Far North Express

FoFNL
The Friends of the Far North Line

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Railfuture
Best Newsletter
2017
Gold Award

The Magazine of the Friends of the Far North Line

For news and views about rail in the North of Scotland

Cairdean Na Loine Tuath

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

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Cover photo:

158718 in beautiful snowy conditions at Muir of Ord on 9 December 2017, with the 10:41 to Wick.

Photo: **Sandy Colley**

Headcode

2018 will be a memorable year for Scotland's railway. Many projects with a long lead-time will come to fruition. Already electric trains are running between Queen Street and Waverley, and the new trains ordered are being delivered. Work to electrify the route through Shotts is now well under way. The HSTs rescued from GWR will start to appear on other Inter-City routes this year, affording a substantial increase in comfort and convenience for passengers. ASR has had to put up with a lot of flak, some of it undeserved, but with any luck 2018 will be the year which brings compliments and passenger appreciation.

The new Sleeper coaches will arrive too, and ought to be delivering the full timetable by the end of the year. Here the improvement in accommodation will be astonishing, and there will be many of us keenly anticipating our first overnight journey. The plan to introduce a sleeper service from Thurso ("for Orkney") to Edinburgh using the best of the displaced rolling stock should move closer to fulfilment - fingers crossed.

VTEC will be introducing their *Azuma* fleet this year. A unit has been as far north as Inverness already. The electric version operating south from Edinburgh will shave a useful amount of time from the current timetable; we awaited, with interest, detailed timings for the much more challenging bi-mode performance over the hilly HML. A table showing a crucial part of the 15 January run appears on page 10. The technical press has been pessimistic about the suggested uprating of the diesel motors' output for reasons not unconnected with the technical press's unhappiness that the trains were ordered by the DfT (who, you will not have failed to notice, neither operate trains nor have 'customers').

And here? The Review Team met, as reported here, in May 2017 and NR were to go and put flesh on their outline proposals for an improved timetable, and generally to give us a better railway. The putting-on of flesh is going to take as long as it would in real life: the next meeting will be in February, too late for its outcome to be reported here. But a process which occupies the finest minds in NR (Scotland) for nine months surely cannot produce a mere mouse.

So let me say, for what I'm confident will be the last time -

THE LENTRAN LOOP MUST BE BUILT

As Bugs Bunny was fond of saying "That's all, folks!"

Mike Lunan

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!

Editorial

The Far North Line is currently in 'waiting' mode. An announcement is expected soon about the infrastructure works to be undertaken in Control Period 6, 2019-24; the Review Team members have been deliberating about some potentially major changes to the way the FNL is operated and the next meeting of the Team is on 16 February; and then there is the question of how to resolve the many smaller operational issues that beset the line at present. The last few years have not been good for FNL passengers and we have high hopes of much better times to come.

FREIGHT

Railways should not only be about passengers. Now that it is accepted by all political parties that much needs to be done to reduce the use of fossil fuel we make no apology for including four full pages on the subject of freight.

Several influential newspapers have picked up the thread and there is a feeling that the present situation, where it is all too easy for companies to opt for using the freely available road system instead of working out how to transfer major freight flows to rail, is not tenable.

It is lamentable that the Lairg oil trains have been discontinued again - road tankers are not the correct answer for that flow. As Philippa Edmunds of the Campaign for Better Transport said in 2015, "Government needs to treat the different modes equally to allow rail freight to compete on a level playing field; that way the economy and society can benefit from safer less polluting freight distribution which reduces road congestion."

MODAL SHIFT

The eye-watering sums being spent on major road projects in Scotland seem hard to understand when the government knows that modal shift to rail is essential. Only a cynic might have a passing thought including the word 'votes'.

We hope you continue to enjoy the mix of items that find their way into *FNE*. Naturally all suggestions will be considered and all offers of material gratefully received!

Ian Budd

AGM 2018

This year's AGM and Conference will take place on Friday 1 June in Thurso at 11:15. We aim to finish around 16:00 in time for attendees to return south by train.

The venue and speakers will be announced nearer the time.

Helmsdale Station Award

Helmsdale Station CIC (Community Interest Company) has been awarded third place in the ACORP Community Rail Awards 2017, in the category of projects involving children and young people.

Helmsdale Station CIC worked in partnership with Gray's School of Art, Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen.

When the station was being restored a photographic darkroom was included with a view to holding residential study courses for photography students with their tutors. Participants travel to Helmsdale by train, some making their first ever rail journey.

Best Newsletter - Railfuture Gold Award

Railfuture is the UK's leading independent organisation campaigning for better rail services for passengers and freight, with branches in Scotland, Wales and England. It is a voluntary group representing rail users, with 20,000 affiliated and individual members. It holds two conferences each year as well as its AGM. At the annual autumn conference awards are given in several categories for the varied work done by rail user groups. In 2017 *Far North Express* was entered in the Best Newsletter category. We are delighted that at the conference in Leicester on November 4th it was announced that *FNE,* and the newsletter of the Tarka Rail Association in Devon, were given the Gold Award in this category.

We were particularly pleased that Railfuture's award shows the future double-track section of the FNL that we've been campaigning so hard for!

The award was presented by Railfuture's Honorary President, the transport writer and broadcaster Christian Wolmar *(above right)*. Gavin Sinclair, a former FoFNL secretary, originally from Watten, between Thurso and Wick, kindly accepted the award on FoFNL's behalf.

On the display were the judges' comments:

Exceptionally accessible and well formed. Engaged the needs of the reader with a thorough review of issues of interest; worth reading even for those not interested in the Far North Line. Good aesthetics and content, well balanced between information and digestibility.

We try hard to make *Far North Express* a good mix of opinion, news and interesting articles. Rhoda Grant, one of our Vice-Presidents, kindly tabled a motion in Holyrood:

Motion S5M-08720: Rhoda Grant, Highlands and Islands, Scottish Labour, Date Lodged: 08/11/2017

That the Parliament congratulates the campaign group, Friends of the Far North Line, and the editor of its newsletter, Ian Budd, on recently winning the Best Newsletter Gold Award; notes that the award was presented by Railfuture, the UK's leading independent organisation campaigning for better rail services for passengers and freight; further notes that it was presented by Christian Wolmar, railway journalist and President of Railfuture, and praises all members of Friends of the Far North Line for keeping up the pressure to bring improvements in infrastructure, journey time and services on the railway lines connecting through Inverness.

Here's a radical idea: let's scrap the current fare structure and build a new one. Seems there are lots of people out there who don't like present position - it's complicated, often illogical, and allegedly prevents people who don't use the railway nowadays from giving it a try.

What criteria should drive a revision? What are the difficulties?

FoFNL Convener Mike Lunan muses on ScotRail's current fare structure.

The basic framework should be that the new system taken over the whole of Scotland should neither increase nor decrease the size of the amount taken in fares. Scottish Ministers will not wish to increase the subsidy agreed in the franchise (so no net reduction in fares) and passengers will not wish to pay more merely as a result of a change in the structure. So it must be revenue-neutral. It must also be a great deal simpler.

Any change will mean that some journeys will cost less, while others will cost more. This unpleasant fact must not be dodged, nor must the increase be fudged by some means, as this will conflict with the need to keep things simple. The pain of increased fares will soon fade: if it is mitigated it will last longer. While the holder of the ScotRail franchise operates over 90% of the services in Scotland three other daytime train operating companies (TOCs) also run here: Virgin Trains East Coast (VTEC) runs services from Berwick (and points south) to Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness and Aberdeen. CrossCountry (CC) runs services from Berwick (and points south) to Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen. Trans-Pennine Express (TPE) runs services from Manchester Airport via Carlisle to Glasgow and Edinburgh. TPE is the only TOC serving Lockerbie. Sleeper services are not covered in this plan - the Sleeper market is sufficiently differentiated from daytime travel for there to be no need for change.

We start with a blank sheet of paper. What system might we model? One of the simplest is the Japanese, helped of course by the fact that inflation there has been zero or negative for so long that fares have remained constant for many years. (As there are no "bullet train" (*Shinkansen*) equivalent services in Scotland the supplements charged in Japan are ignored in this paper.)

There are two fare bands - "trunk lines" and "rural lines". Some journeys encompass both trunk and rural sections. For journeys up to 400km the trunk fare is roughly linear at ¥16 per km (£1 = ¥150 in round numbers). Thus a 400km journey on trunk lines in Japan costs around £42. Above 400km the price per km tapers, with an 800km journey costing £70 and a 1200km journey costing £90. Journeys on rural lines are inevitably shorter, again with little tapering under 400km. 400km and 800km (the maximum) journeys costing respectively £45 and £75. It will be noted that ticket prices in Japan on rural lines are typically up to 10% higher per km than journeys on trunk routes. This added complexity seems out of place, and it is doubtful whether a similar structure would be popular with passengers in Scotland given that a large proportion of the routes in Scotland would be classed as rural. This paper therefore discards the idea of a dual structure based on the type of line.

