

# FAR NORTH EXPRESS



Issue 80

May 2020



THE MAGAZINE OF THE FRIENDS OF THE FAR NORTH LINE

For news and views about rail in the North of Scotland

Cairdean Na Loine Tuath

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**Cover Photo:** Last train of the day., 158705 Northbound at Rogart on 21 July 2019.

Photo: **Peter Moore** (Facebook: North Highland Railways)

# HEADCODE

**AGM:** Please note, our 2020 AGM & Conference has been postponed and may be cancelled.

I begin with two announcements: having sent out a request for members' email addresses to which I attached a plea for a volunteer to become FoFNL Secretary I'm delighted to say that we received an offer from Neil Wallace, who lives in Kiltarlity, near Beauly. We have co-opted Neil to the Executive Committee and accepted his secretarial offer.

Neil is a registered Health & Safety Consultant, with a background in Civil Engineering, Construction and Transportation and has a keen interest in improving the Far North Line - we are looking forward to working with him.

My second announcement is that committee member and renowned railway author David Spaven has now stood down as Scottish Representative of the Rail Freight Group. We shall continue to tap into his expertise in this vital field, as efforts throughout the rail industry to gain modal-shift of freight to rail are stepped up.

We often publish articles by David - his final article for *Friends of the Scotsman*, published on 31 March, arrived too late to reproduce in this issue, but his final sentence sums up our collective view on Scottish Government transport policy:

*The big symbolic test of the Scottish Government's commitment to change will be whether it continues to back the £6,000 million+ dualling of the A9 and A96 roads, linking Inverness with Perth and Aberdeen – or*

*finally admits the parallel, largely single track, inter-city railways desperately need the same single-minded drive to bring them into the 21st century.*

As you will see on pages 6 & 7, FoFNL sent a letter to all MSPs at the beginning of March in much the same vein. Until the politicians, who have the final say over which projects are funded, really embrace the need to place a hold on large road projects - yesterday's transport solution - and look to achieving large, prestigious, rail projects, nothing much will change.

Meanwhile, the regrettable failure to admit to giving a misleading Parliamentary Answer, as laid out in the Parliamentary Questions section on page 12, displays a worrying willingness in Government to avoid confronting the failure so far to properly address the infrastructure needs of our main feeder route from the south. There has *not* been a 10-minute reduction in journey times between Inverness and the Central Belt. This is not a time for complacency.

FoFNL is, of course, delighted that work is proceeding apace on development and costing for the significant improvements which are coming to the Far North Line, but is always aware that so many of our travellers are using the Highland Main Line or the route to Aberdeen for a large part of their journey.

**Ian Budd**

**66433 passing through Culloden Wood on 27 February 2020 with the southbound "Stobart".**

**Photo: Sandy Colley**

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Seven years ago Pandora wrote a piece looking at ScotRail's possible rolling stock picture well into what was then the future. It was revised in 2017 and can be read on the FoFNL website ([www.fofnl.org.uk/archives/Rolling-Stock-Needs-in-Scotland-2017.pdf](http://www.fofnl.org.uk/archives/Rolling-Stock-Needs-in-Scotland-2017.pdf)). With the development of alternative technologies it seemed a good idea to incorporate these, and this was done - mercifully unpublished - later that year. 'Mercifully' because the speed at which these new technologies has advanced is breath-taking. It is not often that Pandora isn't optimistic enough. My thoughts have crystallised following a highly informative Conference in Glasgow in March, and it's worth risking what I hope will be a final look at where we are going.

## Pandora considers future rolling stock

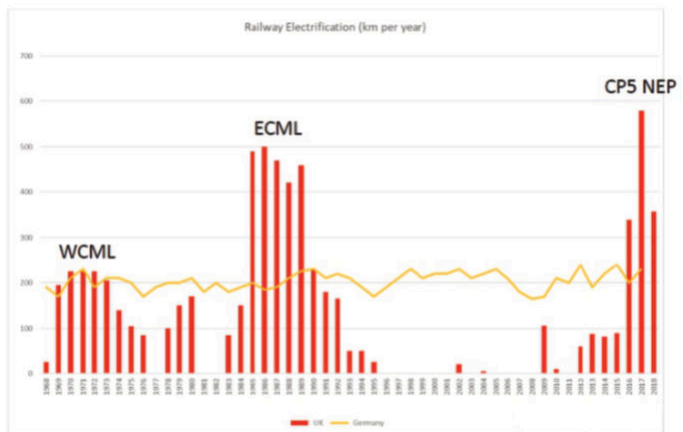
The First Minister, ever keen to go one better than Westminster, has announced that the passenger railway will be diesel-free by 2035. That's no diesel passenger trains in Scotland. Let's overlook cross-border services which are not in the remit of Scottish Ministers, but there aren't all that many (less than 5% of all services in Scotland). None of this bi-mode nonsense from them, where either a diesel engine (and its fuel) or an electric motor is hauled around dead while the other one powers the train. See camel, see committee. So what has happened?

A huge increase in research (and its useful outcome - development) into battery- and hydrogen-powered trains. In 2018 I spoke of a battery range of 40km - now we're talking about maybe 200km. Hydrogen takes up a lot of room - maybe a whole carriage - but it can deliver journeys of several hundred km. Neither battery nor hydrogen is particularly good at delivering the big

power needed to start a heavy train, so the rolling stock into which these power units will have to be fitted will be light-weight multiple units. They are useless for freight and not brilliant at longer, faster passenger trains. For these the only solution is electricity, and that means 25kV overhead.

So where does this leave us? The HSTs now gradually coming into service on the Inter7City routes won't last more than about 10 years. The lines north of Haymarket to Aberdeen, from Dunblane to Inverness, from Perth to Dundee and from Inverness to Aberdeen will have to be electrified by 2035. In fact they'll have to be electrified by about 2032 if newly-ordered electric trains (locomotives? multiple units?) are to be trialled and enter service by 2035. The last bit (Inverness to Aberdeen), although unlikely to be able to make a stand-alone business case for putting up the wires, is necessary so that the 'figure of 8' Inter7City system remains a holistic diagramming reality. It's crazy not to electrify the rest of the Fife Circle too while we're at it.

Now that nobody publishes proper timetables any more (a gripe to which Pandora might return) it's harder to look up the route mileage of all that, but it won't be greatly different from 1200km. Transport Scotland has been electrifying at the rate of about 100km/year for ages, so putting up the knitting at the required rate is no more than carrying on for another 10 years. (How different, how very different, from the home life of their own dear DfT cousins. The



Conference guys showed us a graph of the volume of wiring put up by the UK over the last 40 years, much resembling a heart monitor: peaks and troughs. Germany, on the other hand, just had a boring - and laudable - flat line. Just like Scotland. But I digress.)

Once that's all done what is left? Inverness to Kyle and Wick/Thurso. Glasgow to Oban, Fort William and Mallaig. Glasgow to Stranraer and Carlisle via Dumfries (and other bits nearby). Borders Railway. All are suitable for battery or hydrogen; all will benefit from new order multiple units with great big windows and nice comfy seats and lots of tourist-friendly luggage space and - let's think really outside the box now - a buffet just like the big grown-up trains have. Every single passenger has a Mk.1 bum which will, if all goes to plan, occupy a seat. Let these bums assist in the process of finding a good seat - a seat whose comfort is comparable with the competing seat: the one in his/her car.

Transport Scotland knows all this far better than

Pandora does. Transport Scotland is as excited by new motive power technology as Pandora is. Transport Scotland will not be slow to emulate the First Minister in showing the way to others. Transport Scotland has a slide and these were its bullet points. No more need be said.

- more EMUs
- replace old EMU fleets
- IPMU (independently-powered MU) on non-electrified routes
- battery EMU for discontinuous overhead line
- HSTs replaced by InterCity-type electric trains "once electricity gets to Inverness and Aberdeen" [note the lack of any 'if' in that direct quotation]
- DMUs retired

I have a dream...



## BOB MACLENNAN - AN APPRECIATION

*Lord Maclennan of Rogart died on 17 January. He was FoFNL's first President and played a vital role in our establishment in 1994. FoFNL member Daniel Brittain-Catlin shares his memories:*

I was lucky enough to know Bob Maclennan very well over some thirty years. Before he succumbed to his final illness we met up, for what proved to be the last time, for a cup of tea and a bun in the House of Lords in the summer of 2018. It wasn't a prolonged journey as I work just over the road. In earlier years I'm glad to say that we met up pretty frequently in Caithness and he certainly got to know Scotscaelder station well.



In fact he was a big fan of the station and it was through his efforts that Scotscaelder received its highest ever number of arriving passengers - 72 - when the late lamented Northlands Festival (which he founded) staged an event in a specially set up marquee adjoining the station in the summer of 1999. It was a marvellous day.

Bob was passionately devoted to his constituency and everyone who lived in it and really relished the public meetings throughout Caithness and Sutherland during general election campaigns. That was a tradition which had very much died out in the vast majority of UK constituencies in the 80s and 90s, but most definitely lived on in the far north.

Much as Bob enjoyed election campaign meetings he was above all a unifier, always searching out political common ground within his party and across parties, so although he reached the very top of his party, the SDP, he was certainly not the archetypal modern politician. He took a highly intellectual interest in politics and his areas of concern were far from traditional crowd pleasers. He was very much the aesthete in politics, not the bar room sage.

Above all Bob was a very good friend, and that's how I shall remember him.

**Daniel Brittain-Catlin**

# THINKING BIG IN GOVERNMENT

*When the UK2070 Commission Final Report came out on 27 February the urgent message to government it delivered gave us the opportunity to highlight its relevance to the Scottish Government, especially in terms of transport policy. All governments enjoy being the instigators of prestigious projects so we wanted to point out that, in the era of extreme concern about the effect of burning fossil fuels, the Scottish Government should be looking to achieve some flagship rail projects in the very near future.*

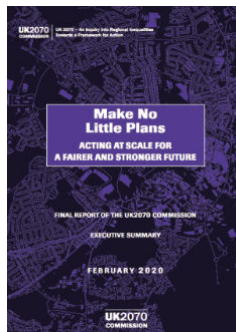
*FoFNL therefore sent a letter to every MSP suggesting that now is the time for rail to be at the forefront of their transport thinking. We attached the UK2070 Commission press release to the letter we sent.*



**MediaCityUK, Salford, 27 February 2020** – The UK2070 Commission issued both its Final Report *Make No Little Plans - Acting At Scale For A Fairer And Stronger Future*<sup>1</sup> and an Executive Summary<sup>2</sup> of this Report today, with chair Lord Kerslake, the former Head of the Home Civil Service, warning Government that it must “go big or go home” if it is to arrest further economic decline and social division.

Lord Kerslake said: “The Government’s desire to level up the UK economy is welcome. However, the scale of the challenge we face is such that we need a generational shift if we are to avoid serious decline and division. Many people in Britain feel left behind by growth elsewhere and that has contributed to an acrimonious debate about Europe. We now face a decade of potential disruption – leaving the European Union, confronting the impact of climate change and adjusting to the fourth industrial revolution.

“Our research shows clearly that these inequalities did not grow up overnight. They reflect an over-centralised system that fails to comprehend the reality of regional need and consistently comes up with policies that are either under-resourced, too fragmented, or too short-lived to make a difference. Some policy guidelines have actively stacked the odds against the regions. Time is not on our side and we cannot afford to keep on repeating those mistakes. Government must therefore think big, plan big and act at scale. Bluntly, if it can’t go big, it should go home.”



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fofnl.org.uk/docs/reports/UK2070-FINAL-REPORT.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.fofnl.org.uk/docs/reports/UK2070-EXEC-SUMMARY-FINAL-REPORT.pdf>

# THE FRIENDS OF THE FAR NORTH LINE

We at the Friends of the Far North Line read the summary of the UK2070 Commission report Make No Little Plans – Acting At Scale For A Fairer And Stronger Future with a feeling that it happens to encapsulate our view of the Scottish situation, especially with regard to rail infrastructure.



