

FAR NORTH EXPRESS



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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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Cover picture:

37516 and 37685 crossing Ness Bridge in Inverness, heading from Keith to Kyle of Lochalsh on Day 2 of the Royal Scotsman Classic Tour, 15 June 2014.

Photo: **Jordan Kearney**

HEADCODE

2019 marks the 25th anniversary of the forming of FoFNL so It would be nice to begin the year with great news about the Far North Line. However, we are simply waiting, optimistically it has to be said, for the decisions about future improvements to be announced. By the time of the next Headcode we will know what we have to look forward to - at the very least, we hope, the installation of a passing loop at Lentr...

Our line relies heavily on the railways from the other side of Inverness so I make no apology for emphasising the need for the Scottish Government to get a grip on upgrading the HML in this issue. Single track railways don't work unless there is very little traffic and a large number of passing loops. September's derailment of a freight train after hitting fallen branches at Culloden Viaduct caused massive delays. As the *P&J* noted "*DERAILED: only a single line over the viaduct - so this incident held up all the trains*". Remarkably, Inverness is still only served by predominantly single track railways.

It's quite difficult not to lose patience with politicians. In Scotland we have the Scottish Government saying one thing and doing another. Stated policy is to encourage modal shift to help reduce pollution and the wastage of fuel but the practice is to prioritise road building and upgrading. As Liam Kirkaldy recently wrote in *Holyrood Magazine*, quoting the Green Party, "*Stop the ministerial obsession with car use and move to active travel and public transport.*"

Meanwhile from Westminster and the unionist parties in Holyrood we have opposition to the devolution of Network Rail Scotland Route, in the face of, probably, the unanimous wishes of the Scottish rail industry. Presumably this is because the thought triggers in some a feeling of pandering to Scottish self-government. FoFNL has written to all MSPs to ask them to please put aside such 'political' thoughts and support this for practical reasons.

FoFNL is a politically agnostic organisation, all our suggestions are based on common sense. Unfortunately we're living in a time (temporarily I hope) in which common sense has become unfashionable.

The Far North Line's punctuality and cancellation rate in the last few months has fluctuated between mixed and appalling, although it is now showing signs of improvement. There are in fact a couple of reasons for this which have put ScotRail in a no-win situation. Late delivery of stock, both from Hitachi and Wabtec, has caused training difficulties all over Scotland. Not only were the trains not available in time to train crews for the December timetable, but additional factors came into play, particularly the unexpected need to train them for operating slam-door stock ('Classic HSTs for the Inter7City services) and a temporary fleet of Class 365 units for the Central Belt. The timing of an overtime and rest day working ban by the rail union RMT exacerbated an already impossible situation. In its public handling of this ScotRail may have been the victim of software developers' love of 'drop-down lists' - the guess being that the only option available in the system to explain cancellations was "crew shortage" - which made it look as though ScotRail was not employing enough staff to run the services! A rather public foot-shooting.

Ian Budd

FOFNL 2019 AGM & CONFERENCE

This will take place on **Friday 21 June** in the **Royal Marine Hotel, Brora**.

It is planned to begin with the AGM at 10:30, followed by the Conference.

There will be five speakers:

Sir Peter Hendy, Chairman of Network Rail [tbc]

Bill Reeve, Director of Rail at Transport Scotland.

Scott Prentice, Head of Business Development, ScotRail

David Shirres, Editor, *Rail Engineer*

Nick Lindsay, Clyne Heritage Society

REMEMBERING BBW



Photos: John McCormick

17 November was a special day for FoFNL and the Scottish Association for Public Transport. The plaque in memory of Bob Barnes-Watts, who was an invaluable member of both organisations, was unveiled by his sister Mary and his partner Anne inside Platform 1864, the restaurant in the original Tain Station building where he and Anne were regular visitors.



John, Anne and Mary about to unveil the memorial plaque, which reads: Remembering our friend, campaigner and timetabling expert Bob Barnes-Watts 1955-2018 who tirelessly championed all that was best in public transport.

The plaque is placed above a Highland Transport Company bus timetable of 1938 which Platform 1864's owner, Graham Rooney, had acquired, much to Bob's delight.

Over 30 of Bob's friends enjoyed soup, sandwiches and tea/coffee before a tour of the station building. Bob would have been very happy that the event was presided over by his friend John Yellowlees - someone whose head is filled with fascinating and useful information, just like Bob's.

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!

In order to comply with EU legislation concerning data protection - the EU General Data Protection Regulation which is in force from 25th May 2018 - we now have three documents relating to FoFNL membership: an amended Membership Form, a Privacy Notice, and a Legitimate Interest Assessment.

These can be viewed at www.fofnl.org.uk/join.html

BROKEN CONNECTIONS

At the end of October FoFNL received the news that four weekday and five weekend connections were to be broken at Inverness in the 9 December timetable. This would result in several hours' delay on journeys and sometimes mean the last onward train would be missed.

We immediately contacted Alex Hynes, MD of the Abellio ScotRail Alliance, to express our shock and to press for last minute changes to be made by Network Rail timetablers in Milton Keynes.

ScotRail moved very fast, having had very little notice of the broken connections, and put pressure on NR to fix whatever they could. Because of the fallout from last summer's timetable catastrophes down south, NR was very reluctant to consider any changes at all. However, the two organisations got together and managed to fix eight broken connections, leaving the 16:00 Wick-Inverness (Mon-Fri) which will have to wait until the May timetable

to be reinstated. The other casualty, described by ScotRail as "the least worst option" was the suspension of the Beaulay stop on the 18:31 Inverness-Wick, which, it is hoped, will be reinstated in May, although it may not be possible until the introduction of the new HML timetable in December 2019. The resolution of most of this problem was completed by 26 November - impressive indeed!

In FoFNL's view the whole sorry tale would have been avoided had the Westminster Government allowed Network Rail Scotland Route to be devolved to Holyrood. With this in mind we have written to all the MSPs asking them to support applying more pressure to achieve this improvement. We emphasised to them that this is a practical question, not a 'political' one, and cross-party support would therefore be expected.

Our letter can be read at www.fofnl.org.uk/docs/archived/Network-Rail-Devolution.pdf

FAR NORTH LINE UPDATE

The Far North Line has had mixed fortunes this autumn, as can be seen from the punctuality reports compiled weekly by our Secretary and posted on the FoFNL website. The Punctuality Performance Measure (PPM) has generally been above 70% and climbed to a welcome 96% for the week before Christmas.

One of the reasons has been delays caused by the pipe train which runs from Hartlepool to Georgemas. It is a very heavy train of over 900 tonnes and has been having difficulties sometimes with slippery rails on the inclines between Invershin and Lairg, Golspie and Dunrobin, and Helmsdale and Georgemas.

For Abellio's promised initiative to market some of our services as Tourist Trains, our former Secretary, Gavin Sinclair, has

suggested that the name "*The Orcadian*" should be revived for the 10:41 from Inverness and the 16:00 back from Wick. An anonymous source quipped that naming the 16:00 "*The Guaranteed Connection*" might have a more beneficial influence on the timetable!

There is no word of the timber traffic from Kinbrace returning to rail yet, despite a lot of hard work from Frank Roach and welcome interest from the Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy. Trees are being removed from the embankments of the line by Network Rail in order to prevent recurrence of the blockages after high winds which have been happening in recent years. Starting from Inverness the tree fellers have now reached the Muir of Ord to Conon Bridge section.

Richard Ardern

TRANSFORMING THE HIGHLAND MAIN LINE: AN URGENT TASK

The project to dual the A9 between Perth and Inverness is prominent both on the ground and in the Press. Not so the 3rd priority of the Strategic Transport Project Review of 2008, which was making the HML fit for purpose for both passenger and freight service demand.

The total enhancements in place by the end of Control Period 5 this March, will have about as much significance, compared with what's needed, as the rebuilding of Croy and Bishopbriggs stations around twenty years ago had in relation to the size of the Edinburgh Glasgow Improvement Programme. The HML improvement work over the last ten years is minute compared to what was promised in the First Minister's Declaration of Inverness in 2008.

Why has the HML been allowed to languish? The Queensferry Crossing and EGIP which were 1st and 2nd priorities are now largely completed. The HML is Scotland's strategic railway to the north of Scotland serving the Moray Firth area and destinations along the connecting lines towards Moray, Caithness and the north west coast. Resources related to the timber and whisky industries could again be carried by rail as both are expanding hugely. The Highlands is second only to Edinburgh as a tourist destination, and business and leisure travel in both directions would increase considerably if the line were fit for purpose. The Scottish Chambers of Commerce has told Government that single track railways between the northern cities are unacceptable in the 21st century.

It is recognised that it is currently quicker to drive between the Central Belt and Inverness and that the promised major improvements to the line must be completed before the A9 is fully transformed or there will be reverse modal shift of freight and passengers in favour of the road sending a juggernaut through the Government's emissions reduction policies. Time is running out.

A number of schemes to quickly improve the HML during financial Control Period 6 (2019-2024) are suggested below. (The figures in brackets refer to Network Rail's Scotland Route Study of 2016).

STANLEY JUNCTION AND ON TO MURTHLY

Stanley Junction remodelling was in the list of

projects a few years ago, but never happened. The idea was to create a gentler and faster curve with a high speed point interface with the end of the double track from Perth.

In view of the frequency with which northbound trains have to be held here awaiting late trains coming off the single track from Dunkeld, it would make sense to double the 3 miles on from Stanley Jnc to Murthly where there used to be a crossing loop. This would reduce the length of the ensuing single track section to 5¾ miles and reduce any delay times.

DALGUISE TO BALLINLUIG

Create a new track northwards to the former long loop at Ballinluig from the Dalguise viaduct. Build it alongside, but on a higher embankment than, the present line. This is most important to increase the resilience of the line from flooding, the latest iteration of which closed the line on 18 December 2018. Once this new line is in use, the old one could be closed and its embankment raised before reopening again.

The result would be doubly beneficial, with a new stretch of dual track and a line able to resist the flooding which has been such a problem in the last few years.

DALWHINNIE TOWARDS CRUBENMORE

Continue the double track northward from Dalwhinnie along the level for 3 miles through Cuaich towards Crubenmore. This 13 mile section is another of the bottlenecks on the line with trains frequently having to wait at Dalwhinnie for a train to struggle up the gradient through Glen Truim. The 19.42 Edinburgh to Inverness had its schedule extended by six minutes from Mondays to Fridays to allow extra time for the Caledonian Sleeper to get up the hill. At that time of night passengers would much prefer the train to arrive in Inverness at its former time of 23.10 rather than at 23.16!

MAKE SURE THE A9 DUALLING DOES NOT PREVENT DOUBLING OF THE RAILWAY ALONG THIS STRETCH THROUGH GLEN TRUIM WHERE RAIL AND ROAD RUN CLOSE TOGETHER.

