

**As promised**, Transport Scotland has given us a snapshot of the current state of play with the implementation of the recommendations of the Far North Line Review Team. Inevitably Covid-19 restrictions have slowed progress.

- Prior to the lock-down, preparations were ongoing for trials of 'Request to Stop' equipment at Scotscalder.
- Preparations were also in hand for trials of token-operated points (enabling trains to run through them at 40mph rather than 15mph) at Muir of Ord.
- The contractor will complete its points condition survey of the line once Covid-19 restrictions have been eased sufficiently.
- Network Rail has awarded a separate contract to identify the optimum position for a new loop(s) in the Lentrán/Bunchrew area.
- Transport Scotland is keen to get these three elements moving as soon as possible and progress is currently depending on an agreement for the cost of the work.
- NR has submitted a revised Strategic Business Case for the FNL work, which is now under the TS review process.

An unexpected complication has arisen concerning the unavoidable need to stop Caledonian Canal traffic to allow trains to cross the canal at Clachnaharry. The planned increase in rail traffic, made possible by the building of the new loop(s) means that there will need to be negotiation with Scottish Canals.

FoFNL has been asked for its views on a suggestion that has been made by NR concerning passive provision for a new station near Bunchrew. We do not think this is either necessary or helpful, as its presence would negate the benefits of the new dynamic loop(s). It would also increase the line's end-to-end journey times.

To sum up: things are moving forward, it's frustrating to all of us that the process takes so long, but that is a fact of life – exacerbated by the pandemic. I can't resist quoting the final remark of our TS contact, "I am both confident and determined that the Lentrán/Bunchrew loop will be built!" which beautifully echoes Mike Lunan's valedictory cry in *FNE 73*, January 2018, "THE LENTRAN LOOP MUST BE BUILT."

Ian Budd – 23 June 2020