timetable for the rest of the day.

The most damaging, and sadly not infrequent, occurrence is when the first train from Caithness (having left Wick at 06:18) reaches Muir of Ord more than around 15 minutes after its scheduled time of 10:14. In order to make maximum use of the single track between there and Inverness the 10:38 departure to Wick and the 11:00 departure to Kyle of Lochalsh are flighted, with the Kyle train not leaving Muir of Ord until 11:21. Thus by the time the delayed Wick train is allowed to proceed - perhaps not until 11:22 at the earliest - it will not arrive at Inverness until 11:43, some 69 minutes late. Connections to Aberdeen and the Central Belt have been missed, as have many appointments, not least at Raigmore Hospital. While a passing place - or better still a dynamic loop 2 or 3 miles long - would not eliminate this, it would allow the Wick train to reach Inverness before the Kyle departure, and thus arrive only 25 or so minutes late. The knock-on effect of a late arrival naturally makes the use of the late set for other services harder to achieve, and a late departure with that set will mean that all services are likely not to present at passing places at the correct time for the rest of the day.

In the *Scotland Route Study* Network Rail (NR) states (p53) "The rail network north of Inverness ... provides "lifeline" services to rural communities, consequently connectivity and resilience are key" (emphasis added). Later (p83) one of the Far North Enhancements is "Inverness to Dingwall additional loop to provide greater flexibility to pass trains". A long-term objective (p147) is for "1 opportunity to travel every other hour [between Inverness and Wick]". If the "day" is taken to mean roughly what it does now (with trains running on the FNL between 06:18 and 22:52 - say 16 hours) that will mean at least 6 services each way each weekday: far beyond the current capability of the route). However, the study does give itself until 2043 to deliver this "output".

When we reach the meat of the study (p194) there is no sign of any plan to provide a loop south of Dingwall. 6.6.21 suggests a possible (green) plan to install double track between Dingwall and Invergordon in CP6. While FoFNL would applaud this, we do not believe it will do anything to address the problem of the 21-minute single section through Lentrán. 6.6.19 suggests re-signalling between Inverness and Dingwall, but not until CP7 - we suggest a shorter time-scale.

The consultation paper "*The Far North Line: a performance study*", commissioned from Aliona Ltd in October 2016, recommends (p15) that NR's proposed re-signalling between Inverness and Dingwall could allow a passing loop to be signalled using what it describes as the "Aviemore solution". Scottish Ministers and Transport Scotland have copies of this paper. On p23 it goes on to suggest that comparative costings are obtained for providing a Lentrán loop as part of any re-signalling, or as a stand-alone scheme retaining RETB. FoFNL supports this approach as likely to constrain costs.

At FoFNL's Annual Conference in Inverness in June 2008 Iain Coucher, then CEO of NR, said, in the context of the FNL "**We must find and exploit real opportunities to reduce journey times**". While the Lentrán Loop will not of itself reduce journey times, it will permit more robust delivery of the timetable. NR has, in the study, "found" opportunities: it must now be instructed to "exploit" them.

We urge Transport Scotland and Scottish Ministers to include the Lentrán Loop in its HLOS in June 2017.

LEVEL CROSSINGS - 10

UPDATE

It's a bit like the buses – you wait 2½ years for another article about Level Crossings and then two come at once. This one is occasioned by my attending Frank Roach's second Points North conference – reported elsewhere in FNE. Simon Constable (Head of Route Safety, Health and Environment at Network Rail, but as far as I'm concerned the LX guru), gave a most useful update of what happening on the FNL.

RENEWAL

Line speeds have been, or shortly will be, increased at 4 LXs: Lairg, Balnacra, Brora and Rovie. Alas, thanks to increased road traffic use, it may need to be reduced at Bunchrew and Watten. Network Rail's Route Study says this "Bunchrew level crossing is due for renewal during CP6, which could align with introducing conventional signalling and higher linespeeds" which would be nice, but is clearly not immediate.

BARRIERS

Observant passengers will have noted that, while barriers (AOCL+B) have been installed at almost all LXs on the FNL, Delny is still as it was. This is because lengthy negotiations with local residents and The Highland Council have failed to come to an agreement. NR now plans to carry out a temporary upgrade at Delny by fitting barriers next summer. This will be an interim ABCL allowing an increase in line speed to a welcome 55 mph. The longer-term ("early in CP6") solution is the construction of a bridge and the closure of the LX. It would seem reasonable to have 2020 in mind. The temporary piece of kit will be re-used then at Kildonan or Rogart, eliminating one of the two OCs (where there is no barrier, no warning wig-wag for dozy motorists); at Kildonan the train is required to

stop lest an ox cart approach. Progress is in the air.

CHAMPAGNE

The long-running "temporary" speed restriction at Chapelton Farm just north of Muir of Ord, which has been on the go for about 6 years, will be lifted on 6 April 2017. But don't buy the champagne until a day or two before ... just in case.

NEW KIT

The complicated situation in Dingwall – blessed, if that is the right word, with no fewer than 3 LXs – is to be made a great deal safer. Dingwall Middle – the one next to the High School – has, as you would expect, a lot of misuse from pupils dodging round the half barriers. They know perfectly well that the trains are going slowly, that they make a lot of noise, that they run to something approaching known time, and that they – the pupils – are immortal and thus free from risk. NR knows otherwise and as a result Dingwall Middle will be upgraded to AFBLM (the FB bit being full barrier) which will block off the full width of the roadway and pedestrian paths. The totally daft will find a way, no doubt, but the majority will see a complete barrier and will wait. This new kit – designed specially in Scotland – will be tested at my favourite Scottish LX – Ardrossan Princes Street – where the road is a proper width. (It is my favourite not least because it is where I was a passenger in my one, and I hope only, train crash.)

I wish I had good news, or news of any sort, on the lack of Parliamentary progress on the updating of 7000-odd Acts regulating LXs, but I haven't. Maybe next time - then, like the apocryphal buses, it will indeed be three in a row.

Mike Lunan

Question S5W-04033: **David Stewart**, Highlands and Islands, Scottish Labour, answered: 31/10/16

To ask the Scottish Government what information it has on Network Rail's plans for safety improvements to the Delny open level crossing in Ross-shire, and what the timescale is for any plans.

Humza Yousaf: Network Rail plans to upgrade Delny Automatic Open Crossing to an Automatic Barrier Crossing in 2017. Network Rail advise that this will not address the increased risk that is likely to arise as a consequence of a potential nearby development, to which they continue to object, and that they are still pursuing eventual closure of the level crossing and its replacement by a bridge.

Question S5W-04016: **Rhoda Grant**, Highlands and Islands, Scottish Labour, answered: 02/11/16

To ask the Scottish Government how much will be invested by Network Rail in the Far North Line between 2014 and 2019, broken down by individual project and their related costs.

Humza Yousaf: As part of the Scottish Government's wider £5 billion programme of transformative investment in Scotland's railways over the five-year control period to March 2019, Network Rail are investing over £30 million to maintain, renew and enhance the rail infrastructure on the Far North Line. This includes over £7 million in track renewals, around £13 million on earthworks and associated remediation works, over £3 million on structures works supporting scour prevention and rectification and coastal improvements, and around £9 million to complete the roll out of next generation signalling system renewal. This investment is over and above that required through Network Rail to support the daily operation of rail services along the route.

Question S5W-04625: **Gail Ross**, Caithness, Sutherland and Ross, Scottish National Party, answered: 24/11/16

To ask the Scottish Government which services on the (a) Far North and (b) Kyle of Lochalsh Line will be considered as "golden trains" following the implementation of the ScotRail improvement plan, and when this status will come into force.

Humza Yousaf: ScotRail continually review and amended the services they stipulate internally as "Golden Trains". Performance patterns are altered as operational circumstances change and improvement plans take effect. The purpose of classifying these services at any given time is to minimise the knock on impact any lateness can present to timetabled services later in the day.

Question S5W-05298: **Rhoda Grant**, Highlands and Islands, Scottish Labour, answered: 08/12/16

To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on it reinstating the direct rail link between Perth and Edinburgh, and what impact such a service would have on journey times on the Highland Main Line.

Humza Yousaf: Reinstatement of the direct rail link between Perth and Edinburgh does not feature in the Scottish Government's current £5 billion investment programme to 2019. However, we are committed to on-going improvements to rail services and connectivity and will consider projects subject to the Scottish Government's investment priorities for the strategic transport network, a robust business case, affordability and other competing proposals. The first step for promoters of this scheme is to contact the Regional Transport Partnership (RTP), SEStran, to establish if the proposal fits with their local and regional transport strategies. Any impact on Highland Main Line journey times would need to be determined by detailed timetable analysis should the proposal emerge from a multi-modal transport appraisal.