NEWTONMORE TO KINGUSSIE

Provide double track from north of the Spey

viaduct through the former Newtonmore station loop for 3 level miles to Kingussie. (6.6.5).

Taken together with the previous suggestion (above) this would leave only 7 miles of Glen Truim bank as single track. Ideally it would be good to dual the bank as well eventually but it would be a more expensive project. There used to be passing loops at Inchlea (4 miles N of Dalwhinnie) and at Etteridge (7 miles N of Dalwhinnie) which together with Newtonmore Loop made sections of 4, 3, 3 and 3 miles long between Dalwhinnie and Kingussie).

KINGUSSIE TO KINCRAIG

Construct a parallel line on a higher embankment for the 6 miles between Kingussie and Kincraig to improve resilience and prevent closure when flooding at Insh Marshes gets too high. Then raise the embankment on the existing 100 mph line and thus create a 6 mile double track section. (6.6.5).

At the same time, a solution should be found for the course of the Gynack Burn which causes flooding problems at Kingussie station.

MOY TO CULLODEN MOOR

Redouble the section from Culloden Moor to Daviot and extend formation to create a second track from Daviot to the top of the hill at Moy to create 8 miles of double track on the steep climb out of Inverness.

FURTHER WORK

It is recognised that there are sections of the line which it would be very difficult to double, such as through Killiecrankie. With the current diesel traction it would be beneficial to double the line over the steeper hill sections such as Tomatin to Slochd, Carr Bridge to Slochd, Newtonmore to Crubenmore and Dunkeld to Kingswood (where a tunnel is also involved).

Improved and faster services on the line also depend on other work elsewhere, such as removing the crippling speed restrictions either side of Perth station and constructing the Greenhill Flyover to improve access to Glasgow. Providing a loop at Newburgh on the single track line between Perth and Edinburgh, until such time as the direct electrified railway route through Kinross-shire is constructed, would help too. The Kinross line would also ease congestion on the coastal route through Kirkcaldy and save 30 minutes in journey

time between Edinburgh and Perth, a huge advantage for HML and further north passengers too!

CUMULATIVE OUTCOME

Taken together doubling these HML sections would give around 25 more miles of double track to add to the 37 miles already doubled between Perth and Inverness, leaving 56 miles single with 62 miles double on the 118 mile long route. It would be a really significant improvement to benefit both passenger and freight traffic.

Dualing the easier stages between Stanley Junction and Culloden Moor (as suggested above) first of all could also help to prepare the line for electrification. As is well known, electrification is particularly beneficial in reducing journey time on steep gradients (the Beattock effect). Presumably, electrification is still being thought about for the Government's aspiration date of 2030 when the refurbished InterCity HSTs may require to be retired from service.

More pressing is to get the HML into much better condition to compete with the dualled A9 which is due to be completed in 2025. Providing a much faster journey time with greater track capacity for both passenger and freight services is essential to make rail the attractive and sustainable transport mode of choice preventing any modal switch from rail towards road which would be contrary to Scottish Government policy.

As the First Minister said in the context of the Katowice climate change conference in December 2018:

"We have a moral responsibility to do what we can to prevent and mitigate the effects of global climate change.

"Scotland has been widely praised internationally for our work to tackle climate change, and I am absolutely determined that there will be no let-up in our efforts.

"It requires everyone in society – individuals, businesses and governments – to play their part in changing behaviours."

Therefore, we must make a big effort to complete a major transformation of the Highland Main Line strategic route for Scotland during the next five or six years.

Richard Ardern

INVERNESS-ABERDEEN UPDATE

The increased frequency of trains between Inverness and Elgin began with December's new timetable. Five new trains outward from Inverness between 10 am and 7 pm and four inward. The 16.49 will be particularly useful in relieving pressure on the 17.14 to Aberdeen. With a journey time of forty minutes, the service is much quicker than going by bus.

Some of the early and late end to end trains are now operated by ScotRail's "Classic" High Speed Trains giving an improved ride and acceleration. It is good to see that work is continuing through the winter to redouble the line between Inverurie and Dyce. From May to August there will be another closure at that end of the line to finish the job started last summer of redoubling and resignalling the whole stretch from Inverurie to

London Kings Cross.

This double track section would provide greater flexibility to operate the new Dalcross station, operate a replacement siding of some kind at the Norbord wood factory (which was recently doubled in size) and reduce delays. Unfortunately, a second track cannot be replaced all the way in to Inverness because the Raigmore A9/A96 interchange overbridge was constructed with insufficient room for two tracks. Extension for one kilometre eastwards on a new formation to the new station at Dalcross should also be considered and planning permission obtained for a new platform.

HISTORY NOT YET IN THE MAKING

Proposals to build a new station at Dalcross Airport were outlined in a HITRANS leaflet *Providing connectivity: Inverness Airport Station* which told us "*Development of the new station will commence in 2016 with planned completion expected in the Spring of 2019*". "HITRANS is investing in the rail infrastructure..."

In its early days, HITRANS paid for a lot of useful smaller items of infrastructure on the Highland lines. Sadly, a change in Government policy saw their budget for infrastructure truncated.

Also of interest is Network Rail *Document 116647 Aberdeen to Inverness Rail Improvement* quoting the Office of Rail Regulation allocation of Tier 3 funding to allow for development of enhancement projects that could be implemented during the course of CP5. This stated "*An initial programme has been developed indicating that GRIP Stage 3 Option Selection report will be carried out in 2011 and implementation works can be completed in 2016*".

This was followed by another NR document, asked for by Government, which came up with a more detailed timetable to complete the works to the whole line by the end of February 2017.

History has been a long time in the making. Austerity and changes to the way rail enhancements are funded are partly to blame. It is good to be able to report concrete progress in the last year, but there is a long way to go yet to bring the line up to modern standards.

Richard Arden



Aberdeen-Inverness Virtual Reality booth at Aberdeen Station. Photo: Network Rail

the tunnel mouth just a mile short of Aberdeen station.

Attention then needs to switch to the Inverness end with money being made available to redouble the track between Inverness and Dalcross (Woodend).

Doing this would enable the required 8 am commuter from Inverness to Elgin to run and (in the present timetable) allow a 10 to 15 minute speed up of the 09.00 Inverness to Aberdeen and the 13.38 and 18.22 services from Aberdeen.

The former could leave at 09.15, the 13.38 would no longer have to wait 17 minutes at Elgin for a path, and the latter would allow the current 20.03 from Inverness to Elgin to leave later and provide a connection with the Highland Chieftain from

STATION USAGE FIGURES 2017-18

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	One Year Change	Two Year Change
Wick	19,766	18,438	17,546	-4.84%	-11.23%
Thurso	38,426	37,322	39,174	4.96%	1.95%
Georgemas Junction	1,572	1,502	1,320	-12.12%	-16.03%
Scotscaider	294	200	182	-9.00%	-38.10%
Altnabreac	312	356	658	84.83%	110.90%
Forsinard	1,516	2,124	2,210	4.05%	45.78%
Kinbrace	456	464	376	-18.97%	-17.54%
Kildonan	170	76	206	171.05%	21.18%
Helmsdale	6,204	5,768	4,636	-19.63%	-25.27%
Brora	5,524	5,616	5,994	6.73%	8.51%
Dunrobin Castle	782	882	1,030	16.78%	31.71%
Golspie	5,192	5,718	5,786	1.19%	11.44%
Rogart	1,710	1,948	1,630	-16.32%	-4.68%
Lairg	6,592	5,576	5,426	-2.69%	-17.69%
Invershin	706	826	438	-46.97%	-37.96%
Culrain	432	372	300	-19.35%	-30.56%
Ardgay	6,732	7,144	7,140	-0.06%	6.06%
Tain	27,896	28,622	29,774	4.02%	6.73%
Fearn	5,396	5,262	5,256	-0.11%	-2.59%
Invergordon	29,054	27,886	28,958	3.84%	-0.33%
Alness	23,614	26,376	29,272	10.98%	23.96%
Dingwall	82,508	80,900	86,276	6.65%	4.57%
Conon Bridge	15,276	15,494	15,100	-2.54%	-1.15%
Muir Of Ord	66,480	64,480	64,820	0.53%	-2.50%
Beauly	59,406	52,870	51,522	-2.55%	-13.27%
Inverness	1,306,556	1,259,496	1,238,772	-1.65%	-5.19%
Total (Excluding Inverness)	406,016	396,222	405,030	2.22%	-0.24%

These are the figures issued by the Office of Rail Regulation. They show an overall rise of 2.22% in the total for the Far North Line excluding Inverness (for which no FNL-only figures exist) compared with last year's drop of 2.41%. 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.

BOOK REVIEW

The Kyle of Lochalsh and Far North Lines by David Price

Amberley Books [www.amberley-books.com] 96pp £14.99 ISBN: 9781445683041

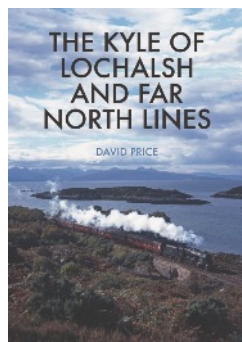
If you love looking at railway pictures and especially if you don't know the lines this is a great book with which to while away a considerable amount of time.

Of the 96 pages only the first two contain text. This book is all about pictures. Only complaint is that the binding makes it difficult to open the pages flat. There are pictures of all sorts of workings, diesel and steam, service, freight and railtours over the last four decades.

It's fascinating to see how much has changed in railway terms, while the scenery has, of course, remained beautiful. The Kyle Line is famous for its scenery, the Far North Line less so, yet here we see just how varied its offering is too.

The book is divided between the two lines in a very satisfactory way, beginning in Inverness, taking the whole route north to Thurso and Wick before picking up again from Dingwall to follow the Kyle Line to the end.

This reviewer was especially pleased to see not one but TWO photos of the erstwhile, and hopefully soon to be again, Lentrans Loop. One of them is used for the back cover. A not-too-subliminal message for the Transport Scotland decision makers!



Ian Budd

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

Question S5W-18438: John Finnie, Highlands and Islands, Scottish Green Party, answered, 13/09/18

To ask the Scottish Government how many trains were (a) cancelled or (b) delayed by the Highland Chieftain breakdown on the single track at Kingussie on 13 August 2018, and how long (i) the delay was in minutes and (ii) it took to get all the passengers on their way in light of reports that the following ScotRail trains were already at capacity.

Michael Matheson: Due to breakdown of the Highland Chieftain on 13 August 2018, a total of 6 ScotRail trains were cancelled, with 3 of these being full cancellations and 3 part cancellation. A total of 31 ScotRail trains were delayed, amounting to 388 total delay minutes.

