

FAR NORTH EXPRESS



Issue 81
September 2020



Branchliner!

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: Timber trial train waiting at Rogart on 4 August

Photo: **Jordan Kearney**

HEADCODE

This issue of *Far North Express* contains much good news, a good counterbalance to the rigours of Covid-19 and the shock of the accident at Carmont on 12 August.

Our sympathy goes out to those involved in the accident, especially to the wife of the train driver who has had to endure some awful media coverage, not least from the BBC which should know better.

The emptiness of our trains during the pandemic has obvious consequences for the industry. We hope that the message is soon understood that travelling by train is nothing like as risky as many believe. Research has shown a 1 in 11,000 risk of catching Covid-19 whilst on a train journey. Passengers need to feel confident about this, and it is to be hoped that a successful vaccine is available soon. We should not subscribe to the gloomy predictions that life will never be the same again.

On to the good news: work on the FNL Review Team recommendations has now restarted and we have been given a detailed list of current progress which makes us smile. Network Rail's purchase of property needed to clear the land ready for the construction of a real Transport Hub beside Inverness Station also brought us much cheer and we commend Frank Roach for his indefatigable determination to make this happen. And finally...thanks to Frank again... a trial is underway to prove how well railways handle timber transport. We are very much hoping that this will convince Norbord to go

ahead with installing a siding at their Inverness factory. We see that the "Screening Application" currently in place for the proposed station at nearby Dalcross also mentions the siding.

It is worth noting too that all these excellent developments would be impossible without the support of Transport Scotland which is the envy of our peers 'down South'!

Talking of which, TS has now published its *Rail Services Decarbonisation Action Plan* which, we are delighted to note, includes eventual electrification to Tain - something inconceivable until recently.

All lines connecting Scotland's 'Seven Cities' are to be electrified. This will make a huge difference, especially to the Highland Main Line with its steep gradients. We have passed on our emphatic wish that, if electrification takes place before double-tracking, all design and build work is done with double track in mind. Bridge replacement and the positioning of OLE masts must be done correctly. The fiasco of de-scoping the Borders Railway and actually *building* new single-track bridges must not be repeated.

We hope that when considering the First Minister's *Programme for Government* on 1 September, MSPs will have appreciated the need for rebalancing rail infrastructure plans to aid areas such as the Highlands, which are in dire need of upgrading, so that double-tracking is achieved as soon as possible.

Ian Budd

CIS SUCCESS

Over a year after the installation of Customer Information Screens was completed on the Far North Line, the one remaining problem installation has been fixed. The screen on Platform 2 at Invergordon had been covered, Out of Use, due to difficulties with the electricity supply. Work had been suspended because of Covid-19.

FoFNL is pleased that a change which we suggested has been implemented: in the event of a CIS losing connection to the system the display defaulted to "TIMETABLE" and showed the next train if it was due in an hour or less. This has now changed to show "NEXT SCHEDULED SERVICE FROM THIS PLATFORM" with the time shown for the next service up to five hours ahead.



PANDORA

At long last we have Transport Scotland's 25-year plan to electrify Scotland's railway. The wait has been worth it. By 2035 the lines from the Central Belt to Inverness and Aberdeen (including the Fife Circle), the GSWR line to Kilmarnock and Gretna, and the Borders Railway will all have been electrified. Three more discrete lines - Inverness to Aberdeen, Inverness to Tain and Ayr to Girvan are to be electrified thereafter. The Far North Line, the Kyle Line, the West Highland Lines to Fort William, Mallaig and Oban, and the Girvan to Stranraer line will remain unelectrified - no great surprise.

Pandora celebrates Transport Scotland's Rail Services Decarbonisation Action Plan

It's immediately clear from the Plan that Network Rail has been intimately involved in its preparation - a fact that could not have been said about electrification plans drawn up by the DfT for the Great Western. Indeed even in the Minister's Introduction (often a rather bland part of any government publication) we see these words. "This plan builds on...the recent devolution - at my request - of NR's planning and development functions to Scotland." This is surely the first step in bringing total control, including legal accountability, north of the Border.