Wick Engineer Appointment - Press Release from ScotRail Alliance - 7 November 2016

Rail travellers on the Far North Line will now benefit from the expertise of engineer John Sutherland who's responsible for inspecting and maintaining the trains around Caithness.

John is the ScotRail Alliance's first train engineer to be based in Wick and he'll diagnose and repair faults on the fleet, as well as acting in a first-responder role to deal with any issues in the wider Caithness area. As an A1 grade engineer, who previously worked at Dounreay, John has completed the eight-week railway engineer's competency course, providing him with specialist train knowledge.

Looking ahead to his first winter on the rails, John said: "I'm delighted to be taking up this role and look forward to playing my part in keeping rail services running on the Far North Line. Checking and maintaining our trains before they depart on their journeys is vital as we're providing an essential service for local people, visitors and tourists."

Investment in the Far North Line is budgeted at £42m for the period from 2014-19 and John's appointment is part of that spend, as the ScotRail Alliance focuses on providing a robust rail service to customers travelling between Inverness and Wick. Track infrastructure, the train fleet and signalling are all set to be improved before 2019.

ScotRail Alliance Engineering Director Angus Thom said: "Having a highly skilled engineer based in Wick means we're spending more time maintaining our fleet and the trains start the day after an inspection by John."

"His input is important to keeping the trains running and also for spotting longer-term maintenance needs, which can then be scheduled at our depot in Inverness."

Also pleased with this appointment is Trudy Morris, Chair of the Caithness Transport Forum. Welcoming local-man John's employment on the railway, she said: "We were delighted to hear at our last meeting that the ScotRail Alliance is taking meaningful steps to invest in the Far North Line, including employing a dedicated



John Sutherland

engineer in the area. This appointment will make a real difference to maintenance of the fleet in Wick, and we are pleased to see the ScotRail Alliance providing skilled employment in the local area."

"We congratulate John on his new role, and look forward to hearing more good news from the ScotRail Alliance over the coming year."

STATION USAGE FIGURES 2015-16

These are the figures issued by the Office of Rail Regulation. They show an overall drop of 4.7% in the total for the Far North Line excluding Inverness (for which no FNL-only figures exist) compared with last year's drop of 8.81%. The table shows the percentage change in the last 12 months and the last 24 months. Note that this table reads chronologically from left to right.

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	One Year Change	Two Year Change
Wick	21,884	21,442	19,766	-7.82%	-9.68%
Thurso	43,802	42,082	38,426	-8.69%	-12.27%
Georgemas Junction	1,652	1,696	1,572	-7.31%	-4.84%
Scotscalder	376	388	294	-24.23%	-21.81%
Altnabreac	138	240	312	30.00%	126.09%
Forsinard	1,718	1,456	1,516	4.12%	-11.76%
Kinbrace	1,092	528	456	-13.64%	-58.24%
Kildonan	144	96	170	77.08%	18.06%
Helmsdale	5,778	5,096	6,204	21.74%	7.37%
Brora	6,380	5,616	5,524	-1.64%	-13.42%
Dunrobin Castle	916	822	782	-4.87%	-14.63%
Golspie	7,788	6,770	5,192	-23.31%	-33.33%
Rogart	1,662	1,522	1,710	12.35%	2.89%
Lairg	7,440	7,514	6,592	-12.27%	-11.40%
Invershin	790	486	706	45.27%	-10.63%
Culrain	628	530	432	-18.49%	-31.21%
Ardgay	8,806	8,416	6,732	-20.01%	-23.55%
Tain	34,580	30,004	27,896	-7.03%	-19.33%
Fearn	6,606	6,130	5,396	-11.97%	-18.32%
Invergordon	36,356	31,962	29,054	-9.10%	-20.08%
Alness	27,796	25,934	23,614	-8.95%	-15.05%
Dingwall	101,996	87,782	82,508	-6.01%	-19.11%
Conon Bridge	18,114	15,510	15,276	-1.51%	-15.67%
Muir Of Ord	72,832	66,576	66,480	-0.14%	-8.72%
Beauly	57,946	57,446	59,406	3.41%	2.52%
Inverness	1,282,445	1,303,662	1,306,556	0.22%	1.88%
Total (Excluding Inverness)	467220	426044	406016	-4.70%	-13.10%

EVANTON STATION PROPOSAL

The Ross-shire journal reported on 5 November on the campaign to reopen Evanton station, which is between Dingwall and Alness.

The station closed to passengers in 1960 and to goods in 1964. Cromarty Firth councillors Mike Finlayson and Martin Rattray now have the support of the Ross and Cromarty Area committee of Highland Council to set up a consultation survey of local residents followed by a feasibility study once funding has been agreed. HISTRANS has already said it will jointly fund such a study.

A petition, raised by local resident George Glassier, has been signed by about two hundred people in Evanton and it is felt that a station at Evanton would be good for the community and for business.

One of the difficulties involved in the reopening would be accommodating the extra time taken for the stop into a timetable which is already difficult to maintain. As well as through trains to Thurso and Wick, Tain to Inverness additional services pass through Evanton.

COW STRIKE!



Derek Glasgow, Fleet Manager Inverness, sent us these pictures to illustrate the kind of work that staff at Inverness depot sometimes have to carry out at very short notice and with an incredibly tight deadline.

A class 158 unit, 158722, struck a cow just outside Brora. Significant damage was done to the train and the cow didn't survive the collision. The unit had to be returned to

Inverness depot for repair where it arrived at 16:00 that day.

Train availability was already at a premium due to another unit having suffered a gearbox failure and yet another being in the midst of engine renewal, therefore an overnight turnaround was required to keep the Far North Line service running.

158722 was available for service at 06:00 the following day thanks to the skills of engineer D Carrol who worked tirelessly on completing a fantastic repair job.

As Derek commented, "It is easy to criticise the railway but at Inverness depot there are 80 men and women dedicated to delivering the service for the Far North lines and as Fleet Manager I am proud of the work they produce day in, day out."



FOOTBALL RESULTS



In an effort to avoid problems with exuberant football supporters ScotRail provided an extra train from Dingwall to Inverness, departing at 17:21 after the Ross County (2) v Aberdeen (1) match on 17 December (connecting with the 18:13 train to Aberdeen) and the RC (0) v Inverness CT (0) game on 31 December. Both trains were full with the one on the 31st full and standing. A great success for all.

DAVID SPAVEN, SCOTTISH REPRESENTATIVE, RAIL FREIGHT GROUP, WRITING IN THE SCOTSMAN 27TH DECEMBER 2016

'There needs to be a recognition that the Scottish rail network is essentially unfit for purpose north of Perth at present.' That damning - but accurate - verdict came from the Scottish Chambers of Commerce in their response to the Scottish Government's Rail 2014 consultation.

Upgrading of the railway network north of the Central Belt has been severely neglected for 40 years, a period during which there has been unprecedented road investment, such as the complete rebuilding of the A9 from Perth to Inverness in the 1970s and 1980s. The last upgrade of the parallel 118-mile Highland Main Line was in the mid-1970s, when 35 miles of track were redoubled and three new crossing loops installed.

Ironically, there has been disinvestment in the Highland Main Line since then, with three crossing loops removed, creating even longer single-track sections and reducing capacity and flexibility.

So what does this mean for rail freight, the safe and sustainable alternative to road haulage? Firstly, there is a stop-start journey from rail hubs in Central Scotland to various terminals in Inverness and beyond. In contrast, the road haulier can contemplate an uninterrupted journey over roads which are entirely dual-lane or dual-carriageway.

The second infrastructure barrier is the highly-variable length of crossing loops - not a major problem for relatively short passenger trains, but hugely significant for freight. Rail freight can best compete with long trains of multiple loads hauled by a single locomotive. Yet rail's competitive opportunity is severely hamstrung between Perth and Inverness, with the shortest of the nine crossing loops being just 265 metres in length compared to the longest of 505m.

How does this impact on key freight flows, particularly in new markets which rail has developed over the last two decades? The daily Stobart/Tesco train from Mossend to Inverness is limited to 20 containers, yet the Class 66 locomotive hauling the train could handle up to

28 containers (lorry load equivalents) if loop lengths were consistently longer (530 metres+). That would have an enormous impact on rail's ability to win traffic from road haulage.