The great simplicity of the Japanese system (modified by ignoring rural lines) is that the length of the journey is the only determinant of the ticket price: nothing could be easier to understand. A degree of tapering is sensible as most commercial purchases of any commodity (or goods) expect a discount for quantity, and rail travel ought not to be an exception. Where,

and to what degree, a taper should operate is a matter for detailed examination. The points of change should be round numbers of miles (eg. 100 and 400) reflecting the fact that Scotland is much smaller than Japan, and relatively few journeys exceed 400 miles. A suggested ticket cost would be X pence per mile up to 100 miles, 0.85X pence for the next 300 miles (giving an average of 0.89X per mile, being roughly the same proportion as in Japan for 800km journeys). Any excess over 400 miles could be charged at 0.75X pence per mile. There would no longer be any variation between a journey of 100 miles between say Aberdeen to Kirkcaldy on the East Coast Main Line (now £29) and Thurso to Tain on the Far North Line (now £17.40). Clearly there will be problems in introducing a system where the two prices are harmonized - a good reason why the exercise has lain for so long in the "too difficult" box.

Transport Scotland will have the data necessary to determine the value of X such that the change would be revenue-neutral. Carrying out this exercise will deliver valuable insights about where stresses are likely to occur, and will indicate where modifications may be needed. Historically, unlike Japan, ticket prices on rural routes have been lower than on trunk routes. This can be ascribed to the policy of accepting that rural communities are often disadvantaged purely by their remoteness, and seeking to ameliorate this by ensuring that travel to urban locations (for health, education etc.) should be subsidized to a greater degree than travel elsewhere. It would be simple to carry out a desk-top study where rural journeys (which would be easy to define) would cost kX pence per mile, with k chosen appropriately (k = 0.6 in the example given above).

Once a clear and simple structure is agreed for a normal single ticket thought must be given to other types of ticket. A simple factor of 1.5 for First Class would seem sensible. A return ticket would not exist: there would instead be a single ticket for the outward journey and a separate single ticket for the return. (In Japan a 10% discount is allowed if the return ticket is bought at the same time, but I see no good reason to copy this.) The opportunity for the TOC to market special bargain fares (perhaps at Christmas, or in the summer holidays) to particular destinations would permit a discount being offered on return travel. As this would not be routine it would represent a genuine advantage to intending passengers.

Japan offers no discount for advance purchase, and I see no good reason to introduce that layer of complexity. Apart from a price advantage, the only reason for buying an Advance ticket here is that it brings a reserved seat - or it used to. CrossCountry has rendered that advantage nugatory. There is evidence on any long-distance service nowadays that a significant proportion of reserved seats are not taken up, causing confusion and annoyance to turn-up-and-go passengers. Formerly a small charge was made to reserve a seat, and it would be worth exploring whether a return to a modest charge (not more than £1) would be resisted. If there were no longer any incentive to buy a ticket in advance for price reasons, the attraction of a guaranteed seat for an extra £1 might be significant.

TOCs would be denied the flexibility they now have to price seats according to demand as the time to travel shortens. However this adds greatly to the complexity of the pricing system, exactly what this paper is seeking to eliminate. A passenger who pays £250 for a turn-up-and-go 200 mile journey is not delighted to discover that the passenger in the next seat paid only £40. The rail industry suffers reputational damage when this happens: the story is not "how inexpensive an advance purchase seat can be", but "how much we're being ripped off by the railway". Denying a TOC the ability to adjust prices is not an infringement: it's a much-needed simplification. Devising special seasonal bargain fares, as described above, would not be ruled out, but would be seen as "special" rather than routine.

Mike Lunan

It is highly probable that the Far North and Kyle lines would not continue to operate if there was no Highland Main Line. If there was no Aberdeen to Inverness line either that probability becomes a racing certainty. This is why FoFNL takes a keen interest in both lines.

In December 2008 these two lines were named as priorities 3 and 4 respectively in the Scottish Government's Strategic Transport Policy Review. The Queensferry Crossing and the Edinburgh-Glasgow rail Improvement Programme (EGIP) were numbers 1 and 2. Dualling the A9 and A96 trunk roads were lesser priorities.

What has happened since then to let the HML slip back so badly while the major £3billion A9 dualling project powers ahead? Now that Queensferry is complete and EGIP well advanced, may we see some real progress on comprehensively modernising the HML to allow it to play its true potential role in providing a carbon-friendly and sustainable alternative to the A9 for travellers and freight please?

In the early days of the Hydro Electric Board its Chairman, Tom Johnston, is understood to have offered to electrify the HML using power from the Tummel Valley hydro schemes. As he recognised in the early Fifties, this line with its long steep gradients would now be the foremost beneficiary of any in Scotland from electrification (after the Carlisle to Glasgow line via Beattock Summit which was wired 40 years ago). Electrification allows top speeds on hills as we have seen from the TGV high speed lines in France. Top journey time reductions are what HML passengers need. Until recently the government aspiration was to electrify all lines between the seven Scottish cities by 2030. Dunblane to Perth next and then Perth to Inverness??

The DfT in London has recently promoted bi-mode hybrid electric trains with an auxiliary diesel motor slung underneath as an alternative to electrification and some of these are now being built by Hitachi in County Durham. The first one of these class 800 trains reached Inverness on test from Doncaster on 15 December, but lost time on the gradients northbound to Druimuachdar and southbound to Slochd.

Writing in the January 2018 issue of Modern Railways, respected engineer and regular columnist, Roger Ford, refers to the first observations from Railway Performance Society members of in-service running by class 800 bi-modes. One conclusion is that the 750hp diesel engines need to be uprated to 900hp to match the previous HST train performance. Presumably this would apply to the HML also.

Roger's evidence to the House of Commons Welsh Affairs Committee on 21 November is well worth reading. He states that in both modes, the bi-mode represents a "sub-optimal" solution:

"With up to 10 tonnes of diesel power pack and fuel under 60% of its coaches, when running as an electric train a bi-mode is an overweight Electric Multiple Unit, and in diesel mode it is underpowered".

Speed and reliability

Compared with the existing A9 trunk road it is obvious that the single track railway between Inverness, Perth and both Edinburgh and Glasgow is too slow. The

£3bn upgrade to finish dualling the A9 between Perth and Inverness by 2025 is likely to make the railway even less competitive for both passengers and freight.

The former First Minister, Alex Salmond recognised this when he said in Inverness in August 2008 that "railways must at least compete with roads". Nicola Sturgeon, when she was Cities Minister, said that the railways between all seven Scottish cities should be electrified and the Scottish Chambers of Commerce asserted in 2015 that "Scotland's northern cities need to be better connected and single track railways linking Inverness, Aberdeen and the Central Belt are **'unacceptable'** in the 21st century".

The Reform Scotland think tank "On the right track" briefing paper published on 27 December calls for a Scottish Rail Infrastructure Commission to look at a strategic transformation in the rail network between now and 2050. Board Member and former UK Transport Minister and Glasgow MP, Tom Harris, repeats his comment of a year ago:

"Do we really want to be in a situation where it could take less time to reach London from Edinburgh than it does to reach Inverness?"

"While rail links to London are important, so too are links within Scotland, links which are sadly lacking at present."

Faster trains are to be introduced on the HML later this year and the May 2019 timetable will see services speeded up. Timetabling work is ongoing and could see some services from Inverness to Edinburgh poised to nearly break the 3 hour end to end journey time barrier. Extra trains should see the service become hourly, but at a cost to the journey times of other trains because of the crippling capacity constraints caused by so much of the line from Inverness to Perth and onwards to Ladybank in Fife being single track with passing places.

The case for doubling much more of the line is further strengthened by breakdown incidents such as that to the Caledonian Sleeper's hired-in locomotive north of Dalwhinnie on 6 November. Ten ScotRail trains were cancelled in full and eight more for part of their journeys. ScotRail services incurred 417 minutes of delay and freight services were also affected. Multiply that by the number of passengers affected and the damage to both individual lives and to the economy is huge.

We do not need a Scottish Rail Infrastructure Commission to tell us that capacity and speed improvements to the HML are needed now. We just need the long promised comprehensive modernising of the line. Where the proposed SRIC might help would be to argue the case for reinstating a direct line from Edinburgh to Perth. A double track electric line would be a big boost to the Tayside and Kinross economy, reducing the journey time to and from Perth by 30 minutes. Passengers would feel the effects of the 30 minute saving all the way to Wick and Kyle with a competitive time of 2 hours 30 on the Edinburgh to Inverness part of the journey. That would be well worth having. An environmentally friendly and sustainable railway might then become the preferred option for both passengers and freight. That is the future!

High time for the Government to implement its 2008 promises!

Richard Ardern

When will we reach the point when we can say we have a modernised 21st century line? It seems such a long and weary battle since the heady days of the STPR promises in 2008. They were almost ten years ago, and now it is five years that we have been waiting for details of the CP5 improvements which gained qualified acceptance and funding of £121M from the ORR in 2013 even though the details and costs were not then available. Now it seems less will be spent and the reinstated loops which were suggested to ease capacity will not happen until CP6.

"We are where we are", as the saying goes and signalling improvements and loop upgradings at Aviemore and Pitlochry are planned to be completed by the end of CP5 in March 2019. On the brighter side too, the most recent sign of progress is the first appearance of a new Hitachi *Azuma* electric/diesel bimode train on an 18 hour long test run from Doncaster and back on Friday 15 December.