TS is clear that where electrification will not happen there are only two other technologies: battery and hydrogen. Much is made of "discontinuous electrification" throughout the Plan, implying that an imaginative use of electrification is at least under consideration. It's suggested that "[battery-operated trains are] effective for lower-intensity services of up to around 55 miles". This is fascinating in the context of the FNL. Electrification as far as Tain is to be carried out soon *after* 2035. From Tain to Thurso is 110 miles. Were a battery-

powered train fully charged on leaving Tain it would be able to reach Brora (45 miles) without running dangerously low. Were the FNL electrified from Brora to Helmsdale, and were the battery able fully to recharge over those 11 miles, the train could then run to Thurso (assuming a Halkirk chord), 54 miles away. Tight, but if battery technology improves in the intervening 15 years, entirely realistic. Is this what is meant by "discontinuous electrification"? Other routes have similar possibilities, allowing battery bi-modes for the whole of Scotland. Maintenance and other costs will be reduced if only two power sources are involved. It may be, of course, that hydrogen-powered trains offer a better outcome, but there is a problem of the size of the necessary hydrogen tanks for longer distances. A technical box advises that a hydrogen train is significantly less efficient than a battery train, which would seem to suggest that the ongoing running costs would, other things being equal, favour the battery option (see below).

In CP4 and CP5 TS committed to electrifying 100 stk a year. In other words 50 km of a double-track railway or 100 km of single track. This commitment was enough to carry out all the electrification now complete in the Central Belt, but it is only in this document that we find the commitment - as distinct from the intention - to continue. "We aim to electrify, on average, 130 stk per year in order to achieve our 2035 target."

It is clearly the intention to deliver the passenger benefits conferred by the elimination of diesel traction as swiftly as possible. Bi-mode diesel and electric trains will operate as an interim measure between now and 2035 - quite what these will be is not yet clear. There are many DMU classes which could be temporarily adapted to carry us though the next 15 years by the addition of an electrically-powered unit. It might be a locomotive or it might be carriages with a pantograph. The simplest is the former, and has been used for many years with, for example, Class 390s being loco-hauled by

diesel to Holyhead.

The Plan notes that Class 156s (which operate on the WHL) and Class 158s (FNL and Kyle) have end of life dates "between 2025 and 2035", though which will last as long as the next 15 years is not spelt out. The following paragraph, somewhat dispiritingly, concerns itself with refurbished stock as well as new stock: it would be encouraging to think that those long straggly bits which will not see electric trains will see spanning new trains whose motive power is equally spanning new.

TS has managed to avoid the biggest pitfall of all, and one into which the DfT (and its predecessor departments) almost seems to have made its home: doing it all in fits and starts. *FNE 80* carried, on page 4, a stark illustration of this. In contrast "we must have a rolling programme that provides a constant, sustainable design and delivery work-bank, both for NR and for contractors ... In addition to economies of scale, that will provide the supply chain with the confidence to invest in research, resource and talent thus supporting continuous efficiency improvement ..."

Here are a few more direct quotes:

- "Our aim is for a continuous electrified

line of route from Edinburgh through Fife to Dundee and Aberdeen";

- "Based on fleet expiry dates, and rolling stock interworking, the FNL, WHL and Kyle Line are considered appropriate for the *early introduction* of alternative traction technology as a permanent solution" (emphasis added);
- "By 2035 we plan to have fully electrified routes from the Central Belt to both Aberdeen and Inverness East";
- "Though our plans are to electrify the entire route [Inverness East to Aberdeen] ..." the Plan talks of a lower priority for this than the other work to be completed by 2035. However there is an expectation "that the route, with an extension to Tain, will be fully electrified in the years shortly after 2035".

The Plan, to use a familiar expression, is the settled will of TS, of NR, of Scottish Ministers and by implication of ScotRail. FoFNL, had it had a magic wand to wave benignly over Scotland's railway, could not realistically have asked for more ...

