

# Friends of the Far North Line AGM 2020

The COVID-19 emergency has caused the cancellation of our 2020 AGM. The FoFNL Committee decided on 17 May to cancel rather than postpone. This means that all official business will be carried over to the 2021 AGM. As elections cannot take place, the holders of all the offices and committee places will continue as they are now:

Convener:	Ian Budd
Secretary:	Neil Wallace (co-opted)
Membership Secretary:	Angus Stewart
Treasurer:	David Start
Newsletter Editor:	Ian Budd

Committee Members:	Richard Ardern
	Mike Lunan
	Iain MacDonald
	David Spaven
	Malcolm Wood

The appointment of an Independent Examiner of Accounts for the ensuing financial year is extended to the 2021 AGM.

## CONVENER'S REPORT

The 2019 FoFNL Conference launched the year now ending in fine style, with excellent presentations by Bill Reeve, Director of Rail, Transport Scotland; Sir Peter Hendy, Chairman of Network Rail; David Shirres, Editor of *Rail Engineer*; Scott Prentice, Head of Business Development, ScotRail and Dr Nick Lindsay, Chairman of the Clyde Heritage Trust.

The year since the last AGM has seen significant progress on implementing the recommendations of the Far North Line Review Team. We are in regular contact with Transport Scotland and I will post a brief progress summary from the appropriate TS official to our website once he returns from annual leave.

New groups have been set up by ScotRail to discuss and contribute to SR's tourism policy and FoFNL is represented on the Highland Group.

We continue to keep up the pressure on the Scottish Government to focus on its commitment to modal shift from road to rail, especially in the light of the Climate Emergency declared during the year. This is perhaps more difficult than it should be, which suggests strong pressure being applied by others in favour of prioritising road projects over rail.

We were delighted with the recent news that land next to Inverness Station has now been purchased by Network Rail so that a purpose-built transport interchange can be provided. This will give Inverness a facility which is astonishingly rare in Scotland, and the rest of the UK, yet is so clearly needed in all conurbations.

In November, rather later than we had hoped, we published our 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary book, *FoFNL 25*. We gave complimentary copies to all the regular rail industry recipients of *Far North Express* and it has been very well received. It was particularly gratifying to hear a senior figure in ScotRail saying how much they'd enjoyed learning some of the recent history of the Far North Line and how useful that was in understanding certain things. We have sold close to 100 copies and would have sold more but for the interruption of the pandemic.

When the book was published we decided to take PayPal payments online for book purchase and then extended that to accepting membership payments.

Another aspect of FoFNL's work is attending conferences. On 5 March Mike Lunan and I attended the Rail North of the Border Conference. We were very struck by the total focus on the Scottish Government's commitment to remove diesel passenger trains by 2035. Transport Scotland mentioned in passing the need to electrify to Aberdeen and Inverness. It is also likely that the FNL will be electrified to Tain.

Battery and Hydrogen traction both have serious limitations, although the speed of development is astonishing. It seems possible that lines such as the FNL which are unlikely to be electrified throughout may have sections of OLE to enable charging of batteries in transit - every option is in the pot to be stirred.

We are fortunate that our Vice Presidents are active in asking Parliamentary Questions. The answers provided are very useful and the airing of the questions brings parliamentary attention to our issues. I've attached a separate section with examples of these after the Treasurer and Membership Secretary reports.

## **MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S REPORT**

I joined FoFNL on 14 May 1996 after my wife and I enjoyed B&B at Frank Roach's railway coach in Rogart. On 1 January 2001 I started as Membership Secretary. At the end of that year we had 172 members including 30 new members. Of the 2001 membership we still have 47 in membership.

At the end of 2019 we had 209 members including 22 new members, 8 of

them life members. PayPal has proved to be a popular way to pay with 30 members using this method of payment.

I would like to thank the members for the kind comments to the committee on the renewal membership forms and in the replies received after the request for member's emails.

## **FRIENDS OF THE FAR NORTH LINE TREASURER REPORT FOR 2019**

The accounts are presented for the year ending 31 December 2019 for consideration and acceptance.

The year showed a surplus of £1077.79.

As with previous years a quantity of stamps was purchased as a buffer against the usual annual price rise from the Royal Mail.

Membership levels remain healthy, a reflection of the work of the FoFNL committee, in particular the excellence of *Far North Express*.

Donations remain good and life memberships have been taken up.

Our twenty-fifth anniversary publication available towards the end of 2019 has sold well and continues to generate sales through our decision to create additional income streams by the creation of a PayPal account. I am indebted to Ian Budd for his administration and oversight of this.

The expectation is that future investment returns will be limited in the rate of interest paid, and therefore reserves may have to be used to cover expenses for exceptional expenditure.

All known expenses presented to the Treasurer have been paid in full.

I commend this report to the Annual General Meeting.

**David Start**, Hon. Treasurer, 5 June 2020.