As you will be aware, Transport Scotland is currently compiling the Scottish Government's Strategic Transport Projects Review (SPTR2) update and has just released preliminary documents summarising the current position and listing challenges which have been described by stakeholders across the country.

Stepping back from the minutiae it is our belief that some very large rail projects are urgently needed. Naturally our first thoughts have to be about the requirements of the Far North Line itself and much work is already in progress to tackle some of its shortcomings, as agreed by the Far North Line Review Team. However, our passengers very often travel far beyond the FNL and this is when the need for major investment becomes very apparent.

Of the two routes onwards from our southern terminus at Inverness, the line to Aberdeen recently received some of the transformational funding it desperately needed, and more is required for it to become a true inter-city passenger and freight route. However, it is the Highland Main Line which needs major investment. It directly links the Far North and the Highlands to the Central Belt conurbations, the English network and the rest of Europe.

First, the line is currently not electrified. This means that the new LNER Azuma trains have to use their diesel engines and can't operate their service as fast as the ScotRail HSTs. It will have to be electrified soon anyway to meet the 2035 rail decarbonisation deadline, so that is an urgent priority. Extending electrification northwards from Dunblane to Perth is already in the pipeline.

At least as important as that is the need to double-track most, if not all, of the route from Inverness to Perth. Currently, capacity for both passengers and freight is strangled by the fact that 81 miles of the 118 mile route are only single-track\*. The recent work on the line made only small improvements.

This leads to the next main requirement for the Scottish inter-city network which is to reverse the closure in 1970 of the direct route from Perth to Edinburgh, which was done partly to make space for the M90. Restoration of the fast link between the cities would reduce journey times from above 80 mins to around 45 mins and would be likely to cost less than half what is currently being spent on dualling the A9. Currently, the journey from Perth to Edinburgh by rail is slower than it was in 1895. Surely Scotland cannot tolerate this any longer.

The re-opening of the direct route from Perth to Edinburgh will tie in very effectively with the HS2 project which will bring enormous benefit to Scotland through faster and better connectivity with England and Europe.

To summarise:

- Electrify and double the Highland Main Line between Inverness and Perth
- Rebuild the direct route from Perth to Edinburgh as a double track electric main line

Scotland has the opportunity to embrace the Scottish Government's policy to achieve modal shift from road to rail and make really big improvements. What is needed is for MSPs from all parties to see what needs to be done and sign up to these flagship projects.

\*The rail equivalent of a 'single-track road with passing places'.

FoFNL is delighted to have support for this statement from these organisations: Inverness Chamber of Commerce, Rail Freight Group and Transform Scotland.

**Ian Budd - Convener, Friends of the Far North Line, 3 March 2020**

## ...ongoing consequences and future rail projects

*[Please note **December 2008**, not 2009 as is being misquoted in too many sources!]*

It is a useful exercise to recap on where we were at in 2008 and to consider what has been achieved in eleven years and what has been delayed; some things seriously delayed, due to austerity and over-runs with the Edinburgh to Glasgow Improvement Programme (EGIP) in particular.

With EGIP we got there in the end and we now have a splendid range of services of new electric trains on five routes between Edinburgh and Glasgow and further, incorporating Stirling, Dunblane and Alloa. EGIP was Priority 2 after the unexpected new Queensferry Crossing which claimed £1.3bn from the transport infrastructure budget.

Priority 3 was the Highland Main Line (HML) and Priority 4 the Aberdeen to Inverness Line (A2I).

There was nothing in STPR for the Far North and Kyle Lines, but their capacity constraints are now being addressed as a consequence of the sterling work done by the December 2016 Review Team whose report was published in November 2019.

### Progress and projects in the North

A2I has seen a good half of the project happen, but there is still a long way to go to provide the line capacity for the promised hourly service with a two hour journey time end to end. The original target was December 2016.

HML has seen a welcome increase in the frequency of passenger services but this has also visibly underlined the crippling capacity constraints caused by the many single line sections which were also needing to be addressed. Regular parliamentary answers were given saying that new loops or sections of double track would be provided. The original target for the three hour average journey time from Inverness to Edinburgh and Glasgow was December 2012.

Targets for the £6bn complete dualling of the

two one hundred mile long trunk roads: the A9 from Perth to Inverness and the A96 from Aberdeen to Inverness by 2025 and 2030 respectively were announced post 2008 and the HML and A2I completion dates significantly extended by the 2011 Infrastructure Investment Plan. Complete double-tracking was not included in these rail improvements.

A new double track cut-off line in Fife from Inverkeithing to Halbeath (west of Cowdenbeath) was item 28 in the STPR but has not progressed. This would help alleviate congestion on the main line through Kirkcaldy.

The idea of extending this new Inverkeithing to Halbeath line by reinstating the former line from Cowdenbeath to Bridge of Earn was formally launched by Transform Scotland on 3 March 2014 as part of their *InterCity Express* strategy. It would provide dramatic time savings of 30 minutes between Edinburgh and Perth and much increased line capacity at a time of Climate Emergency. It would also help to extend the "HS2 effect" further north for more Scots to benefit. A survey of the route needs to be commissioned now as a first stage.

### Political responses

We have been told several times that railways must at least compete with roads.

As you will see elsewhere in this issue. Parliamentary Answer S5W-24750 dated 5 March, referring to the £57m spent on the HML, claims that "This investment has also delivered a ten minute journey time saving between Inverness and the Central Belt". **This is not true.**

Since 2011/12 average journey times have increased by 3 minutes between Inverness and Glasgow in both directions and by 6 minutes southbound and by four minutes northbound between Inverness and Edinburgh.

Some good news is coming, but is due more to a change in rolling stock than the long expected investment to increase line capacity. The long delayed introduction of the full squadron of refurbished InterCity High Speed Trains did not happen as planned in December 2018 and is now expected in December 2020.

This will allow a new timetable to be introduced which is expected to shorten average journey times from Inverness southbound to

- Edinburgh 204½ minutes (saving 5½ minutes) and to Glasgow 188½ minutes (saving 13½ minutes).

But northbound there is expected to be a small increase from the Central Belt to Inverness of

- One minute from Edinburgh (average 205 minutes) and two minutes from Glasgow (average 197 minutes).

205 minutes is an average journey time of 3 hours 25 minutes.

### **Quart into Pint Pot**

This has clearly demonstrated the extreme difficulty that has been experienced in fitting more trains into the schedules on a long, largely single track “main line” [so called]. The train planners are to be congratulated in doing a Herculean job to achieve even these savings.

It should be obvious to all that substantial extra capacity, provided by a mix of double tracking, dynamic loops and perhaps some extra static loops, is urgently required. A two tier railway experience is developing in Scotland with the north falling behind. Some of the Prime Minister’s “levelling up for the North” is needed in the north of Scotland too.

Worryingly, the “Phase Two” target for the HML for 2019 was way short of half of what was required to achieve (now by 2025) the objective of a 3 hour average time between the Central Belt and Inverness and yet it has used up more than half of the 13 years available to reach that objective! We certainly need some dynamism and determination to crack on to reach the declared goal of a railway fit for purpose which is able to compete with the roads on journey times.

Add to this the now declared Climate Emergency, and the environmental imperative to encourage passengers and freight on to the railway is compelling. With the major works currently going on to dual the parallel A9 road, improving the railway is really urgent to prevent reverse modal shift and to fulfil the former First Minister’s 2008 statement that

“railways should be able to compete with roads”. The Scottish Government mentioned modal shift away from rail in its own document, A9 Dualling, Case for Investment, Main Report 2016, although it is contrary to its declared policy.

### **Pain before Gain**

How to achieve this? The declared political goals have been the three hour average journey times north to Inverness with headline fastest trains taking 2 hours 45 minutes; and an aspiration to electrify the routes between all seven Scottish cities by 2030 (now 2035?). By definition, that should include the line between Aberdeen and Inverness but this sometimes seems to be forgotten.

**Decarbonisation** of rail transport by 2035 is a new aim prompted by the Climate Emergency. This implies electrification for much of the network (even as far north as Tain) but leaving deeply rural lines to be served by hydrogen or battery power solutions yet to be created.

The Climate Emergency underlines yet again the need to switch a good deal of freight from road to rail where this is possible. The pitted state of the road surface of much of the A9 due to all the lorries, and the narrow nature of the A95 for lorries serving the whisky kingdom of Moray, underlines the urgency of this.

To do this we need to have sufficient paths for freight trains on the HML and on the A21. At present there are none between Aberdeen and Inverness! The Scottish Freight Joint Board [Railfreight Scotland and Network Rail] *Industry Growth Plan for Rail Freight 2019* is calling for more paths on both these lines. You cannot move the whisky and timber related traffic to and from Moray without train paths. Again it is all down to capacity and, in the case of freight, sufficient loading gauge for modern containers too.

A very important criterion for rail freight is the prevention of line blockages. The freight must get through every day especially if it contains perishables. Diversionary routes are thin on the ground in the north, but the A21 line is the link for when either the HML or the Dundee to Aberdeen line is blocked. There have to be paths for diversions too, including for the Caledonian Sleeper.

Double tracking, for example, one of the two longest sections of the HML, the 13 miles between Dunkeld and Pitlochry with a 5 minute headway of trains would in theory allow a total of 24 trains per hour, 12 in each direction. At present we are lucky to get four trains an hour through these single line bottlenecks. Other factors such as line speeds and gradients also come into play, of course.

**What** has to be decided is where to double throughout, **where** to introduce dynamic loops or in rare cases where to rely on static loops and single track (Killecrankie Tunnel perhaps?). It then has to be decided **when** to do the work, as a forerunner to when to put in the electrification. Much of this disruptive work should be done before the new flows of freight traffic are obtained and introduced.

The SYSTRA study of the route for HITRANS was published in February and is available in full on our website at [www.fofnl.org.uk/archives/Highland-Mainline-Unfazed.pdf](http://www.fofnl.org.uk/archives/Highland-Mainline-Unfazed.pdf). It details the lack of progress with speeding up the trains and suggests a Task Force be formed to take advantage of new possibilities such as early electrification driven by the new decarbonisation timetable.

### Call to urgent action

From the point of view of the climate emergency, decarbonisation, and modal shift of freight from road to rail, it is essential that the outstanding HML work is now urgently prioritised.

The optimum specification is to produce an electrified double track main line from Perth to Inverness to secure more efficient and significantly faster journey times and considerably increased freight capacity. This should have been done before the A9 dualling is completed, but too much time has now been lost.

To have a modern double track HML railway, not subject to shortage-of-capacity delays at times of perturbation, will also be a great benefit to punctuality on the busy lines into Edinburgh and Glasgow.

In the spirit of Kerslake (see page 6) let us "level up" investment between the Scottish regions and *Let us get the HML and A21 lines done!*

It won't be achieved by 31 December 2020 but how about 2025 as promised for the track and 2030 for the electrification? ...STPR2 - please?

Contents

Richard Ardern



*Highland Chieftain southbound, 800105 at Culloden Wood on 15 March 2020. Photo: Sandy Colley*

# INVERNESS - ABERDEEN UPDATE

## ***“Quite the most irregular service in Scotland”***

This quotation comes from Barry Doe’s *National Rail Timetable Review for December 15 2019 - May 16 2020* published on pp 54-63 of *RAIL* issue 897 dated 29 January 2020. After commenting on the large increase in the number of trains between Aberdeen and Inverurie he continues *“Sadly, however, while there are 11 trains a day between Inverness and Aberdeen, not only is it far from hourly, but it’s quite the most irregular service in Scotland”*.

Don’t we know it! Since 1996 there have been moves to provide an hourly service taking two hours or less end to end from Aberdeen to Inverness. The state of play in 2011, from Network Rail document 116647 was:

An initial programme has been developed indicating that GRIP Stage 3, Option Selection report development will be carried out in 2011 and implementation works can be complete in 2016.

The estimated costs for delivering all objectives totals circa £203m and this is an all inclusive figure including a 35% contingency allowance and is to +/- 40% quality. The estimate has been prepared using appropriate rates within the Network Rail estimating database and this will be further refined in the next GRIP Stage.