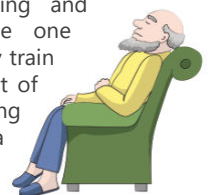
Doubtless the Lentrans Loop and other enhancements will appear in a different document soon.

www

This was all Pandora wanted to say on the subject until his attention was drawn to an article in *Railway Gazette* which puts much more flesh on the technical box mentioned above. This reviews a German paper which concludes that "hydrogen-powered multiple-units are more expensive [than battery-powered EMUs] and less efficient, being 35% more expensive to buy, operate and maintain". Hydrogen must be generated by electrolysis with an efficiency of less than 80%; it then has to be converted back into electricity for traction with efficiency less than 70%. Thus the energy costs "significantly exceed those of a train taking power from overhead wires or batteries" [emphasis added]. The review goes on to point out that the present hydrogen-cell technology would require

these to be replaced seven times during the life of the vehicle, and while the life of a cell would be expected to be increased with technical developments, that's still a lot of replacement.

Pandora is drawn more and more to the idea of discrete sections of overhead electrification as suggested above. The great merit of hydrogen, we have been led to believe, is that a train can go a lot further without recharging or refuelling. But if that comes at a daily running and maintenance cost maybe one third higher than a battery train then the initial capital cost of doing a bit more electrifying here and there may be a small price to pay.



FNL REVIEW TEAM NEWS

The meeting of the Caithness Transport Forum on 13 August heard from Derek Glasgow of ScotRail about the progress of planning works to enhance the Far North Line. Two work-streams had reached GRIP-3, the final preliminary stage before decisions are made and funds allocated for physical (as distinct from design) work to start (GRIP-4). He expected GRIP-3 to be concluded by the end of 2020.

The two work-streams are *motorising points* (allowing passage at 40 mph instead of 15) and - one's heart lifted - *the Lentrán Loop*. He estimated the range of funding required, depending on how much of the work was sanctioned by Transport Scotland, to be "between £50m and £200m". That buys a lot of improvement.

The FoFNL AGM, cancelled this year, was to have been held in Dingwall and plans are in hand to hold the 2021 AGM and Conference there in view of its proximity to Lentrán. We hope to be able to organise a site visit if large-scale gatherings are permitted then.

Derek mentioned the Decarbonising policy (see *Pandora*) and reminded us that in the new improved world in which we now live it took "7 to 8 years" from deciding to buy a bit of new rolling stock to its actually carrying passengers. How different, how very different, from the situation in which Nigel Gresley found himself in 1935 with what became *Silver Link**. It is good to have it on record that 158s won't last for ever. Some of us were beginning to think otherwise.

Mike Lunan

**The LNER's first A4 locomotive was pulling passengers only seven months after the Board decision to design and build.*

INVERNESS TRANSPORT HUB NEWS

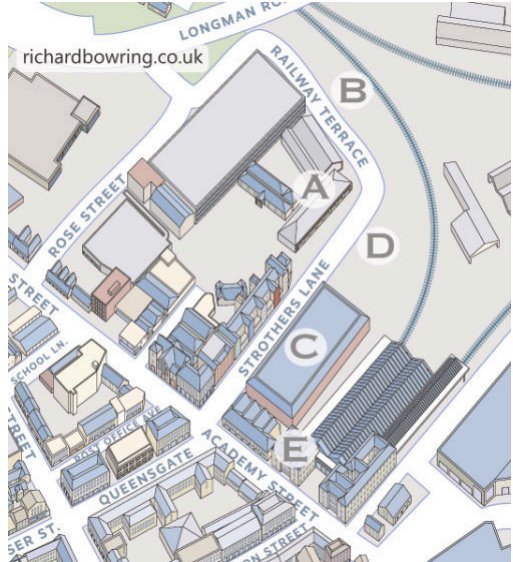
On 5 June the news broke in the *Inverness Courier* that the long-planned transport hub for the city has passed a vital landmark.

Network Rail has bought several key sites needed for the development. Transport Scotland funded the purchase of the Royal Mail sorting office [A] and car park [B], the TK Maxx and Sports Direct buildings [C], the Strothers Lane car park [D] and Highland Rail House [E] - a Grade A listed building, the original headquarters of the Highland Railway.

The 'Platform for Change' project is promoted by HITRANS and the detailed planning will also involve Network Rail, Transport Scotland, Highland Council and organisations such as Inverness Business Improvement District and Inverness Chamber of Commerce.

Frank Roach, HITRANS partnership manager, has been working on the project since 2014. He commented, "This investment by Transport Scotland will enable long-held aspirations to improve facilities to be realised. In the future there may be something much more majestic than the 1960s development we have at the moment. Whatever is planned, it will be spacious and is very likely to include a retail offer and bars and cafés."

