

# 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:

Thompson B1 61306, *Mayflower*, leaving Rogart on the Dunrobin leg of the Steam Dreams *Highlands & Islands Explorer* tour on 11 May 2019.

Photo: **Alistair Moulstone**

# HEADCODE

The Parliamentary Questions section of *Far North Express* is normally given without comment - not least in order to maintain our politically neutral status as campaigners. I'm going to make an exception on this occasion because the two exchanges printed on pages 18 and 19 illustrate the problems of both rail campaigners and party politicians.

In the background is a reluctance to hint at giving any ground in relation to reducing the roads programme. The Deputy First Minister said that recent work to improve the Highland Main Line is part of a "balanced package". In fact, the HML is getting slower. In the new timetable, the longest journey time from Inverness to Edinburgh has increased to 3 hours 46 minutes. This is a whole hour longer than the 2 hours 45 minutes promised by Alex Salmond in 2008 for the fastest services. He also stated that by 2012 the average journey time would be only 3 hours. Under current Government Policy, achieving this promise will have been delayed by 13 years to 2025.

On the subject of freight The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity said on 12 June, "We will continue to do everything that we can to encourage commercial businesses to make use of the rail freight options that are available to them." This ignores the fact that until there is better infrastructure to allow more freight paths and longer trains, the options available are very limited. This applies to all the single track railways in Scotland. It is revealing that he also felt it necessary to say that he did "not know whether it is now official Labour Party policy to cut the roads budget and transfer that money to rail instead" and "I suspect that, in later questions, members will also ask me to make more investment in roads."

As mentioned elsewhere in this edition, we were delighted to hear the First Minister, on 5 September, rise to the challenge to "be bold in the Climate Emergency and take funds out of new, big, roads projects and invest them in public transport instead".

The reason we never stop talking about the single-track HML is that many of our northbound services are directly affected by holding departures from Inverness, particularly the 18:31, to wait for late-running trains from the south. If the HML was mostly double-track this would cease to be a problem. We have to get the message across: **Main lines linking important cities in Scotland must not remain single track.**

Ian Budd

## 2019 AGM - CONVENER'S REPORT

### Loss of BBW, death of John Melling

Firstly I would like to talk about the loss of two of our members.

John Melling, one of our founder members, and our second chairman from 1997-2003, died peacefully in May. I only met him once but I know that he was a pivotal figure in the early days of FoFNL.

Our other great loss was one of our committee members, Bob Barnes-Watts, who died last August after a difficult illness. I think everyone here will be aware of the enormous contribution he made and of his amazing knowledge of all public transport matters. He has left an unfillable gap.

### Performance

This has been quite a tough year for the Far North Line. Most noticeable to passengers has been the very variable performance of the timetable - in the last twelve months the PPM figure has struggled to reach an average of 80%, sometimes dropping into the low forties. ScotRail's problems over the year are well-known and mostly not of their own making. The late delivery of new trains in the Central Belt and, more relevant to our line, the extremely late delivery of the refurbished HSTs has wrecked ScotRail's driver training schedule causing massive disruption to our services.

However, one part of this sad story is quite definitely Abellio's fault: it seems that the

franchise bid may have been based on compulsory Rest Day Working, in order to keep staff numbers down. This decision has since been overturned and drivers and conductors are now being recruited to remove this reliance. Unfortunately driving a train requires far greater training than is obvious to a non-railway person and takes a long time. Things are improving, but slowly.

The other causes of the bad timekeeping are several, including problems with the Class 158 trains on occasion. Needless to say, the excessively long single-track sections cause massive repercussions in the event of any lateness.

The other issue which makes passengers very unhappy is the all-too-frequent lack of catering, which on a journey of over four hours is unforgivable. We struggle to understand why it seems so difficult to maintain the required number of staff for the service. Sometimes we are told that there is a staff shortage because someone has moved on - whatever happened to having to give notice of leaving? We believe some staff are provided by an agency which would explain this. If that's the case, it's clearly not a suitable way to provide such a vital service. *[We have since learned that agency staff are not used]*

### **Review Team - Year of Waiting**

Now onto more cheerful matters. You will remember the report done by Tony Glazebrook on all aspects of the Far North Line in 2016. This led directly to the establishment of the Far North Line Review Team which met six times as a group, the final meeting being on the 1st February this year.

The result of its deliberations is that an enormous amount of work has been carried out by both ScotRail and Network Rail, with important input from HITRANS. Every aspect of the line has been studied and many initiatives have been taken, or are currently being worked on. These range from small but important items, such as designing a passenger-operated request stop system, enabling a waiting passenger to notify an approaching train of their intention to board, to the major item on our shopping list, the famous Lentrans Loop. Also, I'm pleased to report that Customer Information Screens have been installed

at all stations except Dunrobin Castle - coming soon!

The FoFNL committee's main problem at the moment is more psychological than practical. Although planned work is still funded in five-year Control Periods - we're now in CP6 - the list of work to be done is no longer prepared and announced before the start of each Control Period, we now have a 'pipeline' process and projects are worked up, agreed and continuously fed into the workstream. For us this means that we have no certainty at all about what is to be done for the FNL in the next five years, even though we have very good vibes. This means that we've had our fingers crossed for so long that it will be hard to straighten them out! We are very much hoping that some of the mist will be cleared at our conference today, we'll have to wait and see.

There are two other possibilities I'd like to mention. The first is one that has been on the cards for quite some time, courtesy of Frank Roach at HITRANS - the Caithness Sleeper - or "Midnight Train to Georgemas" (thank you Gladys Knight and the Pips). The project is now in need of political support, so if any of you have any connections to local, or indeed national, politicians, this is something to bring to their attention as a very worthwhile addition to FNL services.

The other possibility is the running of a trial to assess the desirability of a Thurso-Wick Shuttle. There is considerable interest from ScotRail, local residents and, I believe, Transport Scotland. The idea would be to use one of the battery trains that are being produced from ex-TfL Underground stock. I went to a demo of this train at Bo'ness in October and was extremely impressed. The train itself would be very cheap to run, especially if it were possible to use power generated in the Pentland Firth which can be stored and transferred when needed, taking only a few minutes to fully charge the train for a fifty mile round trip.

### **Conclusion**

All in all these are exciting times for the Far North Line, it's just a shame that it seems to take such a long time to achieve improvements - rather like manoeuvring an oil tanker - we'll get there!

**Ian Budd**

# 2019 FoFNL CONFERENCE REPORT

This year's AGM & Conference took place on 21 June in the Royal Marine Hotel, Brora.

The weather was kind and the venue was good. However, the number of attendees was disappointing. I suspect that was due to the difficulty involved in getting to Brora and back in a day from many places in Scotland. Fortunately several of our members from far away southern parts did manage to be there!

The AGM business was carried out first - the minutes are online. Since Malcolm Wood demitted office as Secretary at the AGM we now have a vacancy on the committee and no Secretary.

At the Conference we had five excellent guest speakers as well as Frank Roach from HITRANS who, fortunately for us, is a fixture at every AGM. Alice Gillman, Head of Marketing at Vivarail - a last-minute attendee, also gave an enthusiastic pitch for Vivarail's battery train to be given a chance to provide a new shuttle service between Thurso and Wick for a trial period - ideal for this unit and a current aspiration of FoFNL.

The Conference began with an entertaining welcome speech from our President, Jamie Stone MP. He spoke about his own long-standing interest in railways as well as giving us a glimpse of what life is like for a brand new Westminster MP.

Bill Reeve, Director of Rail, Transport Scotland, was our first guest speaker. He expressed much satisfaction with the success of the Far North Line Review Team, which met for the final time on 1 February. He listed the many initiatives now coming to fruition and hinted that the bigger things we are hoping for (e.g. the Lentrán Loop) are on the way. Indeed Bill's opening remark to me on arrival was, "*I'm suffering from a sense of optimism!*"

Bill was followed by Sir Peter Hendy, Chairman of Network Rail, who continued in the same optimistic vein. He expressed admiration for the way the railway is run in Scotland, with an intelligent client (Transport Scotland) delivering the Scottish Government's rail policy. Summing up, he said that the notion of any future threat of closure of the Far North Line is inconceivable. This prompted a sotto voce "David Spaven, please

note" from Bill Reeve, referring, I suspect, to one of David's closing remarks in *Highland Survivor!*

The third speaker was David Shirres, Editor of *Rail Engineer*. His brief was to talk about trains beyond the end of diesels. He gave an excellent presentation covering other forms of propulsion currently under development, referencing Vivarail's battery train and the hydrogen-powered train built by Alstom. As he said, all future trains will be electric and the motors will not care where their power comes from.

After lunch we had a summary by Frank Roach of the current work of HITRANS, including plans for a sleeper service from Caithness to the Central Belt, which is now in urgent need of political support - MSPs and Councillors etc, please note!

Next in line was Scott Prentice, Head of Business Development, ScotRail. Not obvious from his job title is that he is responsible for designing service patterns and is currently working on a completely new way of organising FNL services. This will take a while and depends on the Scottish Government agreeing to fund certain enhancements (e.g. the Lentrán Loop). It is an exciting prospect, aiming to give as much of a regular 'clock-face' service as possible.

The last speaker was chosen to fulfil my current wish to have one speaker not from the rail industry. In Brora it was Dr Nick Lindsay, Chairman of the Clyne Heritage Trust which is all about the history of the Brora area. Dr Lindsay's talk was fascinating and I for one now wish to return to Brora and have a good look round the village and its heritage centre!

In the light of the only complaint I received about the day, I would like to assure members that tea and coffee will always be provided in future. Although the Brora venue's charge for this would have been astonishingly high I feel it was a saving too far.

David Shirres' and Scott Prentice's slides are available online.

David also gave us some superb extra publicity in the [editorial of July's Rail Engineer](#) which is also available to view.

Ian Budd

# SHUTTLE

There was welcome press coverage in July of the Thurso-Wick shuttle proposal:

*Press & Journal, 20 July: Alistair Munro*

## Battery-powered trains call for Thurso-Wick line

Caithness would be the ideal place in Scotland to trial a short-range rail shuttle using battery-powered trains, according to a lobby group.

The business case for the service between Wick and Thurso is being fleshed out after the idea won the support of a senior official of green-friendly train maker Vivarail.

A direct scheduled service between the two towns was last operated in the steam era.

Interest is being taken forward by Friends of the Far North Line (FoFNL) which is keen to boost traffic on the line in Caithness. It believes the drive away from diesel engines to renewable forms of energy can be a major factor in getting the service under way.

Backing came from Vivarail at FoFNL's recent annual general meeting when marketing head Alice Gillman suggested there is potential to use one its Class 230 battery trains on the inter-town shuttle service.

With a range of 60 miles, it could make three runs before it needed to recharge.

Ms Gillman said it could draw on the energy produced from the MeyGen tidal energy scheme.

*Caithness Courier, 24 July: Gordon Calder*

## North line tidal power potential

Electricity produced at the MeyGen tidal energy scheme in the Pentland Firth could be used to power an experimental battery train between Wick and Thurso.

That is the hope of rail campaign group Friends of the Far North Line (FoFNL) which claims Caithness would be a good place to test the

Frank Roach, of HITRANS, said: "This seems to us a no-brainer as long as it is something people would use and there are already good indications of interest from local residents."

"We're currently investigating the business case for the service, just how it would operate and what we would need at either end."