GRIP Stage 3, Single Option Selection will examine the range of options in greater depth. The complexity will be in examining the inter-relationships and dependencies between the options to satisfy the objectives.

The existing train service fails to encourage significant modal shift and stifles opportunities for growth. To support modal shift to rail travel there are aspirations to open two new stations on the route.

The current passenger journey times and irregular service between Aberdeen and Inverness does not offer an attractive alternative to road travel. The journey times are presently in the range of 2 hours 12 minutes - 2 hours 28 minutes.

- Reasonable provision of freight capacity will be required but not during peak periods
- Seasonal Charter trains will continue to operate over the route

By the start of 2020, the line has been redoubled from just north of Aberdeen to Inverurie, Forres station rebuilt, signalling modernised and Elgin and Insch platforms lengthened to take six coaches. There are many extra trains between Inverurie and Aberdeen and extras to give a roughly hourly morning and afternoon service between Inverness and Elgin. West of Inverurie long single track sections such as 18 miles between Keith and Elgin and 15 miles between Nairn and Inverness still continue to prevent the desired hourly service between Aberdeen and Inverness especially an 08:00 commuter east from Inverness and a 16:30 return from Aberdeen.

The planning application for the now to be two platform station at Inverness Airport (Dalcross) has been delayed. This has meant that, in order to avoid the whole process having to start again from scratch, an application will be made to renew the existing planning permission for a single platform in the meantime.

Two platforms means the long promised and much needed double track, and the minimum hope is that this will extend at least as far west as the recently expanded Norbord wood factory at Morayhill to allow rail freighting of timber (and finished product) to restart from there and avoid the cost of double handling. The line from Inverness to Dalcross (Woodend) was singled in 1966.

HITRANS has published a report it commissioned from AECOM dated January 2020 entitled *Inverness Rail East: a new station feasibility study*. This considers three sites at Seafield and Stratton Farm near to the Inverness Retail Park and new housing on the Aberdeen line, and near the Beechwood campus of the University of the Highlands and Islands on the Aviemore line.

Beechwood would have the greater potential demand but would require a two platform station on a 1 in 60 gradient which would be non-compliant with the rules for new stations. The two Aberdeen line stations have been assessed on the premise of it remaining single track at those points. This might mean restricting the length of the future redoubling of track being considered for that stretch and starting the double section immediately east of the new station.

**Richard Ardern**

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# PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

## General Question Time - 30 Jan 2020. Rail Infrastructure (Highlands)

**Question S5O-04082: John Finnie**, Highlands and Islands, Scottish Green Party

*To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has for improving rail infrastructure in the Highlands.*

**Michael Matheson**, Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity:

The recent £57 million Highland mainline investment has delivered performance and resilience improvements, and, by May 2020, **there will be around a 10-minute journey-time saving between Inverness and the Central Belt**. The £330 million Aberdeen to Inverness project has delivered a new station at Forres and a half-hourly service between Aberdeen and Inverurie. Additional services between Inverness and Elgin are planned for May 2020. Looking forward, the second strategic transport projects review is under way to identify the transport investment priorities for the next 20 years, and it will include Scotland's rail network.

**John Finnie:** I thank the cabinet secretary for that response, but what he said is at odds with the Inverness city region deal, which makes no mention of rail or trains but has £64 million for the so-called west link and £109 million for the so-called east link. A modest passing loop at Lentrane would increase capacity to not only the west but the north and would obviate the need for the ridiculous flyover that is proposed for the south side of the Kessock bridge. When is the Scottish Government going to prioritise public transport?

**Michael Matheson:** We do prioritise public transport. The member will be aware that the Inverness and Highland city region deal has been shaped by local partners, recognising the key strategic investments that are necessary to support and create inclusive economic growth in the Highlands. There is no doubt in my mind that providing the right road infrastructure is critical to that.

Alongside that, as I have just outlined, we have invested £330 million in the rail line between Inverness and Aberdeen and nearly £60 million in the Highland mainline. As I also set out, through the STPR2 process, we will look to make further strategic investments—including in rail, such as in the Highland mainline—to make sure that we continue investing in our public transport as we have in recent years.

## Written questions

**Question S5W-27450: Rhoda Grant**, Highlands and Islands, Scottish Labour, Answered 05/03/20.

*To ask the Scottish Government how much it has invested in the Highland mainline in each of the last five years.*

**Michael Matheson:** The Scottish Government has invested £57 million on major projects on the Highland Mainline over the last 5 years to improve services and performance along the length of the route. This investment **has also delivered a ten minute journey time saving between Inverness and the Central Belt**.

The Scottish Government has also invested £2.2 million in other works along the route, including improving accessibility at both Aviemore and Pitlochry Stations.

[A breakdown of the £57 million project spend followed.]

**Question S5W-28045: Rhoda Grant**, Highlands and Islands, Scottish Labour. Answered 07/04/20

*To ask the Scottish Government, further to the answer to question S5W-27450 by Michael Matheson on 5 March 2020, how it calculated **the 10-minute figure**.*

**Michael Matheson:** The 10 minute journey time improvement on the Highland Mainline was calculated to be achieved through a combination of track enhancement and the delivery and introduction into service of all 26 refurbished High Speed Trains (HSTs).

[Unfortunately, in this reply, the Cabinet Secretary did not acknowledge the error in his original answer.]

**2012** was the baseline year from which a 10-minute reduction in journey time by 2019 was promised but has not yet been achieved by any measure, as the table below demonstrates.

For comparison the Scottish Government's stated intention in 2008 was for the journey time to be reduced to 2¾ hours (165 mins) by 2012. "Railways must at least compete with the roads."

| Average Weekday Journey Time in Minutes |                        |                        |                      |                      |
|---|------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Year*                                   | Inverness to Edinburgh | Edinburgh to Inverness | Inverness to Glasgow | Glasgow to Inverness |
| 2011                                    | 211                    | 211                    | 203                  | 200                  |
| 2012                                    | 210                    | 204                    | 202                  | 195                  |
| 2013                                    | 211                    | 205                    | 202                  | 194                  |
| 2014                                    | 212                    | 205                    | 203                  | 196                  |
| 2015                                    | 212                    | 205                    | 203                  | 196                  |
| 2016                                    | 211½                   | 205½                   | 203½                 | 198                  |
| 2017                                    | 216½                   | 208                    | 204                  | 196                  |
| 2018                                    | 216½                   | 207½                   | 204                  | 196                  |
| 2019                                    | 216                    | 209                    | 202½                 | 198                  |
| 2020                                    | 216                    | 208                    | 205                  | 198                  |
| 2021**                                  | 204½                   | 205                    | 188½                 | 197                  |

\*Each year begins the previous December  
 \*\*Latest draft timetable for introduction of the full fleet of refurbished High Speed Trains

# TOWARDS A HIGHLAND HUB

A significant step towards the creation of a proper transport interchange at Inverness Station was announced at the end of March when it was confirmed that Network Rail has purchased the former Royal Mail sorting office in Strothers Lane beside the station.

The *Inverness Courier* reported that Network Rail is also close to acquiring several other sites in the vicinity, possibly including the TK Maxx premises.

FoFNL has long wished for a purpose-built hub linking all forms of land transport at the station. There are few good examples in this country of convenient interchanges and it would be a real feather in the cap of the Highland Council, Network Rail and the Scottish Government if Inverness could show how things should be done.

There are so many visitors arriving and/or passing through Inverness, as well as residents wishing to transfer between modes, that a transport hub here would be a huge benefit and encourage people who can, to leave their car at home.

Stewart Nicol, chief executive of Inverness Chamber of Commerce commented, "It's fantastic news. We knew it was coming, but it's great to have a positive story among everything else that's happening at the moment with coronavirus."



The absurdly cramped pick up and drop off area beside the station, hemmed in by the Eastgate Centre. Photo: Richard Arden

Fraser Grieve, regional director of the Scottish Council for Development and Industry said, "This is a fantastic piece of news in that it will really make a difference as the main transport hub for the Highlands."

FoFNL is looking forward to seeing some detailed plans in the not-too-distant future!

Ian Budd

# TIME FOR TIMBER TRUCKS TO GIVE WAY TO TRAINS

*This article by FoFNL committee member, and Scottish Representative of the Rail Freight Group, David Spaven, first appeared in the Friends of The Scotsman on 10 January 2020.*



Given the importance of timber to the rural Scottish economy – with 10m tonnes forecast to be harvested every year for the foreseeable future – readers will perhaps be surprised to learn that not a single wagon of timber has moved by rail in Scotland for 10 years. But there is now renewed hope that timber trains will once again operate north of the Border, helping the industry to meet the targets for rail freight growth set by the Scottish Government.

## Scottish timber should be transported by rail, benefiting rural communities in the process

For a period of around five years in the late 1990s, underpinned by the wagonload train service network operated by the newly-privatised freight railway, a wide range of timber flows was transported by rail from Scottish forests. Trains took logs from up to 18 timber railheads spread across the country to board, paper and saw mills in Scotland, England and Wales, helping to ease the pressure from 44 tonne trucks on rural roads and rural communities.

However, shareholder pressure for commercial returns led to a rationalisation of the wagonload network in 2000, notable in Scotland for the withdrawal of services from 12 of the timber terminals. The fragmented flows of timber – particularly to those mills (the majority) which were not directly rail-connected – did not lend themselves to competitive pricing or service quality.

The final surviving timber train service – carrying a payload of over 600 tonnes – operated from a Crianlarich railhead, but was suspended in 2009, in part due to concerns about HGVs having to reverse out on to the A82 trunk road because of the entrance configuration and lack of space within the adjacent rail yard.

Ironically, Scottish timber still moves by train, but only southwards from a Carlisle railhead, with HGVs feeding in supply by road from wide tracts of forest in the Borders and Dumfries & Galloway. The continuing success of the Carlisle rail facility has been attributed to five factors:

- a simple supply chain, with regular deliveries of large quantities of timber
- a dedicated contract rail service for one buyer to one rail-served mill (in north east Wales)
- reliable access to a choice of timber suppliers and road hauliers
- the lease of long rail sidings to handle full trainloads, supported by adequate road access, storage space and a weighbridge
- good-quality railway rolling stock and convenient repair facilities

To the above should be added the principle of partnership and good communication between all the players in the supply chain and the critical importance of the motivation, management and performance of the rail haulage company. The challenge in Scotland is to identify locations which can cost-effectively replicate such conditions – and/or to find innovative, but robust, methods of transferring logs from truck to train deep within timber harvesting areas.

In recent years the forest industry and HITRANS, the regional transport partnership for the Highlands, have been exploring the scope for revived rail timber transport on the Far North Line to Caithness, and the West Highland Line to Fort William, both of which pass directly through heavily-forested areas, in some cases getting closer to the timber than public roads do.

However, forests are owned and/or managed by a variety of private and public sector interests, and securing their co-operation to co-ordinate supply – sufficient to fill big trains

– can be challenging. But awareness of the climate emergency is adding further pressure to identify rail-based solutions, which would also cut road accidents and reduce the heavy maintenance burden on rural roads. And Scottish Government grants are available to support the transfer of freight from road to rail.

Other rail routes with timber potential include Inverness to Kyle of Lochalsh and the Ayr-Stranraer line serving the extensive South Ayrshire and Galloway forests. At Crianlarich on the West Highland Line, the A82 now bypasses the village, creating the opportunity for a more accessible, fit-for-purpose railhead to take trucks off the main road south by Loch Lomond.

Direct rail connection at one end of the transit at least – saving the cost of rail to road transfer and local road collection/delivery – can be a crucial factor in rail economics, particularly for

shorter trunk hauls where rail is generally less competitive. One of Scotland’s two remaining paper mills – at Irvine – is directly rail-connected already, and board mills at Cowie (Stirlingshire), Dalcross (near Inverness) and Barony (Ayrshire) lie close to existing rail routes, with scope to relay sidings.

We all want to see more freight on rail, and timber lorries continue to be a significant source of disruption to rural communities across Scotland. By collaborating on innovation and investment, the forest and rail industries and the Scottish Government can help to transform the role of our rural railways – realising the lessons from as far afield as New Zealand, Norway and Sweden that ‘tourists and timber’ are a winning traffic combination on Highland-type rail routes.