These trains are expected to shave 20 minutes off the London to Edinburgh journey time in electric mode (which might mean there will be a different departure time for the *Highland Chieftain* northbound from Edinburgh). In diesel mode, the worry is that the Azumas might be slower than the current HST sets on the long steep Highland gradients. The northbound schedule on 15 December is shown here.

	Working Timetable		Realtime		
	Arr	Dep	Arr	Dep	Delay
Perth	1456	1502½	**1451**	**1456**	6E
Stanley	pass	1510½	pass	**1511**	RT
Dunkeld & Birnam	pass	1518½	pass	**1526**	7L
Pitlochry	1530	1543	**1539**	**1546**	3L
Blair Atholl	pass	1552	pass	**1558**	6L
Dalnacardoch	pass	1602		No Report	
Dalnaspidal	pass	1608½		No Report	
Dalwhinnie	pass	1614	pass	**1623**	9L
Newtonmore	pass	1622½		No Report	
Kingussie	1625	1647½	**1637**	*1647*	12L

This was exactly the same over "The Hill" as the HST Pitlochry to Kingussie start to stop schedule. The HST is allowed an extra one minute recovery time before Dalwhinnie. This trial is only one run with a new train and there was a bit of snow about, but nothing unusual for winter.

It is concerning nevertheless to see a loss of three minutes to Blair Atholl and another three minutes over the hill to Dalwhinnie followed by a further three minutes lost down the hill to the stop at Kingussie. Nine minutes down on the current schedule. A three minute late start became a twelve minute late arrival.

The return service at 19:13 lost 6 minutes between Inverness and Aviemore, but as no actual timings are given by Realtime Trains for Slochd (where it was due to wait in the loop for five and a half minutes to cross the northbound HST) it is impossible to work out how well it did on the climb. Sometimes Slochd loop is out of use, in which case the train might have been held at Tomatin.

By the May 2019 timetable, we should have the ScotRail HSTs and the Virgin East Coast *Azumas* in service. The Caledonian Sleeper will have new carriages too. The line will be quite different with some faster trains and more services and seats and with better paths (and fewer stops) between Perth and Edinburgh/Glasgow. Modernised loops at Aviemore and Pitlochry and improved signalling should all help.

What is urgently needed then is expanded capacity for both passenger and freight trains by replacing single track sections with double. Preparation for greater resilience from flooding and, importantly, preparation for electrification should then follow.

Richard Ardern

A NEW RAILWAY FOR THE NEW YEAR

All concerned are to be congratulated on the improvements made to this line which came in to service on 17 October. According to Network Rail's retweet of an "*insideMORAY*" article all this work has cost £80M.

The new station at Forres has two platforms, lifts and more car and cycle parking spaces. Elgin and Insch now have platforms to cope with six coach trains, and the signalling system on substantial sections of the line has been fully updated and these are now controlled from Inverness. Train services should be several minutes faster but this has not yet been written in to the timetable. Arrivals at Elgin from Forres are now frequently several minutes early.

Phase 1 of the Aberdeen to Inverness improvement scheme (which aims eventually to give an hourly service end to end with a journey time of two hours) is also to include redoubling of the track from Aberdeen (sic) to Inverurie together with infrastructure to allow for new stations at Kintore and Inverness Airport (Dalcross). [Transport Scotland website 5 January]. This second part of Phase 1 was due to have started by now, but there is a worrying lack of up to date information at present. It is unfortunate that this initial work is now being described as the completion of Phase 1 which could lead to some confusion. Perhaps it should be called Phase 1A with the second part as 1B?

NEW FREIGHT FLOWS??

Sadly, the connection at Alves to the Burghead branch has now been severed which means that no rail freight traffic can now come directly out of the new Diageo whisky plant. More encouraging is the revelation in the *Inverness Courier* on 2 January that Norbord are talking to Network Rail about the rail freight option but the quotes from the timber industry and from Scottish Government Minister Fergus Ewing MSP, do not confirm that it will happen. It is understood that the new signalling module for the line at Inverness should facilitate the reinstatement of a siding at this location. It is a great pity the original siding was built over.

Possibilities for timber traffic and whisky related traffic from elsewhere on the line require further development work. A new opportunity is presented by the Co-op's decision to site its new distribution depot for the north at Inverness Airport Business Park.

Richard Ardern

The late running 09:00 Inverness-Aberdeen at Forres on 17th October 2017. Photo: Sandy Colley

Parliamentary Questions

Question S5W-12961: Monica Lennon, Central Scotland, Scottish Labour, answered: 07/12/17

To ask the Scottish Government what the take-up rate has been of the ScotRail Smartcard; when it will be rolled out across all routes; what it considers the advantages of the card are, and how the services that it offers compare with the Oyster Card in London and other similar cards across the UK.

Humza Yousaf: ScotRail's Smartcard has been introduced on all routes and is available for most ticket types.

There are a number of advantages for passengers using a ScotRail smartcard (Saltire Card). Some special promotional fares are only available on Smart. Super Off Peak Day Return and Club 50 are exclusive to Smart which provide discount travel. For Smart season ticket holders, exclusive online benefits are also offered, including discounts and deals on the high street. Smart also offers more convenience for passengers as tickets can be purchased online making it faster and easier with no need to queue at the ticket office as well as providing more security against lost and stolen cards. Smartcard also brings the rail industry in line with other transport operators and it provides the opportunity for Transport Scotland to expand and create new ways of making Scotland's public transport interoperable.

ScotRail will be piloting Account Based Ticketing in 2018, which will allow payment to be added to Smartcards and offer passengers daily and weekly best fares without having to purchase tickets before travelling (similar to that which is offered on Oyster in London).

Question S5W-12962: Monica Lennon, Central Scotland, Scottish Labour, answered: 05/12/17

To ask the Scottish Government, further to the answer to question S5W-03905 by Humza Yousaf on 28 October 2016, how many smartcards a person would need to travel by bus, rail, ferry, subway and tram.

Humza Yousaf: We continue to work towards our vision that all journeys on Scotland's bus, rail, ferry, subway and tram can be made using some form of smart ticket or payment. For some time now this has focused on creating an infrastructure across all of Scotland that can support saltirecards (ITSO secure smartcard) and – particularly for bus - contactless bank cards (EMV).

To make using public transport around Scotland a simpler experience for the public, and having now largely put the infrastructure in place, we are now working to improve smart ticketing interoperability by persuading over 200 transport operators across all modes to accept products on each others' cards.

Over the last few months many of the major operators have also launched EMV on their services, benefiting the travelling public with an additional, easy and convenient way to pay. As technology moves apace we are also looking to take advantage of ITSO's emerging options for using a mobile phone rather than a smartcard.

Lastly, we have just closed our "Future of Smart Ticketing" consultation (December 5th) which considers whether legislation and governance requirements are needed to enable further, quicker progress with this consistent and standardised approach.

Question S5W-13181: Rhoda Grant, Highlands and Islands, Scottish Labour, answered: 20/12/17

To ask the Scottish Government how many trains were (a) cancelled or (b) delayed by the northbound Caledonian Sleeper breakdown on the single track north of Dalwhinnie on 6 November 2017, and what the total delay minutes were.

Humza Yousaf: As a result of the breakdown of the Caledonian Sleeper locomotive north of Dalwhinnie on 6 November, ten ScotRail trains were cancelled in full and eight more in part; three trains which completed their journeys were delayed for more than five minutes; and ScotRail services as a whole incurred 417 minutes of delay.

Question S5W-13183: Rhoda Grant, Highlands and Islands, Scottish Labour, answered: 19/12/17

To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to double-track the Highland rail mainline between Dalwhinnie and Newtonmore, and whether it plans to double-track the other remaining sections of the line.

Humza Yousaf: Phase 2 of the Highland Main Line Enhancements Programme, which aims to deliver faster more frequent journeys by spring 2019, used the Rail industry Governance for Railway Investment Projects (GRIP) process to develop and select a preferred option that was output focused, this combines timetable enhancements, better performance of the High Speed Trains (HST's) to be introduced on the route, and infrastructure interventions at key train passing points at Aviemore and Pitlochry.

Currently there are no plans to double-track the Highland Main Line between Dalwhinnie and Newtonmore or other remaining sections of the line.

The following question produced an interesting fact in the paragraph extracted from the full answer:

Question S5W-12510: Kate Forbes, Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch, Scottish National Party, answered: 15/11/17

To ask the Scottish Government what investment it is making in the West Highland Line.

Humza Yousaf: *[extract]*...The Programme for Government, published in September 2017 also highlighted the development of proposals to introduce dedicated carriages for cycles and other outdoor equipment on rural routes in the north and west.