The last, but certainly not least, infrastructure constraint along the Highland Main Line is the limited 'loading gauge', in other words the capability of square-profile tall containers to pass through arched tunnels and overbridges. Scotland's rail network as a whole is a patchwork of six different loading gauge clearance categories, making for complex choices as to what width and height of container can be safely accommodated on different types of rail wagon. In contrast, the road haulier simply utilises a standard tractor and trailer combination, since height constraints have long been eliminated from the trunk road network, courtesy of the taxpayer.

These gross disparities between rail and road network capacity and capability are a key reason why the Rail Freight Group is supporting the Inter-City Express (ICE) campaign led by Transform Scotland, the sustainable transport alliance, to push for a fit-for-purpose network north of the Central Belt. ICE is arguing for electrification, extension of double track and more, longer crossing loops on the routes linking Glasgow and Edinburgh with Aberdeen, Inverness and Elgin.

The Scottish Government's intentions for upgrading freight capacity and capability on the Highland Main Line remain unclear - all we know is that 'more efficient freight operations' were promised for the period 2014 to 2019.

With a properly-upgraded Perth-Inverness railway we could increase the number of daily freight trains from two to as many as eight in each direction, carrying a wide range of commodities. It would be the equivalent of taking more than 300 lorries off the A9 every day. A government really committed to sustainable economic development - and road safety - would regard this as a golden opportunity.

Over the next six months crucial decisions will be made over the future of the Highland Main Line (HML) and whether it will become a fast modern line fit for the 21st century.

With the commencement of the new timetable on 11 December, all concerned are to be congratulated on the introduction of a new train at 05:36 from Inverness to give an earlier arrival in Edinburgh of 09:21 and (by changing at Perth) a Glasgow Queen Street arrival at 09:14. This will help business people and others willing to spend 3 hours 45 minutes on the train to reach an early appointment.

The slow speed overall, with a ten minute long wait at Blair Atholl and a four minute wait at Pitlochry, underlines the need to get on with doubling the line. The early new train from Perth

robust and all will be well. Money will be saved and that will be a good thing!

Forgive my scepticism, but all sorts of things can go wrong with trains being late south of Perth. Every late train is likely to cause delays on the beautifully dovetailed new service on the HML because it remains single track over much of its length and delays mean opposing trains having to wait in loops for a late runner and then themselves causing delays to other opposing trains later on in their journey. There is no escaping the fact that single track lines are unforgiving to late running, with the virus of a lateness being passed on from one train to another and another.

We are seeing this late-running-due-to-single-track problem now on the new Borders Railway.

The Borders Railway does not have any freight unlike the Highland Main Line.

Freight runs more slowly than passenger trains particularly on long steep gradients and there are many of

these on the HML. The requirements for railfreight on the HML were very clearly set out by David Spaven in his "*Friends of the Scotsman*" article in that paper on 27 December 2016. (Reproduced on p15)

The Government's CP5 objective for the HML is to facilitate "more efficient freight operations" and to provide an hourly passenger service between Perth and Inverness with two extra services each way daily by March 2019. Operating such a welcome demand-driven frequency of passenger services together with a mix of freight which runs at different speeds over the two long lengths of single track with passing places from Culloden to Dalwhinnie and from Blair Atholl to Stanley will continue to be a challenging juggling act.

Unless a start is made with more loop or double track provision in CP5, the majority of the upgrading work will be left to CP6 and that would bring us right up against the deadline to

Will we get some more double tracking during financial control period CP5 (April 2014-March 2019)?

at 05:08 which has to wait 17 minutes at Kingussie, 9 minutes at Aviemore and 6 minutes at Carr Bridge makes this point even more forcefully. It could be more than 30 minutes quicker to Inverness if we had a double track line!

Will we get some more double tracking during financial control period CP5 (April 2014-March 2019)? We still await publication (in February 2017 perhaps?) of the long promised GRIP 3 report to know for sure. We are now more than halfway through this funding period with the finance not yet committed. The suggestions are that a much smaller amount of money will be spent to improve loops and signalling at Aviemore and Pitlochry and that this will be the only current spend on a line which is crying out for more track capacity.

Assurances are being made in good faith that the new trains will be much more punctual, will be presented at Perth (from Edinburgh and Glasgow) on time, the new timetable will be

make the HML fit for purpose before the completion date for the A9 dualling of 2025. If we fail to achieve this, there is a very real danger of reverse modal shift from rail to road with more carbon emissions, and more road congestion in town and city centres.

Fulfilling the 2008 objectives

Let us consider the objective set by the Strategic Transport Projects Review in 2008 of a 2 hour 45 minutes headline journey time between Edinburgh and Inverness with the average of under 3 hours. Consider the outcomes requested by business leaders to have first arrivals in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Inverness around 9:00 and work back from what we have today

The new 05:36 arrives at 09:21 in Edinburgh and at 09:14 in Glasgow (3h 45/3h 38 min), but there is still no arrival in Inverness from Edinburgh or Glasgow until 10:26.

The aims must be to get the 06:50 train to leave Inverness at around 06:40 and arrive at around 09:20/09:15 to achieve these goals. The northbound aim should be for a similar 06:30/06:40 departure arriving in Inverness by 09:15.

Currently, the fastest northbound schedule from Perth is 2h 2min (1h 59 on a Sunday)

Southbound from Inverness to Perth is 1h 59 (1h 58 on a Sunday)

Fastest Glasgow to Perth is 59 min (53 min by an Aberdeen train)

Fastest Edinburgh to Perth is 1h 16min (1h 13 on a Sunday).

Combine these with a 2 minute dwell at Perth and you have 2h 54 from Glasgow and 3h 14 from Edinburgh to Inverness. A lot of line speed and signalling improvements will be required to achieve the 2008 goals and traction capabilities are also unknown.

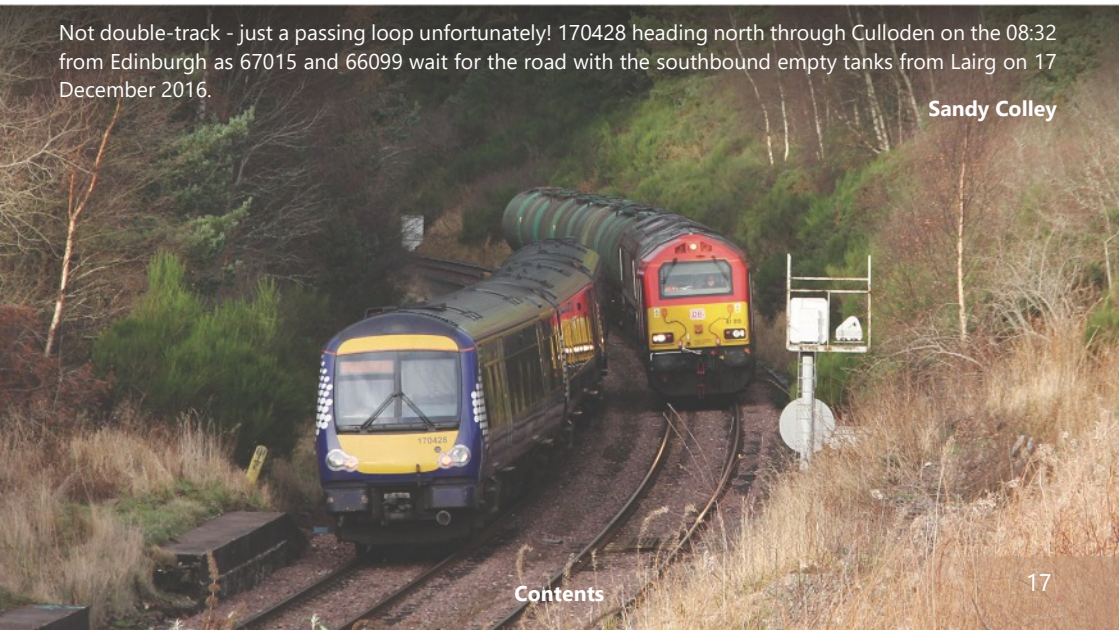
FoFNL has been asking for many years for faster trains such as Voyagers to be given a trial on the HML. We do not know what an HST 2+4 can do but look forward to ScotRail's use of these with keen anticipation. Suggestions are that the new Virgin Trains East Coast Azuma bimodes will be slower on the hills than the present VTEC HST 2+9s.

This is the task facing the Scottish Government, Transport Scotland, and Network Rail/ScotRail Alliance so that the railway can more than hold its own against the improving A9 road. Come on boys and girls, step up to the mark please!