Ian Budd



DECARBONISATION ACTION PLAN

Transport Scotland's eagerly awaited *Rail Services Decarbonisation Action Plan* was published on 28 July and has been welcomed as a comprehensive description of the way ahead for rail traction in Scotland. This response by **Stewart Nicol**, Chief Executive, Inverness Chamber of Commerce, appeared in the *Inverness Courier* on 4 August.

I welcome the publication of Transport Scotland's *Rail Services Decarbonisation Action Plan*.

Colleagues and I from across the Scottish Chambers of Commerce network lobbied Transport Secretary Michael Mathieson on this matter when we held a meeting in early July.

I also used the opportunity to press the Cabinet Secretary on improvements to the Highland Main Line.

The City of Inverness and our wider Highland region needs significantly improved rail connectivity to other parts of Scotland. This improvement must be manifested by an increased frequency of service and reduced journey times to both the Central Belt and Aberdeen.

Transport Scotland's action plan, at 48 pages, is impressive and ambitious in terms of both the scope of the task and the timescale of delivery. It is also appropriate to recognise that it has been presented against the backdrop of Covid-19 which is setting additional complexity and challenge for government, business, and community alike.

The plan rightly has the core objectives of reducing carbon emissions from transport, while helping contribute to a green economic recovery following the pandemic.

There is much to be done to create the rail network we need to achieve our aspirational modal shift to rail as an effective and efficient means of transport for those of us who live and work in the Highlands, as well as visitors from across the globe who seek to enjoy all that our region has to offer.

As the report acknowledges, only three of Scotland's seven cities are currently connected by a modern electrified network: Glasgow, Edinburgh and Stirling. Transport Scotland's intent for the plan to be flexible and engaging is welcome and we look forward to working with them.

We do not just need just a flexible plan though, we must have delivery where it matters, on the ground and no later than within these published timescales.

I, and my colleagues at Inverness Chamber of Commerce, will continue to lobby for improvements to the transport infrastructure that serves our city and region as we connect, support and represent Highland business.

Stewart Nicol

Take the existing line, double the track, add electricity and you have a true InterCity railway!

Highland Chieftain at Kingussie on 2 August 2020



Photo: Peter Moore

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR - NORDIC LINES

SIR - The point I wish to raise is that on viewing the *World's Most Scenic Railway Journeys* yesterday evening (June 12) on Channel 5, I was struck by a situation which is almost identical to that of the Far North Line, and wished to draw it to your attention.

The programme (well worth watching) was all about lines in Finland starting in Helsinki and progressing north to Oulu, then Rovaniemi, the last major centre of population in Finland. From there a single track line extends to the Russian border with passenger services as far as Kemijärvi.

Rovaniemi has a population of approx 65,000, almost the same as (Greater) Inverness, and Kemijärvi has a population of 7,500, rather similar to Thurso. There is almost nothing in between the two and this line is far more remote than the FNL.

The line was put down for closure in 2005 and at the time was diesel operated. Services did in fact cease in 2005. The locals however

mounted a campaign and not only won a reprieve but the line, 15 years on, is now electrified with modern rolling stock for the passenger service. Interestingly there is only ONE service in each direction per day yet this line received electrification!!! I grant that there are freight services for the timber trade but I am absolutely certain the business case for retention of the line PLUS electrification would never have got approval in the UK, be it from Holyrood or Westminster.

This does beg the question of how we assess the 'business case' of schemes. It is my opinion that the business case criteria are rigged to permit only very few schemes to win and we really should be questioning the whole process much more vigorously.

*Nigel Morley
Heckington,
Lincolnshire*

[Editor's note: the FNL is almost three times as long as the Finnish railway and has quite a few towns and villages on its route.]

SIR - The recent publication of the *Rail Services Decarbonisation Action Plan* by Transport Scotland is a welcome document as is the proposed electrification beyond Inverness to Tain by 2035. However, with the importance of climate change issues, fossil fuel emission reduction and sustainability, surely greater urgency or emphasis could be made to implement the recommendations of this plan.

