

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*

Transport Focus
For ScotRail

Ian Budd
Convener
Friends of the Far North Line

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ScotRail Ticket Office Consultation

The Role of Ticket Offices – FoFNL Response

We acknowledge that ticket office provision was last looked at in the early 1990s and much has changed since then. However, we are concerned that reduction in provision on the Far North Line and of course on the railway in general, may have undesired consequences.

ScotRail naturally has focused on the statistics for ticket sales made at each location. While this is an important factor from ScotRail's point of view, and the only financial measure, we would like to take a wider view.

The ticket office is the only place where potential passengers can have person to person interaction. Despite the prevalence of electronic means of obtaining information there are many people and many situations where face to face contact is far preferable. Sometimes far more information can be gathered quickly in a conversation than can be found easily online. It's worth remembering too that in comparatively remote places such as Thurso and Wick, the ticket office will be the only contact the local population has with ScotRail.

There is also the danger of 'disenfranchising' people who don't have internet access, either through personal choice or because their device is not working at that time.

We are looking towards a time, especially on the Far North Line, when a greater proportion of travellers will be tourists and visitors. We can see a very useful future for stations such as Thurso and Wick if the traditional ticket office were to extend its facilities to become more of a 'hub' where people come for information, not just about travel, but also tourist and visitor information. A more welcoming environment could become an attractive place to combine information-seeking with shopping and refreshment. A good example of a station where this already partly exists is Dingwall, the other FNL station on the list of possible changes. Locals visit the tearoom there even if not planning to travel.

We realise that it is not possible to quantify missed opportunities but would contend that making a station a more attractive place to visit would tend to encourage more use of the railway for travel. There is nothing more off-putting and unwelcoming than a closed ticket office.

We would suggest that ScotRail works with Visit Scotland to discover possible shared use of the facilities which already exist and would not require major structural change to accommodate the kind of 'hub' we envisage.

Ian Budd