**David Spaven**



A93 in Cairngorms National Park. Great picture if you love lorries and beautiful scenery, but no way to transport timber. Wasteful of power compared with rail and extremely damaging to the roads, not to mention the noise pollution and general intrusive inconvenience to small communities.

# SPICE SPOTLIGHT

## You get what you pay for - 20 years of devolved transport policy

Published on 4 December 2019, this is part of a series of blog posts from the Scottish Parliament Information Centre to mark 20 years since the creation of the Scottish Parliament, and covers 20 years of devolved transport policy. These are selected extracts from the complete blog which can be found at <https://spice-spotlight.scot/2019/12/04/you-get-what-you-pay-for-20-years-of-devolved-transport-policy/>

Introducing a debate on the Transport (Scotland) Bill in September 2000, Sarah Boyack MSP, then Minister for Transport and Environment, highlighted that there was a...

*...growing recognition over the past few years that congestion and a lack of genuine transport choices are harming our economy, our environment, our health and our way of life, that the deregulation policies of the previous Conservative Government resulted in fragmentation, which cost us dear, and that we need to restore a balance to our transport policies in the interest of all our communities.*

Almost 20 year later, the same issues were raised during a similar debate on the most recent Transport (Scotland) Bill. Why has so little progress been made in tackling our key transport challenges? This blog looks at some of the factors underlying changes in how we travel, including transport policy, the cost of personal transport and transport investment.

### Transport policy

The Scottish Government's transport policy has been remarkably consistent throughout the life of the Scottish Parliament. The consultation draft of the new National Transport Strategy, published in July 2019, includes [this] vision:

*We will have a sustainable, inclusive and accessible transport system, helping to deliver a healthier, fairer and more prosperous Scotland for communities, businesses and visitors.*

### How has travel changed since 1999?

So how has travel in Scotland changed since 1999? Key changes include:

- Scotland's roads are safer
- Scotland's roads are more crowded
- bus patronage is down
- rail patronage is up: the number of ScotRail passengers increased by 58%, rising from 61.72m in 1999-2000 to 97.78m in 2017-18.

SPICE The Information Centre  
An Ionad Fiosrachaidh

The environmental impact of transport has grown in significance: Transport emissions stopped falling in 2013 and have increased annually since then.

### Factors behind these changes

Relative to the Retail Prices Index (RPI) measure of inflation (the measure used to calculate increases in rail fares that are regulated by the UK and Scottish Governments):

- the cost of motoring has fallen by 24%
- rail fares have increased by 38%
- bus fares have increased by 80%

**The growth in rail travel:** While also affected by fares rising above RPI and no significant reduction in journey times, rail use has grown considerably across Scotland and the UK since 1999. Research into why this has occurred, points to three key non-transport related drivers of this growth:

- the overall increase in the population
- the more rapid increase within this population of those segments with a higher than average propensity for rail use, such as those with high incomes or those in households in dense urban areas without cars

- some overall increase in the proportion within each segment that make trips by rail.

The possible impact of significant Scottish Government investment in rail services on increased patronage is outlined below.

### **Transport Investment**

Scottish Government investment priorities are clear, since 2007-08:

- investment in rail services (both infrastructure and franchise operations) has remained at between £800m and £1bn per year. Investment has included major rail infrastructure projects, including the Borders railway, Airdrie-Bathgate railway and the Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine railway and electrification of Central Scotland rail routes.
- investment in trunk roads has been on a significant upward trend, peaking at around £1bn in 2017-18, with a recent fall mainly due to the completion of the Queensferry Crossing project. Investment has included major projects, such as the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route, M8 completion and M74 completion projects.
- investment in bus services has been on a slight downward trend, falling from around £310m in 2007-08 to around £270m in 2018-19. No significant investment has been made in bus infrastructure or bus priority schemes, with the sole exception of a £40m grant towards the development of the Fastlink scheme in Glasgow.

Since the creation of the Scottish Parliament, more people have chosen to drive more often – partly at the expense of trips previously made on foot or by bus. This is generally counter to the thrust of Scottish transport policy, which aims to encourage people to switch from the car to walking, cycling or public transport – particularly for shorter trips, bringing environmental, health and economic benefits.

However, there appears to be a clear correlation between the Scottish Government investing significant sums in trunk road and rail infrastructure and growth in their use and the investment of far smaller sums in buses, walking and cycling and their decline or stagnation. In effect, while policy is important – you get the outcomes that you pay for.

This poses a major challenge for the next 20 years, during which the Scottish Government has committed to the almost complete decarbonisation of transport in Scotland. While the draft National Transport Strategy focuses policy on sustainable and active travel, the Scottish Government has confirmed the investment of £6bn in the dualling of the A9 between Perth and Inverness and the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen – the two most expensive transport projects ever undertaken in Scotland. Significant investment in major road projects has been found to generate “induced demand”, and this investment may simply create additional trips by car, as appears to have happened with the Queensferry Crossing. It also generates significant emissions during construction and locks in higher emission travel choices for years to come. More widely, Transport Scotland has predicted a 27% increase in the distance driven by car between 2015 and 2035.

It could be argued that increasing uptake of ultra-low emission vehicles will mean that increasing vehicle mileage is not a major concern. However, the growth in the distance driven has negated the positive impact of improvements in fuel efficiency and emissions from newer vehicles since 1999. Given that ultra-low emissions vehicles made up just 2.2% of all new vehicle registrations during 2018, and that the average lifespan of a car in the UK is 13.9 years – a step change in the environmental performance of the Scottish vehicle fleet would seem to be many years off.

This means that significant investment in infrastructure and other measures proven to encourage people to switch from driving to walking, cycling and public transport, plus measures to manage demand for car use, will be vital in tackling transport related greenhouse gas emissions in the short to medium term.

**Alan Rehfish, Senior Researcher, Transport and Planning**

# TWENTY YEARS ON

*The June 2000 issue of our Newsletter contained this report of a Rail Users Consultative Committee for Scotland meeting in Inverness on 24 May 2000. It makes interesting, and slightly depressing, reading.*

Nine members and two officials of the RUCCS met with some 35 rail industry representatives and members of the public at this all day meeting described by Helen Millar as the liveliest meeting in her 4 years as Chairman and the first here for six years. John Melling, Donald MacCuish and Richard Ardern attended from FoFNL.

Alastair MacPherson, ScotRail MD, arrived on the Caledonian Sleeper whose engine, Restormel, had expired at Carr Bridge and had to be rescued by a Class 66. Replacement locomotives for the class 47s are under discussion. The all night seating coach on the sleeper has been very successful but ScotRail are not convinced there is a market for a Saturday night train.

National Express are now three years in to the ScotRail franchise and intend to continue to further develop and improve services. Decisions will be taken during June on the thorny problem of increasing bike spaces on the 158s for the North line possibly as an alternative to the disabled seat. Space configuration on these units is presently driven by franchise capacity obligations in Fife and elsewhere. John Melling (JM) stressed the two different markets the units are serving and asked that for the new franchise there should be a requirement to have tourist-market friendly trains on the north lines. Alastair MacPherson gave an assurance that, contrary to timetable indications, there would be catering on almost all services south from Inverness. JM asked for a watching brief to be kept for any problems arising from the new through trains from the north and west to Aberdeen and the south. The extra eight minutes running time between Inverness and Muir of Ord required for reversal purposes is unwelcome and running the Dingwall commuter train eight minutes earlier in the mornings may not be helpful to loadings.

With the Turbostar trains coming on to three or four of the services south from Inverness in the autumn, Richard Ardern (RJA) asked if ScotRail would take the opportunity to further increase the appeal of the service by introducing day return tickets between Inverness and the south. While welcoming the reintroduction of the 9 am departure to Glasgow, he asked if the Edinburgh connection could also be restored. This could be achieved by running the 11:08 Perth to Edinburgh service half an hour later.

Frank Roach then gave a presentation on the work of the Highland Rail Network Development Partnership. FoFNL readers will be familiar with achievements to date, but it was important to brief the RUCCS on these. For the future, aspirations mentioned were signalling access to platform 5 at Inverness from the south for passenger use; an all year Sunday service on the North Line; line speed improvements between Perth and Ladybank; timber loading at Kinbrace and on the West Highland line; reopening Beaulieu station; and an additional unit to work an Inner Moray Firth local service between Kingussie, Tain and Forres. Donald MacCuish (D MacC) suggested new stations at Smithton and Cradlehall and RJA suggested a single coach unit at Georgemas to improve the service to Wick.

A journey time reduction of 5 minutes south from Inverness due to infrastructure improvements should be available by October. Major improvements identified for Inverness-Aberdeen are included in "incremental output statements" submitted to the Strategic Rail Authority for sanction and hopefully funding. A long loop between Orton and Orbliston and one long freight passing loop on both the Far North Line and the West Highland line are other aspirations. Mr. Wunsch expressed the wish that there should also be further line speed improvements on the FNL in the next few years.

A questioner from Elgin asked for crossing loops in the stations at Forres and Keith. Railtrack would like to build a new station at Forres on the loop but expect that the new Orton loop would go a long way to alleviating the crossing problems at Keith. RJA asked for aesthetic improvements at Invergordon, removal of litter from the tracks at Inverness and for Railtrack to become involved in

progressing an integrated transport interchange at the North Line side of the station at Inverness. Railtrack were doubtful if they could do much with the blitzed building at Invergordon because it is listed, but undertook to take the other two issues on board.

There was discussion of Virgin's indicative proposals for clockface interval services south from Scotland in three years time. Alan MacLean, Virgin's Public Affairs Manager for Scotland, stated categorically that Virgin do not propose to run trains from Inverness.

There was also a discussion on the dichotomy between reduced journey times and additional station stops. Speed won! JM suggested that if the fourth train was restored to the FNL it could be more of an express and if there was eventually a regular local service to Tain, trains going further north might omit some local service stops. RJA expressed a wish for the northbound Highland Chieftain to be speeded up north of Edinburgh as it is now almost the slowest service on the line. D MacC drew attention to possible Freightliner services to Inverness next year which might highlight capacity problems on the Inverness-Perth line. The RUCCS will now have a much better appreciation of the strengths and weaknesses of Highland rail services.

They promised to come back soon.

**Richard Arden**

## STATION USAGE FIGURES 2018-19

|                             | 2016-17 | 2017-18 | 2018-19 | One Year Change | Two Year Change |
|-----------------------------|---------|---------|---------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Wick                        | 18438   | 17546   | 17890   | 1.96%           | -2.97%          |
| Thurso                      | 37322   | 39174   | 39974   | 2.04%           | 7.11%           |
| Georgemas Junction          | 1502    | 1320    | 1576    | 19.39%          | 4.93%           |
| Scotscaidder                | 200     | 182     | 238     | 30.77%          | 19.00%          |
| Altnabreac                  | 356     | 658     | 408     | -37.99%         | 14.61%          |
| Forsinard                   | 2124    | 2210    | 2530    | 14.48%          | 19.11%          |
| Kinbrace                    | 464     | 376     | 510     | 35.64%          | 9.91%           |
| Kildonan                    | 76      | 206     | 168     | -18.45%         | 121.05%         |
| Helmsdale                   | 5768    | 4636    | 5044    | 8.80%           | -12.55%         |
| Brora                       | 5616    | 5994    | 6992    | 16.65%          | 24.50%          |
| Dunrobin Castle             | 882     | 1030    | 1224    | 18.83%          | 38.78%          |
| Golspie                     | 5718    | 5786    | 6150    | 6.29%           | 7.56%           |
| Rogart                      | 1948    | 1630    | 1574    | -3.44%          | -19.20%         |
| Lairg                       | 5576    | 5426    | 6016    | 10.87%          | 7.89%           |
| Invershin                   | 826     | 438     | 284     | -35.16%         | -65.62%         |
| Culrain                     | 372     | 300     | 280     | -6.67%          | -24.73%         |
| Ardgay                      | 7144    | 7140    | 6998    | -1.99%          | -2.04%          |
| Tain                        | 28622   | 29774   | 29384   | -1.31%          | 2.66%           |
| Fearn                       | 5262    | 5256    | 4304    | -18.11%         | -18.21%         |
| Invergordon                 | 27886   | 28958   | 28806   | -0.52%          | 3.30%           |
| Alness                      | 26376   | 29272   | 30426   | 3.94%           | 15.35%          |
| Dingwall                    | 80900   | 86276   | 81408   | -5.64%          | 0.63%           |
| Conon Bridge                | 15494   | 15100   | 17530   | 16.09%          | 13.14%          |
| Muir Of Ord                 | 64480   | 64820   | 67554   | 4.22%           | 4.77%           |
| Beauly                      | 52870   | 51522   | 48270   | -6.31%          | -8.70%          |
| Inverness                   | 1259496 | 1238772 | 1243338 | 0.37%           | -1.28%          |
| Total (excluding Inverness) | 396222  | 405030  | 405538  | 0.13%           | 2.35%           |

These are the figures issued by the Office of Rail Regulation, which we normally put in the January issue. They were delayed this year. They show an overall rise of 0.13% in the total for the Far North Line excluding Inverness (for which no FNL-only figures exist) compared with last year's rise of 2.22%. The table shows the percentage change in the last 12 months and the last 24 months. Note that this table reads chronologically from left to right.