Passengers that were on-board the Highland Chieftain service alighted at Kingussie and were accommodated on ScotRail services with no welfare issues reported.

Excerpt from Topical Question Time 25-09-18:

John Finnie: The cabinet secretary will be aware that one of the major factors contributing to low performance, particularly in the Highlands, is the preponderance of single track. He will know that there have recently been a number of breakdowns and that a single breakdown can bring the whole Highland main line to a halt. Will he commit to significant investment, beyond the modest investment that is already in place for control period 6—particularly when compared with the £3 billion expenditure on the road that runs beside the Highland main line—to address that issue?

Michael Matheson: I discussed that very matter with the member just last week. He will be aware of current investment in the Highland main line. The STPR will allow us to look at what further investment should be made, including how we can improve resilience on the existing line. Full details will be set out once we have completed the review work, but a key part of it will be about improving journey times and resilience on the Highland main line.

Question S5W-20532: John Finnie, Highlands and Islands, Scottish Green Party, answered 20/12/18

To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with ScotRail regarding any plans to increase the frequency of rail services between Inverness and Elgin.

Michael Matheson: ScotRail's December 2018 timetable change introduced 9 additional services between Inverness and Elgin, delivering a near hourly all day service for Nairn, Forres and Elgin.

By the end of 2019, in conjunction with ScotRail's new trains, Revolution in Rail will deliver the following changes between Elgin and Inverness:

- an hourly service between Inverness and Elgin, providing 1,300 seats each day;
- high speed trains between Aberdeen and Inverness, providing 1,400 additional seats each day; and
- more through services between Inverness and the central belt via Aberdeen.

Question S5W-20533: John Finnie, Highlands and Islands, Scottish Green Party, answered 20/12/18

To ask the Scottish Government, in light of its responsibility for prioritising rail infrastructure projects, whether it has plans to reinstate double track on the rail line between Inverness and Dalrross.

Michael Matheson: Planning for rail projects in the next Control Period (CP 6) will follow the new pipeline approach set out in the Rail Enhancements and Capital Investment Strategy, published on 19 March 2018.

We have asked Network Rail to explore options for the next stage of the Aberdeen to Inverness project, including options for further doubling. This will build on the benefits which will be delivered from the current phase of works. New projects will be grant funded, and will only be progressed when the business case is fully developed and there is greater certainty on price, affordability and the capacity of the rail industry supply chain to deliver.

Question S5W-20534: John Finnie, Highlands and Islands, Scottish Green Party, answered 20/12/18

To ask the Scottish Government what assessment has been made of the length of time trains wait at passing loops on the Inverness to Aberdeen rail line, and how this can be reduced.

Michael Matheson: No bespoke assessment has been made of the length of time trains wait at passing loops on the Inverness to Aberdeen rail line. However, Scottish Ministers have made clear to Network Rail that they must do more when working with ScotRail to develop timetables that make the best use of the significant Scottish Government investment in the infrastructure between Inverness and Elgin. I would ask the member to support our call for Network Rail's accountability to be devolved to Scottish Ministers.

GREENS CALL FOR MORE RAIL FREIGHT

The Green Party has issued a call in the Scottish Parliament to transfer as much freight as possible from road to rail arguing it would improve things for passengers, the environment and the roads.

Highlands and Islands Green MSP John Finnie wants to see the Scottish Government increase capacity to ensure more freight can be transported by rail.

That is after Michael Matheson, the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity, told parliament that only 4.3 per cent of freight is carried by rail.

Mr Finnie then highlighted the potential benefits of improving the Highland Main Line and reinstating the Levenmouth Rail Link which could carry both freight and passenger services.

He said: "It is quite remarkable that only around four per cent of freight in Scotland is transported by rail. The Scottish Government should be prioritising moving freight off our roads and onto the rails. Not only would this

help us to meet our climate change obligations, it would make our communities safer by removing large numbers of HGVs from our roads."

Mr Finnie believes delays to advancing proposals that aid the transportation of goods and passengers are a concern.

He said: "There is a great deal of frustration at the length of time it can take to progress rail projects, which can increase capacity for both passenger and freight services. For instance, it has taken several years to develop proposals for the Highland Spring freight terminal at Blackford.

"The Levenmouth Rail Link, and work to dual the Highland Main Line, are two major projects which could dramatically increase freight capacity in Scotland, and must be brought forward by the Scottish Government in its upcoming programme of works, which covers the period from 2019-2024. I am disappointed that the Cabinet Secretary would not commit to promoting these projects."

First printed in the Inverness Courier - 28 December 2018

A recent observation by our Secretary:

Last week I was on the Lairg to Tain bus. At Fearn Lodge, at a bend in the road, we met one of the enormous road tankers which now carry oil to Lairg coming the other way. Both vehicles had to stop and the protracted edging forward, with high stone walls at both sides of the road took about 3 or 4 minutes.

Surely Transport Scotland realises what nonsense this is and is taking steps to help the economics of rail freight to be more favourable, to encourage the return of this traffic to rail.

As the First Minister recently said, "We have a moral responsibility to do what we can to prevent and mitigate the effects of global climate change.

"Scotland has been widely praised internationally for our work to tackle climate change, and I am absolutely determined that there will be no let-up in our efforts.

"It requires everyone in society – individuals, businesses and governments – to play their part in changing behaviours, and I'm pleased that the Scottish Government is able to support the Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action in its work."

Modal shift is, after all, Scottish Government policy - as long as all MSPs and the Cabinet Secretary realise that the "shift" is meant to be away from road!

VIVARAIL DEMONSTRATION

I was delighted to be invited by Vivarail to a demonstration run of their battery operated Class 230, 230002 - the UK's first mainline production battery train - on the Bo'ness & Kinneil Railway in October. Vivarail is producing new trains from ex-District Line D78 stock from London. The original electric motors and bodysells are kept, a modular power supply system is installed and the interiors are totally redesigned to meet operators' requirements.

Readers may remember a reference to these trains in *FNE 74*, May 2018, when I referred to possible use of one to provide a shuttle service at the Thurso/Wick end of the line. There are various thoughts about how to solve the current situation of passengers to/from Wick currently having to traverse the entire 6½ mile branch from Georgemas Junction to Thurso and back, as well as having to wait while the driver changes ends, all of which adds half an hour to every journey.

The most useful, but expensive, option would be a new station at Halkirk, just south of GGJ, and the construction of a chord line to the Thurso branch, thereby making Thurso and Wick symmetrical in relation to the line south. In any case, my personal favourite idea is for there to be a regular Thurso-Wick service - reflecting incidentally the first railway to be surveyed in the area - the Caithness Railway in 1845. I believe that currently some mixed commuting is done between the towns: train one way, bus the other! It would be interesting to find out potential traffic for such a service - an ideal proposition for a battery powered Class 230 which would only need a rapid recharge after every round trip.



Vivarail artist's impression

Bo'ness was a good place for a demonstration of the power available using modern batteries, with the long gradient through woods as the line climbs from Kinneil to Birkhill. This presented no problem at all to the train which had to stick to the speed limit of the line. Vivarail Chief Executive, Adrian Shooter, told me that the climb could have been done much quicker had it been allowed!

The modular power supply system that Vivarail has developed means that any combination of diesel, battery and, in the future, hydrogen can be supplied to suit the operating environment. As Vivarail says, "D trains run on electricity and don't mind where it comes from."

When there is a combination of diesel and battery power units regenerative braking means that power provided by a diesel module to accelerate can be partly re-used via regenerative braking to recharge the batteries.

Sampling the train was quite an experience and, as a Londoner, I found riding an 'underground train' whilst gazing across the Forth to Culross delightfully bizarre!

Ian Budd



230002 at Manuel, 11th October 2018

PANDORA POKES AROUND WHAT LIES AT THE RAINBOW'S END

The Williams Review of the railway industry will, among its many other terms of remit, involve itself with "value for money". This is now sufficiently well bedded into railwayspeak for it to merit its own TLA: VfM. Pandora has written at some length, occasionally in formal Responses, about the slippery nature of VfM, and of why chasing it too diligently is in the same category of things worth spending time on as looking for crocks of gold.

Let us visit our local Tesco (other emporia are available). Here we see litres of milk offered at 100p, or two for 160p. Is this VfM? You might think so, but for vegans it's heresy. Further along are found loaves at 130p, or two for 200p. Not VfM if you're gluten intolerant. So we leave Tesco and venture to Harrods where we find grand pianos for sale at £55,000 or two for £100,000. Is this VfM? Yes, if you're the Labèque sisters, but probably not otherwise. Pandora's point is that VfM is far too subjective to be capable of measurement, and is therefore a foolish - worse, a distracting - thing to aim for. No self-respecting passenger is going to reply favourably to the question: *is the cost of your journey VfM?*, precisely because a negative answer is more likely to produce improvement in the service, or a reduction in the amount of any likely increase in fares.

What should be worth pursuing is *an increase in VfM*. And by that Pandora means *an increase in VfM as likely to be perceived by a decent chunk of passengers*. Is the journey "better" than it was last year, before the new rolling stock was introduced? Are there more seats? Are there fewer delays? Is the journey time shorter? All of these can be measured and none is subjective. While we cannot know (nor do we need to) what percentage of passengers think that "VfM" has been delivered, we can measure whether that percentage is likely to have increased. And that, surely, is what matters.

We should not forget that many of the things provided at our expense by Her Majesty's Government are not normally required to pass any test of VfM-ness. Some are things with which most taxpayers would be likely to agree: foreign aid, for example. Others might occasion a significant level of disquiet: the replacement of Trident, for example. The rights and wrongs of these decisions are not at issue here: but the complete absence of a VfM criterion is surely significant.

Let us forget chasing VfM. Instead let the railway concentrate on two simple aims. Improve things. Eliminate waste. Then VfM is guaranteed to increase.

GOOD WORK SHOULD NOT GO UNNOTICED

Tuesday 13th November

The 1335 Kyler failed today at around 1336 (engine, apparently), luckily still in P5.

We were turfed off the 1400 in P6 which formed the Kyler, which left at around 1340.

Gloom set in among the Caithnessites foregathered by the buffers. Fear not, we were told, another unit will appear.

And lo! it did, and the 1400 left on time.

That's pretty impressive in my book. I don't know what "our" set was diagrammed to do, and I guess an Invernet service may have been cancelled, but the right choice was made, and made quickly.

INVERNESS STATION

In the absence of any news about either Inverness Station improvements, or the possibility of relocating the bus station to give a proper interchange, you might find it interesting - not to say depressing - to read a letter Richard Ardern had published in *Modern Railways* in 2000.