I am already dismayed by the large investment and determination by Scottish Government to upgrade the A9 and A96 to the status of dual carriageways, despite their highly fluctuating seasonal traffic flows between Summer and Winter. This is in comparison to greatly reduced sums being invested in the parallel, but I would consider more sustainable, Highland Main Line and Inverness to Aberdeen railways.

It has struck me for a long time that there appears to be a deliberate bias towards road schemes in Scotland, with these taking precedence over railways. This also seems to

contradict efforts by Scottish Government to reduce impact on the environment and address climate change issues.

Whilst recently watching the Channel 5 *World's Most Scenic Railway Journeys* programme set in Finland, I was impressed that the electrified line from the country's northernmost city of Rovaniemi (Population 65,000) far inside the Arctic Circle, had been electrified a further 54 miles north to the small town of Kemijärvi, with a population of 7,000 on 11 March 2014. This scale of investment in a remote part of the country with extreme winter conditions was made only after this line had been closed to all passenger traffic between September 2006 and March 2008. This small town is now the terminus of the night sleeper from Helsinki and adjacent to Finland's Winter Sports Area where there are few roads and a very low population density.

Another Nordic country that seems keen to invest in its remote rural areas is Norway. Currently rail electrification is being extended

northwards from Trondheim (Population 180,000) to Hell and Stjørdal 18 and 22 miles respectively, marking the current limit of Trondheim Local Services. Double tracking is also a part of this project.



Flåm to Myrdal Railway
Photo: SprinterJockey/flickr/CC-BY-NC 2.0

Norway's electricity is mainly generated by hydroelectric power. Significantly the world's steepest electrified adhesion railway, the 12½ mile Flåm branch, has its own hydropower generated entirely at its own hydroelectric power station at Kjosfossen, two stops down the line from its junction with the Bergen Railway at Myrdal.

Perhaps, based on this logic, more investment and the electrification of the entire Far North Line beyond Tain, to Wick and Thurso, should be considered, rather than the use of the proposed battery or hydrogen powered trains.

This could take advantage of locally produced

Lairg Power Station and Dam

hydroelectric power produced at the long established Loch Shin scheme accessing the grid at Lairg, and Conon Valley, Strathfarrar/ Kilmorack and Glen Affric schemes feeding into the grid at Beauly. Presumably this could also help reduce cable transmission costs, and leakage could be boosted at various points by sub stations.

A full explanation of the development of the North of Scotland Hydro Electric Board and its schemes can be found in the very readable *The Hydro* by Peter L. Payne (Aberdeen University Press 1988) and *The Dam Builders, Power from the Glens*, by James Miller of Inverness (Birlinn 2002).

The Oban Line also runs past the Loch Sloy Hydro Scheme with its generating station at Inveruglas and then again past the Ben Cruachan Hydro Scheme with its generating station in the Pass of Brander. Even the Kyle Line traverses land which forms a part of the Strathfarrar Hydro Scheme and the generating station at Loch Luichart.

I offer these comments to help stimulate general discussion, but perhaps it is also necessary to challenge the current view that electrification of the entirety of the Highland railways is not considered viable, even with locally produced hydroelectric power, although I accept that generated power output and potential could be limiting factors.

*Graham Atkins, Edinburgh
Retired Public Transport Officer/Planner*

Photo © Richard Sutcliffe [cc-by-sa/2.0]



PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

Question S5W-29320: Rhoda Grant, Highlands and Islands, Scottish Labour, Answered: 08/06/2020

To ask the Scottish Government what consideration it has given to supporting the use of battery and hydrogen technology-powered trains on the Far North Line.

Michael Matheson: The Scottish Government is committed to publishing the rail services decarbonisation action plan for Scotland's railways, this will include its assessment on the use of battery and hydrogen technology powered trains as well as electrification to meet the 2035 traction decarbonisation target.

Question S5W-29322: Rhoda Grant, Highlands and Islands, Scottish Labour, Answered: 08/06/2020

To ask the Scottish Government whether improvements to double tracking of railway lines north of Perth and serving the Highlands will be undertaken before electrification of lines.

Michael Matheson: The Scottish Government is committed to publishing the rail services decarbonisation action plan for Scotland's railways, this will include its assessment on the use of battery and hydrogen technology powered trains as well as electrification to meet the 2035 traction decarbonisation target. Other infrastructure works may also be required to fully capture the benefits and these will be assessed on each line of route based on current and forecast capacity.

