

Press release from Friends of the Far North Line – for immediate publication 13 October 2021

RAIL CAMPAIGNERS ALARMED OVER HIGHLAND COUNCIL ‘HEADS IN SAND’ ON A9 AND A96 DUALLING

A rail campaigning group has criticised recent lobbying by Highland Council for completion of A9 and A96 dualling while ignoring the potential of the parallel railway lines to generate massive safety, connectivity and environmental benefits. In an open letter to the Council [1], Friends of the Far North Line [2], which campaigns for upgrading of the railway from Caithness to Inverness – and the connecting routes to Aberdeen, Perth, Edinburgh and Glasgow – says:

‘The Highland Council, far from supporting moves to change Scottish transport priorities, is calling for spending on road upgrades as though there is no Climate Emergency. This is not a good look for Scotland as delegates arrive for the COP26 conference in Glasgow. Heads must be pulled out of the sand in the face of the emergency. It is well known that, especially for freight, rail represents a massive fuel saving compared with road transport powered by any means.’

Urging the Council and all the area’s newspapers ‘to fully back calls for upgrading the intercity links from Inverness as soon as possible, and to provide leadership’ Ian Budd, the Convener of Friends of the Far North Line, said:

‘We are still waiting for improvements to the largely single-track Inverness-Perth line which were promised by the Scottish Government in 2008, but were quietly dropped in favour of the dualling of the A9. Yet the A9 had been completely rebuilt in the 1980s, while the railway infrastructure has been cut back since then.

‘While some town bypasses are needed along the A96 route from Inverness to Aberdeen, full dualling at a cost of some £5 billion [3] is unnecessary, especially when the parallel, largely single-track, railway has so much potential for enhancement.’

MORE INFO: Contact Ian Budd

NOTES FOR EDITORS:

[1] Link <http://www.fofnl.org.uk/archives/Open-Letter-to-THC-12-10-21.pdf> to open letter to

Highland Council

[2] Friends of the Far North Line is the campaign group for rail north of Inverness - lobbying for improved services for the local user, tourist and freight operator. See:

<http://www.fofnl.org.uk/index.php>

[3] A cost of £3 billion was estimated by the Scottish Government in 2010, but subsequent inflation is likely to have inflated the cost to around £5 billion

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