The figures for the lightly used stations are too low to draw meaningful conclusions about trends.

# DEALING WITH RAIL TRAGEDY

*Inverness Courier* 14 March 2020

ScotRail comes in for a lot of criticism, especially here in the north of Scotland. Some of it is justified, some less so. With my 'Old Lady Railcard' (I think the official term is Club 50) I get fantastic discounts. Between January and March it has been just £17 for a return journey anywhere in Scotland, and those prices are hard to resist.

## **Nicky Marr considers a tragedy that rail staff have to deal with all too often**

When the trains are running well there is no better way to travel, especially when you get the 'holy trinity' of first world desirables; wi-fi, a socket for your laptop and a trolley service for tea and shortbread. Heading south from Inverness to Edinburgh the views through the Cairngorms National Park are breath-taking. And as the train slides round the Fife coast towards the Forth bridges, I am always a little surprised by the beauty of the beaches.

Most journeys are fairly unremarkable, but my last trip to Edinburgh, a couple of Fridays ago, will stay with me for all the wrong - and also all the right - reasons.

I'd planned to work all the way to Edinburgh, but a lack of power sockets meant my laptop battery died just as we were drawing into Perth station. It didn't matter, it was Friday afternoon, and my emails could wait. There was the usual changeover of passengers. I put my work away and switched my headphones on to settle into my audiobook.

Seasoned travellers get a sense of what feels right. A few minutes after we left Perth, there was a collective exchange of glances around the carriage as the brakes squealed. We weren't near a station - all around us were sodden fields. Then... nothing. We sat, exchanged more glances, and waited for an announcement. Finally, one came: For 'operational reasons' we would be there for some time. Collectively, we reached for our phones to complain that we'd been delayed.

There were grumbles, and speculation. Had the driver had a heart attack?

Someone noticed blue flashing lights in the distance. I found a tweet from ScotRail that confirmed our worst suspicions - our train had hit a person on the track. Suddenly, arriving in Edinburgh on time was irrelevant.

ScotRail's crew were truly magnificent. The guard, upset but composed, was making his way through the train talking to us in small groups. He explained that the driver was completely devastated; the braking distance of a train travelling at speed is a mile and a quarter and of course there is no option to swerve. There was nothing that could humanly have been done to avoid the collision. The entire crew was being replaced by a relief crew who were on their way from Perth.

And just like that, with the reality of the situation explained, the atmosphere changed. We weren't just individuals in a train any more; we started talking to each other, making small, human connections. More phone calls were made, but in place of annoyance was sadness. A concert and a dinner date would be missed, and a man behind me had a flight he wouldn't catch. But compared to the news that one family would soon be receiving from police at their door, our inconvenience was nothing.

With no roads nearby the relief crew had to walk over a mile along the tracks to reach us. What sights had they seen? It didn't bear thinking about.

Once the train was ready to depart, the new crew explained to us - again in small groups, that the train would be travelling straight to Haymarket where it would terminate.

"Why can't it just stop in Kirkcaldy?" one woman asked, and she was gently told that it was to protect members of the public from "awful things on the front of the train that they wouldn't want to see". Of course. Her protest turned to apologies. She just hadn't thought.

The train arrived in Haymarket two hours late,

but without a murmur of complaint. We were repeatedly encouraged to claim back the cost of our tickets under 'delay-repay'. I commented that I doubted many of us would, but was told there is an option to divert refunds to MND Scotland. It was only £8.50, but I've done that.

I won't speculate as to why there was a person on the track, but ours was not the only ScotRail train that collided with a person that afternoon. The reaction of the staff was

exemplary, but I've been told it's because they are - all too sadly - used to dealing with such situations.

And there's the tragedy. All I can do is thank ScotRail for the compassion, humanity and care with which they treated us in the face of these dreadful circumstances and hope that it doesn't happen again.

[www.nickymarr.co.uk](http://www.nickymarr.co.uk)

## FURTHER THOUGHTS

Nicky Marr's main point is that everybody stopped being angry at the delay and went quiet thinking about the grieving family. Yes, up to a point. But there has to be a way of showing the community at large that choosing to kill yourself by walking in front of a train isn't the best way of doing it. The driver is often so traumatised that he/she never drives a train again. Large numbers of passengers are delayed, and for some of them the delay may be critically important; for the rest it's just highly inconvenient. The staff who have to clean up are traumatised, even those in medical jobs where wrecked bodies are to be expected; train cleaners are not hardened in the way that paramedics are. Any suicide is sad,

but if all of us are aware that doing it in front of a train is about the least forgivable way of doing it (short of being an airline pilot and flying a passenger jet into the ground) then if - heaven forbid - we ever become suicidal we might do it privately. There are, after all, plenty of ways that don't cause anything like as much grief to quite as many total strangers.

None of which detracts from the sadness anyone feels at the death of a person who must have been unbelievably unhappy, but it still needs to be said. One's final act, surely, should never be among the most selfish of one's life.

**Mike Lunan**

## CROMARTY FRUSTRATION

The 7 February issue of the *Ross-shire Journal* contained an item in its "100 Years Ago" feature. The indignant tone reflecting frustration at the actions of a far-away government has resonance today. Railway companies were, as now, privately owned but there was obviously a feeling that what was taken away in wartime should now be returned. It would be another six years before the Cromarty & Dingwall Light Railway was wound up. An article about this railway, by FoFNL member Roger Piercy, appeared in *FNE* 69 - September 2016.

*There is much speculation in Cromarty, and along the route which it will follow, about the future of the Cromarty and Dingwall railway.*

*But for an unfortunate hold-up in 1913, it would have been completed before the war. But for government intervention the work, well-started in 1914, would have been finished in 1915, and its usefulness for war purposes, realised too late, would have been abundantly proved to both sides of the Firth.*

*It was the Government's action in lifting plant and rails and transferring the whole to some centre, at which it seemed at the moment better national use could be made, that completely wrecked the project for time and place. It is to the Government that the public, through the original company or otherwise, looked for fulfilment of the original design.*

# WEAVING THE FAR NORTH THREAD

As a career railwayman who has spent twenty five years working in Scotland, with ScotRail and subsequently Transport Scotland, and someone who has been involved in community railways and also wider community issues, I enjoyed *FoFNL25*. Of particular interest was the piece *Far North Timetable Evolution* which presented an interesting timeline of changes. I was surprised how often I had interacted with FNL events and people over that period. It was like following a thread from my railway career, through the wider tapestry of the railway. I noticed how my thread interacted repeatedly with that of three colleagues and friends: Frank Roach, Paul Salvesson and David Spaven.

So, emboldened by those thoughts I have dredged my memory to provide a few "behind the scenes" insights into some of Far North events over the past 25 years.

**David Prescott, Director of Marketing and Development, Grand Union Trains Ltd and owner of Allan Rail consultancy, was reminded of his extensive Far North connections by our book, *FoFNL 25*.**

The 26th October 1995 conference included three friends that I had yet to know - Frank Roach as a key player, Donald Macpherson who became a colleague in ScotRail, regrettably no longer with us, David Spaven, and Paul Salvesson, who I knew well. I had first met Paul when he came to Regional Railways HQ in Birmingham in about 1991 or 92 seeking our support with his new project. It was a concept

that resonated with my own experiences as Marketing Manager for Provincial North Eastern, working on the pioneering Provincial North Eastern Scenic Line Guides a few years earlier and also during the latter part of the Settle - Carlisle closure process up to, and then beyond, the reprieve. The outcome *New Futures for Rural Rail* was an excellent template on how to realise the potential of rural railways, coming as it did from Paul's challenging, community orientated, thinking and practical input from Regional Railways. It certainly developed and coloured the following nearly 25 years of my working life.

Fast forward a few years and I was with ScotRail, where I first met Frank Roach and David Spaven, now long-standing friends and colleagues. We met in different circumstances - Frank as one of the two Highland Rail Partnership (HRP) managers and also owner of Rogart Station buildings and David during his consultation work. As (National Express) ScotRail's manager responsible for all the commercial station tenancies I was able to provide Lairg station as the HRP base and also lease to Frank the remaining railway operational tenancy at Rogart station, although in spite of the ground work, it took until the end of the First franchise, some ten years later, before he was able to buy it and give it the care that it needed.

One of Frank and my early successes was the Dingwall morning commuter service, which started in March 1998. It established a pattern - Frank came forward with the idea and I worked on how to deliver it. Here it was to use a Class 156, sitting at Inverness, which had no work in the morning peak. I worked through the ScotRail costs and took it through the (quite relaxed) National Express ScotRail approval process. We agreed the number of passengers required for it to break even, (about forty) which was not an unduly high requirement, and the rest as they say is history.

With the arrival of the 158s, with their reduced cycle carrying capacity, we worked up the "bike van", which I was able to oversee, as I also managed the ScotRail reservations system. Also as part of overseeing the reservations team I met our big "block booking" customers such as Shearings and Lochs & Glens coach holiday operators. Their interest was primarily on the Mallaig and Kyle lines, but by getting to understand their business model I was able to sell Shearings the idea of a one-way scenic rail trip on the Far North based in their Dornoch hotel. As the journey was Golspie to Wick on the first train, it was valuable income for ScotRail, at no cost. Shearings were happy too, as they

significantly improved the occupancy of the hotel.

Frank followed with Beaully station. The projected demand figures were too low to be able to afford a four coach long platform. So the idea of the short platform came from the ORR station guidance document - where I worked on the basis that it was "guidance" not mandatory. ScotRail safety colleagues were persuaded by the argument, as were ORR in London and the station was built with its 10m long platform. Unfortunately the Glasgow office of ORR were not involved in the planning and it took a bit of "behind the scenes" work for them to approve the opening on a trial basis. The trial was, as expected, successful and the station has delivered passenger numbers, well beyond our expectations (virtually 1,000 users a week for each of the past ten years and third busiest on the line). It has provided income, and especially passengers, to both the Far North and Kyle routes.



A Shearings bus delivers passengers from their Dornoch hotel to Golspie station, ready for their train trip to Wick.

I had left ScotRail by the time I was next involved with Beaully in 2003/4 - as a consultant. (Thanks to David Spaven for introducing me to my new employers.) I worked on the follow-up market research for Frank. The results showed what we hoped, that there was mode switch from car and motor bike as well as some new trips, and one recommendation was that Conon Bridge could be re-opened using the same model.

By the time Frank had developed Invernet I was working as a rail technical advisor with Scottish Government, pre-Transport Scotland (as a consultant) and then became a founder member of Transport Scotland when it was formed. The fourth train from Wick (December 2006) was a FoFNL initiative supported by Jim Wallace, Orkney MSP, - to offer a connection out of the first ferry from Stromness. It was facilitated by the arrival of the four Class 170s from Hull Trains, another First company, which displaced a Class 158 from elsewhere to increase the fleet on the Far North. The northbound service did not come until December 2008, where some effort was required to demonstrate that the extra cost was only in the train crew, as the fuel and mileage costs were already

being paid taking it virtually empty back on the evening train.