Mr Roach said the service would be an ideal way to soak up some of the fast-mounting supply of renewable energy being produced in the far north.

Apart from the tidal energy, he referred to plans to turn Thurso into a battery storage hub on the back of the two firms with bases in the town.

One of them, Denchi Power provided the lithium-ion batteries that powered Britain's first hydrogen fuel cell train launched at the Rail Live 2019 exhibition in Warwickshire last month.

Mr Roach said: "There is a commitment to phase out diesel trains, but outlying rural routes like this aren't going to get electrified, so we need to come up with new solutions like this."

"We believe that Wick - Thurso is the ideal length of route and location in Scotland if you want to experiment with this sort of initiative."

technology.

The proposal has the support of HITRANS - the Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership - and rolling stock manufacturer Vivarail, which produces new trains from ex-District Line stock from London. The original electric motors and bodyshells are kept, a modular power supply

system is installed and the interiors are redesigned to meet operators' requirements.

FoFNL which wants to see more traffic on the far north rail line, thinks the scheme "ticks many boxes", although it is still in the very early stages.

Mike Lunan, a committee member, and former convener of the group, thinks Caithness would be "admirably suited" for such a test.

As the journey between Wick and Thurso is just over 20 miles, he said, the train could make a return trip before needing the battery to be recharged.

Mr Lunan, who lives in Thurso, said there is a

surplus of energy being created in the far north and it could be feasible to use electricity from the MeyGen scheme to power the battery-operated train. The idea was mooted at the FoFNL annual general meeting.

He said funding for the three-year trial could come from Transport Scotland and would not be "a huge amount of money" in railway terms.

ScotRail could also be interested in the experiment as it is keen to phase out diesel trains on some branch lines. It would not be economic to electrify them but an alternative could be to use battery power.

### *These items in the press inspired an anonymous author:*

Once upon a time there were three Wise Men called Adrian, Alex and Bill. Adrian had a little train. He hadn't always had the train - it had belonged to somebody else, but they didn't want it any more, so he said "please may I have your train?" and they said "yes, here you are".

Adrian made the train all nice and new, and he wanted to find a place for the train to run up and down. Alex had lots of trains, and lots of

people to drive them and look after them, but you can never have too many trains, so when he heard that Adrian's train wanted somewhere to run up and down he said, "I know the very place. It's a long, long way from where the train used to go when it was new, but if someone will bring the train to the special place I will look after it and it can take people in it for journeys, just like it used to".

But none of this was going to happen unless the third Wise Man, Bill, said that it would be all right. Bill knew that the people who looked after the train and drove it would need to be paid, and the train would have to be fed with special train-electricity, and although it wouldn't need a Very Big Bag of Money it would still need a Little Bag, and even Little Bags don't grow on trees. Bill sat down and thought really hard. He so wanted to see the train going up and down, full of happy smiling people.

Adrian said that he would let Alex play with his train, and he wouldn't want any money at all! Bill thought really really hard again and said, "very well. Here is a Little Bag, Alex, tell the train it can come up to Caithness and go up and down all day to its heart's content.

And Adrian, and Alex, and Bill, and all the boys and girls and their mummies and daddies loved the little train, and they all lived happily ever after.



# STUCK AT STANLEY...

## ...a capacity crisis on the HML

Double track on the Highland Main Line initially runs out 7 miles north of Perth at Stanley. ScotRail timetable planners work wonders trying to squeeze in all the traffic, but any expansion in the numbers of both passenger and freight services is now being compromised by the restrictions caused by too many long single track sections.

Late running by one train causes knock-on delays to several others en-route. It is now common to have to wait at Stanley for a delayed train coming south. Wabtec Engineering of Doncaster is far behind with its contract to deliver 26 sets of refurbished High Speed Trains with automatic doors by 2018. The conductor currently has to go along the platform to shut all the doors manually and this can delay trains by 7 to 10 minutes over the whole route.

Parliamentary answers suggested that phase 2 of the line improvements would include reinstatement of some passing loops, but this didn't happen. One at Murthly could have saved some of the waits at Stanley. Freight interests asked for the long loop at Ballinluig to be reinstated as all of the loops are too short for long intermodal freight trains to pass each other. It wasn't and neither was the resignalled loop at Pitlochry (which is the shortest on the line) extended such that when the Stobart/Tesco empties met the northbound Royal Scotsman there one day this summer there was a train jam!

The March 2019 NR/Scotland Freight Joint Board's report "*Industry Growth Plan for Rail Freight*" has a lot to say about the capacity problems of the line currently stifling growth of rail freight. Gauge and weight clearances mean that certain widely used containers for chilled and frozen produce cannot be conveyed and the cement train loses about one third of what it could carry. The known potential traffic for four additional freight train paths each way cannot currently be met.

The report sums all this up as "Network Capacity Pinch Points" comprising single line sections, lengths of loops and lack of passing locations. It has long been known that the Stobart train locomotive is being restricted to 20 containers

because of this, but could haul 28 containers. The HML is crying out for more capacity.

All this against the background of the A9 trunk road dualling. Since 2009, when that was announced, it has been made clear that the rail improvements required ought to be finished first in order to get the passenger and freight flows established and prevent any possible reverse modal shift from rail to road, which would be against Government policy. Now that everyone is aware of the Climate Emergency, making the railway fit for purpose is even more urgent.

The A9 dualling could cause an access problem for Dunkeld Station. The community wishes to preserve level access which means lowering the new dual carriageway road at that point. This short stretch has now been costed at between £1bn and £1.6bn which is half the total projected budget cost of £3bn for the whole 80 miles of A9 dualling. It makes the £300m spent on doubling 16 miles of railway from Aberdeen to Inverurie seem modest. Even more so, when you realise that that includes a substantial amount for a traffic control system known as railway signalling.

Safety on the A9 is really important, but the Climate Emergency means that we must make more use of sustainable transport modes such as rail for both passengers and particularly for heavy freight. The largely Victorian state of the HML is overdue for substantial investment in double tracking, modern signalling and electrification. Transform Scotland's *Vision 2030: Clean Rail* document published on 2 September calls for decarbonisation of Scotland's rail network and underlines the need to start planning now to electrify the lines to Inverness and Aberdeen for 2030.

At FMQs in the Scottish Parliament on 5 September Green Party MSP Alison Johnstone asked the First Minister if she would be bold in the Climate Emergency and take funds out of new, big, roads projects and invest them in public transport instead?

"Yes, we will be bold" was the reply.

FoFNL and many other organisations and individuals will be delighted about that.

**Richard Ardern**

# INVERNESS - ABERDEEN UPDATE

It is wonderful that the two year construction programme to redouble the 16 miles long Aberdeen (Hutcheon Street) to Inverurie stretch of the line was completed on schedule and that through trains were reintroduced on 20 August. From the December timetable, train services between Aberdeen and Inverurie will increase from 45 to 76 each weekday and there will be no more waiting for late runners to clear the only track ahead. The tall lighthouse-like structure which was Dyce Junction signalbox has been demolished. The new modern signalling (now controlled from Inverness) is as important as the new track in facilitating all these extra trains. Well done to all involved!

Kintore station is in the process of being built to open in May 2020. Further good news concerns the future Inverness Airport (Dalcross) station which will now have two platforms and a passing loop from the outset. Transport Scotland will be applying for new planning permission. It is hoped the loop will be long enough to stretch as far as the recently extended Norbord wood plant to enable logs and finished product to be carried to and from their door, not least the timber from the FNL at Kinbrace and Georgemas. Hopefully that will still leave more paths for freight trains than we have at present. There is considerable scope for Scotland's railway to carry food and drink traffic (including bulk spirit) from Elgin and/or Keith in particular. A Government working group is about to begin meeting to progress this. It is also possible that timber traffic could be seen on this and other lines again.

This and the enhancements needed just for the promised hourly frequency for passenger trains with the target of end to end journey times reduced to two hours, or less, indicate substantial extra capacity is required. The need to cater also for the extra freight paths and the prudent provision of some diversionary paths for freight and for the Caledonian Sleeper underlines the serious constraints we were already under, even before the declaration by the First Minister of the Climate Emergency.

The March 2019 NR/Scotland Freight Joint Board's report "*Industry Growth Plan for Rail Freight*" expresses considerable concern at the lack of scope to carry potential new traffic and considers that three new freight paths between Aberdeen and Inverness are required.

It is reasonable to expect that the doubling towards Inverness from Dalcross will be announced for early in CP6. There are other pinch points, but the main one thereafter is to provide more capacity either side of Keith. A dynamic loop of several miles is needed in the Orton area to break up the 18 mile long single track section between Elgin and Keith, and Keith station needs to be provided with another platform so that trains can cross there rather than delaying alighting passengers in the loop further on. It is incredible that this main line between two of our cities still has an 18 mile section which is single track.

There is a lot of work still to do and the Climate Emergency makes it even more urgent.

66561 and 66557 on ballast trains for unloading at Inverurie on 10 July.  
The photo was taken by Jordan Kearney, one of the locomotive drivers

Richard Ardern



# CONTROL EXPERIENCE

Since 2014 the ScotRail Alliance Integrated Control has shared a new building at Cowlairs, not far from the northern exit from the Cowlairs Tunnel on the Edinburgh-Glasgow main line. It is set in the triangle between the E&G, the City of Glasgow Union Railway which connects Springburn to the E&G towards Bishopbriggs and the 1992 Cowlairs Chord which gives a direct connection from Glasgow Queen Street to Springburn. The building also houses the West of Scotland Signalling Centre.

I was very fortunate to be invited by David Simpson, ScotRail Operations Director, to hold one of our six-monthly meetings there and to spend the afternoon being shown the workings of 'Control'.

The striking first impression is that the people who work there are very proud of how well it functions. They were keen to show me the benefits of them all being in one large room. All monitoring, and operational decision-making in response to events, is now done in one place.

Workstations are arranged in long rows back-to-back so staff often communicate by standing up and talking over the top of their monitors to their colleagues on the opposite side - much quicker than any electronic method!

Control brings together staff from Network Rail, ScotRail and Hitachi (makers of the new Class 385 trains), covering all aspects of operation, including arranging train maintenance schedules (and emergencies), as well as the more obvious monitoring and troubleshooting. A large screen at the end of the long 'boardroom style' table along one side has a live display of real time performance, including a prominent, constantly updating, PPM (Public Performance Measure) figure. This screen, and others strategically placed, include news and weather reports - vital information!

I was able to spend time sitting beside various staff as they worked and answered my questions at the same time!

I spoke at length to Network Rail Route Control Manager, Bobby Scott, whose job is to keep trains to the timetable and to decide how to prioritise trains in a late running situation. He emphasised how important it is for him to consider all the TOCs (Train Operating Companies) and freight operators fairly, making



**Bobby Scott and Ian Budd**

judgments based on the greater good in any situation.

I had a long conversation with a Hitachi employee, one of two in Control who monitor the new Class 385 electrics in real time. This means that they can see the same warnings that the driver sees in the cab at any given moment, including the speed the unit is doing! He told me that drivers will sometimes phone in to ask for technical advice while at a station.

Something I was particularly keen to do was talk to the person whose job is to put up any problem announcements online and at stations. I discovered that the same person also books buses and taxis when there is disruption. The messages about the reasons for delays are chosen from drop-down lists and templates.

