

THE FRIENDS OF THE FAR NORTH LINE



Cairdean Na Loine Tuath
*the campaign group for rail north of
Inverness - lobbying for improved
services for the local user, tourist
and freight operator*

Introduction

This is the Friends of the Far North Line's submission for the development of the Scottish Government's Strategic Transport Projects Review 2.

Our perspective on strategic rail plans for Scotland for the next 20 years is that of campaigning for the best possible outcomes for passengers and freight, with the Far North Line providing the most resilient corridor between Orkney and the rest of Scotland, England and the other European countries.

Above all we seek a major readjustment of Scottish Government transport priorities which accepts that although the road system needs to be fully maintained, rail needs to be placed at the forefront of planning and financing decisions as we move towards a more sustainable transport system.

1. Far North Line

In addition to the already planned works, including the Lentrán Loop:

- Provision of a chord between Halkirk and Georgemas to allow direct services to Thurso or Wick without reversal and provision of 'branch' services, probably best achieved by opening a new station at Halkirk with an island platform so that trains from either Thurso or Wick can terminate there, allowing passengers to change to/from the other branch.
- Extension of the Far North Line to Scrabster to connect directly with Orkney ferries. *[We recognise there are difficulties with the topography here.]*
- Provision of a loop, perhaps at Kinbrace. Long enough to accommodate maximum length freight trains, to aid timetable resilience and allow additional paths. The current distance between loops, HMS-FRS takes around 35 mins resulting in massive delays when there is even minor late-running in one direction.

2. The doubling of the Highland Main Line north of Perth and the remainder of the Aberdeen-Inverness route.

It is likely that doubling of both lines would be done in stages which would need to be worked out taking into account greatest efficiency both economically and in terms of disruption. If there is significant delay in doubling these routes, temporary midway loops should be considered between Keith and Elgin; Dunkeld and Pitlochry; and Dalwhinnie and Kingussie to ease the current pinch points by the middle of CP6.

The following specific comments may also prove useful:

HML

- Fettle up Culloden Viaduct to take two trains at once
- New line alongside old between Kincaig and Kingussie but on higher embankment to prevent flooding
- Dredge Gynack Burn at Kingussie station to prevent flooding
- New resilient line between Ballinluig and Dunkeld on higher embankment to prevent flooding
- Completely remodel Perth station to ease punishing speed limits on approaches from north and south

Two further items which would improve journeys towards the Central Belt are:

- Construct loop at Newburgh to allow trains to pass on that line (needed before reopening of direct route to Edinburgh)
- Construct Greenhill flyover to allow trains from north to GLQ easier access on to the Edinburgh - Glasgow main line

Inverness - Aberdeen

- Reinstate siding at Norbord factory to receive timber trains and export wood panels
- Take steps to prevent flooding near the Nairn, Findhorn and Lossie bridges and in Elgin goods yard
- Provide well connected sidings in Elgin with good road access to serve future whisky related traffic and also timber traffic
- Prior to doubling, make provision for trains to cross at Keith without keeping one train and its passengers waiting for a late runner to arrive, either by:

Building another loop on the Inverness side of the station as favoured in NR doc 116647 *Aberdeen to Inverness Rail Improvement* of 2010, page 36, paragraph 4.6.1, or building a second platform with disabled access etc.

- Provide well connected sidings at Keith with good road access to serve future whisky related traffic and also timber traffic
- Reinstate sidings at Huntly when required for timber traffic
- Ensure sufficient platform space and access at the north end of Aberdeen station

3. The electrification of the lines from Stirling to Perth, from Perth to Inverness and Aberdeen and from Inverness to Aberdeen.

4. The reopening and electrification of the direct, and 30 mins quicker route between Perth and Edinburgh via Kinross. That journey currently takes as long as it did at the end of the 19th Century.