CLASS 158 - THIRTY YEARS IN SERVICE

The class 158 "Express Sprinter" trains currently used on the Far North Line were first introduced in Britain by ScotRail in September 1990.



The 09.00 Inverness to Glasgow service was flagged off on Monday 1 October 1990 by Councillor Peter Peacock, Vice-Convenor of Highland Council, who later became the Scottish Government's Education Minister.

They were a radical departure from the locomotive-hauled carriages they were replacing. ScotRail's marketing brochure

promised "a modern, spacious open saloon with ergonomically designed seating, wall-to-wall carpeting, full air-conditioning and wide anti-glare picture windows."

While appreciating many of these features, the cramped nature compared to what had gone before was a shock to most passengers. They were built at a time when the concept of "Social Distancing" was unknown. Indeed, Margaret Thatcher would only allow two new coaches to be built for every three they were replacing.

It was *All Change!* at Inverness in 1990 with the 158s on the Central Belt services and 156 "Super Sprinters" on the Aberdeen and Far North Line services. The 156s were replaced on the FNL and Kyle lines by the 158s with the May 2000 timetable, which enabled an 18 minute reduction in timings between Wick and Inverness. As we know, the 18 minutes (and more) was lost to us in 2005 for other reasons. FoFNL had a part to play in the refurbishment of the 25 Inverness-allocated 158s in 2007 when seating space was made a little more friendly. See *FNE* issue 42 of September 2007 for details and a front cover picture of the first refurbished unit, kindly diagrammed for AGM day in Thurso.

Richard Ardern

HML PROMISES - 2006

This article appeared in The Herald on 28 June 2006:

Faster rail link to Highlands will cost £55m *Glasgow-Inverness 'in less than three hours'*

David Ross - Highland Correspondent

The mainline rail journey between Inverness and the Central Belt could become quicker and more competitive in comparison with road travel - and carry as many as 200,000 more passengers a year - for an investment of just £55m.

This is the conclusion of two reports published yesterday on improving rail services in the Highlands. They claim that significant service enhancements on all of the railway lines in the north could be made for a relatively modest investment.

The reports are designed to influence railway strategy in the north up to 2020. They say that, at a cost of £55m, journey times from Inverness to Glasgow and Edinburgh could be cut by 44 minutes to 2hrs 45mins with hourly services.

The key works required include returning the four-mile stretch between Culloden and Daviot to twin track; building a passing loop at Ballinluig, along with general improvements; and work to Kingswood tunnel at Birnam Hill.

Taking an optimistic view, it is expected that in the first year around 138,000 passenger trips would result from the upgrade, rising to 200,000 by 2020. A good return on investment is expected, with every £1 generating a £2.61 benefit. More significant infrastructural work in Fife region could further reduce journey times to Edinburgh to 2hrs 30mins and would also benefit services to Perth, Dundee, Aberdeen and the north-

east. The reports - commissioned by Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), HITRANS (the Highland transport agency) and the Highland Rail Partnership - also consider possibilities for increasing freight and charter operations from Dingwall to Kyle of Lochalsh along with provision of a commuter service at a cost of around £1.4m.

The options for the Fort William and Oban lines include running separate trains to both places. Currently, the trains run together to and from Glasgow, splitting at Crianlarich. Two trains would have extra operating costs of £600,000 a year, and would be possible with the existing infrastructure. Line speeds could be improved at an estimated cost of £10 to £15m, which would also allow heavier freight.

Charlie King, chairman of HITRANS, said: "Rail is already an important driver in the economy supporting more than 1500 FTE [full-time equivalent] jobs. These reports help underline the further potential an enhanced rail network can give the Highlands."

Douglas MacDiarmid, HIE's director of global connections, said: "The enhancements proposed represent very good value for rail projects in a UK context and would deliver significant economic benefits for the north of Scotland."

Ron McAulay, Director of Network Rail in Scotland said: "These reports will feed into the process of compiling a future strategy for Scotland's growing railway."