During my visit news came through that some lineside equipment at Tomatin on the Highland

Main Line had been struck by lightning, disabling a set of points. All trains were halted and the whole room seemed to spring into action. Phone calls had to be made to Network Rail engineers to attend. Hurried conversations took place with train conductors to find out the needs of passengers who were now going to arrive very late and miss onward connections. Information for travellers was rapidly posted online and on the station CIS. Buses and taxis were booked where needed, including a taxi to Ullapool for two passengers whose late arrival in Inverness would otherwise mean an overnight stay. What was most striking was that although everyone was moving fast to confer with colleagues, or speaking rapidly on the phone, there was no drama in the room and quite quickly everything required had been done.

One question which had always concerned FoFNL was about the 'remoteness' of Control from the FNL. It was pointed out to me that the staff specialise in geographical areas, some having been in charge of the same area for many years and that their local knowledge was as good as it would be if they were physically nearer. Add this to the easy verbal communication to all the staff working on Scotland and they felt this was by far the most effective way to work.

At the end of my visit I was able to have a long conversation with Mark Ilderton, who reports directly to David Simpson but is stationed in Control. He is the manager of both the SR and NR control teams.

I asked Mark about the drop-down lists and templates mentioned above. He said that FoFNL is welcome to put in suggestions and comments, which would be fed in to the six-monthly meetings which are held to discuss IT matters. I mentioned that we liked the idea of making it clear to the public when a delay's real cause is that the line is single track. It would help to raise public awareness about deficiencies in the infrastructure.

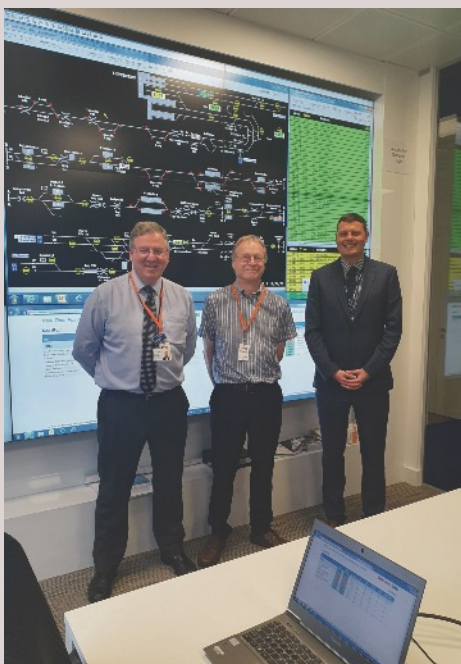
He was keen to show me a new system which is in place to help with decisions about trains from England heading for Inverness or Aberdeen. Traffic Management Statements are now attached to crucial trains. Generated from

knowledge and experience, train graphs (showing conflicts) are applied to 'trigger trains' i.e. those whose late running is most likely to cause disruption, so that they can be given priority as they pass through certain places. He gave the example of the 10:00 Kings Cross to Aberdeen which, if more than 14 mins late approaching Dundee, will be held to allow the 14:41 Glasgow Queen Street-Aberdeen-Inverness to run ahead. This is because of the single line sections later in its journey which, if it presented late, would cause bad disruption between Aberdeen and Inverness.

Having been given the chance to see for myself how things are done, and witness the care and enthusiasm of the staff, I wish it were possible to convey something of this to the media which is so quick to jump on the slightest failing in the rail system as though it's a national scandal.

These are the people at the sharp end of rail operation and everything they do is aimed at making the system run like clockwork .

**Ian Budd**



**David Simpson, Ian Budd and Mark Ilderton**

# NEW CIS ON FNL

Having successfully completed the installation of CIS (Customer Information Screens) at all stations on the Far North Line, progress is now being made on improving the system.

Currently the CIS use a combination of fixed link and mobile connectivity. The SIMs used where a fixed data link is not provided are configured to connect to the best available mobile signal.

The CIS at 26 stations on the Far North and Kyle Lines are being upgraded to IP (Internet Protocol) using ADSL (Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line). The remainder cannot be

system in use on the FNL. This therefore requires the manual input of train location by the RETB signalmen.

Due to the vagaries of the weather, the CIS which use mobile signals will sometimes go offline (as can the connected ones). The screens are pre-loaded with the line timetable and are configured to automatically show the next trains according to the timetable if they lose their connection. Trains cease to be displayed three minutes after scheduled departure time and the subsequent train is later displayed. In the position where "On time" or "Expected

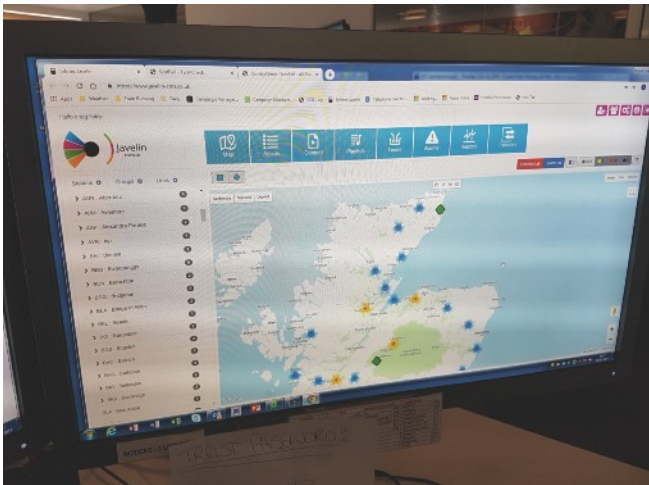
xx:xx" are normally displayed a disconnected screen will show "Timetable" to indicate this. Currently it is planned to change "Timetable" to "Use helpline".

The CIS for Scotland are managed from the ScotRail Alliance Integrated Control in Cowllairs in Glasgow. The person monitoring the screens can query each one to see if it is connected to the data feed. Unfortunately there is no automatic notification from the software that a CIS is offline, but drivers and conductors are aware that they should report

any CIS which they see has 'defaulted'.

The current default state for CIS is that the next train is only displayed from one hour before it is due. FoFNL has made the point that on the FNL, where there are such long gaps between trains, it would be a source of comfort to intending passengers who arrive early at the station to check the service, if the next train were always displayed.

The presence of a unified provision of CIS across all Scottish stations is clearly an important step forward for passengers.



**All CIS in Scotland are monitored at this workstation in Control**

connected to the telephone network so will have to continue to use mobile signals.

Culrain and Kinbrace are solar-powered, all the rest are connected to the mains.

Information displayed on the screens is provided by a system called *Javelin RT* - real time data distribution - which in turn receives a constant feed from the rail industry's central train-running information engine, *Darwin*. Unfortunately *Darwin* receives information about the whereabouts of trains via the signalling system and track circuits, not used with the RETB (Rail Electronic Token Block)

# ACTIVE TRAVEL CARRIAGES

FoFNL was given the opportunity in June to visit Brodie Engineering's works in Kilmarnock where the five Class 153 single-coach units are being prepared for use on the West Highland, Kyle and Far North Lines.

The units are being stripped out to provide 20 bike spaces as well as a seating area and space for other larger items such as skis.

We were shown a test version, in one of the units, of what will probably be the final configuration of the bike storage area. This is the result of some very inventive design work to make sure that every bike is

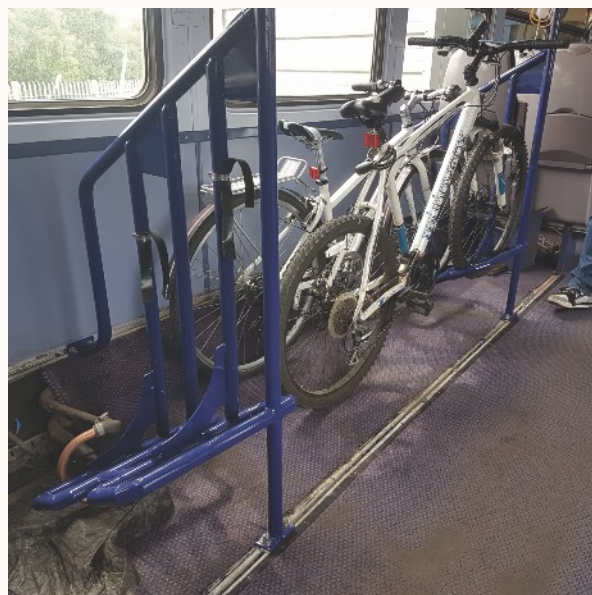


easily accessible at stations en route and yet is securely held in place.

These carriages will be attached to some existing services and will give a massive boost to the cycling-related travel on these lines - we think the FNL "end-to-enders" will be delighted!

Unfortunately the latest thoughts from ScotRail are that they may deploy all the units on the WHL initially, for operating reasons. In any case, the experience gained in designing the active travel units will be invaluable when it comes to specifying whatever bi-mode trains replace the ageing 158s - sooner, rather than later we hope!

The Class 153 units were originally built in 1987/8 as Class 155 two-car units, by Leyland Bus in Workington. In 1990 British Rail awarded a contract to Hunslet-Barclay in Kilmarnock (now Wabtec Rail Scotland) to convert 35 two-car units into Class 153s.



**Ian Budd**

This mockup shows accommodation for four bikes. It has been tested with very many types of bicycle, including tandems.

The front wheel rests in a 'caddy' which slopes towards the outside of the carriage using gravity to ensure a stable resting position.

The space next to the window is accessible by simply lifting the rear wheel of the neighbouring bike and pivoting it out of the way, while the front wheel is resting securely. The ease of doing this was demonstrated to us.

The exterior design shown above is a ScotRail 'concept' and may not be the final livery.

# PANDORA

## **A Brown cloud no bigger than a man's hand**

Long long ago, in a galaxy far away, dwelt an actuary with a long memory. He was awakened from his slumbers - for, Best Beloved, he was very old - by noises from within the rail unions that the pensions of their members were under threat. Curiously these noises also emanated from the train operators. He smiled: a chicken was coming home to roost.

The chicken had been started on its journey many years earlier, over 20 years earlier indeed, when The Man In Charge of these things made what seemed to everybody (everybody, that is, except the actuaries and a few others of like mind) a simple change to the taxation arrangements. Too dull to be interesting; too technical. So of grumbling there was little, and of pressing the panic button there was none.

What actuaries (and others of like mind) didn't like was that pension funds would - at a stroke - have the value of the dividends on their investments drastically reduced. Pension funds are, by their nature, very long term investors, and

need as much certainty in their decision-making as possible. Having some idiot Chancellor dropping a bomb like that required a dramatic response. The majority of private sector pension funds noticed this pretty quickly and took the appropriate steps. (These protected the long-term viability of the fund at the cost of the size of the eventual pension to most individuals, however.). The public sector, as always, was slower to react, and the railway was in the throes of settling down to privatisation. So little happened.

Recently the Pensions Regulator made a ruling - like Mr Brown's it came from a clear blue sky - that the numbers to be used in the formula which cranked out the required contributions from employer and employee had changed. Result: profound unhappiness. Companies refused to bid for franchises (or made non-compliant bids); Mr Cash is threatening the first all-out rail strike in a generation. One can hardly blame either the Train Operating Companies or the Unions. But who will be buying pins and making waxen images of Mr Brown? Only the odd old actuary.