Beaully station soon after it reopened on 15 April 2002

The retiming, earlier, of the first Kyle - Inverness train at the same time was part of the refocusing of resources on providing a stronger Inverness commuting network, whilst still providing the required connectivity for the extremities of the routes.

The next interaction was Conon Bridge which Frank had been promoting for some time, but which was stuck in the Network Rail GRIP development processes. At that time I was working with both Transport Scotland Road and Rail colleagues on the additional rail activity that was to be part of the alternative travel options being offered in mitigation of the prolonged road closures arising from the planned Kessock Bridge resurfacing. They had budgeted to use expensive

loco-hauled trains to displace DMUs to provide the additional 158s required north of Inverness. (As now, there were no spare DMUs about.) We were able to negotiate a reduced cost from ScotRail by using the extra 156s, which had become available after the very successful and rapid electrification of the Paisley Canal line.

As part of this involvement I became aware that the planned bus-based Park and Ride site at the north end of the Kessock Bridge was not going to happen, because it was not going to remain after the works and the Roads team wanted these mitigation facilities to become permanent. So, in March 2012, I jumped in with the suggestion of Conon Bridge station, pressing a surprised Network Rail, on the back of their successful alliance with ScotRail to deliver Paisley Canal electrification, to build a new station by mid-February 2013. And in fairness to them they rose to the challenge and it did open on time at the start of the road closure period. Not only a new station, but another short platform station, which is now helping to establish a low-cost station option for other potential rural re-openings, or possibly platform raising. Usage has settled down to a steady 15,000 a year putting it into the top ten stations on the line.

Perhaps this illustrates the importance of individuals and personal relationships in achieving results. These particular relationships were based on mutual trust between individuals who have different experiences and approaches, but who, when brought together, have the right chemistry and have been able to deliver results, both on the FNL and elsewhere. So it seems that to get the right results, it is necessary to have the right people, in the right place, at the right time. Regrettably the converse is equally likely to be true, with the wrong people and poor timing, preventing good outcomes, but these are much more difficult to discover!

In summary it demonstrates the importance of creating and maintaining the right networks, not just amongst the "top" decision makers, important as they are, but also more widely through the various railway organisations.

**David Prescott**

## SOURCES OF POWER

Letter in *RailWatch* December 2019

The need for more electricity for trains (*Railwatch* 161) has raised worries about supplying peak demand, partly because electricity is difficult and expensive to store. Solution one is to ensure a plentiful supply of electricity from renewable sources, mainly wind and solar, and to use any surplus to generate hydrogen (which is storable) by electrolysis of sea water. In contrast to renewables, even without the problems of future storage, nuclear power costs are already twice the cost of renewables. Nuclear is as out of date as coal in this age of global warming. Solution two is to cooperate with our neighbours, such as Norway, which has lots of hydro power. We can send Norway electricity on windy days and take it back on still days. Transmission losses can be reduced by using very high voltage DC, rather than high voltage AC lines which we use now. There have been plans for interconnectors from St Fergus, near Peterhead, to Norway, as well as Wales-Ireland and Scotland-Northern Ireland. The lack of a connector prevents renewable schemes in Shetland. We should not waste power by using battery vehicles, which are inherently less efficient than pure electric trains, trams and trolleybuses which should replace diesels in cities. Capital costs are also lower for pure electric vehicles. Engineers have solutions while politicians seem to lack both knowledge and political will.

James A Whitworth, Old School, Burravoe, Isle of Yell, Shetland ZE2 9BA

## HITRANS WEBSITE

It's always worth having a look at <https://hitrans.org.uk/Documents>. At the time of writing items 10,12,15 and 22, dated 7 February 2020, are of particular relevance. Item 15 for example, *Rail Matters*, will give you an update on various current topics in the area.

# BOOK REVIEW

## *A decade of driver training in Inverness*

**Richard Maclennan.** *The Footplate to the Boardroom. Part 1 - the footplate years.* 114pp. The author, Whitrope Siding, 2019.

ISBN 978-1-5272-5033-8. £17.

This is a fascinating read covering 1980 to 1990, the first eleven years of the author's railway career on the footplate in Inverness and Ayr continuing briefly into the start of his staff training role further south. It will be followed by a second volume leading up to his appointment in 2005 as a board member at Chiltern Railways.

The 1980s were a period of rapid change and retrenchment on the railway. Steam heating, much of the freight traffic and double manning all largely disappeared and, in Ayrshire, DMUs were taking over. Richard considers the switchback line from Ayr to Girvan more difficult to drive than any in the Highlands.

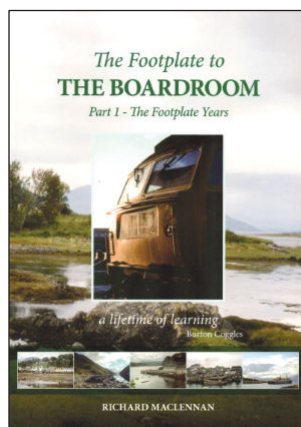
He was trained first on the Class 26s in which he found the cabs much warmer and more comfortable than those in the successor Class 37s. The 37s initially had great difficulty coping with the autumn leaves on the FNL.

The first DMU which tried to invade the FNL is described in a choice passage.

*"A tottering plastic nightmare arrived in town. 150001 was allocated to the 11:15 Wick service from 27 January 1986 with the trip booked to be single manned. The sprinter was struggling big time with the arduous task of running trains over this totally underrated route. The look on passengers' faces was priceless... no buffet, nowhere for mail, and no portion for Thurso. By Wednesday the thing was wheezing along on two engines and dropping time on every section. By Friday we were all royally sick to death of it. If this was the future, then God help us all."*

Two weeks later, Richard was being trained by Jock Hay on the electric train heating Class 37/4 locos which were to take over from the "steaming" 37s. The disbenefit of single track is evidenced by the cold weather in early 1984 when *The Clansman* suffered complete freezing up of its air brakes when waiting passage on to the single line at Dalwhinnie.

Richard's journeys covered turns to Brora, Kyle, Aberdeen, Perth, and to former freight sidings at Burghead, Dufftown, Evanton and Invergordon. There are lots of stories about his comrades in the cab and even of scary events like fixing detonators in the dark on "The Hill" north of Struan. You will need to buy the book to read that one, a colourful (and well illustrated) book that you will find difficult to put down!



**Richard Ardern**

## DISABLED PERSONS RAILCARD

FoFNL member Frank Faulkner has been in touch with this information:

As a Hearing Aid wearer I was surprised to learn recently that I qualify for a Disabled Persons Railcard and this seems not to be generally known.

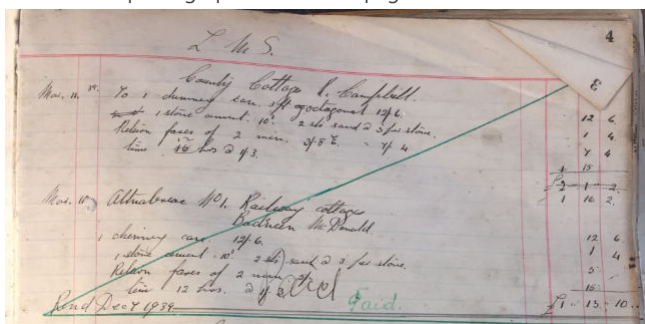
Although it offers the same 1/3 discount as my previous Senior Railcard it has other benefits, the most important of which is that its use is not time-limited. You can also take another person at the same discounted fare - and it's cheaper! I applied online and received my railcard three days later.

<https://www.disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk/>

# HISTORIC HALKIRK LEDGER

Extracts from a 1000-page Halkirk shop ledger have been sent to us by Stuart Gray, a former resident of Halkirk district who was a lecturer in agricultural engineering at Thurso College in the 70/80s.

The ledger, which contains many entries relating to stations on the Far North Line from the 1930s through to the 1950s, is currently in the possession of a Caithness farmer who kindly granted Stuart access to photograph some of the pages.



The shop, near the former station in Halkirk, was owned by the Sinclair Family. The description, "Alexander Sinclair, General Merchant, Carpenter and Undertaker" appears at the beginning of the ledger.

The shop often undertook railway-related work such as "Altnabreac, No1, Railway Cottages - 1 Chimney Cap - 12/6" billed to the L.M.S. in March 1938.

Full-size versions of Stuart's photos can be seen online at [www.fofnl.org.uk/fne80.php](http://www.fofnl.org.uk/fne80.php).

## No Book - Review

*Note from author, Andy Drummond (see FNE 75 & 79):* Around about now, I had been hoping to advise you to raid the piggy-bank and splash out on my new book, due out on 8 May. Its title is *A Quite Impossible Proposal* and it concerns wonderfully hopeless railway-schemes for the north-west of Scotland. Alas, Covid-19 has intervened, and my publisher – probably sensibly, but nonetheless very annoyingly – has postponed publication to a future date (at present unknown).

In the meantime, all is not lost. I would now point you rather insistently in the direction of a new rabbit-hole in the dangerous warren that is my website ([www.andydrummond.net/impossiblejourney.php](http://www.andydrummond.net/impossiblejourney.php)). Here you may examine the many timetables and fares on the Highland Railway Company network, and be invited to buy a passenger ticket, or send your phaeton, a half-dozen anvils or 20 barrels of fish from (say) Ullapool to Aultgish (where's that?).

## SCOTRAIL STAFF CHARITY SUCCESS

It was reported in *Rail Business Daily* on 12 March that, since Abellio took over the ScotRail franchise, staff have raised over £160,000 for charity.

All sorts of fundraising events have taken place from parachuting to mountain climbing. Among the charities to receive donations were Action for Children, Macmillan Cancer Support, and Alzheimer Scotland.

ScotRail's Employee Charitable Giving Fund added almost £40,000 in matched funding to the total. As Sophie Nightingale, ScotRail Community Investment Manager, said, "It's our way of saying thank you to our people, and to show our support for their selflessness"

# SLEEPER REPORT

In the January issue of *Far North Express* you asked for reports about the new sleeper service. My husband and I used it early this year for the first time when we were travelling to London to join the main transport for our cross-country skiing holiday. Normally if we cannot fly from Scotland we fly to London, but on this occasion, because of the flight times, I was able to persuade my husband to try the new sleeper service for the outward journey, rather than stay overnight in an airport hotel.

We booked the Caledonian cabin, with two single bunks and en-suite toilet and washing facilities and joined the train at Inverness, having caught the evening train from Ardgay. The en-suite toilet was welcome, greatly preferable to having to go out along the corridor during the night. Having just come from home that evening we used the wash basin, but did not try the shower.

Our holiday luggage was one medium sized suitcase and one wheeled holdall and we each had a day rucksack. Fortunately we had not taken two hard-shell suitcases as they would have occupied most of the limited floor space. The "squashy" holdall was able to be pushed beneath the bottom bunk, as were our rucksacks during the night. This was disappointing compared to the old cabins that had the shelf across the end of the bed which was very useful for putting rucksacks or small bags with your overnight things, and were also sturdy enough to take larger pieces of luggage. I don't recall getting any warning about luggage capacity, and there is nothing on the website at the time of writing.

The other disappointing feature was the position of the ladder to reach the top bunk. Neither of us is very tall, and my husband is fit and active, but had great difficulty in contorting himself to get into bed in the bottom bunk with the ladder in position for the top bunk person to use. In the end he took the top bunk.

Plus points were helpful staff, a more comfortable temperature than the one I remember from previous sleeper journeys, and a smoother ride. The breakfast menu was acceptable, as neither of us normally take large breakfasts. The bag of toiletries was pleasant but unnecessary, as we had our own things with us, and there seemed to be a lot of small plastic containers at a time when we are being urged to reduce our use of plastic.