Richard Ardern

Not double-track - just a passing loop unfortunately! 170428 heading north through Culloden on the 08:32 from Edinburgh as 67015 and 66099 wait for the road with the southbound empty tanks from Lairg on 17 December 2016.

Sandy Colley



HIGHLAND MAIN LINE

With the start of the new timetable from 11 December 2016 the average southbound weekday journey times between Inverness and Edinburgh and Glasgow are now worse than before the much hailed journey time improvements of December 2012. The average journey time to Edinburgh is now 5 minutes worse than in 2011 and that to Glasgow 3 minutes worse. Northbound from Edinburgh four of the 7 minutes gained have now been lost and from Glasgow one of the 5 minutes gained has been lost. This is most disappointing.

Edinburgh Gateway

The opening of the new Edinburgh Gateway interchange (with the tram for the airport) is a major factor but doesn't apply to the services to Glasgow. The Aberdeen expresses do not stop at Gateway but it has been decided to trial a stop there for the Inverness expresses, the only expresses to do so.

An extra 5 minutes have been added to the 06:50 business train from Inverness over the last few miles of its journey such that it does not now reach Waverley until 10:08. It still leaves Kirkcaldy at 09:25 as it did in 2006/7 when it was timed to reach Waverley at 09:59. Timings from Gateway to Waverley are generally 14 minutes (18 minutes for the 06:50 "express") but in the opposite direction are only 10 minutes.

There will be passengers who appreciate the call at Gateway especially if they are using the airport, but I suspect that the majority of long distance passengers would rather have the quickest possible journey to central Edinburgh. It is envisaged that the 2018/9 speed up will see Inverness trains call only at Haymarket and Kirkcaldy south of Perth. No doubt the use, or not, of the Gateway call by these trains will be monitored to see whether it is justified.

Question S4W-29000: David Stewart, Highlands and Islands, Scottish Labour, answered 05/01/2016

To ask the Scottish Government what the average (a) weekday, (b) Saturday and (c) Sunday journey time is on the (i) Inverness to Edinburgh, (ii) Edinburgh to Inverness, (iii) Inverness to Glasgow and (iv) Glasgow to Inverness rail service, and how this compares with each year since 2011.

Derek Mackay: (a) average weekday journey time (current timings added by us for comparison)

Year/Route	(i) Inverness to Edinburgh	(ii) Edinburgh to Inverness	(iii) Inverness to Glasgow	(iv) Glasgow to Inverness
2011	211	211	203	200
2012	210	204	202	195
2013	211	205	202	194
2014	212	205	203	196
2015	211	205	203	196
Current	216	208	206	196

Highland Mainline Journey Time Improvements

5.22 Highland Mainline has suffered from slow development progress to date, with two revised development milestones in CP5 and as yet no fixed scope. A recent risk assessment has however provided a degree of confidence that the project can deliver its outputs by the regulatory milestone of March 2019.

5.23 The project cost estimate however remains stable and Network Rail Scotland has taken advantage of timetabling opportunities enabled by the ScotRail Alliance to develop a high-level scope and estimate that will deliver the journey time improvements via a small number of limited infrastructure interventions. This represents a significant efficiency on the initial estimates for the project and demonstrates the value of a collaborative, system-based approach to enhancements. The Alliance and Transport Scotland are currently exploring further efficient scope options to deliver additional outputs as part of the broader Highland Enhancements Programme. We will carry out an efficiency review of Highland Mainline costs once detailed design work has been completed and a robust estimate for the project has been developed.

Source: ORR November 2016

INVERNESS - ABERDEEN LINE

"The current passenger journey times (around 2 hours 25 minutes) and irregular service (every 2 hours) between Aberdeen and Inverness means that it does not offer an attractive alternative to road travel" Transport Scotland website.

Some of the improvements identified in British Rail's prescient discussion paper of 1994 are now starting to happen. Earthworks are ongoing at Forres for the more efficient new station and road crossing, the new footbridge with lifts is open at Elgin and advance work on doubling the line on the approaches to Aberdeen is scheduled to start in February under new financial arrangements. Modern signalling controlled from Inverness was, and is, also envisaged. As also identified in 1994, the next pressing requirements are for a dynamic passing loop between Keith and Elgin and double track in the Dalcross area.

The Office of Road and Rail has published another **Network Rail Monitor for Scotland 1 April to 15 October 2016** following an efficiency review of the Aberdeen to Inverness project and now expects NR to agree the phasing of outputs with Transport Scotland (TS) to a revised completion date extended by six months to September 2019. The considerable increase in costs "was primarily due to increased compliance work for track and civils and additional scope to accommodate freight access rights". ORR has set a new "efficient cost baseline" for the project but the Monitor does not reveal what this is.

The start of new rail enhancement work is always to be welcomed. Sometimes there can be a downside too, such as a finite period of disruption to normality while the work is carried out. One such period will be upon us from 8 January when work begins on the Aberdeen approaches. The 21:33 last Inverness to Aberdeen train will leave at 20:38 on Mondays to Thursdays inclusive and at 20:42 on Sundays.

"This will give a much better connection for passengers from the Far North Line but will have consequences for passengers for Nairn, Forres and Elgin who are used to getting home from the south via the Highland Main Line services. A Nairn arrival at 23:57 via Aberdeen is unattractive compared with the normal 21:48". **STOP PRESS** ScotRail will provide a set-down-only bus connection from the HML trains to Nairn, Forres and Elgin at around 21:30 from Inverness M-ThO.

The new timetable shows that the majority of trains will no longer have first class accommodation. This is because of the decision to refurbish the Inverness class 158s first before the less comfortable Haymarket fleet is tackled. Only the Inverness ones had first class provision which was retained especially for the Inverness to Aberdeen line market.

A new website is being developed to which users of the line may subscribe:

www.aberdeeninverness.co.uk [no longer online - 2026]

A RAILMAN REMEMBERS

3 – GETTING MY FEET UNDER THE DESK

The beginning of 1974 was an unsettling time for an impressionable Briton starting out in the world. For a start, IRA bombs were killing people in major cities and towns like Birmingham and Guildford. There was a lot of negative press about environmental concerns and the likelihood of oil supplies becoming exhausted, which was compounded and confused by the first oil crisis in late 1973. Although the 'crisis' was an economic embargo rather than a symptom of the oil running out, it was easy for a naive teenager to link them. The price of petrol jumped from 34p to 50p a gallon, and just to add to the unease, panic buying caused petrol stations to run out, and for a while fuel was rationed.*

At the same time we were experiencing one of the worst stock market crashes in recent history. Anyone starting a business or embarking on property purchase was highly exposed. Then miners and power workers started striking over restrictions on pay which had been introduced to reduce inflation. Bin collectors left rubbish in the streets in support of the miners. Then there were power cuts, and the final straw was the government imposing a three day week on non essential industries.

The Scottish Highlands were mostly immune to these difficulties. The haste to get oil production up meant that we were exempt from the restrictions across the rest of the country. Cocooned in my little station, Fearn was considered an essential service, and the lights stayed on.

The trains of the day consisted of around five diesel hauled Mk1 coaches, many with corridors and compartments with sliding doors. They didn't hare around like 158s do today, so the

Continuing Mark Nolan's reminiscences of his time working at Fearn station

timetable was less intensive, but the steam heated trains were reliable in all weathers, and spacious. Locomotives were uniformly painted blue, while the coaches were blue and grey. All this BR blue did create a corporate identity, but it was low on style and didn't do the locomotives any favours.



There were three passenger services daily each way between Inverness and the northerly outpost of Wick 'n Thurso, and none on Sundays. I would arrive off the 7:30 heading north, and use a wooden barrow with large cart wheels to move the parcels which had

been disgorged onto the platform to a wire cage in the station. Then there would be time for breakfast before I greeted the southbound at 9 am. This frantic activity climaxed in a leisurely morning until the northbound midday train came through, followed by an idle afternoon until I jumped onto the 3:15 back to Invergordon. Consequently I had plenty of time to explore the station I'd unexpectedly acquired.

The ticket office had a window hatch to the main entrance hall which could be raised or lowered. The counter was fitted and, like the rest of the furniture, painted in thick black or grey gloss paint. Next to the hatch was a cupboard full of

* Forty years later we are burning more oil than ever, and it is still every citizen's right and economic duty to own a car.

card tickets and a column date stamp which I changed each day. Probably. There was a bakelite rotary dial phone (Fearn 206) and another handset attached to a teak box with a couple of buttons which communicated by bell with all the neighbouring signal boxes. There was no longer any need for a signaller, which was the reason an inexperienced 19 year old had been entrusted with the keys to the station. I was however sensible enough not to bother the signallers whose work, unlike mine, was safety critical.