*Editor's note: When, in his first budget, Gordon Brown scrapped the tax relief on dividends paid into pension funds most final salary pension schemes became unviable and were eventually terminated. Two large public sector pension schemes, including the Railway Pension Fund (to which all TOCs contribute) remained as Final Salary.*

## **PANDORA witnesses the Jeremy and Victor confrontation**

Jeremy Bentham, father of Utilitarianism, was sitting quietly in his snug in UCL one afternoon. The greatest good of the greatest number, he mused, mentally ticking off Crossrail, Crossrail 2 (it's in the bag, he thought), various extensions to tube lines in the last 50 years, Heathrow expansion - those 9 million Londoners and the oodles of tourists would be so pleased, and so deserving. He allowed himself to dream - Crossrail 3, Crossrail 4...when an unwanted irritant buzzed about him.

The spirit of Victor d'Hondt was muttering something about fairness. A formula floated by ...when those most in number had their fill at the trough they were moved aside by some

arithmetical jiggery-pokery, allowing others, fewer in number but also hungry, to have a chance of sustenance...and they, filled, moved on, and yet others, fewer again in number...

Poor Jeremy swatted this away. No, the greatest number would always prevail, must always prevail. Numbers trumped need all the way down. But Victor buzzed annoyingly on. He knew he would prevail in the end, for he appealed to all the hungry, those greatest in number and those least: they might have to wait, but they would be fed. Besides, he had an ambition to join Audrey Hepburn and Hercule Poirot on that oh-so-short list.

*[Sadly, your Editor had to google that!]*

# CAITHNESS SLEEPER

There has been welcome public support for the proposed Caithness sleeper service (Midnight Train to Georgemas) from three Conservative politicians.

Highlands and Islands MSPs Jamie Halcro Johnston and Edward Mountain as well as Thurso councillor Struan Mackie, have been encouraged by learning of four possible operators for the service.

The John O'Groat Journal & Caithness Courier of 12 July carried comments from the three:

Edward Mountain - "I am pleased to see that plans to improve transport links with a sleeper service between Caithness and the central belt are attracting serious interest. A new sleeper service could be a win-win situation for the region. Firstly, it could mean business travellers heading south on the sleeper train overnight can look forward to a full day of meetings when they arrive in the central belt. Secondly, it could attract tourists heading north from the central belt who want to leave the car behind and travel in a more relaxed way on the sleeper service instead. I welcome the moves to make a new sleeper service a reality and I believe it has real potential to boost the Caithness economy."

Jamie Halcro Johnson (who lives in Orkney) - "This news is very encouraging. Any new route to and from Orkney is welcome, and I know from conversations I have had with constituents in Orkney that there is real interest from people in the islands for a service like this. As well as a route south for local people, this could be a great way of bringing people to the north of Scotland and on to Orkney. It will therefore be important that any service is integrated with other transport links – such as the boats and reliable local bus services – and that it is affordable for local people to use. A new link with the south could be of real benefit to Orkney, as well as providing an attractive and more environmentally sustainable alternative to flying or the long drive south."

Councillor Struan Mackie - "Connectivity in the far north has been a long-standing issue for locals, businesses travellers and tourists wishing to travel from the central belt to Caithness or Orkney. Few existing transport options allow for evening travel and the proposed sleeper service is a logical step forward in supporting the Caithness and North Sutherland economy as well as providing additional use of the Far North Line. I am delighted that HITRANS is reporting significant support from potential passengers and that four operators have come forward with expressions of interest in running the service. I, and Conservative council colleagues, have backed the sleeper concept from its conception and I hope that the Scottish Government will provide the 'hard financial support' that the project requires to get it off the ground."

## BTP MERGER DROPPED



On 26 June the BBC reported that merger plans for the Scottish part of the British Transport Police to be subsumed by Police Scotland have been dropped. New Scottish Government plans involve the oversight of railway policing in Scotland by a new committee consisting of two members drawn from each of the Scottish Police Authority board and the British Transport Police board and meeting four times a year.

This marks the end of a very contentious issue which set the Scottish Government against all the other involved parties. The Justice Secretary, Humza Yousaf, regards the amalgamation as still being a "long-term goal", but hopefully the plan has now been laid to rest.

# INVERTED PRIORITIES

John Finnie MSP, the Green Party regional member for Highlands & Islands and one of FoFNL's Vice Presidents writes regularly for the *Inside Holyrood* column in SPP Media Group newspapers.

John often writes about railway matters and is an excellent advocate for rail, endeavouring to change the Scottish Government's transport policy which is currently heavily weighted towards major road projects, inevitably at the expense of vital rail improvements. This is John's column from the *Inverness Courier* on 2 August.

Unfortunately the headline writer managed to reverse the crucial words: **Roads not rail should be the priority!** After some requests from FoFNL and elsewhere to rectify this, SPP published a correction the following week.

*Inverness Courier 02-08-19*

## Rail not roads should be the priority

One of the biggest changes we will have to make as a society if we are to address the climate emergency quickly and effectively, is transportation of people and goods. The primacy of cars and lorries must come to an end if we are to cut emissions to the extent necessary.

That's why it's so frustrating the Scottish Government has poured billions of pounds into dualling the A9 and A96, while the Highland Mainline remains only single track. The line could have been dualled in a much shorter time and for considerably less cost than the enormously expensive road projects.

The flaws in a single-track system are clear. One breakdown grinds the system to a halt and the single line places a low cap on the route's capacity. If the Highlands is to have an interconnected transport system, then the status quo for railway is not good enough.

Changing the way we move ourselves and goods around the country doesn't have to mean sacrifice though. Too often the changes we need to make to address climate change are presented as giving something up where as the truth is there are considerable opportunities.

In terms of emissions, rail freight is a significant improvement on road haulage and the electrification of rail lines would only improve this further. There's the additional benefit of fewer

lorries on the roads, further improving air quality and traffic flow. If run in the correct way rail freight can also end up cheaper. As we look to the future and alternative modes of transport, viable rail infrastructure will be vital for communities and industries across the Highlands.

While the Highland Main Line already supports significant flows of freight, the room for growth is almost non-existent. This is enormous wasted potential. The whisky industry for example would be perfectly poised to take advantage of expanded rail freight capacity.

With almost 50 distilleries in the Highland region, raw materials such as barley or imported casks could be swiftly and effortlessly brought north, while the finished product is sent south. Increased capacity is also essential if the Highlands is to cope with the demands of growing tourist numbers.

All of this underlines the absurdity of spending an inordinate amount of money on the A9 and A96 while almost completely neglecting the Highland Main Line. Rail was the main mode of transport into the Highlands in the past and with proper investment it can be again. We must quickly switch our focus to providing a modern rail network that gives passengers and business a viable and attractive alternative to dirtier modes of transport.

**John Finnie**

**Sadly the Programme for Government set out by the First Minister on 3 September contained no evidence that the government intends to invest massively in rail now. (I.B.)**

# INVERNESS GRIDLOCK

A comparatively minor road accident on 12 July caused the road system in Inverness to lock up. This prompted much anger and a news item and editorial in the *Inverness Courier* the following week.

It would be perfectly possible to substantially improve the rail provision north of Inverness. There used to be a six-mile double-track section from Clachnaharry to Clunes. FoFNL has long been pressing for at least the passing loop at Lentrán to be reinstated, and we may be about to hear that it will be. The fact will remain though that single track railways, even with plenty of passing places, can still only provide a limited service.

In the end the Scottish Government needs to tackle this problem and put money into upgrading the southern end of the route, including a better signalling system. It's not clear at the moment that they are listening to the rising clamour, but newspaper coverage such as this certainly helps.

## **A9 crash causes traffic chaos**

An Inverness business leader has called for improved train services in the region after a campervan overturned just north of the Kessock Bridge, causing traffic chaos in the city.

Stewart Nicol, chief executive of the Inverness Chamber of Commerce, said the incident, which blocked the northbound carriageway of the A9, highlighted the need for better commuter rail services.

The crash, at 4.45pm on Friday, also led to gridlock in the city for an estimated two hours as motorists sought alternative routes. There were also long tailbacks on the northbound A9.

Mr Nicol said it illustrated the importance of the Kessock Bridge, which is used by tourists and locals, to the Highland economy. But it also highlighted the volume of traffic.

"It reminds us how reliant we are on the roads," he said. "There is not really a great commuter service by rail."

"They are not frequent enough to get people off their reliance on cars."

## **Editorial - Gridlock was unacceptable**

Inverness came to a complete standstill at rush hour on Friday and all those caught up in the traffic nightmare are quite entitled to wonder what on earth went wrong.

Almost the whole city ground to a halt for around two hours.

And all because a campervan overturned on the other side of the Kessock Bridge near North Kessock.

Fridays at this time of year are particularly busy in any event, but can it be right that a relatively minor accident can bring an entire 21st century city to a grinding halt?

It certainly doesn't augur well for the rest of the summer with a packed diary of major events adding extra pressure to the road system.

This weekend sees the Inverness Highland Games and Pride march, quickly followed by the Black Isle Show and Belladrum music festival — on the same day!

Inverness Chamber of Commerce chief executive Stewart Nicol is quite right when he says too many people are using their cars because commuter rail services aren't up to scratch.

## First Minister's Question Time 6 June 2019

### Transport (Infrastructure Projects)

**Patrick Harvie** (*Glasgow*) (*Green*): I join the other political parties in commemorating the actions of those who took part in the D-day landings. As we see the forces of the far right reinvent themselves in the United Kingdom, the US and so many other countries—too often aided and abetted by people in mainstream politics and the media—we must remind ourselves that the fight against the far right is one for which every generation must be ready if we are to properly remember and respect the memory of those who did not return from the fight 75 years ago.

At the end of April, the First Minister declared a climate emergency, as did the Welsh Government. Now, barely a month later, the Welsh Government has announced the welcome decision to scrap plans to build a £1.4 billion motorway relief road. However, the Scottish Government is pressing ahead with spending £6 billion on dualling the A9 and A96. Since she made her announcement, the First Minister has repeatedly said that, when it comes to the policy changes that are needed, everything is under review. Does that include the next phases of those road projects?

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney)**: Patrick Harvie has reflected on the issues that we all face in relation to climate change, but the Government must take forward its agenda in a sustainable way. We have already made changes to our policy framework that he is familiar with in relation to air departure tax.

The Government also has a duty to ensure that the country is equipped with the appropriate infrastructure to meet the needs of all our population. Anyone who is familiar with the A9 and the A96 will know that both those roads have serious and alarming safety records, given their current construction and the volume of traffic that uses them. Such issues need to be addressed, and the Government will do so as part of its programme.

However, my comments should be taken in the context of the Government's absolute obligation to meet the climate change targets that we have set out and to which we have committed. Roseanna Cunningham has lodged amendments to the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Bill to ensure that we fulfil the commitments that we have given to Parliament and to the people of Scotland.

**Patrick Harvie**: The Deputy First Minister seems to disagree with the First Minister, who said that everything is under review. He cites the problem of the volume of traffic, but the current plans will do nothing to control the volume of traffic that uses the roads.

The Scottish Government has an opportunity to change direction by redirecting expenditure from road building to investment in a modern, affordable and efficient rail network. The single-track Highland main line, which runs parallel to the A9, has been described as an antiquated embarrassment. Dualling and electrifying that line could be done for a far lower cost than the cost of the Government's road-building scheme. It is more than 10 years since the Scottish Government promised significant investment to ensure that "*railway travel to the heart of the Highlands ... is competitive with roads.*"

People in the Highlands have been waiting since 2008 to see improvement in journey times. How much longer will they have to wait?