There is not enough room to reproduce it here so pop along to our website:

<http://www.fofnl.org.uk/newsletters/0900/090013.html> [Newsletters | September 2000]

DID YOU KNOW ... ?

- There are over 1800 occasions a year when a vehicle strikes a low rail bridge,
- Network Rail cannot claim on the vehicle driver's (or owner's) insurance if the driver doesn't report it,
- Car sat navs don't hold low bridge details whereas (more expensive) lorry sat navs do,
- Nearly half of lorry drivers admit to not knowing the height of their vehicle,
- Outwith the railway industry nobody seems to care.

This sad state of affairs is another example of

Mike Lunan discusses bridge strikes and their consequences.

the lack of even-handedness with which society, including government at all levels, regards road traffic and rail traffic. The roads authority pleads the risk of frightful carnage to all sorts of people if a big strong steel bar is erected in front of a low bridge so that it is hit, rather than the bridge, alerting the driver to a greater risk immediately ahead. It is thus very difficult for

such a sensible (in both meanings of the word) device to be erected.

A passenger death on the railway is headline news for several days; a passenger death on the roads is just one of about 15 or so "we" expect (and worse, tolerate) every single day.

Billions of pounds are spent on road improvements, yet the daily cost of motoring has been frozen for several years. Annual fare increases on the railway are needed "to pay for the improvements".

Back to bridge bashes. If a bridge is struck NR has to check that it is safe for trains to pass over it. This inevitably takes time and costs money. Passengers are delayed and are entitled to compensation. The average cost to NR is some £13,000. The actual cost, factoring in the sort of "value per minute saved" figures used to justify (or prevent) new railway, is undoubtedly considerably greater. If I, as a passenger, can claim a 100% refund of my ticket then my compensation is limited to that amount. If in consequence I suffer further loss the railway has no way of capturing that figure - a situation which was raised in *FNE 75*.

There was a widely-publicized picture of a lorry delivering top-of-the-range cars which had



squashed several of them under a low bridge in Perth (13' 0"). A less widely-known picture [previous page] of a lorry snugly fitted under a bridge in Inverness (12' 0") has the name of the haulage firm clearly visible: pjh, whose strap line is, serendipitously, *"together we're better"*. Road-rail integration is all very well, but perhaps not quite this closely.

NR's Scottish people check Control's logs daily for incidents of damage (mainly bridge bashes, but also less than skilled use of level crossings). If the log provides contact details a standard Letter of Liability is sent, seeking the 3rd Party insurance details. If no contact details are provided a request is made to DVLA or Police Scotland for details. This takes time, but eventually the Letter of Liability is sent.

NR's claim falls, like All Gaul, into three parts.

- Bridge inspection fee - charged to every identifiable third party,
- Material damage costs - anything from minor fencing damage to substantial repairs,
- Train delays. Trains are cautioned (i.e. run at much reduced speed) or stopped altogether until the bridge inspectors carry out their inspection. Trains then run cautiously or at full speed unless the bridge requires closure.

Eventually an Application for Payment is sent to the 3rd party or their insurer. (The NR contact who very kindly sent me the details of the process adds the splendid sentence: *Generally there is ongoing correspondence (especially with the more substantial claims) until settlement.* I bet!)

But there's more. If I, as a car driver, act

"without due care and attention" or - worse - if my driving is "dangerous" I am liable for prosecution. It seems, however that the Crown Prosecution service isn't bothered about prosecuting drivers striking bridges because no-one is hurt. (This is the off-the-record view of a lawyer quoted in *RAIL 867*.) However we are surely on borrowed time - while most low bridges are in towns not all trains stop at all stations, and some hurtle through at high speed. One of the frequent victims is the bridge carrying the A607 just north of Grantham station. LNER's fine trains pass over it at a speed sufficient to cause dozens of fatalities were the track to be shifted sideways by a few inches. Does the CPS need to wait for this to happen before setting useful examples? And what about the passengers on the upper deck of a bus crushed by being driven into a big strong steel structure? Does CPS not have a duty of care to them?

It is heartening that in her second Editorial Stefanie Foster reports that, following the first, NR have shown interest in vibration sensors on bridges to alert them of a strike. The railway takes bridge strikes seriously, as it should. The rest of society shrugs its shoulders and notes that no-one has been killed. Yet.

I am indebted to a Network Rail spokeswoman for lifting the veil on what goes on; and to *RAIL 865* and *867* from whose articles by Stefanie Foster "Five bridge strikes every day" and "Bridges: it's time for action" I have shamelessly, and without permission, lifted the five leading bullet points and other details.

As the Prince of Wales before the present one said when doing a walkabout in South Wales, *Something must be done.*

POINTS FAILURE

There are many reasons why trains are cancelled. Sometimes they are completely outwith the rail system.

On Tuesday 9th October a notice appeared: *"Due to failure of the electricity supply at Georgemas Junction the line is closed."* A bit vague and mysterious; the truth however was that the outage was caused by a cattle transporter leaving the A9 at Spittal, a few miles south of Georgemas Junction, the rear section overturning and badly damaging a Scottish Hydro power line in the process.

Passengers had to complete their journeys by bus - and the cattle weren't too pleased either!

LEVEL CROSSINGS - 14

As CP5 draws to a close it's worth looking back at what NR has achieved since 2014. A device was installed at the user-worked crossing at Borrobol, reducing the number of times the line had to be crossed to access the farm from five to one. Has a similar device been installed elsewhere, or is the cost simply too high?

The very not temporary Temporary Speed Restriction at Chapelton Farm just north of Muir of Ord station was finally removed in the spring of 2017 with the installation of a different device. This allows trains to pass the crossing at line speed, particularly useful northbound.

Line speed has also been increased at Delny with the installation of temporary barriers. These will be relocated at Kildonan in CP6, allowing a further increase in line speed at Delny with the closure of the LX and its replacement by a bridge. Line speed will increase by an infinite factor at Kildonan - the only place on the entire GB network where such a claim can be made. NR says the proposed date of 2021 looks challenging, but this is because of possible delays in the legal process at Delny.

The big public win has been at Dingwall where two of the town's LXs have been substantially upgraded. Dingwall Middle and Dingwall No.1 have been converted to full barrier crossings with obstacle detection equipment. Dingwall No.2 remains an AOCL+B.

The major failure, like many others, lies with politicians at Westminster. The DfT has shamefully failed to progress the Joint Law Commissions' Report on the ludicrous (and profoundly unhelpful) state of the statute book with regard to LX matters.



Apparently some parties (not political ones) object. This doesn't usually stop politicians however.

Now to the future. What goodies does NR have for the FNL in CP6? Three places where there will be enhancements, and one improvement in systems. The data logging system at some FNL LXs uses obsolete equipment where spares are hard to find. Modern equivalents will be installed allowing improved fault finding. Allegations of misuse or incorrect operation should be easier to investigate.

As well as Kildonan NR will provide a double line ABCL at Rogart - the other Open Crossing on the network. The proposed date of 2020 looks heroic, but NR has successfully accomplished deeds of heroism before, so we must remain optimistic. Is "heroic" more or less challenging than "challenging"?

I have mentioned Bunchrew in many earlier articles: it has appeared in NR's CP6 plans for some time. The at-first-sight bad news is that it has been put on hold. The good news is why it has been put on hold. The intention was to renew Bunchrew as an ABCL, but the remit development was put on hold due to the work of the Far North Review Team as NR is looking at possible sites for double tracking or new loops. Bunchrew is one of the sites under consideration. If it is chosen then Bunchrew LX would have to be converted to a double line crossing of some kind. See ears, see music to them.

Mike Lunan

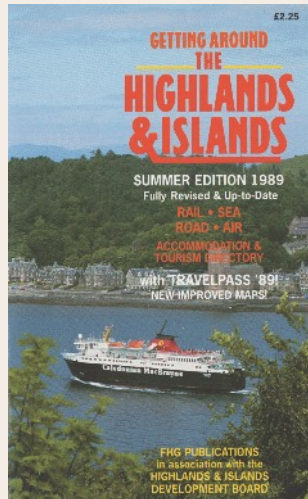
GETTING AROUND THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS

This was the title of an annual comprehensive timetable published from 1969 to 1996 by the Highlands and Islands Development Board in Inverness. The Board also introduced the Highlands and Islands Travelpass 7 day and 14 day rover ticket valid on trains, ferries and connecting bus services.

Although various passes for trains buses and ferries can still be bought, the timetable and separate public transport map are no more. The deregulation of bus services following the Transport Act 1984 made it more difficult to keep up with the much more frequent changes to services. Overall help can be obtained online from the Traveline Scotland service. Most local authorities (though not Highland Council) now publish their own area transport timetables and maps twice yearly: Argyll and Orkney being particularly good examples.



Abellio took over the ScotRail franchise in April 2015 and promised to work hard to make seamless door to door journeys possible. The declared intent in the ScotRail special spring 2015 issue of the *Abellio Way Magazine* is “to address any concerns customers have about changing between public transport services during their journey [using] clear signage, wifi, maps and information [to] help passengers to travel easily.”

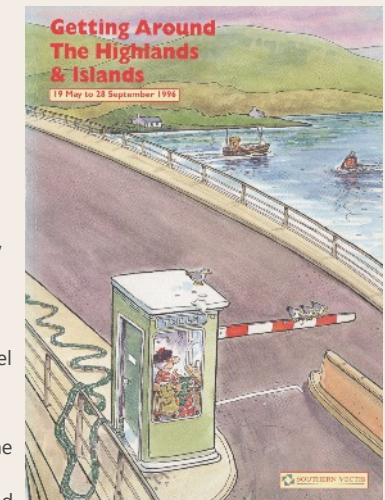


Moving on from Inverness

A city like Inverness, the hub of a huge area popular with tourists, would be expected to excel at getting people to Loch Ness or to the Culloden Battlefield. Sadly, the arriving passenger has to search all around the station for the information, and some is out of date.

The tourist information centre was downsized and moved to the High Street 18 months ago despite FoFNL's arguments that it should be moved to the railway station. The railway's onward travel posters at the station entrances still show it located at Castle Wynd.

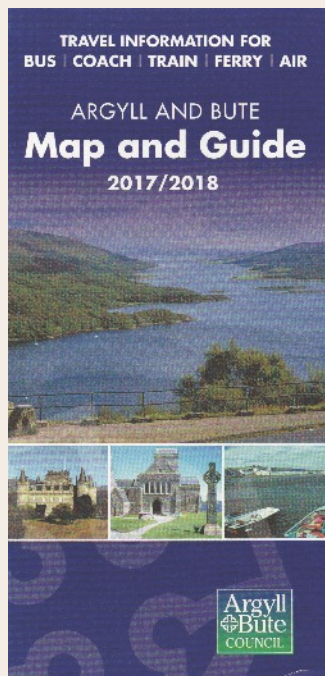
The posters, in Abellio's soon to be “revamped” station, tell you the nearest bus stop is 100 yards to the west in Union Street which is also wrong. Many of the buses go from other nearby bus stops and some from the bus station. At least there is a real time departure board for the bus station tucked away beside the signposted walkway along side platform six. Unfortunately it only gives the destination of the bus and passengers may not know that Fort William is often the final destination of the bus for the popular Urquhart Castle.