Whilst I would use the sleeper service again, being careful which type of luggage I took, my husband would be reluctant to do so, especially when comparing the price of the sleeper to the price of a booked-well-in-advance flight to London (although of course the pricing situation may change once the Coronavirus situation is resolved).

[Contents](#)

**Mrs Patricia Hannah**

**66727 and 73966 bringing the sleeper north at Culloden Wood on 7 March 2020. Photo: Sandy Colley**



# WWI DALMORE BRANCH

## **A New Branch Line on the FNL during the First World War - for a special, strategic project on the shores of the Cromarty Firth.**

*This note was produced following a community history project in Alness & Invergordon carried out under the auspices of ARCH (Archaeology for Communities in the Highlands) in 2019. More images are available at [www.fofnl.org.uk/fne/cps/fne80.html](http://www.fofnl.org.uk/fne/cps/fne80.html). Photos: The Wayne O. Abbott Collection, courtesy of Invergordon Museum, [www.invergordonmuseum.co.uk](http://www.invergordonmuseum.co.uk)*

At the start of World War One the Royal Navy decided to develop a northern fleet anchorage at Scapa Flow and to make provision for dockyard facilities at Invergordon. The main route for supply of provisions for those facilities was to be along the Highland Railway's mountainous single-line routes from Perth to Inverness and from Inverness to Thurso, and the Admiralty's decision greatly increased the strain on the logistics of the railway.

With manpower and resources conscripted elsewhere for the war effort the resources of the Highland Railway became extremely stretched. It is suggested that almost 50% of the locomotives were out of service, and many of the mechanics and fitters had been conscripted. For transport to and from Scapa Flow a major flow of personnel and freight north and south, including timber and construction materials for the numerous facilities, brought over 35 trains passing through Alness each day by May 1916. Including the Naval Special trains, the 'Jellicoe Expresses' each usually carrying over 400 persons, over 1000 troop trains passed over the period of the war, with ambulance trains in addition.

Construction of a major naval shipyard from scratch at Invergordon (previously just a small town), with housing and infrastructure for 4000 personnel, brought a total of almost 20,000 wagons during the first 3 years of the war. It is reported that at times almost every siding north of Perth was full of wagons. In the 8 months from February to September 1918 the sidings at Alness alone handled nearly 5000 wagons.

From 1915 huge tonnages of supplies to support the war effort came across the Atlantic from the United States of America, but the increasing losses caused by German U-boats and other naval encounters were causing major anxiety in Whitehall and in Washington; 2.3 million tons was lost in 1916, but 6.2 million tons in 1917. In the one month of April 1918 it was 881,000 tons! When the USA decided in 1917 to join the Allies in direct action in Europe against Germany such losses could not be sustained. The US Navy developed the concept of a Northern Barrage to contain the German Navy; it would stretch between Orkney and Norway, a 'net' of naval mines some 250 miles (400 km) long, 25 miles (40 km) wide, set at depths of 25 to 240 ft (7-73 m). It would involve the placing of some 100,000 mines and it has been suggested that the budget in 1917 was \$200 million, or above!

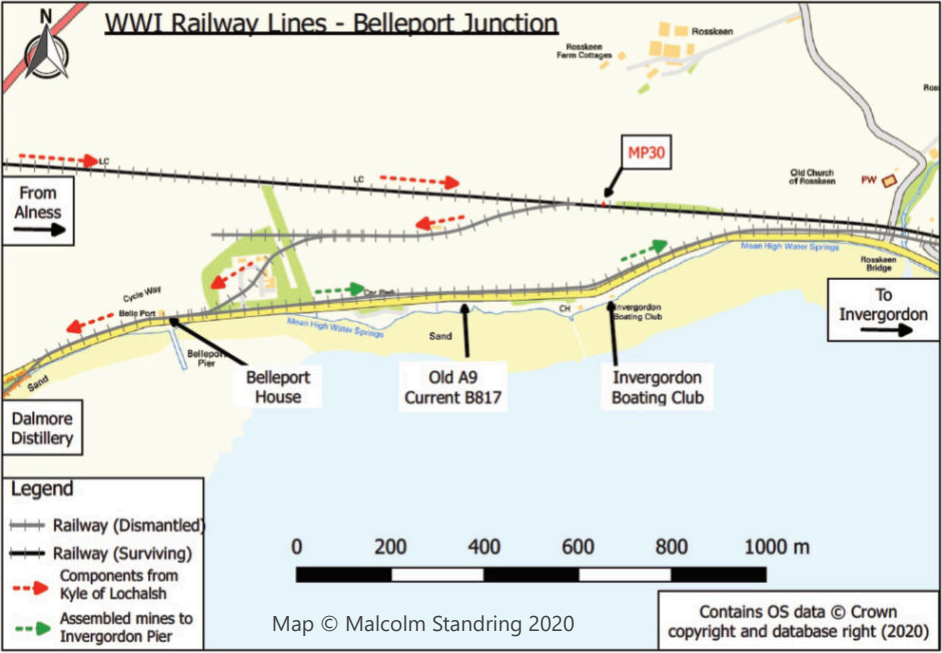
Components of US Type V1 mines would be delivered to Scottish west coast ports, and the mines assembled at two locations on Scotland's east coast, - at Muirtown, Inverness on the site of Glen Albyn Distillery (US Navy Base 18), and at Dalmore (US Navy Base 17) on the Cromarty Firth. Provision was made for assembly of 1500 mines per week at Muirtown and for 2000 per week at Dalmore. For Muirtown the components were delivered from the USA to Corpach, on Loch Linnhe and transported through the Caledonian Canal on lighters to the Muirtown Basin. (Components of mines contributed by the UK were shipped to the Clyde and on to Grangemouth for assembly.) From each assembly place the mines would be delivered to US Navy ships for placing in the Barrage. Those from Muirtown were shipped via the Inverness Firth, and those from Dalmore via the Cromarty Firth. (From Grangemouth this was done via the Firth of Forth.)

The Admiralty had taken over the 10-acre facility at Dalmore Distillery in October 1917; firstly, some 6,500 casks of whisky had to be moved to storage elsewhere in Easter Ross. Building of workshops, sheds and assembly lines required delivery of some 7,000 tons of materials. That work was finished in May 1918 and the site then handed over for US administration.

Supplies for Dalmore were delivered to Kyle of Lochalsh and brought east via the Dingwall & Skye Railway (D&SR) to Dingwall, and then via the Highland Railway (HR) to a new spur line at Belleport about halfway between Alness and Invergordon. (This is not to be confused with the already existing private branch line running south from Alness Station to Dalmore Distillery which ended at a point above the north side of the distillery.)

The D&SR was commandeered for the war effort; the HR was not allowed to carry any freight on the line and was restricted to one passenger train per day in each direction. Additional water towers were provided along the route, with a new and longer passing loop at a point between Achnasheen and Achnasshellach near Luib Summit, and new sidings were provided at Duirnish. Trains consisted of 11 wagons and it took a week for 3 or 4 trains per day to transfer a shipload to Dalmore some 73 miles (117 km) from Kyle. Problems of operation of the railway were compounded by availability of wagons and return of empties. 'Skye Bogie' 4-4-0 locomotives of the HR had been designed specially for the conditions of steep gradients and tight curves of the line, but so few were serviceable that an additional 3 'Loch Class' were built in 1917 for use on the line; Tractive Effort of HR locomotives for the Kyle Line was about 14,000 lb (62 kN). Some 150 12-ton coal wagons were loaned from the South-Eastern and Chatham Railway for carrying the components. (The Railway Executive Committee allocated 4 locomotives, similar to 'Skye Bogies', for use on the HR from the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway.)

A new branch line from the HR main line between Alness and Invergordon was required to connect to Dalmore. The new 'Belleport Junction' was created close to milepost 30 (MP30), just west of the stone bridge over the main line, which connects the fields of Rosskeen Farm, above the present-day Invergordon Boating Club on the present B817 road [grid reference NH 681692]. Land survey and crop markings on aerial photographs of the 1950s of the Rosskeen Farm fields give a guide to the actual position of this branch. There was a spur on this new branch, which may have served for marshalling or as an 'escape' to protect the Dalmore site in case of a runaway. The route of the branch passed through the present-day copse, east of the water treatment plant, then very close to Belleport House, crossed the former A9, now the B817, and entered the Dalmore Distillery site at the east gate.



The average gradient on the line from the junction to shore level was approximately 1 in 80 (1.25%). During fieldwork for the ARCH project a 7-metre length of railway track was discovered in the copse, near part of the 'projected route' of this branch line.

The first load of components for mines to be assembled at Dalmore, along with associated engineering provisions such as mobile cranes etc, arrived at the railhead at Kyle of Lochalsh on 29 May 1918 on the converted mine carrier Lake Superior; thereafter loads arrived at about 2 weeks intervals. Supplies included equipment for the bases, supplies for the mine-laying ships, hospital equipment, and food as well as components for the mines. Pratt records that of the total tonnage arriving at Kyle, (32,800 tons between May 1918 and November 1918), 24,000 tons were conveyed to Dalmore in some 400 special trains.



**US sailors with components awaiting assembly**

The assembly sheds at Dalmore were accommodated at the western end of the site, which comprised of over 26 acres (10.5 ha), with almost 1 mile (1.6 km) of standard-gauge sidings. In the assembly sheds, 3¾ miles (6 km) of narrow 29 inch (0.74 m) gauge tracks were laid to accommodate the sinkers (anchor boxes) that would later also carry the mines (referred to by the US Ratings as 'eggs') on the minelayers for deployment at the barrage. A pier

(locally known as The Yankee Pier) some 1850 ft long (550 m) was constructed with the intention of being able to load minelayers directly in the deep water of the Cromarty Firth. This had provision for two sets of rail tracks, and the pierhead extended some 400 ft (120 m) westward, accommodating 4 tracks. The rails for the whole project were provided by redeploying track from distillery operations between Buckie and Keith.

Upon arrival at Dalmore, the parts for assembly were unloaded from the delivery wagons by crane. Each mine had over 100 parts to be assembled from components manufactured by 140 manufacturing contractors and over 400 sub-contractors. The completed mine was connected to its sinker by a steel cable, the length of which determined the height of the mine above the sea bed after laying. The total weight of the assembly was about 1400 lb (0.6 tons / 636 kg).

Until the pier was completed the assembled mines on their sinkers were taken to Invergordon pier for loading on to the minelayers. They were not allowed to be carried on the track of the Highland Railway, so a separate standard gauge single track was constructed on a low-level route close to the shore. It ran on the north side of the former A9, now the B817, and crossed the Rosskeen Burn on a timber trestle bridge between the road bridge and the main railway embankment – at low tide the bases of 2 piers of the trestle bridge can be seen on the west side of the burn. From there, the route passed behind the present houses on the east side of the burn, crossed the main road just below Invergordon Golf Course, carried on along the shore side of the road and joined the existing harbour railway system to the pier at Invergordon. The 'relief' line carried 3 or 4 trains per day, plus return of 'empties'.



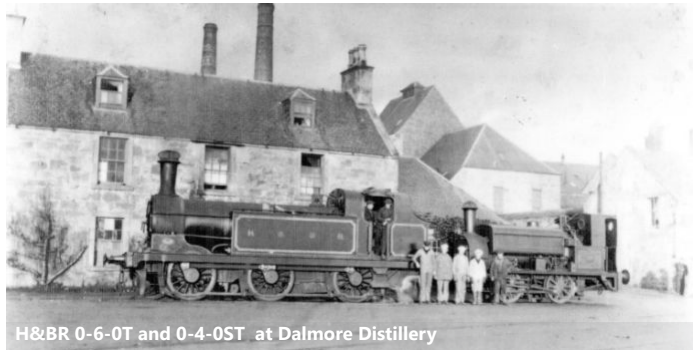
**Assembled mines ready for transfer to invergordon (LBSCR Terrier loco partly hidden by wagons)**

At the pier, the mines, along with their sinkers, were offloaded onto lighters, which shuttled them to the US minelaying ships moored in the Cromarty Firth.