**John Swinney**: Improvements are being undertaken on the Highland main line as we speak, and structural change has already been undertaken on the line to ensure that it can deliver shorter journey times. Through the ScotRail franchise, there has been investment in enhancing the rolling stock that is available for the Highland line, which has resulted in an expansion of capacity between Inverness and the central belt.

All those investments are taking place to improve the attractiveness of the rail network, but it is clear that we have wider obligations to ensure that, in every respect, we equip the country with the connectivity that is required. The massive investment that has been put into digital connectivity is hugely beneficial to communities in the Highlands and Islands. We are delivering those advantages as part of a balanced package,

but I stress that that must be done in the context of fulfilling the climate change targets that the Government will enshrine in law in the weeks that lie ahead.

## Portfolio Question Time - 12 June 2019

### Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity Road Freight

**Claudia Beamish** (*South Scotland*) (*Lab*): To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to move freight off roads and on to rail, in light of it declaring a climate emergency. (**S50-03358**)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity** (*Michael Matheson*): Our approach to supporting rail freight is outlined in our rail freight strategy, strengthened by new Network Rail targets to grow rail freight and backed by past and current investment, including a new £25 million control period 6 Scottish strategic rail freight fund and our mode shift grant system. In addition, our draft national transport strategy, which will set out the future direction for transport, reflects the declaration of the global climate emergency with climate change action identified as a priority. It also reiterates the role of transport in helping to deliver the 2045 net zero target.

**Claudia Beamish**: In evidence to the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee at stage 2 of the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill, the Freight Transport Association stated:

“At best, we could get about 5 per cent of freight off trucks and on to rail”.—[*Official Report, Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee, 28 May 2019; c 57.*]

That is concerning. The Scottish Government funds a great deal more road projects than rail projects, which further marginalises rail freight.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that balanced funding is required for better targeting of small freight facilities grants, longer rail overtaking loops, restoration of double track, diversionary routes, gauge clearance and electrification, to name but a few measures?

**Michael Matheson**: As I outlined, we undertake a considerable amount of work to encourage rail freight. I do not know whether it is now official Labour Party policy to cut the roads budget and transfer that money to rail instead.

**Claudia Beamish**: I said “balanced funding”.

**Michael Matheson**: I suspect that, in later questions, members will also ask me to make more investment in roads.

The £25 million that I announced a few weeks ago is a key part of helping to support industry to make the modal shift from road to rail freight, and we will continue to work with the industry to achieve that. We have also set out ambitious targets for Network Rail, to make sure that it is driving that approach forward in a way that sees more going into rail freight. We will continue to do everything that we can to encourage commercial businesses to make use of the rail freight options that are available to them as we work with the rail freight industry to make it an attractive proposition for businesses.

**Jamie Greene** (*West Scotland*) (*Con*): The cabinet secretary will be aware that Prestwick airport is well connected via rail. A huge amount of cargo goes through the airport and, inevitably, on to the road. What is the Government doing to better utilise that rail capacity—specifically, the Falkland junction? At the moment, it is an underused section of railway that could help to provide the modal shift that we need.

**Michael Matheson**: Companies’ decision to use rail freight is a commercial decision, and we provide funding to support them in making the transition. There are several key areas in which we know that there is a possibility of increasing freight—particularly timber transport—and we have taken forward work with the industry to encourage it to do that. My colleague Fergus Ewing chaired a meeting in London with members of the rail freight and forestry industries and Transport Scotland officials to look at how we can create greater connections in those areas. We try to make rail freight as attractive as possible but, ultimately, choosing to use rail freight rather than road freight is a commercial decision that companies make.

# ALEX HYNES TO GIVE KEYNOTE SPEECH

## SCOTRAIL BOSS TO TELL BUSINESSES: 'WE'RE ON TRACK'

The man charged with keeping Scotland's trains running smoothly has an Inverness appointment on his own timetable next month as keynote speaker at the Highland Business Awards.

Alex Hynes, the managing director of Scotland's Railway, is expected to outline his own vision for the future of rail travel in the north at the final event of Highland Business Week 2019 at the Drumossie Hotel.

Paula Nicol, deputy chief executive and head of events for Inverness Chamber of Commerce, which puts on Highland Business Week and organises the awards, said she was delighted Mr Hynes had accepted the invitation.

"I've met Alex and I was very struck by the vision he has for the rail network in the Highlands and across Scotland," she said.

"I am really delighted he has accepted our invitation because not that many people will have heard his vision and I think it is important that they do.

"It's good for us, as a business community, to understand where we can help in what ScotRail are trying to achieve."

Mr Hynes took over the helm at ScotRail in June 2017, having previously been managing director at Arriva Rail North, Britain's second largest train operating company.

He now has overall charge of a network that carries 295,000 passengers each weekday on 2500 services, and also has responsibility for 359 stations, 4715 bridges and 591 level crossings.

Mr Hynes said he was delighted to have been invited to Highland Business Week.

"It's vital that Scotland's Railway is working side-by-side with the business community so we can understand their needs because ultimately we both have the same goal to grow Scotland's economy," he said. "Undoubtedly, there are challenges around population and infrastructure, as well as the prospect of Brexit, which I know the business

community are grappling with.

"This part of the country makes a significant economic contribution to Scotland, particularly in areas like energy, tourism and food and drink and I want Scotland's Railway to play its part in building on those successes."

This will include the implementation of a new long-term timetable structure for the Far North Line, supporting not just the economy, but social inclusion, he said. "Technical work is being undertaken to understand the magnitude of improvements required to the track and signalling systems to support such a timetable," Mr Hynes said.

"There's no denying that the Far North Line is one of the great scenic rail journeys, and ScotRail, Network Rail and Transport Scotland are committed to unlocking the route's potential. The recent investment in the region shows this."

This includes the installation of a £1.6 million mobile wheel lathe at Inverness Depot which will improve the performance and reliability of services between Inverness and Aberdeen and the West Coast line, as well as the Far North Line, by allowing trains to be serviced locally so they can be returned to passenger service more quickly.

Easy-to-read LED display screens have also been installed at all stations on the Far North Line, except for Dunrobin Castle, to provide real-time train information and in 2017 the route shared a £26 million radio signalling upgrade with the West Highland Line.

These local investments run parallel with Scotland-wide developments which will also benefit the Highlands.

"By the end of this year, our train fleet across the whole network will have grown by 30 per cent, with

almost all of our trains being new or fully refurbished," Mr Hynes said.

"Customers will see a better, and more consistent service from us because we'll be putting the right trains on the right routes. For the Highlands, this means refurbished Class 158 trains on the Far North Line.

"These trains are being refitted with better heating and lighting, new toilets, improved seating, and at-seat power sockets and have wi-fi. Fully refurbished InterCity high-speed trains will connect Scotland's seven cities.

"Recent investment by ScotRail and Network Rail - in refurbished trains, upgraded signalling equipment, and in customer service - shows our commitment to the north, and we'll continue to work to support tourism and bring wider economic benefits along Scotland's most scenic railways."

However, Mr Hynes said any electrification of the routes connecting Inverness with the Central Belt and Aberdeen would require significant investment in both infrastructure and rolling stock and would ultimately be for the Scottish Government to decide on.

On the subject of punctuality, Mr Hynes acknowledged:

"We know that our customers experienced a poor service from us last year, but it's encouraging that we're now delivering improvements in areas where our customers were most affected.

"In the latest period of performance, 90.7 per cent of ScotRail trains met their PPM (public performance measure) target. This is another sign of the fantastic progress we are making in delivering for our customers, and all across the country there are improvements thanks to the hard work of everyone on Scotland's Railway.

"Everyone across Scotland's Railway is continuing to work flat out to maintain this level of performance - it's what our customers expect and deserve."

Along with its contributions to the economy, Mr

Hynes is conscious that Scotland's Railways also have a role in fighting climate change.

"The ambitious targets set for us by the Scottish Government require a commitment to create a sustainable railway and contribute to an environmentally aware Scotland, and I am delighted that we aren't just meeting those targets - we are exceeding them," he said.

"Our drivers are trained extensively on eco-driving techniques and the Driver Advisory System installed across the fleet, assists in promoting energy efficient travel. But we aren't complacent, we are continuing to drive performance by investing and trialling new technology.

"More and more people are travelling across the country from our major towns and seven cities because of our cutting of journey times and creating more comfortable journeys.

"That is changing how we work, how we spend our leisure time, and how we grow our economy. I'm incredibly proud of the contribution that Scotland's Railway makes to every part of the country."

Looking to the future, Mr Hynes added: "I want Scotland's Railway to continue to deliver the major economic benefits that rail brings.

"That means providing a day-to-day service which is punctual and reliable. It also means taking forward our infrastructure investment plans to not only maintain the existing railway that we have, but to develop it more because improved transport infrastructure means reduced and more efficient travel time.

"That then encourages greater trade between Scotland's cities and more investment in those cities from outside Scotland that will bring business opportunities for the north economy."

The Highland Business Awards take place at the Drumossie Hotel, Inverness, from noon on Friday, September 27, 2019.

To book tickets or find out more about this year's Highland Business Week events, including the Highland Spotlight business expo, visit [www.inverness-chamber.co.uk](http://www.inverness-chamber.co.uk)

# LETTER TO THE EDITOR

FoFNL member, Keith Farr, highly respected in railway circles as one of the two authors of *Railway Magazine's "Practice & Performance"* feature, was not impressed by the Nicky Marr column from SPP Media Group newspapers which we obtained permission to reprint in our May issue.

To be fair to Ms Marr, she does not pretend to be a railway correspondent, and writes on many subjects based on her day-to-day experiences; also this piece does reflect the way passengers, with no other interest in railways, see things - something that ScotRail *et al* should always bear in mind. Keith has put her article under an analytical spotlight and makes some very relevant comments though, so I hope any MSPs reading this *read through to the end!*

In Issue 77, Nicky Marr asks for 'faster trains' between Edinburgh and Inverness. The trains themselves are already fast: 125 mph by the London - Inverness '*Highland Chieftain*' and by the newly-introduced 'posh' trains that she seems to welcome but considers inadequate for the job. Even the Class 170 units that have been on the route for 20 years or more are capable of travelling at 100 mph. It is the infrastructure that needs further improvement.

Despite upgrades, 87 of the 118 miles between Perth and Inverness are single line and most of it is restricted to 75-85 mph, chiefly because of curvature. When I first travelled north by one of the principal trains, the 10.00 from Glasgow, it was due at Inverness at 3.31 pm. Perth - Inverness used to take between 3½-4 hours; now the journey time is two hours or a little more, depending on stops: commendable bearing in mind the mountainous terrain through which the railway passes, with Druim-uachdar Summit 1,484ft above sea level.

Your correspondent's comparison between Edinburgh - Inverness and Edinburgh - London journey time cannot be serious. Of course the East Coast main line is faster: it is double or quadruple track the whole way; it is electrified; it serves numerous towns or cities with a total population many times that between Edinburgh and Inverness; in short, it is a profitable trunk route. Nor does it penetrate mountainous country of the type that Nicky Marr may have noticed characterises the line to Inverness.

Perhaps she would like to eliminate some of the intermediate stops. Some years ago, ScotRail put on a new early morning fast train from Inverness to Glasgow. There were howls of protest from

Kingussie people because it wasn't going to stop there; yet, as it was a new service, they were going to lose nothing. They even saw it as a precursor to the closure of Kingussie station.