Culloden Battlefield is reached from the major bus stop at Falcon Square which is 70 yards distant in a southerly direction (and is the nearest to the station with no roads to cross). Two new bus shelters were installed in November, but the stop has been without printed timetables for the last year. There is now only an electronic display of the next three scheduled buses. A visitor could be waiting for a very long time before a less frequent bus to, say, the Tomatin Distillery is shown. Early 2018 saw a welcome big improvement in Inverness bus stop timetable provision but the 100% coverage claim made by the CEO of Transport Scotland to a very senior MSP is still a significant exaggeration.

Integration in the wider Highlands

The bus service between Thurso Station and Scrabster Harbour (for the Orkney ferry) was withdrawn a few years ago. Now the telephone box outside the station seems to have been abandoned. The Onward Travel poster advises that the nearest taxi rank is in the town centre and that this is 15 minutes walk away, but it does not mark the location of the rank or even give the phone numbers of any taxi firms. By the



time the last two train services arrive the station is unmanned and locked up. How helpful is all of this to travellers? Only passengers on a through ticket to Orkney (see below) are provided for.

There is a big gap in bus services from Tain to Inverness in mid afternoon, and it would be quite simple for passengers at the main bus stop in Lamington Street to be advised that there is a railway station nearby with a train service at 15.45. It just needs co-operative action.

ScotRail used to advertise that the 17.54 Inverness to Kyle of Lochalsh due to arrive at 20.31 made a connection with the 20.40 bus to Portree. They stopped doing this after 2015 though neither the train nor the bus times have changed since then. The bus stop is by the old slipway, not visible from the station. No doubt the Abellio conductor would tell the passenger how to find the bus, but is there any way of alerting the bus driver to a potential passenger if the train is a few minutes late? I don't think I would chance that connection.

In his February 2008 *"Study of Connectional Possibilities"* for the Highland Rail Partnership, Bob Barnes Watts observed "Despite the best efforts of various bodies, optimising the possible connection opportunities at this important interchange remain unfulfilled. **There is no liaison between rail and bus operators to cater for advice regarding out-of-course running...the bus doesn't wait for the train and the train doesn't wait for the bus!**" Has anything changed in eleven years?

Other bus services which have been withdrawn include all but one of the connecting post buses between Lairg Station (2 miles distant from Lairg village) and the coastal villages of the north and north west. Postbuses were also withdrawn from Kinbrace.

Richard Lochhead MSP is on the case of the non-connection between LNER's arrival from London Kings Cross at 20.05 and ScotRail's 20.05 from Inverness to Elgin which means a wait until 21.33 for the next train. Even between railway companies passenger convenience seems to get forgotten. [As shown elsewhere, provision of a double track loop in from Dalcross would allow the 20.05 to leave later].

A co-ordinating hand

It is not rocket science. What is needed is a bit of transport science, even common sense. Somehow the transport providers (of trains, buses and ferries), and the transport enablers/funders such as Transport Scotland, HITRANS, and the local authorities need to get together and sort this out. Make services work together, provide services of the right capacity at the right timings and frequencies; make it warm and comfortable (including at interchange points) and travellers will switch to public transport. Above all, travelling should be an enjoyable experience!

Future enhancements

PlusBus is a well established scheme which might be promoted even more. ScotRail could increase marketing of combined Rail and Sail tickets to Arran, Bute, Dunoon, Mull, Skye and the Western Isles. The one to Orkney sensibly now includes a taxi fare between Thurso station and Scrabster harbour. Travellers without a booked through fare need clear guidance too (as already highlighted). Abellio ScotRail has introduced bike hire at Inverness station. Stagecoach has agreed to run the first bus of the day from Lochardil ten minutes earlier so that passengers from that part of the city can connect with LNER's 07.55 train to Edinburgh and London Kings Cross.

Traveline Scotland can be an effective online resource, but it is only as good as the input it gets from operators and councils or regional transport partnerships. Its suggested routing is sometimes convoluted, so it could be made more user friendly. HITRANS developed "an [online] itinerary and journey planner" in 2012/13 named JourneyGenie but this was never fully launched. Online resources can be immensely valuable, but are not an over-riding panacea. We must remember that a significant number of travellers will always require paper timetables, maps and tickets.

Inverness station is soon to be modernised. Hopefully more attention will be given to signposting onward travel options. It would be good if Stagecoach updated and republished their map of bus stops in Inverness and the routes they serve. This should then be displayed prominently on the concourse. How much better it would have been to have the tourist office there too! Past initiatives to move the bus station closer to the railway station have foundered due to lack of a co-ordinated organisation to fund land purchase and project management. This idea is live again, but don't hold your breath. One glimmer of hope is that councillors are about to discuss how to put more of the "region" into the next stage of the Inverness City and Region Deal.

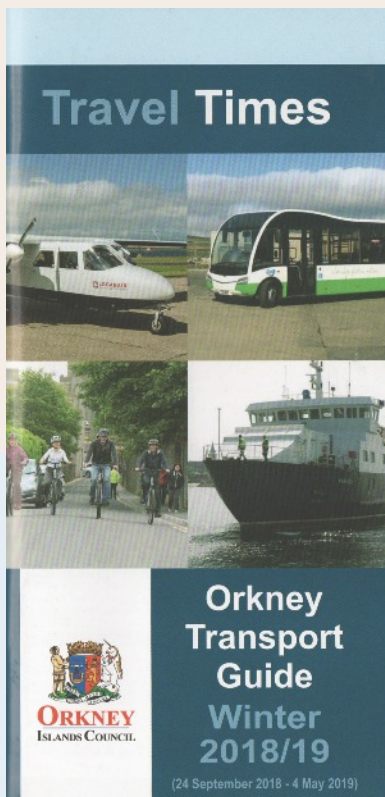
Bob Barnes Watts has the last word

This is the kind of article that our valued colleague Bob Barnes-Watts could have written so much better than me. His knowledge of timetables was tremendous and the advice he gave within and without the industry was invaluable.

To travel on one of his suggested enhanced itineraries - with added gold plating to the vehicle(s), or to the route, was a joy. Two examples will show you what I mean. From Inverness to Fort William via Dalwhinnie "Interchange" meant enjoying different scenery than usual including Loch Laggan. It was only possible because he knew that Fishers Tours of Dundee ran fortnightly as a stage service from Arbroath to Fort William and that a train from Inverness called at Dalwhinnie at the right time. Also that meeting with a former MD of ScotRail happened to be on a Tuesday and the right Tuesday at that!

The other was a journey from Inverness to Arisaig via Pitlochry for a HITRANS meeting. On a glorious June morning it meant a two hour earlier start from Inverness on the 06.50 train. Yule's bus took me to Kinloch Rannoch where a connection was made with the minibus to Rannoch Station for which I was the only passenger. Splendid scenery and the minibus ride was on a road new to me. At Rannoch, I climbed aboard the through train to Mallaig joining others going to the meeting from Glasgow. Well worth the early start.

That was travelling as the enjoyable delight which it should be. Thank you Bob.



FNL - WARTIME LINE OF DUTY

No railway in Britain during the First World War was asked to do more with minimal resources than the Highland Railway (HR). This was almost entirely due to the naval bases along the east coast of northern Scotland and in Orkney.

Scapa Flow in Orkney had been used by the Admiralty since the Napoleonic Wars. The decision to develop it as a northern naval base was taken in 1904, based on its threefold ability to control the entrances to the North Sea, place the Grand Fleet beyond reach of a surprise attack and avoid the risk of a fleet based in the Firth of Forth being bottled in by a minefield. However strategic the choice may have been, it took little or no account of the difficulties of supplying the fleet with coal, ammunition and personnel. It relied on the largely single-line HR whose resources were usually taxed only by

Anthony Lambert, author of *Britain's Railways in Wartime*, charts the unprecedented demands on the humble Highland Railway during WWI.

major sheep sales, tourism and the peregrinations of aristocrats, many in search of field sports.

Coupled with the naval base at Invergordon, the Highlands became an area of such strategic significance that from 25 July 1916, the area to the north and west of the Caledonian Canal and the Burgh of Inverness were declared a Special Military Area. Only members of the armed forces in possession of a travel warrant and civilians with an official pass or a permit book could be booked to stations north of Inverness.

However, it was not coal for the Grand Fleet at Scapa Flow in Orkney that placed such strain on the HR, because the port of Grangemouth was chosen in mid-1915 as the principal destination for railborne coal, to be forwarded by coastal

steamer – the HR could never have coped with the millions of tons of dry steam coal that the Royal Navy required.

In the weeks before war was declared, much of the fleet at southern naval bases was moved to Scapa Flow and other Scottish inlets, and plans for this eventuality had been made since 1911. Stockpiles of suitable coal had been created at Newcastle and other unnamed places where North Sea warships could be rebunkered. The first recorded *Jellicoe Train*, as the coal trains became known after the fleet's commander-in-chief, Admiral Lord Jellicoe, left Pontypool Road near Newport on 27 August 1914 for Grangemouth. By 1918 there was an average of 110 coal trains a week, and by the end of the war 13,676 *Jellicoe Specials* had been operated, carrying over five million tons of coal.

Ammunition for the Grand Fleet was routed through Inverness, entailing construction of a new 1,000 yard branch to the harbour in less than a fortnight. Trains of ammunition arrived from factories in southern Scotland and England for transfer to vessels for delivery to warships.

The passenger equivalent of the Jellicoe Trains was the *"Daily Naval Special"* train between London and Thurso. At first, attempts were made to accommodate naval ratings on service trains, but this descended into such disorder that a special naval train was instituted from 15 February 1917, running every weekday in each direction and scheduled to take 21½ hours for the 716¾ miles, which made it the longest-distance regularly booked train ever run in Britain.

The HR also came under strain from non-coal traffic for Thurso associated with the Grand Fleet, supplies to the base at Invergordon and the military camps at Cromarty, Invergordon and Nigg, and timber traffic. For the first three years of the war, the goods yard at Invergordon dealt with a daily average of 72 wagons, most a consequence of the decision to use its location on Cromarty Firth as a repair base for the Grand Fleet. This northern equivalent of Devonport employed over 4,000 workmen.