Locomotives provided at Dalmore/Invergordon were:

- a powerful 0-6-0T Hull & Barnsley Railway G3 class tank engine (later Class J75 of the London & North Eastern Railway); Tractive Effort (TE) 19,890 lb (88.5 kN).
- a small 0-4-0 saddle tank; typical TE 10,000 lb (45 kN).
- 0-6-0 tanks on loan from the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway (later Class A-1 of British Railways Southern Region, nicknamed 'Terriers'); TE 14,000 lb (62 kN) - individual locos used at Invergordon/Dalmore were: Nos 37 *Southdown*, 79 *Minories* (later transferred to Catterick), 81 *Beulah*, 83 *Earlwood*, (No 38 *Millwall* was used at Glen Albyn). <Wikipedia>

The Armistice was signed before the Barrage was completed, but when hostilities ceased Grangemouth had delivered 13,546 mines, Muirtown 27,641, and Dalmore 28,930 - a total of over 70,000 assembled, delivered and laid between May and November 1918!



Although not used during the laying of the mines, Dalmore Pier was instrumental in the decommissioning of them and the return of the materials to the United States. The US Navy withdrew from the site on 1 March 1919 and the Admiralty took it over. The Dalmore branch line, the tracks at the site and the 'relief' line from the site to Invergordon were dismantled in 1921.

Construction of the pier involved conveyance of 13,000 tons of materials in approximately 2000 wagons, at total cost of £114,000. The pier and the site served the war effort again in World War 2 as an RAF Training Base for Sunderland Flying Boats and for Catalinas.

Much of the information for this note came from:

*The Highland Railway* by H. R. Vallance, published by David & Charles, 1971.

*The Yankee Mining Squadron* by Reginald R. Belknap of the US Naval Institute, 1920.

*Minelaying Bases at Grangemouth, Dalmore and Glen-Albyn*, Admiralty Pamphlet TH45, in CB1515 (45) – The Technical History and Index Vol 6 (Sept 1920) *A Serial History of Problems Dealt with by Admiralty Departments*.

*Operational Characteristics of US Naval Mines*; ORD 696(B); Department of the Navy Bureau of Ordnance, August 1959. <https://archive.hnsa.org/doc/mines-usn/index.htm>

*British Railways in the Great War* by Edwin Pratt, 1921.

In a closing summary Pratt reflects on the challenge faced by the Highland Railway in light of the extent of single-line working north of Perth and recommends that, if it were ever envisaged that similar circumstances might be faced in the future, work should be undertaken to provide dual track throughout the area!! He states that it was negligent of 'our Government' in 1914 not to make such provision and compares this dereliction of duty with the actions of pre-war Germany in assiduously constructing strategic rail infrastructure.

*"We are led to the conclusion that the country should profit by the lesson...and not leave in its present state a line as important as the Highland Railway has now proved to be."*

**RT Baxter & JDS Campbell**, Alness. January 2020

# THE FIN DEL MUNDO RAILWAY

This enterprise, based in the extreme south of Argentina, is the southernmost passenger carrying railway in the world. As such it makes a nice contrast with the Far North Line in Scotland. In fact these two railways, well over 8,000 miles apart could hardly be more different. The Far North Line is part of a national network, is of standard gauge, over 160 miles long and hauled almost exclusively by diesel traction of one kind or another. The Fin del Mundo line by comparison is an isolated tourist line, of less than two foot gauge, only 7 kilometres long and worked mainly by steam locomotives. It is however, a busy and popular railway, running 365 days a

part of a wider tour of Patagonia.

Around 10 kilometres east of the main station lies the city of Ushuaia, again the southernmost in the world. It is the only place of any size in the archipelago of Tierra del Fuego, cut off from the rest of South America by the Magellan Strait. The capital, Buenos Aires, is four hours away by air and many days by road. The city is of comparatively late foundation (1884) and has been an important naval base since then. The city grew quite rapidly in the late 20th century as the government encouraged settlement. It is very close to Chile both to the south and the west. Ushuaia lies on the northern shore of the Beagle Channel while the southern shore is Chilean, and to the west the National Park also borders Chile. Relations between the two countries have not always been cordial and in the 1970s war seemed imminent over territorial issues in the Beagle Channel. Today relations are stable and quite friendly but maybe not as close as Argentina's relations with other bordering countries such as Uruguay, Brazil and Paraguay. Readers may be aware that the warship General Belgrano, sunk in the Falklands War of 1982 was based in Ushuaia. There are no difficult issues for British

## John Turnock visited Argentina's 'End of The World Railway' last year

year through attractive scenery into the Tierra del Fuego National Park. High quality scenery is certainly one attribute that the two lines have in common. I was pleased to be able to visit the Fin del Mundo in November 2019 as





tourists today (unless perhaps they act with the kind of provocation shown by Jeremy Clarkson and his team in a famous jaunt for the TV programme *Top Gear*), but nevertheless there is no doubt that the Falkland Islands (Malvinas) are universally regarded here to rightfully belong to Argentina.

The history of the railway is much bound up with the Ushuaia prison. Argentina was not the first country to see a remote location as suitable for a prison for hardened criminals and the first convicts arrived in 1896 and were housed on an island named Isla de los Estados. This became regarded as inhumane and in 1902 they were moved to Ushuaia which at the time was still a small settlement. This new prison became established as the main one in the country for serious criminals, who were set to work constructing buildings, streets and bridges for little reward. The railway dates from 1910, eventually reaching the length of 25kms from Ushuaia westwards into the forest. It was principally used to transport the logs from the trees felled



Exhibit at the Ushuaia Prison Museum showing loco and carriage used on the prison railway

there. The prison closed in 1947 and two years later an earthquake in Tierra del Fuego provided a further blow to the railway, which limped on until 1952. The former prison is now a museum in Ushuaia and outside there is a locomotive and carriage used in the former

version of the line.

After some 40 years of dormancy, the most western part of the railway was rebuilt in 1994 as a tourist line of 500mm gauge. A 2-6-2 steam locomotive named *Camila* arrived in 1995, built in Britain, but I did not see this on my visit. I did see a diesel locomotive



appropriately named *Tierra del Fuego* and two Garrett steam locos named *Ing L.D. Porta* and *Ing H.R. Zubieta*. *Ing* is short for *Ingeniero*, meaning engineer and Messrs. Porta and Zubieta were both Argentine locomotive engineers. While naming engines after engineers is fairly common place worldwide, in Argentina some towns, glaciers and many streets are also named after individuals.

My journey on the train was, I think, typical of how the railway operates. The timetable suggested that there would be a train at 09:30 then two others later in the day. In fact there were three trains leaving at 15 minute intervals, at 09:00, 09:15 and 09:30. The journey is about one hour, and once all three trains had arrived at the terminus – El Parque station - they would then return at similar intervals. This of course requires considerable space at both ends of the line. I imagine that the same process would happen at lunchtime and in the afternoon. I was a little disappointed that our party travelled behind the diesel loco at 09:00, but that's life. I was able to get some fairly hurried pictures from the observation tower at Fin del Mundo station before departure, including photographs of the station and the



two Garretts preparing to take the following trains. On the platforms meeting the customers were staff dressed in prison uniforms posing for pictures and of course providing opportunities to the visitors to purchase them later.

We left on time and proceeded at quite a sedate pace for about 15 minutes and then stopped at Macarena station. This gave passengers the opportunity to either visit a moderately impressive waterfall or see a reconstructed campsite of a type used by the Yamana people, one of the native tribes of Fuegians who used to live in the area. The journey then resumed and following the Pipo Valley, we entered the National Park. Visitors need to purchase a National Park ticket along with their railway tickets. This is not a great expense; currently the Argentine Peso is more or less in freefall and foreign visitors benefit from falling exchange rates. The scenery along the line is very pleasant and it is easy to see old tree stumps and areas of woodland deforested by the prisoners in the previous century.

## Contents

Having reached the end of the line at El Parque station our group returned to the waiting coach which had initially brought us from Ushuaia to the main station and then we pressed on further into the Tierra del Fuego National Park towards the Chilean border. There are many pleasant walks and spectacular views in the park and it is possible to see the end of the Pan American Highway which provides a continuous route from Alaska, almost 18,000 kilometres away. It is of course perfectly possible to return to the Fin del Mundo station by train if desired but many groups were following our schedule.

Judging by the numbers of passengers it appears that this railway is well placed to meet the serious challenges facing the whole Argentine economy. The two main excursions for visitors to this area are to sail on the Beagle Channel and to visit the National Park, and the Fin del Mundo Railway is well placed to benefit from those choosing the latter. Especially in summer, there is also a steady stream of cruise ships visiting Ushuaia providing many potential passengers. The fact that railway is open 365 days a year suggests that there must be considerable winter trade too. One source suggests that there is a possibility that the line might in the future be extended eastwards towards Ushuaia along the line of the prison railway.

**Photos: John Turnock - December 2019**

*The photos and map in this article are available, along with some extra views at [www.fofnl.org.uk/fne80.php](http://www.fofnl.org.uk/fne80.php)*



# FROM KASHMIR TO KINBRACE

Mohammed Ayub was born in Kashmir on 1 January 1930 and left his wife behind to come to Britain in search of a job to support his family. His father was working in a linoleum factory in Kirkcaldy and Ayub got jobs as a porter and then head shunter at Thornton Junction, rapidly improving his English and learning from several different jobs how the railways worked.



He was appointed Station Master at Kinbrace on 1 April 1963, just five days after Dr Beeching's report was published which *inter alia* recommended the closure of the entire Far North Line! He stayed for four years until the reorganisation which brought the demise of station masters and the rise of area managers.

Ayub has recorded his reminiscences from all over Scotland for the National Railway Museum's National Archive of Railway Oral History and I am indebted to them for access to his file at York under reference number NAROH 2003-07. Pages 12 to 14 of the transcript relate to his time at Kinbrace.

The station house had three bedrooms, a sitting room and a kitchen. He reports that in those days Kinbrace had only six houses beside the station with a grocery shop, post office, and petrol station. He doesn't mention the school up on the main road.

Ayub had colleagues to work with, such as the signalman, Mr Mackenzie, and the permanent-way inspector, but admitted it was lonely at times and more so for his wife, son and daughter. The van roundsman was another Mackenzie, being cousin of the signalman, and Jim Mackenzie the signalman's uncle was another good neighbour.

The estate owners, Lord Leverhulme at Badenloch and Sir Harold Anthony Nutting at Achentoul both gave him local produce or permitted him to go fishing or hunting with the keeper. He mentions the sum of £500 per day being the going rate for fishing – presumably for a party rather than for an individual at that price in those days?

The stationmaster was seen as a person of standing and, along with the doctor and the police sergeant (who were both based in Helmsdale), was an accepted signatory in the community for official documents. Ayub seems to have enjoyed this life, but his time there was limited by a reorganisation.

The station master at Forsinard died and Ayub was put in charge there too. The station master at Helmsdale was given Kildonan to look after "because there is no need for a stationmaster at every station". Before too long, this consolidation went further and groups of stations were put under the charge of a Helmsdale to Thurso Area Manager. Mr Ayub was asked whether he wanted to go to this Area Manager's office or move somewhere else and he decided to move back to the lowlands "because going further north would not serve him any purpose".

Mr Ayub secured a job in Glasgow as a parcels clerk and moved on to work as a platform inspector at Glasgow Central welcoming the Queen Mother on one occasion. His career then took him to the London area working on Southern lines and then on to Liverpool Street in more senior posts. He recorded his reminiscences for NAROH in January 2003.



● Mr Mohammed Ayub ... his promotion is taking him to Glasgow.

Pictures from *The People's Journal* 20 April 1963 and 25 February 1967

**Richard Ardern**

# RAILWAY IN FULL FLOW

Photos: Niall Laybourne



[Above] *Little Loco* - Snow in May! Achentoul, between Kinbrace and Forsinard, 3 May 2019.

*Big Train in a Vast Landscape* - near Kinbrace Hill on 17 October 2018, running nearly 10½ hrs late because of autumn leaves.



*Disturbing the Peace* - Easter Highlander railtour at County March Summit, the highest point of the line on 21 April 2019.