This represents an interesting, and disappointing, counterpoint to what actually happened. Despite the promise from the then First Minister in 2008 that this aim would in fact be met by 2012 a change of policy took place, without an announcement, and the promise was initially denied.

Recent improvements to the HML fall far short of what was being discussed in 2006.

DYNAMIC STRATEGIC PLANNING:

This is a pivotal moment in the future of our railways. The decisions made now about the future will be fundamental in the way that we recover from the COVID pandemic and in how we plan the structure of transport in Britain to incorporate a truly positive response to the declared Climate Emergency which affects the survival of the world.

Why 'Rest and Be Thankful' is not an option

The last train I was on was a replacement bus service between Perth and Inverness because the 15:08 from Glasgow was cancelled due to flooding between Stirling and Dunblane on 22 February. As I write, the A83 access road to mid Argyll over the Rest and be Thankful has been severed yet again by landslips due to heavy rain. [Total closure 5 days]. The West Highland Line has also been closed in two places either side of Arrochar by the same excess rain event and a flooded line closure has occurred once again between Stirling and Dunblane.

Scotland's infrastructure is under increasing threat year by year. The WHL is one of only three railway routes north from the Central Belt. The other two which serve Aberdeen and Inverness and points north are the route across the Forth Bridge and that through Stirling and Dunblane. Without one of these the railways would be severely handicapped. Strategic planning has spent £1.4 bn on the Queensferry Crossing in recent years to partly replace the Forth Road Bridge. We need to have a strategy to increase the resilience of our truncated railway system too.

The Far North Line benefited when the Ness Viaduct at Inverness was washed away in February 1989 and a new bridge was opened in May 1990, a commendably short time of 15 months. The Italians have recently replaced the collapsed motorway viaduct in Genoa in less than 15 months.

Could we do something like this again if it were necessary in such a short time? Or would we have to appoint consultants and go through years of paperwork as seems to be our norm now? This is where the sorely needed

"Dynamism" of the title comes in. The Network Rail planning and development function needs staffing up, to plan and design far greater enhancements to enable the railways to better serve both passenger and freight requirements.

Future Governance

Will there still be a body known as Network Rail? Post COVID both passenger and freight traffic need to be revived and put onto a sound footing. With the franchising system past the point of collapse, there is a tremendous opportunity to build a government structure that really works cost effectively. To join up the railway again in a vertically integrated way with powers and money to do the job would seem sensible.

FoFNL Member and Rail Consultant, Dave Prescott, has mapped out how this route could work well and interested readers should consult his most recent *Rail Professional* article to achieve a "cost-effective, resilient, responsive railway": www.railpro.co.uk/railpro-magazine/july-2020/vertical-integration-the-way-forward

Future Route Planning and Enhancement

We are currently spending a lot of time with consultants going through the process of recommending which "major" but often actually quite modest transport enhancements should be supported in the next twenty years in the Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR2). I would suggest that this is now yesterday's exercise and that in view of the welcome recognition of the Climate Emergency and in order to plan for post COVID recovery we should be doing something much more dynamic. The goalposts have really changed substantially.

A step along the way to recognise this is the **Scottish Government's Rail Services Decarbonisation Action Plan**. At least it has the word "action" in it and hopefully a recognition that this needs money for design and build and that the amount of work proposed to be done by 2035 is way more than has been achieved in the last 15 years.

I would go further and say that the strategic need is not just more double track line capacity, electrification, and new rolling stock. Gauge

enhancement, new freight terminals and diversionary routes are needed too.

Electric trains are faster and more efficient but dependence on catenary is a weak spot. This is another reason why we must have more alternative diversionary routes. Freight contracts depend on these to prevent interruptions. A line closed for several days because of an accident, as at Dock Street in Dundee, or for several months for bridge repair as at Lamington on the West Coast Main Line, can spell "curtains" for a freight contract that depends on daily delivery.

It is already accepted that the Glasgow-Kilmarnock-Dumfries route to Carlisle and the south should be electrified to provide diversionary capacity. In the longer term it might prove possible to reopen the Waverley route from Galashiels through Hawick to Carlisle.