There were other relics from earlier times when Fearn had been a busy station with a second platform and a footbridge. On the office wall hung a board with round red detonators to clip to the track to warn trains of an obstruction in fog. The clock, which needed winding every three days, had a dual face so it could be seen

from the office and the platform. A large desk contained lots of redundant forms, some dating back to the LMS (London Midland and Scottish Railway) which had been nationalised in 1948. Another room through the office had a little oven with a hotplate, a sink and a kettle. Occasionally the permanent way men (track maintenance staff) would call in to warm themselves up and eat their lunches.

The entrance hall was quite bare, with the aforementioned parcels cage and some scales for weighing goods or luggage. Off the hall was a toilet, and further on was a room which could have been a waiting room if it had had any furniture or heat. And there was one more strange thing: in the corner was an industrial quantity of heavy rolls of thick brown paper; another manifestation of Fearn's all-important potato traffic. Of which more later.

BOOK REVIEW

Highland Survivor - The Story of the Far North Line

by **David Spaven**. Kessock Books, 2016. 314 pp paperback. ISBN 978-0-9930296-4-6. £16.99. Available in bookshops or online, [out of print, but available on [our website](#)].

It would be hard to think of anyone better-qualified to write this book. David Spaven has worked on the line, written several important books about railways, is a FoFNL member and the son of FoFNL's founding Vice President, Frank Spaven, who had been instrumental in saving all the main lines north of Perth from closure in the 1960s.

The book is in three very logical sections: Before Beeching, The Beeching Era and After Beeching.

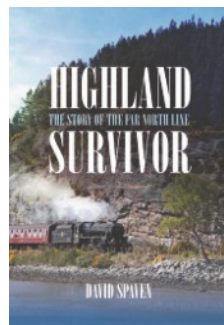
The first part explains exactly what led to the Beeching Report and how it affected the FNL and would be a very worthwhile read even for someone for whom the FNL holds no special interest.

Part Two vividly portrays the struggle to save the line and the sometimes conflicting elements of that struggle. This is where Spaven's personal knowledge is invaluable. The final section of the book charts the progress of the FNL since its reprieve and brings into sharp focus the changes which have occurred and which have led to the difficult situation which the Scottish Government and the ScotRail/Network Rail Alliance are now having to address.

Spaven has laid out what he thinks needs to happen urgently, and the consequences of doing nothing. This has led to some fairly robust assurances from official quarters and, most importantly, has linked in with our own campaigning, to the point where major action to improve things now looks likely.

Highland Survivor is required reading for all concerned in any way with the FNL - as users, campaigners, politicians or observers and is a thoroughly enjoyable read. It was good to hear that it has been short-listed for the Railway & Canal Historical Society's Railway Book of the Year Awards 2017.

Ian Budd



POLICE OFFICER TO COUNCILLOR

FAR NORTH RECOLLECTIONS BY MATTHEW REISS

When your editor suggested I write an article about my recollections as a police officer, and thoughts of the Far North Line, it took me a while to realise that only five years of my police service had not been at a station on the FNL: postings to Wick, Thurso, Inverness, back to Thurso and finally Wick were only interrupted by postings to Aviemore with a main line station and Benbecula where as far as I am aware no trains exist but a rocket range does.

Northern Constabulary was one of the eight Scottish Forces prior to the formation of Police Scotland. We had 800-odd officers to cover an area larger than Belgium, 24/7, 365 days a year. We also had a practical "hands-on" approach with a decidedly non-risk-averse approach. As is often the way, the remoter the community the greater the ingenuity and resilience of the public and the police who serve them. A (probably) healthy disregard for the letter of the law existed in the far north public and, I would like to think, most of the police officers lived up to the Force motto "*Protect and Serve*".

And this approach extended to British Transport Police whose tiny complement based at Inverness did its best to cover its vast kingdom. The "thin blue line" also applies to the FNL in many ways. Over the years the threat of closure has never fully disappeared and landslips, flooding and snow are regular challenges. Latterly in my role as the Area Commander for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross I was always aware that the railway just south of Helmsdale is just feet from a sea that has overcome part of the village's harbour, whilst on the inland side a landslip closed the vital A9 Inverness to Thurso road last winter. The theoretical diversion along the Glen Loth unclassified road is not for the faint-hearted or sports car.

Some years ago, an inaptly named "Sprinter" train became stranded in deep snow near Kinbrace. I recollect 18 folk were rescued by the local estate workers using an ex-military snowcat, backed up by Northern Police vehicles - politicians are fond

of extolling "partnership working" - this was just one example of police and public working together. The fact that BTP were not present simply wasn't an issue for any of us.

The Highland public had a positive and robust attitude to Health and Safety. When trees fell on roads and railways, Police Officers were regularly told not to worry about waiting hours for an official council team to attend. Out of the gloom cars, pick-ups, trucks and tractors would emerge, chainsaws would fire up, the trees were cleared and the route promptly re-opened. At such times, rural police officers do well to follow Admiral Nelson's example of putting his telescope to his blind eye. I go back in time but did you know a humble Ford Escort could pull a large fallen tree off a road...the Fleet Manager didn't either.

On a much more serious note I personally attended three accidents on level crossings at Halkirk in Caithness. In the worst of these, three pensioners tragically lost their lives. After this appalling incident, full barriers were installed.

Walking in the world-famous Flow Country of Caithness and Sutherland the thin dark line of the FNL at Altnabreac comes as a gentle reminder that even this most remote part of our island has been subdued by humankind. The vast forestry plantings of Sitka Spruce and Lodgepole Pine accompany the railway and make the need for snow fences a little less compelling. Ironically these plantations which were controversial when planted due to their perceived negative effects on our unspoilt wild brown trout, largely comprise low grade timber and serious efforts are now being undertaken to ascertain whether the FNL could be used to remove timber from this area instead of using the narrow single-track roads.

Not so far away the A897 Strath Halladale (Helmsdale to Melvich) road meets the FNL at Forsinard where the RSPB is restoring the blanket peat bogs and so far, the views from the viewing tower, are unaffected by wind turbines.

The old song goes "A policeman's lot is not a happy one" and that is true when dealing with fatalities but fortunately that is not the whole story. The long and winding railway that leads to the door of the most northerly railway station in the UK at the frontier-feeling town of Thurso has so much to offer and can tell many tales: read Bill Bryson's *Notes from a Small Island* to hear his more neutral impression of the FNL and the unique hospitality he experienced in Thurso, land of the Vikings.

As an Independent (non-political) Highland Councillor I suggest that the onward march of centralisation seriously threatens our remotest areas. The closure of the Highland Police and Fire control rooms, downgrading of NHS services, inability to attract newcomers to the remotest areas combine to threaten a subtler form of the

Clearances. The A9 North of Dornoch exacts a regular toil of casualties and the FNL represents the only realistic alternative. It may not be profitable but the railway should represent an attractive and safer alternative to the notorious A9 (which does not fully deserve its reputation) - frankly this is not the case for many local folk.

Government money spent on the development of the line could revitalise the railway's appeal. Readers may doubt this but, in conclusion, I respectfully suggest doubters google 'North Coast 500'. This represents the power of the internet at its best; a simple marketing strategy that is reaping substantial financial rewards by publicising an existing road route as something to be enjoyed by visitors driving the route.

The FNL can be re-energised and I wish FoFNL every success in its endeavours.

DINGWALL REGIMENT SOLDIER HONOURED

John Meikle is the only Scottish railwayman to be awarded the V.C. Born in Kirkintilloch in 1898 he worked as a booking clerk at Nitshill station near Glasgow until enlisting in the Seaforth Highlanders in 1915.

The Railway Heritage Trust provided a new stone memorial for permanent display at the station, with support from ScotRail and the Railway Mission. The new plaque was unveiled on 18 October by Sgt Meikle's nephews, Alan and John and ScotRail MD Phil Verster.

In memory of

Sergeant John Meikle VCMM

4th Battalion Seaforth Highlanders (Ross-shire Buffs)
Territorial Force

(11th September 1898 - 20th July 1918)

John Meikle was a Glasgow, Barrhead & Kilmarnock Joint Railway clerk at Nitshill Station, who enlisted in February 1915, at the age of 16 years. Mobilised to France in July 1916, he was awarded the Military Medal after the overthrow of the Menin Road bridge near Ypres in early October 1917.