Station Usage Figures 2016-17

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	One Year Change	Two Year Change
Wick	21,442	19,766	18,438	-6.72%	-14.01%
Thurso	42,082	38,426	37,322	-2.87%	-11.31%
Georgemas Junction	1,696	1,572	1,502	-4.45%	-11.44%
Scotscalder	388	294	200	-31.97%	-48.45%
Altnabreac	240	312	356	14.10%	48.33%
Forsinard	1,456	1,516	2,124	40.11%	45.88%
Kinbrace	528	456	464	1.75%	-12.12%
Kildonan	96	170	76	-55.29%	-20.83%
Helmsdale	5,096	6,204	5,768	-7.03%	13.19%
Brora	5,616	5,524	5,616	1.67%	0.00%
Dunrobin Castle	822	782	882	12.79%	7.30%
Golspie	6,770	5,192	5,718	10.13%	-15.54%
Rogart	1,522	1,710	1,948	13.92%	27.99%
Lairg	7,514	6,592	5,576	-15.41%	-25.79%
Invershin	486	706	826	17.00%	69.96%
Culrain	530	432	372	-13.89%	-29.81%
Ardgay	8,416	6,732	7,144	6.12%	-15.11%
Tain	30,004	27,896	28,622	2.60%	-4.61%
Fearn	6,130	5,396	5,262	-2.48%	-14.16%
Invergordon	31,962	29,054	27,886	-4.02%	-12.75%
Alness	25,934	23,614	26,376	11.70%	1.70%
Dingwall	87,782	82,508	80,900	-1.95%	-7.84%
Conon Bridge	15,510	15,276	15,494	1.43%	-0.10%
Muir Of Ord	66,576	66,480	64,480	-3.01%	-3.15%
Beauly	57,446	59,406	52,870	-11.00%	-7.97%
Inverness	1,303,662	1,306,556	1,259,496	-3.60%	-3.39%
Total (Excluding Inverness)	426044	406016	396222	-2.41%	-7.00%

These are the figures issued by the Office of Rail Regulation. They show an overall drop of 2.41% in the total for the Far North Line excluding Inverness (for which no FNL-only figures exist) compared with last year's drop of 4.7%. 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.

Passengers First...

NETWORK RAIL IN CRISIS

On November 15th expressions of concern were circulating round the FoFNL committee about the short amount of time remaining for NR to complete work on the December 2017 timetable in time for the information to make its way into the advanced ticket booking system. It transpired that, among other things, Network Rail had made an extraordinary decision to suspend this work until they had finished dealing with details needed for the May 2018 timetable. An informed source observed:

"To my mind it is like a chef preparing everything for a lavish dinner party tonight but then being called away in mid-cook to prepare breakfast for the following morning."

Sometimes 'tunnel vision' seems to be used in decision-making, to the detriment of passengers' needs.

SMART TICKETING

Our convener, Mike Lunan, has been much exercised by the topic of Smart Ticketing. Writing to Robert Samson, of Transport Focus, he explained:

Lest there be misunderstanding – I am all in favour of smart ticketing (the smarter, the better) being *available* across as many transport modes as possible but my concern is that smart cards may soon become *compulsory* and that I will resist with my last breath. I don't think that politicians and officials who sing the praises of smart ticketing actually use trains or buses very much. The benefits are clear to see (for transport providers and people with smart phones already) but the drawbacks tend to be hidden, and more readily seen by transport users than by people in offices with ministerial cars. How often are there people whose battery has run out at the wrong time? More, I suggest, than those who have dropped their paper ticket in a puddle rendering it unreadable. The real killer for me is the encounter with the stroppy individual in my seat who won't move until the guard (should there be one, of course) boots him out by waving my paper reserved seat portion in front of him. Who will wave a smartphone in front of a stroppy individual lest it be grasped from the hand and crushed in a hairy paw?

Responding to this passage in the DfT White Paper "*Connecting people: a strategic vision for rail*", published 29-11-17:

3.5 "The paper ticket needs to be largely consigned to history, and we have set a goal of securing smart ticketing across almost all of the rail network by the end of 2018, *while maintaining suitable provision for users for whom smart technology is not suitable.*" (Mike's italics)

Mike wrote:

This is dangerous nonsense. Couching the use of paper tickets as somehow quaint, and merely an interesting historical relic, implies that the DfT has little interest in those passengers (a proportion unknown, surely) who, for whatever reason, do not now use mobile phones to serve as rail tickets. These include the old (mobile phone usage being less among the old than the young), the poor, for whom a mobile phone – certainly a smartphone – is an expense too great, those who actually like to have their travel details (including their seat reservation) written down on a piece of card, those whose mobile phone has a run-down battery ... the list goes on. It is rather charmingly naive of DfT to maintain "suitable provision", as though it were necessary to invent some new mechanism for any travelling peasant without a phone. The suitable provision is a magnetic stripe ticket, and requires no consultant to pronounce upon its suitability.

Level Crossings Latest

The news from Alex Sharkey of Network Rail is that the level crossing work mentioned in *FNE 72* has been successfully commissioned - Balnacra on 15 November and Brora, Rovie and Lairg on 26 November.

Alex reminds us that the resulting lifting of the speeds that trains can pass these points is only part of the improvement story, the work helps with general speed management of the train approaching and leaving the sites, with heavy braking and acceleration no longer needed.

The timetable benefit for each line speed improvement is listed in the table below:

Crossing Name	Existing Crossing Speeds		Proposed Crossing Speeds		Journey time reduction	
	Up	Down	Up	Down	Up	Down
Lairg	X15	X15	X20/40	No Change	24s	-
Balnacra	X25/40	X10/20	X25/45	X10/25	9s	9-11s
Brora	X10/15	X10/15	X10/25	No Change	20s	-
Rovie	X25	X10	X25/40	X10/25	17-18s	49-55s

The crossing speeds marked in the table are freight/passenger.

Jellicoe Express Plaques

2017 was the centenary of the establishment of the "Jellicoe Expresses" which conveyed servicemen to and from the Naval base at Scapa Flow in Orkney.

Moya Macdonald, of Another Orkney Production, has been instrumental in organising the placing of 15 plaques along the route of the train. Admiral Sir John Jellicoe's grandson John, and Captain Chris Smith from Rosyth, have performed a marathon of being present at 11 each, of the 13 unveilings so far.

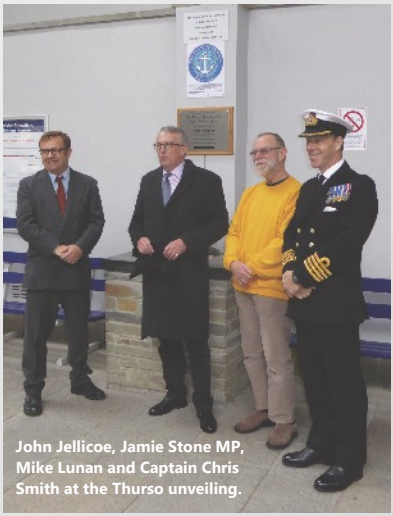
There are two plaques to be unveiled in 2018; one in Forsinard, sponsored by HITRANS, and one in Hawick which temporarily (since 1969) does not have a station or a railway.

FoFNL very fittingly sponsored the plaque at Thurso which was unveiled by our President, Jamie Stone MP, on October 5th, in the presence of several FoFNL committee members.

AOP is grateful for much help given by ScotRail Ambassador John Yellowlees.

Plaques in order of unveiling

Waverley	30-04-17
Inverkeithing	30-04-17
Inverness	01-05-17
Dingwall	01-05-17
Perth	02-05-17
Galashiels	27-08-17
Helmsdale	30-09-17
Thurso	05-10-17 sponsored by FoFNL
Euston	05-12-17 sponsored by Caledonian Sleeper
Invergordon	06-12-17
Alness	06-12-17 sponsored by Highland Rlwy Soc
Kingussie	12-12-17
Aviemore	12-12-17
Forsinard	2018 sponsored by HITRANS
Hawick	2018



John Jellicoe, Jamie Stone MP, Mike Lunan and Captain Chris Smith at the Thurso unveiling.

Few would disagree that railfreight should have a key role in serving industry in a safer cleaner way which reduces road congestion and improves productivity. The Government -directed closure of coal fired power stations will benefit the environment but it has led to a substantial loss of traffic for railfreight companies. This has not been compensated for by equally robust Government environmental directives to move other freight traffic from road to rail. We are in danger of having a weakened railfreight industry because of it.

In the Highlands, Frank Roach of HITRANS has done a great amount of useful work in identifying potential rail freight traffic. This deserves grateful recognition. But regulation is so skewed in favour of using road haulage that, despite a severe shortage of HGV drivers, it has been difficult to make progress. The lack of capacity on the predominantly single track railways is a major factor too. Capital expenditure is needed.

TIMBER

Timber logs used to be carried by rail within and from the Highlands. The amount of timber being harvested is growing and this is likely to continue for the next 40 years, but at present none of it is going by rail. Frank's *"Branchliner"* project to take timber in bulk from Kinbrace and Georgemas on the FNL to users such as Norbord near Inverness is now with the timber industry to action.

The industry is saying that an ageing railway line lacking in freight yards, modern sidings and loading areas make it unviable for an individual company to make the pioneering greener move from road to rail. There are Government grants available but they are seen to be insufficient when it is so easy to put logs on a truck and leave the authorities to strengthen the roads and the police to deal with mishaps.

Norbord expanded its factory and built over its previous siding, but has now opened a new factory and needs double its previous roundwood supply. Not all of this will come from forests close to a railway, but the railway would certainly be a better option to get the wood out from the flow country where the roads are not robust. Public funding of a siding and associated passing loop at Kinbrace would have wider benefits for the operation of the railway. A combination of company and public funding at the factory end could provide the siding and the signalling to get this project under way.