At the beginning of the war whole trainloads of timber, much of it felled in northern Scotland, were required for construction of floats on boom defence works at Scapa Flow and elsewhere. The demand for pit props rose as more coal was required for industry and transport. During 1918 alone the HR handled 293,561 tons of pitwood, much of it felled by the Canadian Forestry Corps. The Newfoundland Forestry Battalion had a camp between Dunkeld and Dalguise, and camps for German POWs with forestry experience were created at Carr Bridge and Lentrán.

Even though the HR was not asked to carry coal for the Grand Fleet, it gained new flows of coal traffic for fishing drifters. Before the war this had been carried by coastal steamers, but with the submarine threat, this was considered too risky, with the consequence that at times almost every Far North Line station was blocked with coal wagons from collieries further south. The pressure on the HR main line was so great that many trains were routed via Aberdeen, despite the much greater mileage.

The strain was further increased after the US entered the war in April 1917 with the decision to create a vast minefield known as the Northern Barrage. This envisaged laying 100,000 mines over about 235 miles between Orkney and the Hordaland coast of Norway.

Minelaying began in March 1918, and 70,000 had been laid by November when it stopped. Over four-fifths of the mines were supplied in component form by the US using the rail-connected Dalmore Distillery near Alness and specially constructed sheds at Muirtown Basin in Inverness as assembly points. Before the Dalmore site could be used, 4,500 casks of whisky had to be moved by train to a distillery at Edderton, 21 miles north of Alness. Most of the mine components were unloaded from US vessels at Kyle of Lochalsh and railed to Dalmore. The work required about 1,700 American naval ratings to be based at Kyle, and about 400 trains of mines were dispatched.

Perhaps the strangest army specials from the Highlands were the seven trains that conveyed from Invergordon to Winchester 161 Russian

officers and 2,993 men sent by Kerensky's short-lived government to fight on the Western Front. They had arrived on 4 October 1917 in three ships which also carried 300 presumably pro-tsarist refugees who were sent by special train to London. On 9 July 1918 Invergordon received another curious collection of largely Serb troops, but also French, Polish and Czech soldiers who had ended up in Russia; the 470 men were taken by a single train to Southampton en route to France. Russia was the probable destination of the contents of two special trains from London which arrived at Invergordon in December 1916 and January 1917: the first was of four vans of bullion guarded by a military escort in four coaches; the second had three bullion vans and five corridor coaches of guards.

In handling all this traffic, the HR was so acutely short of staff that shifts of 12 hours often extended to 14-16 hours. In evidence to the Select Committee on Transport in October 1918, Sir Herbert Walker expressed that view that "certain companies, such as the Highland, have had very heavy burdens placed upon them in the shape of traffic... I think the Highland has been hit more than any other company".

Article first appeared in *The Scotsman*, 22-11-2018

Britain's Railways in Wartime - Anthony Lambert

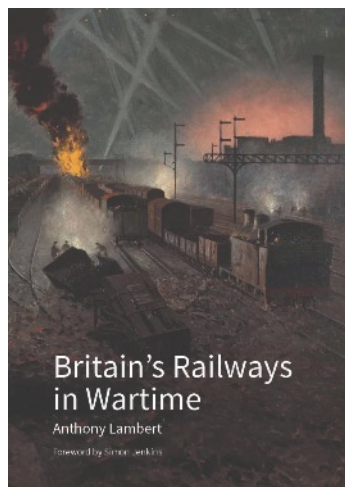
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THE GARVE & ULLAPOOL RAILWAY [PART 2]

1918

In early 1918, in an act of government unusual by its foresight, the Secretary of State for Scotland appointed a 'Rural Transport (Scotland) Committee' to look into existing transport facilities the length and breadth of Scotland and to suggest improvements. It was a mammoth task, but one which the inquiring Committee-members undertook with energy. While it may seem facile to summarise the extensive findings of this Committee in one

Andy Drummond traces the ultimately unsuccessful attempts to have a railway built to Ullapool.

sentence, let us try: the existing facilities ranged from non-existent to poor; and the suggested improvements to roads, railways and steamer services were many and varied.

The investigation of the state of rural transport in Scotland was almost certainly triggered by a number of factors - the realisation that the northern part of the UK was wide open to invasion during wartime, the anticipation that men returning from war would do so with increased expectations; almost certainly the vivid examples of rebellion and revolution in Russia and Ireland focused the attention on improving economic conditions. At all events, it was clear from the report of the Committee in 1919 that there were new ideas to be offered for the management of national transport and communications. The report repeated an argument, first raised by an MP in the 1880s, that the "*inhabitants of these districts have a 'right' to improved communications in the same*

way that they have a 'right' to cheap postage" - an argument which indeed led to its logical conclusion: that the transport network should be under tight national control, and subsidised in the remoter areas. Not only the railways: "*we are of the opinion that the steamer service of Messrs David Macbrayne, Limited, should be taken over by the State upon equitable terms*"; a suggestion that took almost exactly another 50 years to carry through. Some of the thoughts expressed bordered on the revolutionary, and were not restricted to the reform of transportation; one member of the Committee was not backward in expressing his opinion that "*there is small utility in giving a man the possibility of a good railway or steamer service if his conditions of life are such as make it difficult for him to pay the fare.*"

No sooner had the Committee hit the road than they wanted to meet suitable representatives from Ullapool, to discuss the railway project.

Selected members of the Parish Council, under the leadership of Rev. Sir Montague Fowler (John Fowler's third son, now - after a series of unfortunate events - the laird of Braemore) put their case to the Committee in March 1918. Fowler smooth-talked the Committee with some well-rehearsed arguments - and some persuasive new ones as well. In pole position was the usual case for promoting the fisheries; in second place, a new argument was that a railway would greatly facilitate the removal of timber from



Rev. Sir Montague Fowler

the area (mostly, indeed, from Fowler's Braemore estate); with the war still rumbling on, a railway to Ullapool would allow troops to be sent rapidly to the west coast to fend off hostile invasions; and finally, the area was ideally suited for the development of hydro-power, and a

railway could both assist in building the necessary infrastructure and make use of the energy so produced.

Leaving aside the troop-movements (Sir Montague also speculated that troops could readily be sent to Ireland from Ullapool "*in the event of possible disturbances*" there), the two new economic arguments for timber and hydro power were not to be ignored. The supply of timber for the war effort was very much a major concern for the government - hence, indeed, the creation of the Forestry Commission in 1919. And hydro power was very much on the agenda - our friend Major Blunt had already been developing his own local schemes back in 1903. Fowler let it be known that he had been to London in early 1918 and there talked to the War Office, the Admiralty, the Timber Supply Department and influential MPs. He had found great support for the Railway. Even, rather mysteriously, at the American Embassy.

Although the words 'light railway' were nowhere used in any of the memoranda or correspondence between Ullapool and the Transport

Committee, it was clear that there had been a change of plan concerning the route at Braemore. There was certainly no more mention of that seductive tunnel or a descent on the west side of the descent: the line was to come down the steep gradient on the east side - i.e. following the course of the road (A835). In all probability, this could only be achieved by switching to lighter rolling-stock.

Among the many recommendations for improvements to the transport network, seventeen railways were proposed by the Rural Transport Committee. Some of these would now bring tears of joy to the corporate eyes of Visit Scotland: a 75-mile line on Skye, between Armadale, Portree and Dunvegan; on Lewis, a 40-miler between Stornoway, Carloway and

Ness; on Arran, between Whiting Bay and Blackwaterfoot. A host of other new mainland lines were also proposed - including that old favourite, the railway from Culrain to Lochinver. And standing out above them all, the Garve to Ullapool route, which would be termed, in 21st century parlance, a no-brainer. "*We are impressed with the arguments in favour of the construction of this line [...] We are further impressed by the existence of large reserves of water-power, and the consequent prospects of manufacturing industries being established in the neighbourhood of Ullapool [...] Apart from these considerations, the great argument in favour of this line is that it would give the shortest through connection between a port on the west coast and the existing railway system.*"

So sanguine was the Rural Transport Committee of having its recommendations implemented that, in January 1919, several of its members set

off for the still-smoking battlefields of France to take an inventory of spare rolling-stock, rails and other paraphernalia of the light railways which had been laid down by the

British Expeditionary Force during the war. They concluded that the Government should snap up these bargain-basement items for use in the proposed railways in Scotland.

It was, of course, no surprise to find that, of the seventeen proposed railway-lines across the length and breadth of Scotland, not a single one was actually built. There was no nationalisation of the railways (although the Railways Act of 1921 took a step towards it, by amalgamating over 100 companies into four large ones), and no nationalisation of steamer services. Undoubtedly, this failure was due partly to the return of surplus lorries and their trained drivers from the battlefields of France, which resulted in a huge boost to private enterprise passenger transport and haulage by road, and reduced the need for railways; but it



Braemore House - Fowler Family Home

also suggests that there was no appetite in Westminster for rural improvements away up north.

1945

In September of 1945, it was the turn of Commander Vyner to play The Wide-Eyed Optimist. He was the owner of an estate near Ullapool (and others up and down the UK). He approached the LMS Scottish Committee with a proposal to build that railway. He estimated a construction cost of £500,000. The LMS dutifully set up a meeting with him, doubled the estimate to a nice round million, and then swiftly put an end to such nonsense. This was perhaps the shortest-lived of all the hopes and dreams. Commander Vyner had to content himself with other, lesser, philanthropic schemes.

Summary

The 1890 proposal for a railway between Garve and Ullapool was thwarted largely by a

government which was anxious not to spend more money than necessary to improve the lives of the people of the west coast; it was also thwarted by the incompetence of civil servants and the machinations of the Highland Railway. The 1896 proposal failed for lack of funds. The 1918 proposal was ignored by a government that cared not to pay any attention to the well-argued recommendations of its own appointees. The railway historian John Thomas described the Garve and Ullapool Railway and the other unsuccessful candidates of 1890 as "*pie in the sky lines*". The evidence of several official investigations into the Ullapool proposal suggests that it was by no means so fanciful. Difficult of engineering it might have been, but the Victorians were nothing if not good at dramatic engineering solutions. For the moment, we can only admire the efforts of local people to have the line from Ullapool built. In terms of a tourist attraction, the helter-skelter descent at Braemore alone would have been worth the fare.

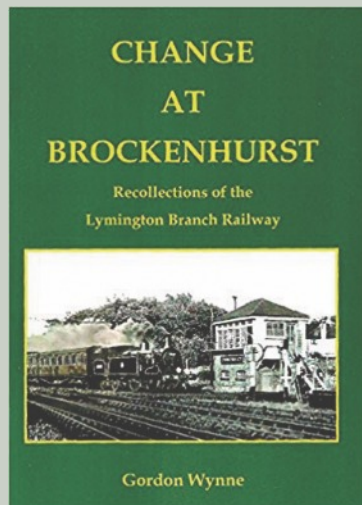
Change at Brockenhurst - *Recollections of the Lymington Branch Railway* by **Gordon Wynne**
Kirkdale Publications (1 Sept. 2018) ISBN: 978-0907089148

This new book has only the most tenuous connection with the FNL although the cover does show a satisfyingly Scottish-looking M7 0-4-4T designed by Dugald Drummond, latterly of the LSWR.