In the end, ScotRail gave in and put in a Kingussie stop.

The time-consuming section today is Edinburgh - Perth: in January 1970, the direct route via Glenfarg was closed, not because there was a case for closure but because the UK government wanted to build a motorway and the railway was in the way. So trains now have to wander round Fife, serving Kirkcaldy, before they eventually reach Perth.

The same mind-set still prevails: despite its claims of concern about the environment, the Scottish Government is spending billions on widening the Perth - Inverness A9 road but penny numbers funnelled into fettling up the railway.

The Scottish Government allegedly aims to improve the environment. Spending billions on 'improving' the A9 and thus encouraging more people to use it will not achieve this. Nor, as is claimed, will it make it safer. Maniacs who exceed the speed limits now will continue to do so. It would surely cost much less to electrify the railway and enforce speed limits on the existing road.

Yours sincerely,

**Keith Farr**

*Editor's note: Average speed cameras have already been installed on the A9 between Perth and Inverness.*

# RAIL INVESTMENT

FoFNL member Alan Findlay had this letter published in the *Inverness Courier* on 13 August

## We need to be spending more on rail, not less

One can only sympathise and agree with the many complaints that I.M. Henderson of Nairn lists regarding a recent return trip on the Highland Main Line (Letters, August 7).

Current improvements to the line's trains and infrastructure are costing only a fraction of the billions of pounds being spent on dualling the A9.

One can only hope that the refurbished InterCity 125s live up to the hype when they appear later than promised, hopefully in December. If so, I.M. Henderson's concerns about overcrowding, toilets and catering have some chance of being addressed.

However, the real concerns are regarding the frequency, speed and reliability of the service, and this depends on track and signalling as well as trains themselves. Currently the only significant investment has been in better passing facilities at Aviemore and Pitlochry; the great majority of the line will remain single-track as far south as Ladybank in Fife. This Fife section of the route is another problem, being a circuitous replacement for the old, direct, double-track route to Edinburgh via Kinross which was sacrificed to build the M90 in 1970.

Railways with significant single-track sections have severe limitations when it comes to reliability, coping with delays and providing the capacity needed for frequent, fast passenger services as well as a big increase in freight.

Recently a "climate emergency" has been declared, and world record temperatures coupled with rapid Arctic sea-ice thinning and Antarctic ice-sheet melting indicate that this is not a moment too soon. Tackling the emergency will entail changes in energy production and use, in farming and what we eat, but also a drastic reduction in the transport emissions which damage climate - emissions which are actually increasing currently in Scotland.

It is to be hoped that our government's moves to deal with the emergency will include a major brake on big road spending, and diversion of this money to climate-friendly means of getting about, like electric rail and bus, cycling and walking. Perhaps the Climate Emergency will deliver a modern, attractive rail service to the Highlands.

Alan Findlay  
Rose Cottage  
Dores

# NATIONAL TRANSPORT STRATEGY

The Scottish Government is working on the new National Transport Strategy and is giving everyone a chance to contribute their thoughts. The online consultation is open until 23 October.

<https://consult.gov.scot/transport-scotland/national-transport-strategy/>

The government's preamble:

We are consulting on the new draft National Transport Strategy to help determine whether the Strategy's Vision, Priorities and Outcomes are the right ones for our transport network for the next twenty years. We want to know if the policies contained in the Strategy are the right ones to help deliver it, and how the Strategy can continue to support what works well and address what does not work so well in our transport system. Your views will be key in helping to shape the kind of transport we want for the next two decades.

# RAILWAY RESILIENCE

## Rail resilience

It is good news that the railway to Leven is nearer to being reopened and your editorial on the need for a railway revival (9 August) was timely.

It is sobering to realise that some 70% of the land mass north of the central belt is dependent on just two railway lines: at the Forth Bridge and at Larbert which you call “choke points”. A Christmas derailment at Dundee some four years ago blocked the line and cut off Aberdeen by rail from the south for three days.

**FoFNL Committee Member and frequent letter-writer, Richard Ardern, had this letter published in *The Scotsman* on 12 August in response to a pro-rail editorial.**

**Seeing his letter prompted another FoFNL member, Rolf Schmidt, to send Richard some comments which we thought should be in print too.**

The Climate Emergency has now been recognised by the Scottish Government and more sustainable means of transport are to be prioritised. A more resilient rail network must be high up that list both for passengers and for freight.

There are five possible rail routes between Edinburgh and Glasgow. All are electrified and three remained open when the Winchburgh tunnel was closed due to flooding. Further north, there is no electrification. Perth has a good rail connection with Glasgow but a very poor one with

Edinburgh (via Newburgh) because the direct line through Kinross was closed to make way for the M90 motorway. Building a new direct line between Cowdenbeath and Perth using some of the old track-bed would reduce the journey time from Edinburgh to Perth (and on to the Highlands) by 30 minutes.

Similarly, recreating a line from Perth to Laurencekirk via Forfar would give a second option to Aberdeen from the south to increase resilience. These are for the future, as you say, but they would also give much more scope for the sustainable railfreight option which the shortage of HGV drivers and the Climate Emergency requires.

More immediately, the Government aspirations to double track and electrify all the lines between the seven Scottish cities have only been progressing slowly. Greater capacity and speed on the Highland Main Line (HML) and between Aberdeen and Inverness were priorities 3 and 4 (after the Queensferry Crossing and EGIP) in the Strategic Transport Priorities Review of December 2008. We should have the doubling of the first 16 miles out of Aberdeen to Inverurie completed later this month, but both lines are over 100 miles long and the usual summer overcrowding and delays on the HML between Perth and Inverness have been as bad as ever this year.

There is a lot to do yet to underpin the Scottish economy with what you call the “21st century railway revival.”

EGIP – Edinburgh-Glasgow Improvement Project [which included electrification to Stirling, Alloa and Dunblane also] was completed in March 2019.

**Richard Ardern**

## Rolf Schmidt's response

I agree with your observations. Creating more diversion routes would certainly help. In addition, I think that the resilience of existing operations (against flooding, train failure, signal problems, etc) should be far better than it is at the moment.

Short turn-around times and lack of spare capacity in every aspect of operations combine to create a situation where a single relatively small problem early in the day can produce an avalanche of disruption across the country that last for the rest of the day.

Unfortunately, building-in resilience does not seem to be compatible with a railway that is run primarily for profit. Spare trains, crews, equipment, and timetable slots are expensive and promise little or no return on investment.

Another factor that works against resilience is the increasing complexity of all the interlinked systems that make up a railway. Even a train toilet these days seems to have more sensors and microprocessors than an Apollo space mission. The result is that when something stops working there is unlikely to be a simple fix that gets things moving - or flushing - again.

And finally, there can be an embarrassing lack of foresight in the design of equipment: a recent, relatively short power cut across England paralysed entire fleets of electric trains. It turned out that Siemens-built Class 700 and Class 717 could only be restarted with the help of a technician, because on-board computer systems could not be rebooted by the driver.

How to improve resilience? I'm sure that lessons are learned in cases like that power cut. It may also be possible to include more requirements for resilience in the franchises for train operators. Ultimately I feel that resilience should be a matter of people taking pride in their operation at all levels, and of creating a culture in which issues are flagged-up and addressed before they become big enough to cause outrage in the news media.

Rolf Schmidt

## FAR NORTH EXCURSION

A correspondent, Stuart Gray, spotted this photocopied advert pinned up on a wall in the Highland Folk Museum in Newtonmore. The Editor's interest was piqued and he contacted the museum for information, not really feeling optimistic. An immediate response was received from Rachel Chisholm, Curator (Collections), High Life Highland, who knew exactly where the picture was from!

Rachel told us that the advert appears in the book *Scottish Railway History in Pictures* by John Thomas, published in 1967, and that the accompanying text reads, "In the 1930s the motor car meant little to the man in the street, and the railways offered enterprising excursions which were well patronised. The LMS, in conjunction with the *Glasgow Weekly Herald* in June 1932 took more than 300 people from Glasgow over the Grampians to Inverness and on to John o' Groats. The return trip embraced 695 miles of rail travel and for the fare, 26s 6d, a hot supper and a full breakfast were included."

For a better view go to our website:  
<https://www.fofnl.org.uk/images/misc/Land-of-the-Never-Night.jpg>

**L M S**  
LONDON MIDLAND AND SCOTTISH RAILWAY

**THE FIRST EXCURSION**  
TO  
**JOHN O' GROATS**  
AND OTHER PLACES IN THE  
**LAND OF THE NEVER-NIGHT**

*Glasgow Weekly Herald*  
Restaurant and Sleeping Car Excursion

OUTWARD JOURNEY Friday Night, 17th June			RETURN JOURNEY Saturday Night, 18th June			
		p.m.			p.m.	
GLASGOW (Buchanan Street) leave	11	35	WICK .....	leave	10	0
INVERNESS .....	1	20	THURSO .....	.....	10	0
LAIRG .....	3	15	HELMSDALE .....	.....	11	50
BOYAR BRIDGE .....	5	8			Sunday	
LAIRG .....	6	52			morning	
INVERGOVRIE .....	7	11			a.m.	
PERTH .....	8	20	ROGART .....	leave	12	2
DINGWALL .....	9	25	GOURLIE .....	.....	12	25
INVERGOVRIE .....	5	19	ROGART .....	.....	12	40
LAIRG .....	3	15	LAIRG .....	.....	2	36
BOYAR BRIDGE .....	6	8	BOYAR BRIDGE .....	.....	1	23
LAIRG .....	6	52	LAIRG .....	.....	1	47
INVERGOVRIE .....	7	11	INVERGOVRIE .....	.....	2	11
PERTH .....	8	20	DINGWALL .....	.....	3	29
DINGWALL .....	7	11	INVERNESS .....	.....	5	29
INVERGOVRIE .....	5	19	PERTH .....	.....	9	41
LAIRG .....	3	15	STIRLING .....	.....	7	31
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# ARTICLE DEBÂCLE

Your Editor was rather shocked by the content of a photo-feature about the Far North Line, which appeared in the August issue of *The Scots Magazine*.

He felt it necessary to contact the Editor of that publication to suggest that an apology was due to their readers:

Dear Editor,

I have just seen a copy of the August issue of *The Scots Magazine* containing a feature about the Far North Line. This is really quite extraordinary and I don't recall reading anything which is meant to be informative being so incorrect. It's hard to tell whether the writer has actually travelled on the line, or even knows where it goes.

I've copied the text below with *comments*.

The Far North Line - now that sounds like an adventure route into the wilds, doesn't it?

Even stepping onboard feels like stepping back in time, as electric trains haven't reached the Highlands yet so all the trains on the Far North Line are diesel-powered. *(There are huge numbers of diesel trains in operation all over Scotland and the rest of the UK, many of them very new. There are non-electrified lines all over Britain.)*

As you pull out of Inverness, across the Black Isle and the natural harbour of the Dornoch Firth *(no, you don't travel across the Black Isle or across the Dornoch Firth - that's the A9)*, you are entering castle country and the line goes right past the doorsteps of Foulis, *(quite close, but no station anywhere near)* Skibo *(the other side of the Dornoch Firth, but quite near the A9)* and Carbisdale Castles.