We do need all parties to co-operate to solve this logjam in funding.

SPIRITS

There is a similar situation in Moray with all the many different streams of traffic associated with the whisky industry. This is another expanding industry. Frank Roach organised the *"Lifting the Spirits"* trial based on Elgin three years ago which showed what could be done. It is likely that Keith might prove to be a better site for the concentration depot which would be needed for outwards and inbound traffic. There is railway land available with access for lorries.

The amount of lorry traffic generated to and from Moray along the narrow A95 is of some concern. Again, the industry needs a strong incentive to adopt the rail solution for some of this traffic. Public expenditure elsewhere on tackling road surfaces, congestion, emissions etc could be saved, but history has proven little will from companies to change habits. Using the road is so easy.

GROCERIES AND SUPPLIES

Intermodal carriage of groceries by rail and road has been one of the fastest growing sectors of railfreight. The Highland Main Line (HML) still has the Stobart Tesco train to Inverness following on from the pioneering Safeway train to Inverness and on to Georgemas which only ceased because Safeway were taken over and the depot goalposts moved.

The Co-op is going to build a new distribution depot at Inverness Airport Business Park. It would be good to see the bulk supplies coming in by rail and maybe some of the finished product from Norbord nearby could piggy back as a return load?

Not many years ago there was a daily bulk parcels train to Inverness for DHL. The firm's circumstances changed and it ceased to run. Menzies Distribution is now a big player in parcels at Inverness. Maybe the train could be revived through co-operation with other companies and a wood product return load? Maybe a section could travel on to Georgemas and supersede some of the numerous "white vans" on the A9?

LOGISTICS AND SOLUTIONS

There are other freight flows which could go by rail. Rail freight gains competitively the longer the distance to be hauled. The Highlands are well placed to take advantage of this. What must be sorted first is the scourge of the growing single track capacity limitations on the number of trains and on operational robustness and resilience. As the Scottish Chambers of Commerce have said "Single track lines to Scotland's cities are unacceptable in the 21st century".

A concerted programme to double track the HML and the Aberdeen to Inverness railway for increased passenger and freight use (and for the two to act as diversionary routes for each other) is sorely needed. At present it is a severe handicap to both the Highland and the Scottish economies. Modern, efficient railway lines to Inverness and Aberdeen and further north should be strategic imperatives for Scotland. The many environmental benefits of, and sustainability of, using the railways make this a no-brainer.

Let us get these lines modernised and better used for freight as well as for passengers!

Richard Ardern

Freight Modal Shift

Since the last issue of FNE there has been a flurry of items in the press about the need to achieve modal-shift of freight from road to rail in significant quantities. Mixed messages come from the Scottish Government which, on the one hand recognises the need to move rapidly towards less consumption of non-renewable power, but on the other feels the need to dual both the A9 between Perth and Inverness and the A96 Aberdeen to Inverness road.

The first of the three press pieces reproduced here is from the Sunday Herald editorial on 24 September 2017

On the Wrong Track Over Highland Rail

The Scottish Government's Programme for Government earlier this month promised to "electrify" the A9 between Perth and Inverness for road vehicles. The plan was widely welcomed.

But there were no similar promises for the Highland main line. It is single track for much of its length, and the passing places are only long enough for freight trains of 300 metres.

Elsewhere in the country, freight trains are 500 or more metres long on much of the rest of the network. That clearly inhibits the potential for rail freight, as do slow journey times.

Ministers are aware of these problems and say they want to significantly boost rail freight by 7.5 per cent by 2024. They know that rail freight could make an important contribution to slowing climate change, as it produces 76 per cent less carbon pollution than road haulage.

A few companies have shown that it can be done. Tesco, in partnership with Eddie Stobart, transports 20 boxes of supplies six days a week by rail to Inverness.

All the more puzzling, then, that ministers seem to have a blind spot when it comes to improving the A9. As we report today, an expert study they commissioned concluded that the £3 billion plan to dual 80 miles of single carriageway between Perth and Inverness would "dampen" prospects for shifting freight from road to rail.

This really is no more than common sense. But instead of looking into how to rectify the imbalance, and reviewing road versus rail spending, they simply decided not to publish the study.

This is not good enough. Ministers often say the right things about increasing rail freight, but little actually happens on the ground. It's time they got on track.

The second piece, by FoFNL member David Spaven, Scotland Representative of the Rail Freight Group, was published by The Scotsman on 19 October 2017

Infrastructure to Suit Long Trains Key to Rail Freight Success

Big headlines were generated last month by news of Scottish Government plans to make the A9 Scotland's first 'fully electric-enabled' highway. However, while the use of electric vehicles in and around cities is a sensible and achievable target, details are sketchy as to how electric technology can be applied to the long journeys travelled by cars and vans along the A9 and beyond. And the prospect of seeing 44-tonne electric lorries wafting silently over Druimuachdar Summit is distant indeed.

In contrast, the much neglected parallel railway - the Highland Main Line from Perth to Inverness —

is crying out for investment to allow it to play a much bigger role in helping the Scottish Government to achieve ambitious low-carbon targets. Electrification of the railway should be a core objective, as part of a rolling programme across Scotland, so that the excellent (but 40-year old) High Speed Trains about to be introduced on express routes can be replaced in ten years' time by state-of-the-art electric trains.

So what can be done in the short to medium term to help rail freight compete more effectively against trucks which generate three to four times as much CO2 for every load moved? Unlike the A9 — where dualling is steadily progressing, and road hauliers now enjoy Central Belt to Inverness transits half an hour faster as a result of raising the HGV speed limit from 40 to 50mph — the railway has suffered from disinvestment over the last 40 years. Two thirds of the 118-mile line is single track, and key crossing loops were taken out in 1980s' rationalisation schemes.

However, in 2008, the Scottish Government's *'Strategic Transport Projects Review'* identified upgrading the Highland Main Line as a national priority. Investment of between £200m and £400m was envisaged — extending double track, building more crossing loops and improving signalling — yet almost 10 years later, nothing has been delivered on the ground. Meanwhile, although the A9 was completely rebuilt in the 1970s and 80s, the first tranches of a further £3 billion investment in the road have already been spent.

A key way to achieve more efficient freight operations — the revised, vague objective set out for the railway by Government in 20l2 - is to provide the infrastructure to allow rail hauliers to operate the longest possible trains. The modern Class 66 locomotives which haul the daily Stobart / Tesco container train from Central Scotland to Inverness have enough power to pull a train of 28 containers — the equivalent of 28 lorries — but the lack of long crossing loops restricts the operation to just 20 containers. So rail is 30% less efficient than it should be, and as A9 dualling progresses, the danger is that instead of freight traffic switching from road to rail — the Scottish Government's objective — the modal switch will be in the opposite direction, increasing carbon emissions!

The current drastically scaled-back plans for the Highland Main Line envisage an extended crossing loop at Aviemore — in principal a very good idea — but likely to deliver little benefit for rail freight in practice, as this loop will be used for most of the day to 'cross' an enhanced frequency of passenger trains. Capacity for long freight trains will only be available in the night — which won't necessarily suit customers, and when rail engineers need access to the single track for maintenance.

In its defence, the Scottish Government is making noises about further improvements in a 'next phase' of rail upgrading after 2019 — but how long can the freight railway afford to wait, without seeing serious A9-inflicted damage to its existing core business?

There are also enormous tranches of potential new rail business which could be realised by a seriously upgraded Highland Main Line. Some 50,000 laden whisky lorries travel the A9 every year, and a share of this, together with other Speyside food and drink products, could provide the base load for a new train from Elgin and/or Keith to the Central Belt — cutting carbon and road accidents. While rail has had much success in attracting supermarket traffic from the roads over the last two decades — by offering a high-quality, timetabled service — all the traffic carried is 'ambient', ie not temperature-controlled. The big prize for rail is to penetrate the chilled and frozen food markets, but this will require infrastructure investment to allow wider refrigerated containers to pass through 'gauge-constrained' Victorian tunnels and overbridges. Together with timber and wood products, and inbound grain, malt and empty casks for the whisky industry, there is scope to generate enough rail traffic to fill many more freight trains than the current two daily — and in so doing,to take hundreds of heavy lorries off the A9 every day. But to achieve that highly desirable objective we need a 'fully enabled' railway — fit for the 21st century.

The final item, by Donna MacAllister, appeared in the Inverness Courier on 31 October 2017, and is particularly relevant to the Far North Line.

Freight Not Rosy

Ambitious plans to transport timber from Scottish forests to timber processors - such as Norbord - by rail instead of road will struggle to get off the ground unless rural rail freight infrastructure is improved and Scottish Government subsidies help meet the significant extra costs, an industry expert has said.

Roland Stiven of the Timber Transport Forum said government grants were available to help forest owners and timber companies shift their goods onto rail, but an aging railway line lacking in freight yards, modern sidings and loading areas made it unviable for an individual company to make the pioneering greener move from road to rail.

He said trying to find a way to make the move to rail possible was an "uphill battle".

And a long-held goal to transport timber from the Flow Country in north Sutherland to Inverness via rail instead of road had stalled because of the high costs involved.