On p33 we find: "For those who might be amused at the idea of a competition to find the shortest luxury train journey it was possible to make in Great Britain the palm has to be shared, it seems, by our Town - Pier journey and that between Invershin and Culrain on the Far North Line that connects Inverness and Wick in Scotland. In both cases the stations are only half a mile apart, at the two ends of a viaduct over a tidal estuary, the Lymington River in the one instance and the Kyle of Sutherland, the River Oykel, in the other. On the face of it the Scottish candidate wins because catering trolleys still run in the trains, but only at Lymington was there a station bookstall where you could buy a book or paper to while away the journey. At neither end of the Oykel Bridge is there a bookstall such as we had under the overall roof at the Town. The serious point here, easily appreciated by those who know the Branch well, is that a great railway journey does not need to be a long railway journey."

Note from FoFNL member John Yellowlees, who worked with the author in the 70s:

"Incidentally the closest station pair is now on the Cardiff-Coryton line - Ty Glas, opened 1987, and Birchgrove are just 340 metres apart."



A RAILMAN REMEMBERS

9 – THE END OF THE INNOCENCE

The Highland Railway and its descendents, currently known as ScotRail, have been part of the fabric of the Highlands for so long, it's easy to take them for granted. A lot of people are surprised when they find out how close we came to losing them.

Beeching had already closed busier lines, notably the Waverley route from Edinburgh to Carlisle. The ill advised nature of this closure is clearly demonstrated by the reopening of part of the route in 2015. But in the 1960s, the predilection for closing lines meant that chopping off everything north of Perth made perfect economic sense to the road lobby. So a group of doughty Highlanders formed a pressure group called 'Macpuff', which was quite a trendy name for its time.

I benefited greatly from knowing a couple of those activists. One was Michael Taylor who moved north to start Westerbuss out of Dundonnell in the late 60s. I'm sure he would be delighted to see his bus still running nearly 50 years later. Another was Phil Durham, a wheelchair-bound wartime submarine commander who was extremely active from Scotsburn Farm in Easter Ross. We owe all the people involved in Macpuff a great deal; without them there would be no Caledonian Sleeper, no trains from Inverness to the Central Belt, no Kyle line and no Fearn Station memoirs.

It was close to the winter solstice, the shortest and darkest day of the year, when the midday train departed leaving a distinctive form looming out of the grey Ross-shire air. He was wearing an old fashioned suit with tails, and he had the demeanour of a crow. He may have had a Victorian buttoned down starched collar. When he knocked on the ticket office door and walked in I knew it was trouble.

He introduced himself, surveyed the office and said; "Is that your record player?"

This was not a good sign.

"Uh huh".

"This is a railway station, not a discotheque, get it out of here."

He walked through to the kitchenette.

"Is that your mattress?"

Did I mention it had got very cold in the caravan? Rather than wasting BR's electricity trying to heat it up, it had seemed logical to move the bed into the warm office. During the day I hid the mattress

in the kitchen. It was just a temporary measure of course.

"Uh huh".

"Get it out of here. And the guitar."

Murdo was the relief clerk from hell via Helmsdale. He was the opposite of the easy going Dick. He'd obviously heard about me and made it his personal mission to impose some discipline, or preferably wrinkle me out of Fearn altogether. It was an awesome performance; a bit like being mugged by a

Free Presbyterian hitman. I knew straight away it was curtains.

I had felt a sense of achievement to see almost a year notched up on my first job. But I was wrestling with whether, when and how to leave Fearn. Or should I do another one year cycle? Now the decision had been made for me, and I was in no mood to fight. I jumped on the 3.15 to Inverness as I often did on a Friday, but this time I got off at Invergordon. Then I walked in to the Area Manager's office where the adventure had begun the previous February and handed in my week's notice.

It was years before I got over the loss of my quarter



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

fare priv travel. But I had some money saved, as well as an ill-advised air-cooled VW van. It was time to head out into the world and start a JJ Cale influenced band called 'Difficult Situations' or 'Hard Times' or something like that. In the end someone else did it far better than I could have imagined.

The caravan was sold for the same price I'd paid for it, to the gentlemen who had towed it in there for me earlier in the year. I did pay the station a courtesy visit a few months later to check out my successor. We had a coffee and compared notes; he was in uniform and looked fairly straight. But as I took my leave, he winked at me and said; "Don't worry, I'm still running Fearn with the same informal attitude you did". I realised it had been a Pyrrhic victory for my nemesis Murdo.

Within a couple of years the freight trains formed of vacuum braked short wheelbase vans had gone, and with them the potato traffic. The next round of economy cuts saw the station formally designated as unmanned. Eventually the building

was disposed of by BR, to be converted into a substantial house.

As a result of my accidental railman status I was lucky to meet Buffet Car Alec who invented fast tea delivery, Dick the unflappable clerk who trained me up, Delivery Dave who took me and the parcels on entertaining rambles, and James the Post, multi-instrumentalist and bandleader. Various family members came to stay during the summer, and even a couple of school friends, Tim and Simon, managed to track me down and pay a surprise visit.

When people ask what you did after you left school, there are many different answers. Some had a gap year. Some had a baby. I had a station.

Fearn became a B listed building in 1978. As yet it has not become necessary to erect a blue plaque, but if it did, it would say that I lived and worked there in 1974, that I enjoyed it very much and, to everyone's surprise, I can still remember most of it.

The end.

Contents

THRUMSTER STATION



The plaque awarded to the Yarrows Heritage Trust by the National Railway Heritage Association in 2017 was unveiled *in situ* at the beautifully restored Thrumster Station on 21st August 2018.

Seen on the left is Andy Savage, director of the Railway Heritage Trust and a trustee of the National Railway Heritage Awards and, on the right, John Gunn, of award sponsor Stagecoach.



Photos: © Fergus Mather



Like your editor, John Yellowlees has never been to New Zealand, but armed with a Dunedin Railways journey guide collected by HML Community Rial Partnership chair Sally Spaven and information from a talk by former ScotRail manager Bob Heasman he offers these thoughts.

Some early New Zealand rail pioneers were intrepid : inhabitants of Invercargill reckoned that their town offered a better route into the Otago region than did Dunedin, and set about building

John Yellowlees with a thought-provoking view of a New Zealand railway

a railway with timber rails and flangeless wheels, using locomotives that were too heavy, which proved to be disastrous when there was a fatal accident and the scheme ran out of money. With Invercargill thus bankrupted, Sir Julius Vogel, governor of the Australian province that NZ then comprised, set about building a national network in an ambitious plan based on American practice that nevertheless was cost-conscious, using the 3'6" gauge.

The last line linking Christchurch with the Interislander train-ferry port of Picton was not completed until the 1950s, by which time rail was in decline, the seeds of its undoing all too evident in timetables which showed trains to be very slow and infrequent - but they were important in their time, and today remain vital for freight, with South Island long-distance scheduled passenger trains now reduced to the, at best, once-daily Christchurch-Picton (restored after earthquake damage) and Christchurch-Greymouth routes.

Even the steam Kingston Flyer has been

mothballed, many lines have been converted into cycle-routes, and except in the Auckland and Wellington commuting areas New Zealanders go everywhere by road or air.

Auckland has seen substantial investment in electrifying its commuter network, and Wellington has had electric trains for many years. Otherwise almost the only glimmer of hope is the tourist trains run by Dunedin Council that operate out of the town's historic station - considered to be the most photographed building in all of New Zealand - by architect George A. Troup (known as "Gingerbread George") that last saw commuters in 1982 and long-distance trains in 2002.

These operate inland to the Taieri Gorge and northwards along the coast. The Otago Excursion Train Trust had been running trains since 1979, and when in 1990 NZ Rail closed the line on completion of the Clyde hydro-electric power scheme they organised an appeal which raised \$1.2m. The Trust and Dunedin City Council subsequently purchased the line and five locomotives. Then in 1994 the Government sold Dunedin Station to the City Council for \$1, and in the following year Trust and Council established



Dunedin Station

the Taieri Gorge Railway limited to run daily tourist trains. In 2004 the company began operating The Seaside service along the by now freight-only South Island main trunk line to Palmerston, and these were extended in 2015 to include regular trips to Otago's second largest urban area, Oamaru with a hop-on hop-off option at Moeraki Boulders. In 2014 Taieri Gorge Railways was rebranded as Dunedin Railways to reflect the diverse range of destinations and services the company operates, now using seven diesel-electric locomotives with eighteen carriages plus

a Silver Fern two-coach railcar.

What is the moral for us? Surely it is to be careful about what we wish for. New Zealand and Canada are often cited as exemplars offering much better tourist trains than Scotland's all-purpose diesel units. However over most of those countries the occasional leisurely tourist train with stop-offs at attractions may be all that is on offer to passengers. It is almost as though the operation of ScotRail had been taken over by The Royal Scotsman!!

CHARTERS: "SCOTLAND OPEN FOR BUSINESS"

Bill Reeve, Director of Rail at Transport Scotland, said in a recent issue of *RAIL* magazine that Transport Scotland would love to see regular charter trains on the Far North Line. He pointed out that the franchise agreement gives ScotRail the necessary service flexibility. He said that on the Borders Railway it is seen as economically rational to run charter trains in actual service paths, cancelling a couple of lightly used off-peak trains in the process.

Mr Reeve added that he intends to keep Scotland free of the European Control System until a cost effective method of fitment to heritage traction is found.

· THE ·
STEAM DREAMS
RAIL CO · EST 1999

HIGHLANDS & ISLANDS
EXPLORER 2019

Steam Dreams is running a tour from 9 - 17 May 2019. It leaves London Victoria, heading directly to Edinburgh with *Flying Scotsman*. On 11 May the train will arrive at Dunrobin Castle station hauled by Thompson B1 *Mayflower*, which will have taken over the train at Inverness. Mike Lunan has agreed with Steam Dreams that he will be welcomed aboard for the Inverness to Dunrobin to distribute FoFNL flyers to passengers.

On returning to Inverness tourists are offered two options involving the Kyle and West Highland lines over the next three days, followed by a couple of days in the Lake District.