Returning to France in early 1918, with his trademark heavy walking stick, he was thrust into intense action centred on the River Marne, east of Paris. His company was attacking in the valley of the Ardre on the afternoon of 20th July, and was held up by machine gun fire. He advanced alone across 150 yards of open ground to destroy a machine gun nest using his revolver and the walking stick. Later he advanced alone again, but was killed when almost on top of a further machine gun post. However, his bravery enabled his comrades to take that position.

For his actions he was awarded the Victoria Cross.



Photo: John Yellowlees

A STATION CLOCK RETURNS TO HELMSDALE

On the back cover of the last edition of the *Far North Express*, the editor was kind enough to publish a photo of the award certificates Helmsdale station CIC has won, displayed in the waiting room and generously photographed by John Yellowlees.

From one of these, the ACoRP (Association of Community Rail Partnerships) award, the station has benefited in a rather pleasing way. The award came with £250 prize money. We resolved to use this on a 'nice to have' addition which would otherwise be unlikely to be achieved. We settled on the reintroduction of the station clock.

This was influenced by the article carried in *FNE* 64 (January 2015) in which Dr Christopher Edwards of The Clock Shop, Chapel of Garioch wrote very knowledgeably about Highland Railway clocks and some attempts to reinstate them. Chris is an antiquarian horologist and clockmaker, contractor to National Galleries and the National Trust for Scotland.

Chris was contacted and was happy to undertake the commission to make a replacement station clock. Our first problem was that the cost, although very modest for the amount of work required, was about 10 times our award money. However we were able to use the award as a co-funding enticement in bids made to the Railway Heritage Trust and

to the SSE Gordonbush Windfarm Community Fund. With funding applications granted in full from both we were in a position to meet the full cost of the reinstatement.

Whilst Chris was researching the project he discovered what purported to be the original Helmsdale station clock in the possession of a clock dealer. Sadly it was already sold and beyond our reach. As with many original Highland Railway clocks, this original was made by Ferguson Bros of Inverness. It was a weight-driven clock with a long pendulum which would have had to be wound weekly.



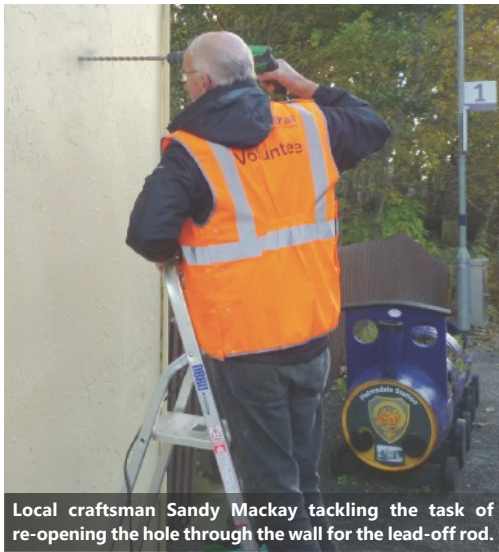
In order to satisfy the railway requirement for an accurate and reliable platform clock, the replacement is required to have a synchronous electric drive. This, like the original, is a double dialled clock. Internally the movement is housed in a mahogany "English dial clock" case of early 20th century vintage, purchased on eBay and suitably refurbished.



The dial is painted and lettered traditionally with Roman numerals. From the rear of the movement a lead-off rod takes the minute information through the concrete wall into the platform-facing slave dial. This dial, with a steel bezel is secured to a wooden baseboard on the external wall, and contains motion-work gearing to convert the

Message from Mark Carne, Chief Executive of Network Rail,

"I am delighted to see that a proper clock will once again be in place at Helmsdale station. There are a few iconic clocks left on the network, but sadly too few, so I especially appreciate this 'reinstatement'".

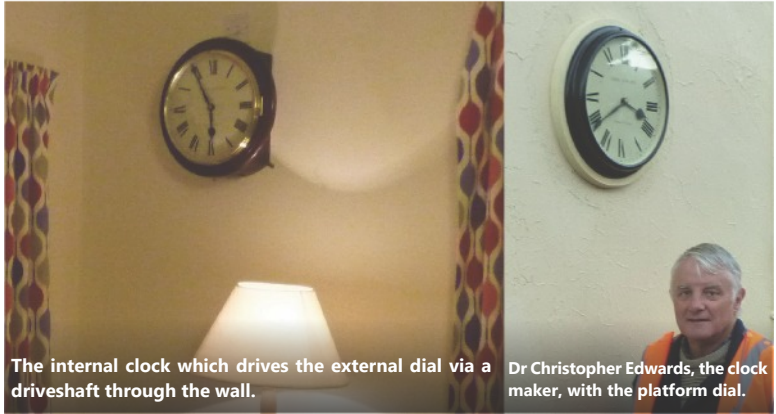


Local craftsman Sandy Mackay tackling the task of re-opening the hole through the wall for the lead-off rod.

minute information to minutes and hours. All this is as the original clock.

Grateful acknowledgment to Network Rail and ScotRail for granting permission for, and welcoming, the reintroduction of the station clock.

To mark its return Chris Edwards, gave a fascinating talk at Timespan (the museum and heritage centre in Helmsdale with which the station has had a number of partnership projects) on *'Clockwork: the Art and Fascination of Mechanical Clocks.'* He was also able to give *'Antiques Roadshow'* style advice to a few people who brought along clocks for his inspection.



The internal clock which drives the external dial via a driveshaft through the wall.

Dr Christopher Edwards, the clock maker, with the platform dial.

Down the line beyond Lairg and just outside the Sutherland estates is Carbisdale Castle, financed by the Sutherland family in the early twentieth century for Dowager Duchess Blair (the widow of the third Duke who built the line) as part of the court settlement at the end of a bitter family feud. The Duchess, it is said motivated by spite, chose as the location for her castle a hillside visible from a large part of Sutherland, and especially from the railway line which the Sutherland family would use to travel south. Her unpleasant motive is supported by the fact that the castle's tower only has clocks on three of its four faces – the side facing Sutherland is blank, supposedly because the Duchess did not wish to give the time of day to her former relatives.

At Helmsdale station the exact opposite is the case! We are delighted to be able to give the time of day to all who use the station. The clock adds to the station planter, waiting room and visitor information point, photographic

darkroom, book exchange scheme and cycle hire facility (more of the last in the next issue of *FNE*) which contribute to making Helmsdale an exemplar community rail partnership station.

Michael Willmot

Since restoration of the derelict station building in 2014, well over 100 people have stayed in the self-catering station accommodation; mostly those who would not otherwise have come to Helmsdale and many rail enthusiasts or those relying on public transport. This has brought some extra business to local shops and amenities. Also, as the station organisation is not for profit, its trading surplus of around £1,000 per year - due to work undertaken by volunteers - is donated to local community causes. www.helmsdalestation.co.uk

I do not know whether any Cheshire men were involved in the Battle of Jutland in 1916 but I would think it highly likely. On Tuesday 31 May 2016, Orkney played host to the national commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the battle. The editor, therefore, suggested that since I live in Orkney, perhaps I could write an article on Jutland for the Ancestor? So here goes...

During WWI, the Royal Navy's Grand Fleet was based at Scapa Flow in Orkney. In fact, the strategic importance of this natural enclosed and protected harbour has been recognised by mariners throughout history. The Vikings used it as a raiding base and that's how the name originates: Scapa comes from the old Norse Word *skalpr* meaning sword or scabbard, but could also be used poetically for ship; Flow also derives from the old Norse *floi* or *fljoy* meaning plenty of water or fjord where ships could be hauled.

Scapa Flow is an area of 270 square miles, roughly sixteen miles by seventeen miles, and has an average depth of 120 feet. It is 400 miles from Jutland Bank, 600 miles from Kiel (German) naval base and 690 miles from the Admiralty based in Whitehall, London. Originally there were seven narrow entrances between various small islands to the Flow, all with strong 10 knot tides, but after the dramatic sinking of HMS *Royal Oak* on 13 Oct 1939 by the German submarine U 47, Winston Churchill ordered the construction of causeways, now known as The Churchill Barriers, to close off the four eastern entrances to the Flow and improve defences. Admiral Sir John Jellicoe said of Scapa Flow... *a fine stretch of water, the centre and pivot of the whole naval side of the war.*

Admiral Jellicoe is best known as Commander of the Grand Fleet in WWI, but to every

serviceman who ever served in both wars in Orkney, his name was more associated with trains! Scapa left its mark on everyone who served there; it was like joining a club of special places of service like Poona, Singapore or the Desert Rats in North Africa. When a serviceman was posted to Orkney, the classic route to Scapa was by train to the north of Scotland and then by boat for at least three tumultuous hours across the treacherous stretch of water between Scotland and Orkney, the Pentland Firth. These trains were affectionately (?) named the "Jellicoes". Journeys began at Euston or King's Cross and the trip of 700 miles could take anything from twenty-four hours to three days. In their splendid book *Scapa Flow*, Michael Brown and Patricia Meehan gathered the personal recollections of servicemen and women and local Orcadians to paint a comprehensive picture of Scapa Flow during both wars. Here are a few quotes from servicemen travelling on the "Jellicoes".