It comes as Norbord nears completion of a multimillion-pound extension to double production at its Dalcross site without any formal plans to install a rail access point to the plant to bring roundwood timber in by rail. Lorries are used instead.

Mr Stiven said: "Substantial public infrastructure investment is needed.

"If we leave it to the market the businesses are going to say it does not make economic sense for them to lead it – if there's no money in it."

He added: "Timber processors are not going to spend £5 more per tonne to get their timber out of the forests plus a lot of up front costs to stick it on a train unless they believe that they can somehow make it viable."

Norbord invested up to £95 million into its expansion scheme, which was topped up by a grant of £11.5 million from Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

The Canadian company made a pledge several years ago to "periodically review" plans to install a rail access point to the plant to ease traffic congestion on the A96 and lower its carbon footprint.

However, a spokesman said yesterday there were "no formal plans" to do so.

He said: "The extension is just completing at the moment. There are no formal plans. We are just looking at it periodically."

A spokeswoman for the Scottish Government agency, Transport Scotland, said rail freight's contribution to sustainable economic growth was recognised for offering "a safer, greener, more efficient" way of transporting products and materials.

She said £9.7 million had been invested in 10 freight handling facilities across Scotland since 2007, removing more than 100 million lorry miles from roads.

In addition, a £30 million Scottish Strategic Rail Freight Investment Fund is helping to "better unlock opportunities for rail freight across the country".

And the actions contained within a key 2016 document called *'Delivering the Goods, Scotland's Rail Freight Strategy'*, were taken forward with industry partners.

There has also been a £5 billion investment in Scotland's railways up to 2019 and ministers have set down targets for Network Rail to grow new rail freight business. The strategy looks to improve rail freight by setting down "challenging but achievable performance targets" and calls on Network Rail to increase the average speed of freight trains by 10 per cent.

Thrumster Station

The last Highland Railway line to be built was the Wick and Lybster Light Railway. Although built and operated by the Highland Railway to Light Railway specifications laid down by the Light Railways Act 1896 it was financed almost entirely by local government and a local landowner, the Duke of Portland.

Thrumster Station on the short-lived Wick to Lybster railway has been beautifully restored by the Yarrows Heritage Trust

The intention was to expand the fishing trade from Lybster and providing a link to the national rail network was deemed a necessity for this. However, the fishing trade didn't really take off and the construction of a road over the Ord of Caithness in the 1930s meant that the railway could not compete. The line was only open for 41 years, from 1903 to 1944.

The line was dismantled immediately on closure but some structures survived, including Thrumster Station. The building was deteriorating and in 2005 was purchased by the Yarrows Heritage Trust, which had been set up in 2002, with a view to using it as an information point for the area and to create a community garden from the adjacent derelict sidings.

Initially there were sufficient funds only for the purchase of the station building and completion of the platform and community garden. It wasn't until 2011 that enough money had been raised to renovate the station building itself. As much as possible of its original structure has been retained but the original goods section of the building has been re-used as an exhibition area.

An important element of the second phase of restoration of the site is the creation of a woodland area next to the community garden. Deciduous trees have been planted here and a pond has been created in a naturally wet area of the site. A wild flower meadow has been sown too, helping to provide additional local habitat for wildlife.

The station building restoration is now complete and as a finishing touch the original station platform sign has been re-erected and repainted in its original colours. Consisting of solid metal lettering on a timber board it evidently "weighs a ton"!

The success of the project was recognised on 6 December at the National Railway Heritage Association annual award ceremony at Merchant Taylors' Hall in the City of London, when The Stagecoach Volunteers Award was presented to Ian Giles, station resident and a founder member of the Yarrows Heritage Trust.

Ian Budd

Honours

FoFNL's President up to 2017, **John Sinclair**, Third Viscount Thurso, has been appointed Lord Lieutenant for Caithness. Lord Thurso is chairman of his family company in Caithness and of VisitScotland.

American born **Dr Susan Kruse**, of Strathpeffer, who came to the UK in 1977 to do postgraduate work in Viking and Anglo-Saxon archaeology, has been made an MBE in the 2018 New Year's Honours list for services to community archaeology in the Highlands.

In 2010 she worked on the *Archaeology for Communities in the Highlands* (ARCH) project researching the archaeology and heritage of the Kyle Line.

Willie Watt, chairman of Wick Harbour Authority and General Manager of Subsea 7's Wester pipeline bundle fabrication site, has been made an MBE in the 2018 New Year's Honours list, largely in recognition of his work on the regeneration of the fishing port at Wick.

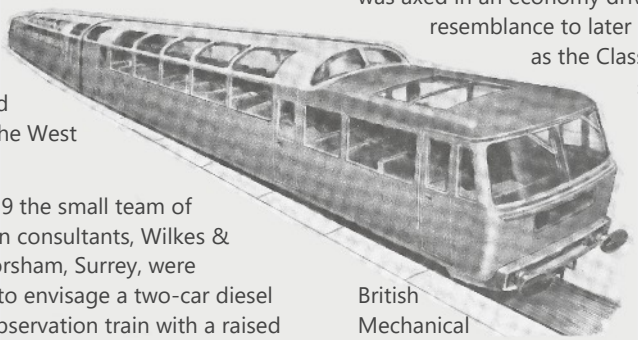
Mr Watt said, "The honour reflects the team work of everyone at Wick Harbour and their collective successes.

"The hard working staff do make it and have all helped to turn Wick from a fishing harbour that was down on its luck, into a diversified port which has a bright future."

See article on Subsea 7 on page 26.

Tourist Train Concept 1959

In the ScotRail franchise specification there are some requirements to help passengers make the most of the beautiful, and often spectacular, views from the train windows. Specially designed observation cars were run in Scotland as far back as 1956 when the pair of 1937-built cars for the high-speed London-Edinburgh service, "*The Coronation*", were rebuilt and transferred to the West Highland Line.



In February 1959 the small team of industrial design consultants, Wilkes & Ashmore, of Horsham, Surrey, were commissioned to envisage a two-car diesel multiple-unit observation train with a raised glazed section. The members of the team had come from the automotive industry after the Second World War and became well known for their innovative designs, in consultation with the British Transport Commission Design Panel, for several locomotive projects, including the ubiquitous Class 47.

Unfortunately the observation train project was axed in an economy drive. Family resemblance to later locomotives, such as the Class 47s, and the short-lived Class 35 "Hymeks" is clear. Their designs conformed to the appearance preferred by British Rail's Chief Mechanical Engineer - cab fronts comprising flat panels with no obvious 'nose'.

Inverness:

'Somewhere in the South'

In September 1954 it was Noel Proudlock, now a prominent member of the Railway Performance Society, who ventured north, using the 10.40am Inverness-Wick 'Mail'. Departure was delayed 55 minutes awaiting the 6.47am from Perth, which would have connected out of the 'West Coast Postal' from Euston and, indirectly, a host of places in the south of England and Wales. The ex-Highland Railway Travelling Post Office van from Perth would have been taken as far as Dingwall by the 10.30 Inverness-Kyle of Lochalsh, to be detached there for partial unloading before transfer to the Far North train.

***The Railway Magazine's* series *'Practice & Performance'* has been running since 1901.**

We have been given permission, by FoFNL member Keith Farr, to serialise this article, which recalls several historic runs over the FNL.

Part 2 (of three) discusses a September 1954 run logged by Noel Proudlock.

With just six vehicles, 'Black Five' No. 44724 naturally made snappy running between stops, and every effort was made to regain time. Thus the Class 5 sprinted up to 60mph between Evanton and Alness, just 3.6 miles apart and with a slow conclusion because of adverse signals.

On single track, it is especially difficult to regain time because the pattern of trains crossing at passing loops goes haywire; thus, at Kildary, the 'Mail' was detained 12¾min, instead of the booked one minute, awaiting the 8.35am Wick-Inverness behind No. 45360. Normally, the crossing would have taken place at Edderton, 12.9 miles farther on. On the other hand, they had passed the 12.05pm Tain-Inverness, hauled by 'Caley Bogie' No. 54470, at Alness instead of Fearn with only 2½ minutes' loss.

Further delay could be caused by unloading mails at stations, so it was up to the loco and its crew to win back minutes as best they could. Leaving Invershin, up 1-in-72 from a standing start, the 'Black Five's exhaust beats reverberated thunderously in the rock cuttings as it fought up

Pickersgill 4-4-0 54496 at Thurso, 1954 (C L Kerr, J L Stevenson collection)

to 40mph, increasing to 54 on the undulations towards Lairg. The 5½ miles of hard slogging from Invershin were thus devoured in 9½min, 4½ less than booked, Noel Proudlock observing that the loco was "beautifully noisy", assessing the maximum equivalent drawbar horsepower at about 1,100.

After mails had been unloaded to be taken by postbus to the far North West, the 'Black Five' resumed its climb to Lairg summit with gusto, attaining 41mph up 1-in-70 before descending

schoolchildren clambered aboard for the short journey to Borrobol Halt where, to quote the working timetable, the 10.40 Inverness called "when required SX to set down School Children from Kildonan".

