

Report of FoFNL Committee Meeting 10 May 2019 Caledonian Sleeper Lounge, Inverness

Present: Richard Ardern, Ian Budd, Iain MacDonald, Frank Roach (HITRANS), David Spaven, David Start, Malcolm Wood

Apologies: Mike Lunan, Angus Stewart

FR HITRANS Report

Frank Roach gave an extensive report on all FNL matters being addressed by HITRANS at the moment.

Inverness Station improvements are progressing slowly. The Royal Highland Hotel is refusing to give up its right to parking spaces in the square, thereby preventing its conversion to an open space with no vehicle access.

The latest thoughts are to have the hotel parking moved to the centre of the square. In any case, taxis will need to be moved and Sustrans has been commissioned to investigate the approaches to the station.

IB agreed to find out if there is any existing work that could be referred to about 'best practice' for pick-up/drop-off points.

The **Caithness Sleeper** project is still being pursued. Political support is now needed as Transport Scotland is ambivalent about the plan. This year's Programme for Government is due to be announced in September and FR would like the Caithness Sleeper to be included.

The economic benefit is currently put at £4½m p.a. and the sleeper would require a £2½m annual subsidy.

The pathing has been validated and it is likely that the sleeper will not be split at Inverness but passengers will be dropped off there, meaning that the train will not connect with the 07:00 ferry to Kirkwall. As the train will be push-pull, Inverness and Georgemas reversing will not be a problem. FR requested that we seek political support at the AGM – FR will send docs to IB and (possibly) the VPs. There have already been expressions of support from various parties.

The trial **Thurso-Wick** shuttle service is currently the subject of a SYSTRA feasibility study, planning to slot it in to the current timetable. FR is hoping to bid for funding for a trial.

Freight – the DRS demo is still intended to run at some point. Currently the possibilities for transferring timber shipment to rail are looking more positive because demand and prices are up. FR is working on the use of Altnabreac as a loading point.

The installation of a link into the Norbord factory is being worked on. There would be an INV-facing connection to Norbord after the Dalcross Loop.

IB agreed to ask Jordan Kearney, a driver and FNE contributor about the current position with numbers of drivers with route knowledge of the FNL and to ask him how long the refresher course is for lapsed knowledge.

Request & Ride units are currently being made up and one is being tested in Inverness.

The **RETB** upgrade allows for the operation of motorised points which will enable 40 mph entrance and exit to passing loops instead of the current 15 mph. FR also explained the benefits of 'collapsing tokens' which are now possible using GPS.

There was a discussion about **STPR2** and the need to ensure that the intention to have hourly services on the HML and InvAb with a 3hr average, 2hr 45 mins best, on the HML and 2hr journey time on InvAb is included in STPR2. It is not automatic that things in the original STPR will

migrate to STPR2 if not already achieved.

FR has asked for a Harrington Hump to be installed at **Fearn** due to the very low platform.

Treasurer's Report

DS briefly outlined FoFNL's current financial position, which is very healthy due to two large bequests made in the past to provide a "fighting fund" in the event of need.

DS stated that we had higher income than expenditure in 2018-19.

The death of Bob Barnes-Watts last year led to the need to have another cheque signatory. This person also has to hold a BoS account. Fortunately Iain MacDonald agreed to take this on.

John Finnie MSP

IB told the committee that he had met with JF after the CPG for Rail on 8 May and JF had said he was happy to be added to our list of VPs.

Committee members and Secretary

Malcolm Wood confirmed his intention to demit from the position of Secretary after the AGM, but said he was happy to stand for the committee.

No-one offered to take up the position of Secretary which will therefore remain vacant.

IB made a request to all members to be looking out for new committee candidates as we have recently lost two members.

Updated Policy Document

The committee agreed that IB would produce a revised version, incorporating ML's annotations and circulate it for agreement.

CRP for FNL?

IB reported on the meeting which took place in Helmsdale on 1 May. It was agreed that FoFNL's position is to observe what happens and to work with whatever body is set up.

25 Anniversary Publication

IB asked the committee for any thoughts, positive or negative, about asking HRH Prince Charles to write an endorsement of FoFNL in the publication. It was agreed that he should be approached.

It was also agreed that Bill Reeve should be asked to write something about FoFNL.

A.O.B.

David Spaven told the committee that he had recently had a meeting with the Cabinet Secretary about pump-priming freight from Elgin to the Central Belt.

It was agreed that the current constitutional arrangement for committee meetings and agreements works well. There will be an annual committee meeting, to which FR will be invited, as it was felt extremely useful to have a full report and discussion about HITRANS' work.

It was also agreed that IB would print a committee report in *FNE*.