Glenmorangie Distillery and the Black Isle Brewery *(which is on the Black Isle, so the Far North Line goes nowhere near it)* make excellent pit stops *(but not as good as the excellent Platform 1864 restaurant situated in the old Tain Station building on the station platform)*, before the line drops down to the east-facing Moray Firth coast *(no, not yet, because it isn't there, it's way inland, going via Ardgay, Invershin and Lairg, then it drops down etc, etc)*. Here you are almost right on the beach, with amazing views out to sea.

There are many picturesque coastal villages and towns *(no towns)* to stop in and explore *(there are only four stations though - three at villages and the stop for Dunrobin Castle, the story of which would have been well worth mentioning)* - like Helmsdale, perched on one of the most productive salmon rivers in Scotland.

At the village of Latheronwheel *(on the A9 but nowhere near the railway)* the line cuts inland *(no, it did that at Helmsdale because the coastal topography is too precipitous for a railway)* for the final stretch across the country *(worth mentioning that it traverses the Flow Country - the largest area of blanket bog in Europe and amazing to see?)* to the most northern station in the UK, Thurso.

The diesel trains you refer to at the opening, but do not include in your choice of photos, are very similar inside to any modern electric trains so the comment about stepping back in time could provide a great disappointment for anyone visiting the line wishing to experience such a thing.

I really think your readers deserve an apology!

Best wishes,

Ian Budd

He rapidly received an apology and an explanation from *The Scots Magazine's* Brand Content Manager [Editor?]:

Dear Ian,

Thank you for getting in touch with *The Scots Magazine* editorial team. I am sorry it is not under better circumstances.

I wanted to address your concerns and to let you know how seriously we take reader feedback.

I have analysed your comments and the feature in question. Ian, please accept my sincere apologies for the mistakes in this article.

This feature was the last in our *Great Scottish Rail Journeys* series – a wonderful series of picture-led articles by photographer Keith Fergus.

Keith was unable to complete this last feature on the Far North Line from Inverness to Thurso, and the magazine team finished the feature in his stead. I'm sorry to see that on this occasion we did not step up to the standards expected of us, with glaring errors marring the feature. You are right – the route described in the feature is more the A9 than the rail route.

I will make sure your comments are circulated round the rest of the editorial team, and will keep a sharper, stricter eye on the fact-checking of features in future.

Thank you for bringing this matter to our attention and for helping us ensure that mistakes like these do not happen again.

Yours sincerely,

Katrina Patrick - Brand Content Manager - *The Scots Magazine*

Let's hope the magazine will return to normality forthwith - apologising to its readers en route!

## PHEW

A study weekend was held in East Sutherland by the Scottish social section of the Panel for Historical Engineering Works (PHEW), part of the Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE). It was organised by FoFNL member Robin Sutherland.

The visit explored the area's infrastructure including the effect of the contribution made by the extremely wealthy Marquis of Stafford, husband of the Countess of Sutherland.

Our member and friend John Yellowlees was on the trip and gave us these notes of the itinerary:

**Thursday:** Dornoch Bridge and Meikle Ferry, Tain Platform 1864, Little Ferry North Pier, Culmailey Burn outlet and canal works.

**Friday:** Torboll fish ladder, Shin hydro, Rosehall House and Canal, Achness and Cassley Falls, Oykell Viaduct, Bonar Bridge, Spinningdale lade, turbine house and mill. Clyne Heritage Centre.

**Saturday:** Brora Salt Street, harbour, coal mine, brickworks, tramway, locomotive works and river bridges. Past distillery and gunnery range observation posts to Helmsdale Harbour and

### Torboll fish ladder

**Photo:**  
Tony Jervis



Timespan. Train Helmsdale-Rogart, slowing to view drain. Pittentrail ford and mill, Rogart Station and Sleeperzz. The Mound old station and sluice, observe Dornoch Light Railway, visit Dornoch old station. Film show at Dornoch Library about the rise and fall of the light railway and about the opening of the Dornoch Firth bridge by the Queen Mother.

**Sunday:** Sutherland gathering stone, Big Burn bridges, railway viaduct and lade. Dunrobin Castle Station, Golspie drill-hall, Duke Street, drove road, ford and observe Gunnery HQ. Golspie Station with plaque and train to Inverness.

A full, detailed report of the weekend, by Robin Sutherland, is available on our website:

[www.fofnl.org.uk/docs/archived/phew-report.pdf](http://www.fofnl.org.uk/docs/archived/phew-report.pdf)

# DINGWALL BID

At a public meeting on 17 June, in Dingwall, it was suggested that the town should work towards becoming a rail gateway to areas of Scotland covered by the NorthCoast 500 road route.

There is a move to get Business Improvement District (BID) status for Dingwall, being led by Dingwall Means Business and the Dingwall Community Development Company. The potential draw of the rail routes is seen as a catalyst in encouraging the acquisition of BID status. George Murray, from Dingwall Means Business, commented, "We must package what we have to attract investment from private enterprises big and small over the long-term - public investment is not coming back so we need to do this or be left behind."

## What is a Business Improvement District?

**A Business Improvement District is a defined area in which a levy is charged on all business rate payers in addition to the business rates bill. This levy is used to develop projects which will benefit businesses in the local area.**

*Scottish Government Website*

It was pointed out at the meeting that Dingwall's position on the rail network makes it an ideal place to begin beautiful scenic rail journeys, both north

on the Far North Line and west on the line to Kyle of Lochalsh.

David Whiteford, Chairman of the North Highland Initiative (NHI), which developed the idea of the NC500, said of the Far North Line, "What a phenomenal journey north through amazingly contrasting scenery like the Flow Country, and it takes a different route from the NC500 which is great as it opens up the hinterland."

This does highlight one of the concerns that has been raised about the concept of NC500, that it has a kind of 'doughnut effect' on tourism in the north of Scotland by directing everyone on a circular route which invites them to miss out everything in the middle.

There was, in passing, a slightly disturbing suggestion that the Far North Line could be renamed - something to which FoFNL is completely opposed. Don't change names: *Consignia* anyone?

**Ian Budd**

# WICK REGENERATION

A timely news item in the *Press & Journal* published on the morning of our AGM & Conference (21 June) announced that the town of Wick has secured, or is applying for, a total of around £500,000. The money will be used to fund a complete rethink of the town centre, as well as going towards the development of other initiatives.

Councillor Nicola Sinclair said: "For the first time in decades, we have a detailed and now fully funded plan to tackle derelict buildings, improve footfall and create a more vibrant and attractive town centre we can all be proud of."

As you can read on page 6, FoFNL is very interested in the idea of running a long trial of a Thurso-Wick regular shuttle service, using one of Vivarail's battery trains. This idea ties in nicely with Wick's aspirations and would be a low-cost addition to the town's facilities, using locally generated, environmentally-friendly power.

Sustrans, one of the main funders, will be working on plans to take to Highland Council. We hope they will include the rail shuttle as an integral component of the town's regeneration.

**Ian Budd**

# BRORA STATION



Photo: ScotRail

Graham Rooney, the chef and owner of Platform 1864, the very successful restaurant in the old Tain Station building has taken on another huge project.

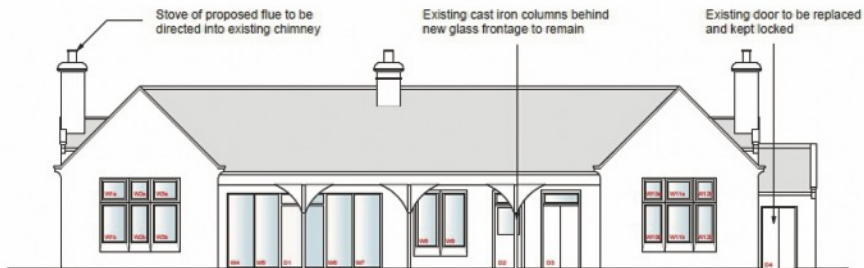
He plans a £500k redevelopment of the disused station building on Brora Station as a micro gin distillery, café bar, tourist information point and gift shop.

The Grade B listed building is owned by Network Rail and comprises a general waiting room, ticket office and small room behind it, a gentlemen's waiting room, ladies' waiting room, store room and toilets.

Besides investing his own resources in the project, Graham is seeking financial support from Transport Scotland's Stations Community Regeneration Fund, Railway Heritage, Highland Council and Highland Opportunity.

Graham took the opportunity of the presence in Brora on 21 June of Sir Peter Hendy, Chairman of NR and Bill Reeve, Director of Rail at Transport Scotland to invite them to meet at the station to discuss the project. FoFNL is delighted to have so fortuitously arranged for our Conference to be in Brora with those speakers!

Graham has the support of local councillors who are delighted to see such a plan for the unused station building, which has long been an unattractive feature of the village. East Sutherland and Edderton ward councillor Deirdre Mackay said: "Graham's plans will bring this currently derelict building back into use and help make Station Square a vibrant location for visitors and locals alike."



**EAST ELEVATION (MINUS NEW GLASS FRONTAGE)**

Scale: 1:150

The plans specify a glass frontage extending the full width between the wings, in front of the cast iron columns, which will remain visible. To view some detailed plans visit the FoFNL website:

[www.fofnl.org.uk/docs/archived/brora-station-plans/index.html](http://www.fofnl.org.uk/docs/archived/brora-station-plans/index.html)

Ian Budd

# JOHN MELLING

Frank Roach gave these memories of John Melling, FoFNL Chairman 1997-2003, who died in May:

I first met John Melling in the eye of STORM - *Stop the Railway Madness*, the anti-privatisation public meeting held in 1994. He quickly joined FoFNL and became the Chair during the early years. A lifelong Liberal activist and Quaker, John had a deep affection for the Highlands and its railways. His was a calm voice of reason in the tumultuous years.

## SFJB REPORT

The March 2019 Scotland Freight Joint Board's report "*Industry Growth Plan for Rail Freight*" contains detailed analysis of the present limitations of the whole Scottish rail system in terms of freight.

On the Far North Line the report sees the potential for one more freight path each way and commodities such as timber (incl biomass), intermodal, metals and fuel (LPG). However, it mentions cost implications for timber traffic if double handling is required i.e. if there is no direct rail access at the source or destination.

The factors affecting freight are the length of passing loops, the per-axle weight restrictions on structures such as the Oykel Bridge, width limits for containers and speed restrictions for Heavy Axle Weight (HAW) vehicles. The last item is of particular importance to allow freight paths to fit in with passenger services and the aspiration is to remove these restrictions.

## TRULY TRANSFORMATIVE

In time for the Programme for Government statement in the Scottish Parliament on 3 September, Transform Scotland issued a two page campaign document *Vision 2030: Clean Rail* on decarbonising Scotland's rail network.

This calls for an immediate commitment to electrification of the routes from the central belt to Aberdeen and Inverness and between the two by 2030. This is because 76% of Scotland's diesel trains (including the HSTs) will need replacing by then. "Currently 75% of passengers travel on electric (or zero emission) trains" and this could increase to 96%. The remaining long distance rural routes might be decarbonised using battery or hydrogen trains.

The paper unintentionally suggests that all the improvements to the Highland Main Line and the Aberdeen to Inverness Line prioritised in 2008 have been completed when this is very far from being the case. Only the early phases are complete.

The Full document: [www.fofnl.org.uk/docs/transport-scotland/TS-Vision-2019.pdf](http://www.fofnl.org.uk/docs/transport-scotland/TS-Vision-2019.pdf)

## GREAT SCENIC TASTING BOX



ScotRail has introduced the *Great Scenic Tasting Box* for its Great Scenic Rail Journeys.