Past wind-ruffled Loch an Ruathair, the vestigial train took County March summit at 38mph; but signals 'on' at the approach to Altnabreac presaged a long wait to cross the 3.40pm from Wick, behind Inverness-based No. 44722. So the 47min late arrival became a 55½min deficit on

Black Five 44789 adding the restaurant car to the up train at Helmsdale. (HRS collection)

to Rogart at a maximum of 63mph. At The Mound, a Drummond 0-4-4T would have been waiting with the last train of the day to Dornoch (the 2.05pm!), while the 'Mail' continued to Golspie and the short 1-in-60 climb to Dunrobin Halt.

More time was regained alongside the Moray Firth to Helmsdale, where the restaurant car and the TPO vehicle were detached, so it was with just two coaches and a van that No. 44724 tackled the successive gradients up to the County March. The Kildonan call lasted just 25 seconds, while

departure. Had the 'Mail' been on time, the 'meet' would have occurred at Georgemas Junction.

At Scotscalder, in contrast, the request stop lasted all of 20 seconds; smart work at Georgemas cut the time there from eight to less than six minutes; and the request stop at Bilbster was not made. To Wick the 'Mail' had recovered just over 2½ minutes all told; but the total gain in running time was 18min, partly offset by station overtime unloading mails, crossing southbound workings at the 'wrong' places and making nearly all the 'conditional' stops.

CHEMIN DE FER DE PROVENCE

France has a "far south" line, almost the same distance in km (151) as ours is in miles and metre-gauge whereas ours is standard.

Opened in 1911, the Chemin de Fer de Provence now marketed as the *Train des Pignes* (shades of the *Pines Express*!) links the carnival city of Nice with the spa retreat of Digne-les-Bains, passing gorges and valleys, lavender fields and olive groves and snow-capped mountains along the way. Whereas our line has the Flow Country, theirs follows the adventures of the River Var, but there are other parallels too.

With 50 stations and halts, the four times daily end-to-end trains take over three hours - too long perhaps for the less patient daytripper. To endear the CFP to local communities, it has developed an Invernet of its own, twenty local trains daily running alongside a congested autoroute to the suburban town of Colomar, ten stops out from Nice, with about half continuing six more stops to Plan du Var.

The Provence-Alpes-Cote d'Azur regional transport authority has franchised the daily passenger operation to Veolia, which has invested in diesel railcars offering excellent seat-to-window alignment and high windows. A separate non-profit company the Group d'Etude pour les Chemins de Fer de Provence runs a steam train whose

carriages have traditional wooden benches on Sundays from May to November (also Fridays from mid-July to late August) over the central scenic section between Puget-

Theniers and Annot, with passengers from Nice connecting by railcar.

Over twenty years ago the CFP quit its original Nice terminus designed by Eiffel which has recently been given a commercial makeover. The modern three-platform station now used, just a short walk from SNCF at Nice-Ville, has attractive displays enticing the tourist to step aboard.

Free on-board commentaries by experienced guides are available up to three days a week in summer on the 0925 train from Nice as far as Annot. Available on Google Play and Apple Store, a new app gives real-time information, tourist commentaries, traffic information and fares, and there is a website at trainprovence.com and a newsletter giving updates on festivals and excursions.

Bikes are not carried, but the new carriages allow transportation of people with reduced mobility. Like the Highland Railcard, a product called Zou! offers a 50% reduction, and up to three passengers travelling with the holder can also benefit from this reduction, while holders of the Zou! Etudes card also are automatically entitled to a 50% reduction for their leisure transport. A free website Pacamobilite.fr calculates all journeys by train, coach, metro, bus and tram in the region - no split ticketing there?

Not sure if there are Les Amis de CFP, but a journey the length of the line is a must if you're in the area, so do put a visit on your bucket-list - for as the musical says "it's so much nicer in Nice"!

John Yellowlees

Caithness Narrow Gauge

A traveller on the A99 about six miles north of Wick will, if they have any interest in railways, notice what appears to be a remarkably straight double-track narrow gauge railway passing beneath. They may also notice that they are crossing the line on a bascule bridge (i.e. a hydraulic lifting bridge) one span of which can be raised for reasons that are not obvious.

This isn't a railway in the normal sense. It's purpose is the fabrication and launching of incredibly long sections of pipeline, manufactured by Subsea 7, for use by the oil industry under the sea. There are no carriages, locomotives or wagons, just tracks and bogies, traction being provided by a tug at launch time with a 125 tonne Capstan winch at the landward end of each of the long tracks to control back tension. The normal, metre gauge, railway tracks end at the edge of the beach, the pipeline 'train' crosses a recovery pit into which the bogies on which it has been rolling are released for recovery. The 'train' completes its journey into the water on a 240m 'slipway' which is like a railway track but with built-in guide rollers.

Although from the A99 only two tracks can be seen, there are in fact four from just west of the bridge. This allows the simultaneous construction of a total 27km of pipelines. The two longer tracks are each 7.7km and run the whole length of the Subsea 7 site westwards from the sea.

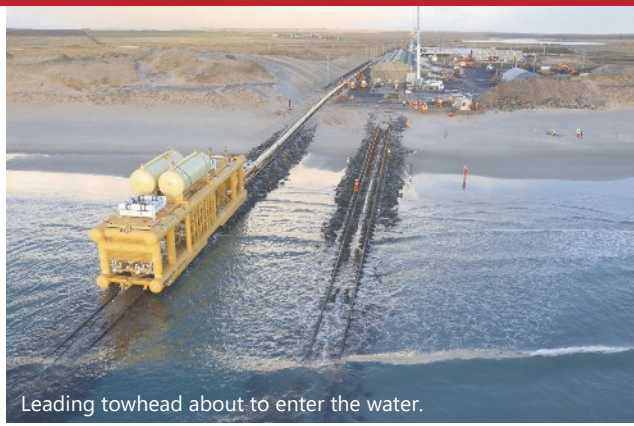
The two pairs of tracks are separated by a vehicle way.

Subsea 7 Fabrication Shop 2 (of three on the site).

The pipelines constructed here are known as 'bundles' because Subsea 7's specialist technology is used to assemble and package any required combination of flow lines, water injection, gas lift and control systems necessary for any subsea development. Pipes in 12m and 27m lengths arrive at the site, often having travelled on the Far North Line to Georgemas Junction. They are then processed through the modern fabrication shops before being lowered onto cradles, resting on bogies, to form the inner bundle cross section. Once the pipes have been fully welded into the final lengths the carrier pipes are then welded up to form "trains" which are pulled over the inner bundle to complete the structure ahead of attaching the towheads. The whole assemblies can be tested in situ before being launched, towed out

to their destination and lowered into position on the seabed.

In order to transport and then install the pipelines every bundle has a 'towhead' attached at each end. These massive structures contain the equipment needed to control the bundle whilst being towed, to connect with other pipelines once placed in position and to control the flow of oil and gas throughout the pipeline system. It is the passage of the trailing towhead that requires the A99 bridge to have a lifting section. The towheads are not manufactured at the Wester site but are brought in, either by sea or road. The larger ones require heavy load specialists to manoeuvre them to the site. On occasion the towheads are so large they have to be delivered directly to the launch site by a beach landing craft and need a purpose-built road across the beach.



Leading towhead about to enter the water.

The launch process takes 12 to 36 hours, depending on the bundle length. Tugs (usually 2) with a pulling power of up to 400 tonnes are attached by cable to the leading towhead. The bundle is then towed out to sea until the trailing towhead is 1.5km from the shore. At this point the site winch is disconnected and the trailing tug hooks up to the trailing towhead cable. During the launch tidal conditions and weather are monitored, and tug positions adjusted, to ensure that the bundle remains aligned to the launchway. Whilst in transit these assemblies are the largest man-made moving objects on the planet!

Since the site went into production in 1980 over eighty bundles of various lengths up to 7.7km have been launched and installed into the North Sea.

Ian Budd

I would like to thank Willie Watt of Subsea 7 for his help in preparing this article and providing photos, and John Yellowlees for pointing me in the right direction.

The leading tug in the distance.

A Railman Remembers
6 – Shunting With Care

Despite my frankly lackadaisical attitude towards my railway business, I was always diligent with the parcels. After all, they had 'stuff' in them, and believe me, although food was relatively cheap, stuff wasn't. A pint of milk was 5p, and even more astonishing, it was the same price wherever you bought it. On the other hand, non essential consumer goods in the 70s were eye-wateringly expensive, not particularly well put together, and inclined to break if you looked at them the wrong way.

After being allowed to get a bit wet on the platform, the parcels which the early train dropped off every morning were loaded on to a high wooden barrow which was slightly too large to wheel into the booking hall. One of my responsibilities was to document them, so all the information which was already on the parcels was faithfully duplicated onto a sheet. The parcels were mostly catalogue purchases from firms like Kay's, Grattan, Littlewoods and Great Universal Stores. I piled them up in different parts of the cage, depending on where they were going.

A militant delivery driver would turn up from the Invergordon goods depot once a week. The usual vehicle was a yellow NCL van or sometimes an articulated lorry which was far too big for the job. As the parcels usually spent a few days sitting around at the station, those in the know would get them much quicker if they dropped in and collected them.