...leaving Devonport late one night, we eventually reached Scapa two nights latermen and baggage everywhere; Moving in or out of the compartment was an obstacle coursethe air was dense with smoke and smelt more like a ship's bilges than a trainon the journey from Portsmouth to Thurso, I lived on pies for three days and we had an occasional wash by putting our heads out of the railway carriage window to catch the raindropscold, my goodness it was cold and a spare blanket of very dubious appearance is at a premium. Snow outside but my neighbour gave me a sip of rum from his hip flask; he'd done this journey beforewhat endless purgatory this isat every stop, we used to try and nip out to grab a cup of teaafter passing through Invergordon, we stopped by a wild remote moor in the darkness and there were the WVS with tables full of cakes and sandwiches.

This article originally appeared in the Cheshire Ancestor, the journal of The Family History Society of Cheshire (<https://fhsc.uk/>). It is reproduced here with the kind permission of the journal's editor, and Suzie Woodward, the article's author. Suzie has lived in Orkney for nearly twenty years and is a proofreader and family history researcher.

But the Jellicoe train was only part of the journey to Scapa; there was the sea crossing to endure across the Pentland Firth. Here's what some servicemen had to say about that.

...we boarded an ancient mail boat and some hardened sailors had found convenient spaces where they could wedge themselves between posts and rails. We passed Dunnet Head and entered the Firth where we received its full welcome - not just ordinary waves, but hills and valleys of deep green sea, the meeting through thousands of years of the Atlantic Ocean and the North Sea creating a nine to ten knot current. One minute we were gazing at clouds and the next we were almost dipping our feet in the Pentland Firth - hence the importance of being wedged!the ship rolled and pitched so much that one moment we were lying almost horizontally on our backs and the next standing on the rail with the swift waters swirling under our feetI remember on one trip hearing a soldier say "I don't mind someone being seasick on me, but when it's someone four places further along the rail and he missed the three in between, that's what I call bloody bad luck!"I remember waiting on the quayside at Stromness to join a ship to go home on leave and I saw men coming north being carried off their boats on stretchers. Wives will never know how we suffered for those ten days at home.

So our brave young servicemen have endured perhaps three fiendishly cold nights on a "Jellicoe" train followed by a three-to-five hour crossing on an old mail boat in a force nine severe gale to reach Orkney - but there's more to follow! For Army or RAF personnel, onward travel was usually by 3-ton truck to their final destination; but for RN personnel, it meant yet more sea journeys to reach their ships anchored out in Scapa Flow. These journeys were undertaken by what were called drifters. Arriving in Orkney, sailors would first be sent to a depot ship which could be described loosely as "holding pens" until the small drifters came alongside to collect personnel allocated to the various ships at anchor. Getting aboard one of these drifters was perhaps the most hazardous

part of their journey. Consider this vivid account of the operation...

...There were often as many as ten drifters alongside the depot ship. It was a nightmare job transferring a full kit-bag, a hammock and a large suitcase and, if you were a tradesman you had a tool box as well which could weigh a hundredweight or more! In the choppy seas of the Flow, the drifters were never still. We poised on the gunwale of one boat until the gunwale of the adjoining one finished its eight to ten feet rise and fall on the swell and then you jumped for it with both arms loaded with your kit! Sometimes you had to make three or four journeys like this to reach the appropriate drifter!

During both world wars, Orkney's population increased more than threefold due to all the service personnel here. Orcadians were, and still are, immensely proud of the part their islands played in these important events, so it was right and proper that the main commemorations of the Battle of Jutland should take place in our capital, Kirkwall, with smaller, but no less important remembrance events, held at the Naval Base at Lyness, on the island of Hoy. The event was on national television and I felt that the BBC did an excellent job in portraying the day of remembrance, peace and commemoration.

I am sure we all remember the wonderful display of poppies at the Tower of London; some of those poppies were brought to Orkney and a similar touching and poignant display was created outside St Magnus Cathedral, the poppies all spilling out of a tiny window far up on the left-hand side of the main door. Most of the shops too had lovely poppy displays in their windows.

Photo: Andrew Simpson



ORCADIAN RAILWAYS

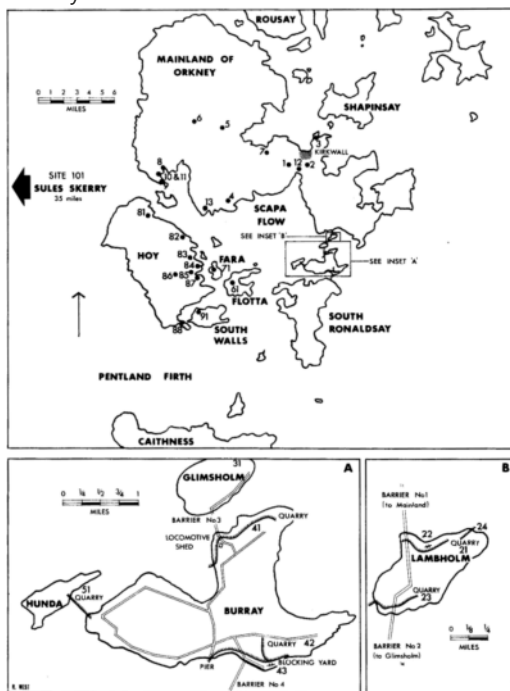
By R. A. BOWEN, B. Sc.

Orkney is a group of about fifty islands, generally low-lying and more fertile than one imagines, lying off the north-east corner of Scotland. The only towns are Stromness and Kirkwall on the Mainland of Orkney, the largest island of the group; both have narrow paved streets, not really suitable for motor traffic. Kirkwall boasts a cathedral of Viking descent, while Stromness is the proud possessor of a museum which, in addition to collecting local relics, is travel minded, though I found no mention of rail-borne systems there at all. The isles generally are so full of historic and prehistoric remains that a trip to study only railways would need a greater enthusiast than I. My wife and I made a trip across the Pentland Firth over Easter 1963 and visited all the places of railway interest to which we had found reference, and some others besides.

In all we visited over twenty-five sites where rail had been used, but I must say that our explorations were not as complete as they might have been. Time and transport restricted our search to the Mainland of Orkney and the southern isles, under conditions which became slightly out-of-hand. It snowed, it blew, planes and boats were cancelled and we were eventually five days late back at work some twenty miles away on the neighbouring mainland of Caithness.

Suffice, to railways (or the editor will not print any of this). Whilst there is still a small amount of standard gauge in the islands, the Orcadian railways are essentially narrow gauge and the majority are those laid down by the Forces or their contractors in the two World Wars.

There are, however, two classes of indigenous civilian systems, which I will deal with first. One belongs to the Northern Lighthouse Commissioners and the other is a series of 2ft systems laid with 'Jubilee' track by the Orkney County Council in its quarries. A typical system consists of lines at the quarry face along which tubs are pushed to the foot of an incline, from where cable haulage is used to the top of a crushing plant. One notable feature is the use of wagon tables instead of points. The track is moved from quarry to quarry as required, but at the time of our visit was laid in Cursiter between Kirkwall and Finstown, and also at Lythes on South Walls. In the past it has been used at Chinglebraes, St. Ola, Workwell, Orphir, Springfield and Harry, all on the Mainland of Orkney.



This article appeared in *The Industrial Railway Record*, the magazine of the Industrial Railway Society, in Issue No.10 June 1966 and is reprinted with permission. Photographs are by the author.

The original article also contains a quite extensive reference section listing Orkney rail sites and locomotives. Visit irsociety.co.uk/ to find this and many other interesting articles.