If you visit Steam Dreams' excellent website to have a look, don't be put off by the opening sentence on the page about this holiday, "In May 2019, *Flying Scotsman* is returning to some of the most beautiful lines in Northern England for the first time since its refurbishment on Steam Dreams' *Highlands & Islands Explorer!*"

RAILDAR

For those with a fascination for rail systems and who enjoy seeing live information about the whereabouts of trains at any given moment a visit to Raildar [<https://raildar.co.uk>] would be very worthwhile.

Not only can you watch the progress of a chosen train, you can also find out the timekeeping history of a particular service - especially useful if you are making a claim for a delay.

If you are interested in the actual track layout at any junction you can see it instantly by searching "Junction Maps".

INTER7CITY CIRCLE

Monday 10th December 2018 – the first weekday of the new ScotRail timetable with HSTs (High Speed Trains) on Inter7City routes if you know where to find them. (See back page for photos)

CIRCULAR TRIP: Inverness>Aberdeen>Perth>Inverness, first class “Anytime Day Singles”

Inverness	dep	05:54	
Aberdeen	arr	08:11,	dep 08:51
Perth	arr	10:18...(well, that was the plan!),	dep 14:51
Inverness	arr	17:07	

Left Ardgay 4.00 am to drive to Inverness. Temperature -2 so it took over an hour. The road over Struie was glistening and the snowploughs don't start until 06:15.

Angst at station car park ticket machine: After four attempts to pay by card, I discovered that I had £6.00 in coins and two seconds later I had my ticket and relaxed again.

Not for long.

It was bloody freezing in the station and the RACKET from all the units and locos sitting in the platforms revving away was horrendous! Nothing was open. No toilets, no newsagent, no coffee, no booking office, no waiting room. Biting cold wind. Tried going out of the exit at Platform 1 but noise was equally intimidating. Eventually went out of the main entrance into Station Square and discovered that I could get away from the full force of the noise.

Once the platform number was displayed and I was on the train – in the leading slam-door carriage – it was bliss. Bagged my seat and hopped off again with camera. Driver looked happy.

Soon under way, almost in silence, or so it seemed. The conductor was very pleasant and professional. My guess is that she actually trains conductors. She was promptly followed by the trolley, which was laden with goodies. I was presented with a “Breakfast Box” containing a substantial apple and oatmeal bar, a sealed pot of diced peaches and pears in juice and a large chocolate-flavoured



muffin with chocolate-flavoured chunks. A nice cup of tea, to which I added my own full-fat milk from a screw-

top bottle in my back-pack, washed it all down.

Another huge relief was that it had not been thought necessary to write the menu in embarrassing slang Glaswegian!

Did I say how comfy the seats were? The seats are simply splendid! Very large table, too, with all sorts of electric sockets. The carriage lighting was muted and there were working curtains at all the windows.



On the approach to Nairn I was bracing myself for the DINGDONGTHISISNAIRN but there were no announcements at all, pre-recorded or live, during the whole journey. Another plus.

It was a busy train and by the time we got to Keith I was beginning to notice the expressions on people's faces standing on the platform. They mostly just gazed in awe and seemed unwilling at first to move at all, probably being convinced that this was a diverted special train which wouldn't be stopping. At almost every station, once they had convinced themselves that this was “their train”, quite a few piled onto the leading carriage and sat down without realising that it was entirely First Class. In fairness, there were no actual notices saying so and the head-rest covers simply said “ScotRail” unlike a train I was on later in the day. At Inch there were quite a lot of schoolchildren,

and by Inverurie our carriage was more like a school bus! A school bus with extremely well-behaved passengers. I don't think there was a spare seat and I don't think any of them realised they were in First Class. It didn't matter.

Meanwhile I had been chatting to a lady from Cullen who had got on at Keith and was bound for Dunbar - a journey she makes fortnightly. She had two or three pieces of luggage and one of those two-wheeled shopping trolleys which contained her dog! I only know this because she told me so. The dog never so much as whimpered, let alone stuck its nose out. Anyway, I learned all the pitfalls of return journeys from Keith to Dunbar, some of which were astonishing. Being stuck in Keith Loop for over an hour - so near and yet so far. Terminating at Huntly . . . no buses on the horizon and train returning to Aberdeen. Learning to change trains on northward journeys not at Aberdeen, where there is a fight to be a sardine, but at Dundee, where the (same) train is relatively empty. During the recent closure at Dyce, being shouted at to get on the bus at Aberdeen and then the bus arriving one minute after the Inverness train had left. Going round by Inverness to avoid the rail replacement bus altogether. This wasn't to be her day either . . . we were about 10 minutes late into Aberdeen and the Penzance via Dunbar train had just left. I was ok though, as I still had half an hour. However, I had spotted on several monitors that the only 08:51 departure appeared to be a train to Dundee. It should have been going to Glasgow.

Coming back onto the concourse, the first person I saw was the conductor from my first train. She came up apologising for the missed connection to Dunbar but when I told her that I was actually going to Perth, she insisted on accompanying me over to the barrier attendants to find out what the score was. She was simultaneously scanning through two different hand-held devices of her own, looking for information. It turned out that the train I was booked onto was being terminated at Dundee, but it was still an HST so I was happy enough. I knew I was going to have a lot of spare time once I got to Perth, so a wait at Dundee would add another colour to my itinerary!

I soon found myself back in exactly the same seat in exactly the same carriage that I had recently left. The difference was that I was the only passenger

in that carriage! Off we set and then suddenly WHOOSH ! It was as if we were flying. What a speed on that line. It was exhilarating. Along came the trolley. Another "Breakfast Box" - this time with a blueberry-flavoured muffin with blueberry-flavoured chunks. There was no sign of the conductor at all - on the whole journey - which wouldn't normally have bothered me except that I wanted to know how and when I was going to get from Dundee to Perth. The trolley guy had nothing else to do but chatter away to me. He had a very strange accent. Not one I'd come across before. He went off to his store cupboard at one point and came back with an "Afternoon Tea Box" which he thought I might like for later on! (Scone, jam and clotted cream!)



So . . . into Dundee. Long narrow and cramped platform was my impression with no signs indicating a way out, but there were plenty of staff to ask. The whole place seemed to be teeming with ScotRail auxiliary staff, who were forcing smiles and cheerfulness onto all and sundry. The next train to Perth was going to be the next train from Aberdeen to Glasgow, due in about 50 minutes. Found my way out, through a café, through the barriers (where I didn't insert my ticket in case it ate it up . . . the guy was happy to let me out and back in again) then up a working escalator to a large concourse area with what seemed like glass walls on three sides and freezing, bloody freezing temperature. In three places there were what looked like glass revolving doors, but nothing revolved. Oh no. When you approached these doors they wheeled apart and as soon as you stepped into the glass circle the opposite side doors wheeled open too, thereby allowing a gale of freezing cold air to enter the building. It was no colder outside than it was in. Took some photos inside and out. Was impressed by the ticket place - three staff in place and able to tell me that my

next train was in fact an HST (it wasn't supposed to be) and that it had a trolley. In fact I got a dubious look and a "Why on earth would a train NOT have a trolley?" expression. "...What an odd question!"

If she only knew . . .

Back down another working escalator, although it did emit an unnerving screech every 15 seconds or so. I thought about playing the piano but decided my fingers were too cold. Through the barrier and there were a lot of people sitting in the café area. Did I tell you it was cold? It's a kind of long narrow area and exactly opposite each other are two large glass sliding doors which open even when nobody is near them allowing an almost constant through draft of freezing air. I bought a Beano. Sorry I mean a Dundee Courier, Dundee edition, and asked the lady behind the counter if there was anywhere warm to wait. She directed me to the "ScotRail small lounge" down the platform. This was a good bit warmer but had the same plan of doors opposite each other leading onto the platforms on either side. It wasn't "just" a waiting room either. It was the only way to get to the toilets, so there was a constant opening of the doors by those wishing to avail themselves. The ramp which started in the middle of the room to the toilets was too steep for one chap to propel his wheelchair up without assistance. The monitor showing departures had a handy light suspended from the ceiling right in front of it, blocking the view! One fairly elderly lady had been on my terminated train from Aberdeen. She had now missed an appointment at Perth so was going to return home. But they had just announced that the next TWO trains to Aberdeen were cancelled so she decided to go and get the service bus.

Onto the uncancelled Glasgow train. Quite busy. Quite a few ScotRail uniformed staff with cheesy grins and jolly ho-ho stuff. Trolley appeared almost immediately and I politely declined a third "Breakfast Box" and bought myself a gin and tonic. I mean a real one – none of your pre-mixed tins.

Perth in no time at all. There was loads of time before my final leg back to Inverness. I had originally planned to meet some friends for lunch but that had fallen through so I had simply decided that it was far too cold to wander around and that I would go into the Station Hotel, have another drink and some lunch and then stay warm in their lounge. Well. Their lounge was warm but it was unattended, as was the reception desk. There was an invitation to ring the bell. I rang the bell. Ten minutes later a young woman passed through. To cut a long story (in broken English) short, the bar was closed and the kitchen was closed. Duncan had an appointment today. I think.

Back outside and there were plenty of taxis across the square. "Please take me to a nice hotel which is open for lunch." No problem. Off to the Salutation. Coal fire in the lounge. Glass of red wine. Ribeye steak + onion rings to die for. Delicious.

Back at the station and a full-size Rail Replacement Bus from Aberfeldy Motors is about to depart for "Inverness only". with four passengers. Dear Lord.

I discovered that my final train of the day, which should have been starting from Edinburgh, was starting from Perth. In fact it was sitting there, but it was too early to be allowed on board. The waiting room though, very sensibly had only one door and was well heated.

When the train left Perth there were to be two disappointments. Firstly, there was no trolley and secondly there was the tannoy. The young lady who made all the announcements (live) had one of those voices which seem to start each sentence frantically fast and at high doh, before gradually working down the scale. At every station we had to be exhorted not to try to open the doors until the train was at a standstill (as well as all the other guff).

Arrived back in Inverness on time. The 17:12 to Ardgay was still sitting there as I walked to the car park. Couldn't see an empty seat on it.



Malcolm G Wood, FoFNL Secretary

'CLASSIC' COMBINATIONS

43148 in new livery is leading blue 43003 and striped blue coaches at Aviemore on the 09.44 Inverness – Edinburgh on 10 December. FoFNL members Les Turner [L] and Richard Ardern [R] can be seen on the platforms.



HSTS ON THE HML

Until the refurbished units arrive, ScotRail is managing with ex-GWR units which still have slam doors.

A very mixed set on the 12.55 Inverness – Edinburgh at Feabuie on 2 January 2019.

The coaches were lettered A, B, B and D which would really assist passengers trying to find where to sit!

All photos by Sandy Colley

On 9 December the 13:33, the first southbound HST working from Inverness, with 43168 leading 43140, both in new livery with green coaches - yet another combination, also seen at Feabuie.