One day a friend turned up in a decrepit ex-Post Office van. *What are you doing here?" I asked in surprise. "The deliveries have been put out to tender" he replied. "I'm the new delivery driver." "You're kidding!" "I'm not, and you're going to have to give me a hand. I haven't got a clue where any of these places are."

"I can't do that, I need to be here for the trains" I replied. "That's ok, we'll pop back in time for the next train and go out again" he said. I have to admit that after several months in the station, the idea of escaping to deliver the parcels was rather attractive.

So it was an executive decision, taken without consulting the Area Manager, that in the interest of getting the parcels to their correct destination, the station would be closed between trains on delivery days. It was great fun zig-zagging across the Fearn peninsula, visiting all the farms, cottages and businesses around Balintore, Nigg and Portmahomack, and actually meeting the locals. We nearly always made it back in time for the train, and as far as I know, no-one ever noticed when the station was closed.

By current standards, there were a lot of problems with gung ho arrangements like this. Would I have been insured in the event of an accident? Did the delivery van even have insurance? Or an MOT? But it was the seventies. For better or worse, it was a much simpler time. My caravan would never be allowed anywhere near railway property today, let alone on the platform. As for unofficially living in the station, no chance.

There were lots of other health and safety issues which weren't issues then. I was running an extension cable out of the station window to the caravan for power; I allowed the public to wait in the ticket office; a four year old girl

Continuing our series of articles by Marc Nolan, telling the story of his early days as a railwayman at Fearn Station on the Far North Line in the 1970s.

who lived in the cottage next door used to come and visit when she was bored; it was a bit like a scene from the railway children, except that Perks was a hippy.

Another thing I used to do was wander around on the track, just because I could. I mean, I knew the timetable, and I could hear any approaching train, right? Wrong. One day I had literally just stepped back on to the low platform when whoosh, out of nowhere a southbound light engine came tanking under the road bridge and through the station. They didn't even have time to whistle at me. Needless to say it was a crucial lesson which I was lucky to survive. That was when I realised that, against all logic, trains really could be silent, unexpected and deadly. From then on I had much more respect for the rules of the railway.

Dick the clerk who had trained me up on the office side of things quite liked getting involved in hands on activities given the opportunity. Maybe it was an antidote to all that paperwork. One day he announced that we should re-arrange some of the wagons "to save the goods train a bit of time". My impression of the goods trains was that they were a law unto themselves. Any hint of a problem and your wagons didn't get collected, a bit like not getting your wheelie bin emptied if it has the wrong sort of rubbish. This could be awkward with a perishable cargo of valuable seed potatoes.

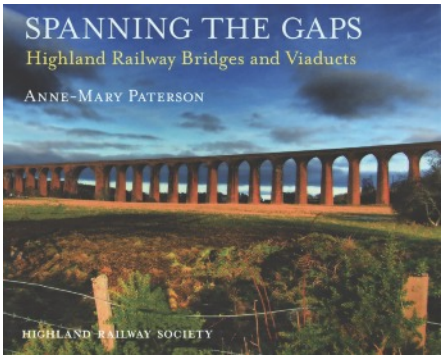
Just in case you ever need to move a railway wagon without an engine, this is how it's done. All you need is a metal bar with a bent tip which has been hammered flat. To get the wagon moving, you let the brake off and lever the pinch bar between the wheel and the rail. It's surprisingly easy to make a few tons of vehicle move; there's virtually no friction when you have steel wheels on steel rails, which is what makes trains so special. My job was to run alongside and reapply the brake before it rolled out of the siding or crashed into the next wagon. Look Ma, no training, no steel toecaps, no high viz.

Another time Dick brought in a ladder and tools so we could remove the enamel signs from the footbridge. The second platform had been decommissioned by the simple expedient of removing the iron steps from the bridge, so the signs telling you to 'Cross the railway by the bridge only' were redundant as well as misleading. I wanted one as a souvenir. We manhandled the heavy signs down without a problem, but it was still a bit hairy getting up there.

Dick used to bring in internal memos and point out vacancies on other parts of the network. To his mind I was well placed to progress within the railway, and he was right. But having stumbled into the job by accident, I was never planning to stay and make a career of it; I had dreams of playing music full time, and not as the singing station master. With hindsight, I might have enjoyed staying with the railways, but at the time, I thought I was doing well to be heading for a year in the job.

Another thing Dick pointed out was that I was getting behind on a task which I was supposed to be completing during the quiet summer months. This involved cutting up rolls of brown paper and tying them in bundles in preparation for the busy autumn potato traffic. But somehow there was always something more interesting to distract me.

Spanning the Gaps: Highland Railway Bridges and Viaducts
Anne-Mary Paterson. Highland Railway Society, 2017.
ISBN 978-0-9927311-1-3 £16.00.



This 96 page oblong format book gives full range to The Highland Railway Society's impressive archive of photographs concerning bridges and viaducts from 1864 to the present. Anne-Mary Paterson has done much to research the work of her grand uncles, William and Murdoch Paterson and of their older contemporary Joseph Mitchell, in the construction of the railways and these bridges in the northern Highlands.

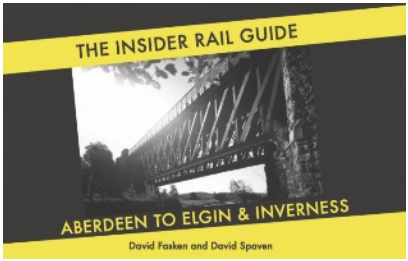
Murdoch's proudest achievement, the 29 stone arch Culloden Viaduct makes a stunning front cover, but in contrast his timber Altnaslanach Burn viaduct at nearby Moy is equally innovative and long lasting. Many contemporary photographs and diagrams have survived, not least of the Findhorn Viaduct at Tomatin built in the 1890s.

The territory covered ranges from Wick to Dunkeld and from Kyle in the west to the Spey in the east. The diversity of designs is huge from a swing bridge to the castellated embellishments requested by the Duke of Atholl and the replacement for the Baddengorm Burn bridge which was so unluckily and tragically washed away in 1914.

This book has such a rich story supported by so many interesting photographs stunningly reproduced in both back and white and in colour. It can be fully recommended.

Richard Ardern

The Insider Rail Guide - Aberdeen to Elgin & Inverness
David Fasken and David Spaven. Kessock Books, 2017.
ISBN: 978-0-9930296-9-1 £7.99



This is the second of David Fasken and David Spaven's *Insider Rail Guides*. Whilst the subject of this book has less obvious tourist credentials, this only goes to prove that fascination can be found everywhere, if you know where to look. The strength of the *Insider* series is that the result of the authors' research is presented in a way that keeps you intrigued, with black and white photos, hand-drawn maps, and many very attractive line drawings to help you on your way.

The pocket-friendly size is just what you need for a book like this - you won't mind carrying it around.

I have a personal interest in this part of Scotland as my wife was brought up in Buckie and our family has spent much time exploring and enjoying the whole area. As a slightly political aside, while reading the history of the line it is impossible not to be struck by the irony of the 'competition is good' mantra that we hear so often. I can't imagine that any pre-grouping passengers would have agreed with that!

Ian Budd

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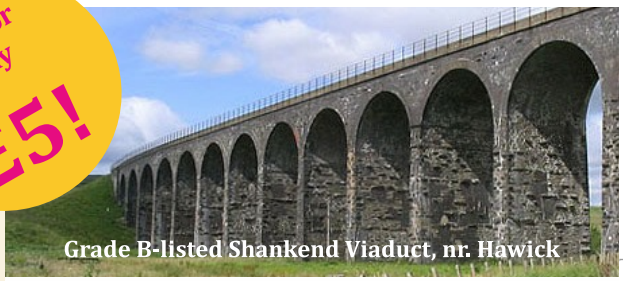

Grade B-listed Shankend Viaduct, nr. Hawick

PHASE 1 NOW OPEN!
EDINBURGH-TWEEDBANK

Opening day service at Stow Station 2015

Upper: Copyright Walter Baxter, geograph.org.uk
Lower: Copyright Robert Drysdale, CBR.

Founded in 1999, the Campaign for Borders Rail (CBR) has been one of the most successful grassroots rail campaigns in Great Britain, a story of concerned citizens from all walks of life getting together to right the 1969 injustice of complete closure of the 98-mile Waverley Route through the Borders.

With our initial goal secured - services on the rebuilt 35-mile 'Borders Railway' from Edinburgh to Galashiels and Tweedbank began on 6th September 2015 - CBR is now focussed on onwards extension to Hawick and Carlisle, lobbying hard for a full and fit-for-purpose feasibility study as soon as possible.

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Membership is from only £5 a year to £50 for life; just ring our secretary on **017683 62022** or email **dgma@talktalk.net** for details of how to join online, or send a cheque to 'CBR' at The Station, Long Marton, APPLEBY, Cumbria CA16 6BJ.

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Photo: Chris Watt, courtesy of Virgin Trains

Sandy Colley

AZUMA!

A beautiful shot of nine car set 80010 speeding near Gleneagles on its test run from Doncaster to Inverness on Friday 15th December 2017.

And then captured that evening arriving at Inverness Station.

READY FOR ANYTHING!

The two Inverness independent ploughs approaching Moy whilst running out to Tomatin and back with 37218 and 37602 on 9th January

Sandy Colley