The Northern Lighthouse Commissioners have their service depot in Stromness and use a little standard gauge track for moving buoys on a trolley. They also have a 2ft 6in system which appears to have been laid when the base was installed in the 1890's. This system serves their own pier and includes several oddities in the way of points and loops. When we were present a tame otter patrolled the system! The



A rare length of track on the pier of Stromness

Commissioners have installed track of the same gauge at some of their lighthouses, where a cable hauled bogie is used to land stores. The only one I have visited is on Sules Skerry, one of a pair of islands about 38 miles west of the Orkney group. A similar system, including a point, exists on the Flannan Isles off the west coast of the Hebrides, and I have heard that there is one on Muckle Flugga, the penultimate northerly rock in Great Britain.

Of the 'military' lines perhaps the most interesting are those installed by Balfour, Beatty & Co. Ltd. (including their associates) for the construction of the Churchill Barriers. These barriers, four in number, replaced in the Second World War the blockships of the First, and were built by Balfour Beatty using prisoner-of-war labour, with the exception of the southern half of the most southerly one which was constructed by William Tawse Ltd. They connected the Mainland of Orkney with South Ronaldsay through the islands of Lambholm, Glimsholm and Burray, making a barrier along the eastern side of Scapa Flow and so forming a defence to the large wartime base there. Today they appear as an unfenced

roadway on top of a mound of concrete blocks, spanning bits of the Atlantic Ocean. Balfour Beatty constructed their barriers by lowering rock from a cable suspended across each strait until sea level was reached, sometimes dealing with depths of up to five fathoms. Then the concrete blocks of three sizes (but typically six feet square by eight feet high) were lowered to form the edges and the basis for the roadway. The sites of the triangular fixtures that anchored the cableways and an attendant hut are still clearly visible in all cases.

These cableways were supplied by 3ft gauge systems, which ran from alongside a pier (though not actually confirmed on any) to the cable and then on to the "Blocking Yard" where the concrete blocks were made. The 3ft lines also served the quarries from which the raw materials were obtained and were frequently supported by a standard gauge system in the blocking yards on which steam cranes operated. Balfour Beatty had a service depot for these sites at Scapa on the Mainland (now a depot of the Orkney County Council Water Dept.), where a small quantity of track remains.

From north to south the lines were as follows. The first was on the north side of Lambholm. This island, otherwise uninhabited, housed the Prisoner-of-War camp, of which all that remains now is the 'Italian Chapel', two beautifully converted Nissen huts. The pier lies to the west, while to the east is the P.o.W. camp site, a few lengths of rail and a large Blocking Yard, with traces of the standard gauge system. The remains of another system exist on the south side of the island with the pier to the west, and to the east a large quarry, a few rails and one building, next to which are truck bodies suitable for carrying concrete blocks. The Blocking Yard was smaller and just before the quarry, but here it is not clear whether or not standard gauge track was used.

On the north side of the small island of Glimsholm there are traces of a 2ft system, leading from a small quarry on the west to the

cableway, but No.3 Barrier was obviously built mainly from the Burray end. On the north side of the latter are the remains of a mile long system leading from a pier on the west, past a cliff face quarry and through a cutting (60ft long and up to 8ft deep), now affected by the sea, to the locomotive shed. From here the line continues past the cable and the remains, high up, of a camp, behind a farm to a quarry, and further up on to the island to a sandpit by a ruined broch (a Pictish dwelling shaped like a G.W.R. safety valve cover, with hollow walls). Here again confirmation of any standard gauge track is lacking, though it may have been to the west of the cable.

On the south side of Burray lie many traces of the longest system to be described. This leads from an old and still used pier on the west behind the village and thence up a hill to the road and past the cableway. It continues to the Blocking Yard with traces of the standard gauge lines, and then along the sand dunes to a reversing point from where it runs uphill to descend into the now flooded quarry.



In addition Balfour Beatty built a small causeway on top of a reef linking the island of Burray with the privately owned one of Hunda in Scapa Flow to the west. A 2ft gauge Jubilee track system was used to convey the stone from a quarry at the western end of the causeway, and this was probably hand worked; the odd sleeper remains in the quarry. Their most interesting 2ft system, however, was used in the construction of two tunnels on the moor above Lyness-on-Hoy, the only generally upland island. Lyness had a large hospital and

naval base in the First World War and in the Second was used for oil storage; it is now an Admiralty Oil Fuel Depot. The tunnels in question issue from Wee Fea about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile apart near the 400ft contour. The line was used to remove spoil and was operated by two diesel locomotives. Though each tunnel was essentially an independent unit, the line did join them and connected with two quarries and an emplacement higher up the hillside. Some of the works were of a substantial nature with proper ballast occurring in places instead of just sand on top of the peat bog. A wagon table remains in one of the quarries since the lifting in 1943, and part of the formation has been adapted to form a single track road.

The hillside in question is full of bunkers and narrow concrete paths, but is otherwise primitive moorland. My exploration was rewarded with sights of grouse and an eagle, as well as a spectacular view at sunset of many of the Orkney islands, the lighthouses twinkling among the dark islets dotted in a turquoise sea.

If we remain at Lyness we can consider the purely Services installations, commencing with the Admiralty. Between the oil tanks set back from the shore and the three huge jetties that form the harbour is the remains of a standard gauge system installed first to serve the floating hospital in 1916 and constructed from bits of the Cromarty & Dingwall Light Railway. It was built by contractors using a steam locomotive (or locomotives) that later worked it. The system lay derelict until the Second World War when it was adapted to the needs of boom laying, acquiring pointwork dated 1937 in the process. In its present state it consists basically of half a square of double track, 150 yards along a limb, which can be used by the two steam cranes that shunt the limited stock (two flat trucks of 1916).

In the same area and serving the same piers is a 2ft system, which in places shares a rail with the standard gauge system. This is an

adaptation of the earliest system on the site - one serving quarrying works by Topham, Jones & Railton Ltd. There do not appear to have been any locomotives in use on it in the Second World War, but that serving the pier at Rinnigill on the South side of the same bay, most certainly did have one diesel. One flat car remains on this track which is still present, but the locomotive was cut up not all that long before my visit.

The War Department also left traces, the most interesting being a self-acting incline about 900 yards long to serve a gun battery at Scad Head half way along the totally unpopulated section of the north-east coast of Hoy. The line ran from a camp set on top of a hill to the emplacement on the cliff top below, but it has been removed so effectively that even its gauge is now in doubt.

Two types of short lengths of 2ft track laid by the War Department can be enumerated. One is a straight length joining two or more huts, or more truthfully, the concrete bases where the huts once were. These exist at the north end of the town of Stromness, at Howton (now a seaweed factory) on the Mainland of Orkney and at Muckle Rysa on Hoy. The second is that in a gun emplacement and which is typically semicircular and about 25 yards long; these exist to the south of Stromness on the mainland, on the south side of Glimsholm and probably in the south-east corner of Flotta. Neither of these types appears to have any interest to the locomotive enthusiast.

The Air Ministry laid a circular line on Fara, an island lying off Lyness, and the diesel locomotive used here was cut up at Rinnigill within the last decade. In addition to these systems there are one or two which appear to be of Ministry origin, but of which I have no further knowledge. At Flotta, where once there was a huge camp and where the Services cinema is still used for dances, wedding receptions, etc., the two piers were connected

by a 2ft system. Some of the track is still laid in the concrete.

Towards the north end of Hoy, just south of Quoys (a farm near Linkness) and separated from the south by four miles of unpopulated country, is the remains of a system some 900 yards in length that ran from a quarry (now a reservoir) alongside a road to a crossroads. One surmises that it is from systems like these that the various privately owned launching trolleys on rails (found all over the islands) originated.

One more rail system remains to be mentioned. That is the monorail of Alexander



The monorail on Lambholm

Sutherland (Contractors) on Lambholm, not far from the Italian Chapel, which lifts shingle from the beach to the hopper on the cliff top. It is quite standard with a Ford engine, mounted at the highest point, which hauls a car up. There are two cars extant, one lashed to the rail and the other lying beside it. It has one unusual feature in that tidal action is used to ensure a ready supply of shingle to the lower hopper.

It will be apparent that the history of the Orcadian railways and locomotives is far from complete; I should like to express my thanks for information to several people in Orkney including the County Surveyor and, in particular, Norman Sinclair of Burray whose house abutted one of the Balfour Beatty lines, and also to Dr I.D.O. Frew, E.S. Lomay, K.P. Plant, C.H.A. Townley and W.K. Williams.

CALEDONIAN SLEEPERS TAKE SHAPE



Production of Caledonian Sleeper's new rolling stock continues at train manufacturer, CAF's, facility in Beasain, Spain.

The images show the construction stages of the coach bodyshell from the initial build through to the exterior painting.

Photos: Serco