The boxes are available from Glasgow Queen St and Inverness stations and from the catering trolleys on the trains.

ScotRail hospitality host Hazel MacLean is pictured showing off the contents of the box on the Far North Line: pie-slice, oatcakes, pâté, gin and tonic or malt whisky, venison, chocolate, shortbread, crisps and water for £16 - plus a Brewdog IPA Elvis Juice from the trolley for £4.20.

I think our correspondent was happy!

## A ROYAL ROUTE: THE FAR NORTH LINE TO THE CASTLE OF MEY

Once the Queen Mother purchased the Castle of Mey between Thurso and John o' Groats in 1952 it became more common to see the Royal Train on the Far North Line. It became something of a Royal Route.

Files in the National Railway Museum (yet to be studied) give some details of such trains in 1957, and in early August 1958 and 1959. The Queen Mother would be met by car at Georgemas Junction.

The Royal Train was usually kept at Wolverton near what is now Milton Keynes. In August 1955 the Wolverton train was cancelled and the Scottish Region had to provide the rolling stock from Inverness to Wick. FoFNL member John Macnab, who worked on carriage diagramming in Glasgow remembers a similar occasion some years later: "My minor involvement concerned a moment in time in the early 1960s when we in Glasgow North were informed that the Queen Mother was travelling back from an evening engagement in Glasgow on the timetabled overnight Glasgow Queen Street-Inverness service requiring us to make available one of our BR Mk1 sleepers for this purpose. The Cowlairs cleaners at the carriage sheds set to but were not told who it was for. Curiosity got the better of these cleaning ladies (somewhat tough in demeanour) and the boss one asked (nay, demanded) of myself and the inspector on our calling in to see how things were going, "Wha is this fur onywey?" We hesitated but took the plunge and said it was for the Queen Mother. Both of us expected an outcry of "Whit!" but, somewhat surprisingly, the reply was, "That's awright then." I rather imagine there was a genuine generational fondness for the Queen Mum stemming from WWII days.

So far so good! Until on finishing the task the steam heating was tested and the isolating cock at one end was unfortunately still closed and, yes, the pressure blew the main heating pipe! What to do? Only recourse was to get an LM car from Larkfield post haste to Cowlairs and start the cleaning and equipping all over again! (Expletives deleted!). In summary, it took until early evening to have everything in order and marshalled into the train set. Phew!"

Iain MacDonald remembers an occasion from the operating point of view when things nearly went wrong: "In the days of token block working the Royal Train had to have two sections clear ahead of it instead of the normal one. If trains were going to be crossing on single lines the other train had to have already been stopped in the loop ahead before the Royal Train could leave the previous loop.

A staff member had to be stationed at every level crossing ahead of the Royal Train to physically prevent anyone trying to cross the line. Royal Trains had to carry two tail lamps instead of one, in case one failed.



**Royal Train passing Clachnaharry on 27 May 2002  
47798 Prince William leading with 47799 Prince Harry at rear**

In Radio Signalling (RETB) days a supervisor had to be in the signal centre when a Royal Train was running and the signal centre was security checked in advance. There would be a Traction Inspector in the cab supervising the locomotive train crew.

However, on one occasion the driver of a Royal Train (which was carrying temporary RETB equipment) phoned in from Forsinard to say he couldn't get a signal. I asked him where the aerial was and he said, "It is beside me". I had to gently tell him that it is meant to be attached to the outside of the locomotive!"

Two of the last occasions when the Royal Train was on the line were on Monday 27 May 2002 when HM The Queen had engagements in Caithness and on 26 September that year when the Prince of Wales boarded at Lairg.

**Richard Ardern**

# MAYFLOWER IN MAY



[Left] and [Below]:

Photos taken at Dunrobin Castle Station by FoFNL member **Daniel Brittain-Catlin**, who also runs the railway museum inside the station building.

On 11 May the Steam Dreams rail tour visited the Far North Line, hauled by LNER B1 4-6-0, *Mayflower*, which is owned by Steam Dreams chairman David Buck. The trip had left London Victoria on 9 May, and was taken over by Flying Scotsman for the York-Inverness leg of the journey. *Mayflower* was in charge from Inverness to Brora, then over both the Kyle and West Highland lines, eventually returning to London Euston on 17 May.

Not many trains beginning their journey at London's Southern Railway Victoria terminus have ever arrived at Brora - Brighton is a far more likely destination!

The Duke of Sutherland might have enjoyed this dominant situation. Perhaps he'd have preferred 6233, LMS *Duchess of Sutherland* to *Mayflower*!

Photo: **Richard Ardern**



# NESS ISLANDS RAILWAY VANDALISED



Our 'other' southern neighbour, the Ness Islands Railway in Whin Park in Inverness, which has been operating since the 1980s, was temporarily closed in July after vandals severely damaged the wooden decking on the bridge, which is a major feature of the railway. The historic structure, erected in around 1837, was originally a footbridge on the River Ness.

The bridge was already due for refurbishment so the vandalism only really had the effect of causing the work to be done sooner than planned, although the railway had to be diverted away from the bridge to enable it to run while the work was being carried out.

The 7¼" gauge line currently has two locomotives: *Chrissy*, an 0-4-2T, built by Peter Beevers in 2012 to the 1968 'Tinkerbelle' specification; and *Uncle Frank*, a 4-4wPH petrol locomotive, in the style of an American diesel.

The railway was purchased in April 2019, by Highland Hospice, from the family of Ian Young, who had established the line in 1983. The line is built in the shape of a dumbbell folded over on top of itself, giving a journey of over half a mile. It is now run as a social enterprise, an unusual and rather wonderful way of fundraising.

Inverness City Heritage Trust partially funded the work which is expected to cost in the region of £12,000 to £15,000 and involves replacement of all the timbers and repainting of the bridge.

'Chrissy' having just passed beneath the bridge on 6 October 2018.



Photo: **Ryan Munro**

# A PEATLAND WORLD HERITAGE SITE?

The Flow Country enjoys a very positive reputation among peatland enthusiasts around the world, yet it flies very much under the radar for most Scottish residents and visitors. This could all change, however, if the Flow Country were to be brought to wider attention through World Heritage Site status.

The Flow Country currently sits on the UK's tentative list for World Heritage Site inscription, in recognition of its potential to join world-renowned

## Flow Country in the running to be UK's next World Heritage Site

*By Joe Perry, Project Coordinator,  
Flow Country World Heritage Site*

natural sites such as the Grand Canyon, the Great Barrier Reef and the Serengeti. The Flow Country's position on the tentative list was first encouraged by the Nature Conservancy Council in 1988 and has more recently been strengthened by a Comparative Study commissioned from the Greifswald Mire Centre, who concluded that the Flow Country exhibits the best habitat of its type in the world.

### How might The Flow Country become a World Heritage Site?

The process of bringing a site to World Heritage inscription is neither short, nor simple. A technical evaluation, outlining the property's suitability as a World Heritage Site, first needs to be submitted to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), who will then decide whether or not

the Flow Country can proceed with a full application to UNESCO. Two such evaluations, submitted in 2013 and 2015, were put forward by the Peatlands Partnership and were subsequently returned with encouragement for reapplication. In early 2018 The Peatlands Partnership established a World Heritage Site Working Group with the sole purpose of submitting a successful technical evaluation as an essential step in realising the Flow Country as a World Heritage Site.

UNESCO accepts new properties on the basis of their "outstanding universal value" (OUV), of which there are ten criteria. A property only needs to prove OUV in one criterion to be accepted as a World Heritage Site, so an application is not necessarily strengthened by arguing for multiple criteria. The Flow Country stakes claim to criterions ix and x; the former in recognition of the quality and extent of its blanket bog habitat and the latter in recognition of its unique breeding bird assemblages. In proving that The Flow Country has OUV, it must be argued that this property is vital not only to the two counties in which it sits, nor Scotland or the UK as a whole, but to the whole world. If the World Heritage Site bid were to be successful, it would be the responsibility of the Scottish Government, through local planning and existing environmental designations, to ensure that the Flow Country retained its OUV for future generations.

### The location and scale of the proposed World Heritage Site

The proposed Flow Country World Heritage Site is located in the historic counties of Caithness



and Sutherland, at the heart of one of the largest areas of blanket bog in the world. The term 'Flow Country' derives from the Scot's word "flow" or "flowe", meaning a wet peat-bog, and is often taken to refer to all of the peatlands in the two counties. These peatlands extend to approximately 4,000km<sup>2</sup> and, while it is unlikely that a World Heritage Site would include every square kilometre of peatland in Caithness and Sutherland, it would be likely to dwarf existing UK World Heritage Sites. To give an idea of scale, The Lake District World Heritage Site could fit almost twice into the Flow Country, as it stands at just 2,300km<sup>2</sup>.

### **Involving communities in the process**

The process of writing the current technical evaluation will be completed in the Autumn of 2019, when it will be sent to the DCMS in London. Running alongside this process will be a community consultation, which will give those living and working in and around The Flow Country the opportunity to give their thoughts and opinions on the project and express their ambitions for the future of this remarkable region. Furthermore, this consultation will facilitate an important discussion of the opportunities offered by World Heritage Site status and how these might be best taken advantage of by local communities and businesses.

First and foremost, any Flow Country World Heritage Site will belong to these communities and its future status as a world-class habitat will be dependent on their continued relationship with the land. The Flow Country has experienced human influence for thousands of years and this landscape will continue to be affected by those fortunate

enough to call it their home. World Heritage Site status would be a tremendous accolade for local communities, who will be able to look out on an environment that has been granted the "Michelin Star" of heritage awards.

### **What could a World Heritage Site bring to Caithness and Sutherland?**

The opportunities that come with World Heritage Site status are not uniform; indeed, the benefits of each property worldwide are unique and are shaped largely by the decisions and attitudes of the surrounding communities. With this in mind, it is impossible to say exactly what a World Heritage Site would bring to Caithness and Sutherland, but many similar properties around the world have taken advantage of the branding, marketing and international recognition that comes with inscription. Taking the Dorset and East Devon Coast (Jurassic Coast) World Heritage site as a case study, the majority of holiday accommodation prominently advertises its proximity to the World Heritage Site on their websites, while a local ice cream producer has brought out a "Jurassic Range" in partnership with the Jurassic Coast Trust.

We have held a number of consultation events through the spring and summer of 2019, including three big speaking events featuring talks from Geologist Professor Iain Stewart and archaeologist Neil Oliver.

We welcome questions and feedback from any source and are delighted to be part of this exciting project, which we hope will raise the profile of The Flow Country to a level more befitting its outstanding universal value.



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# NIGHT & DAY



Stunning shot, with hints of Egypt!

Picture taken by driver **Jordan Kearney** of his works train having driven it back inside Dyce, Raiths Farm freight terminal during the A21 blockade on 2 July 2019. The locomotive (66593) is about to be shut down for stabling.

On the first two Sundays in September a Norbord trial train was run from Mossend to Nairn, via Inverness and back. On Sunday 8 September the train makes a truly impressive sight heading south over Culloden Viaduct with a Class 66 at each end. The Norbord containers are attached to the scheduled Tesco train, making a total of 28, and a train around 600 yards long.

Photo: **Sandy Colley**