North of the Forth

North of the Forth a journey time reduction of thirty minutes for passenger trains from Edinburgh to Perth and Inverness could be achieved by the creation/reopening of a line along the Inverkeithing to Cowdenbeath, Kinross and Bridge of Earn corridor. This would also provide an alternative express route to Aberdeen and for freight traffic to the likes of Aberdeen, Inverness and Dundee (where a new freight terminal is needed). It would be of immense strategic benefit in so many ways that a priority scoping exercise is now overdue.

Continuing north of Perth by reopening the former rail corridor from Stanley past Forfar to Kinnaber (north of Montrose) would provide an alternative route to Aberdeen independent of the Tay Bridge and the Montrose Viaduct. The cost is considerable, but new routes have the advantage of being easier to electrify without the disruption of existing traffic.

Resilience of the network is another issue related to our changing climate. Flooding disruption is now an annual event on the Conwy Valley line in North Wales which can be closed for months. There are problems also with the Earn south of Perth; with the Tay north of Perth on the Highland Main Line; with the Spey and Gynack Burn [Kingussie] on the HML; and with river crossings between Aberdeen and Inverness such as the Lossie and the Findhorn. Bridges on the Beaully and Conon on the FNL need

watching too.

Invest to survive

We are now in an era where we must make transport more sustainable and less environmentally harmful. This means much more use of rail especially for freight. You only get one chance with a new freight flow or change of contract, and the rail capacity has to be there, or achievable quickly. This applies to wagons as well as track capacity, terminals and drivers.

Passenger traffic may take time to recover from the pandemic and we may tend to travel less frequently and far. The days of "pack 'em in" for passengers such as on the Great Western HSTs is hopefully over [even Moir Lockhead eventually conceded that that had been a mistake], but longer trains with the same frequency as in 2019 may still be needed to allow for more socially acceptable "distancing" of passengers.

There is a new urgency to strategic planning for the railway in Scotland. STPR2 was conceived for a different era. It would be helpful if it could be quickly finished off, with its CP6 proposals made known. **Might the focus then turn to a new dynamic, based on a firmer Government policy on what the Climate Emergency really means for transport, and transport budgets reassessed to underpin the greater role for the railway in supplying future logistic needs?**

Postscript

Sadly, a week after the above was written, we had the dreadful derailment at Carmont south of Stonehaven. It will likely mean closure of the line for more than two weeks. Aberdeen will be effectively cut off by rail. The only possible diversion is the long way round by Inverness. As discussed above, there is very little spare capacity to bring trains that way because much of both the HML from Perth to Inverness, and the Inverness to Aberdeen line is single track. These lines are at full capacity and badly need the doubling discussed above. Stranded units and freight trains have been running this way with severe delays on both lines and consequent cancellations of some Inverness to Elgin local services.

Richard Ardern

TIMBER TRIAL

FoFNL member, Niall Laybourne, captured the start of the *Branchliner* trial, on 3-4 August, the first non-nuclear freight loaded at Georgemas Junction for around 16 years.



[www](#)

MORE FREIGHT ON THE FAR NORTH LINE!

A six-week trial of moving timber by rail from Georgemas Junction to Inverness, for transfer to the nearby Norbord factory, began in the first week of August. This marks a major milestone in the work undertaken over several years by Frank Roach of HITRANS [Highlands & Islands Transport Partnership] on the '*Branchliner*' project.

Around fifteen trains are planned to run over a six-week period, and other loading points at Thurso, Lairg and Kyle of Lochalsh may also be used. The trial is to establish 'best practice' for future timber transport by rail, in terms of train operation and the loading and securing of the timber.

The Scottish Government's Strategic Rail Freight Fund has provided £195,000 to enable Victa Railfreight to run the trial. Neil Sime, Victa

Railfreight's Managing Director said: "We hope that it will lead to further movements of timber by rail across Scotland, providing greener solutions and reducing damage to sensitive rural roads."

Up to 6000 tonnes of timber will be carried, which will save around 250 long-distance lorry movements totalling 55,000 lorry miles.

Anne MacKenzie, Senior Route Freight Manager for Network Rail Scotland, said: "We are confident that this trial will demonstrate that rail is a viable and environmentally sustainable way to transport timber, and are delighted to have worked closely with our rail freight industry partners in supporting this co-operative venture."

It is hoped that a successful trial will help convince Norbord to reinstate its lost rail connection to the Inverness-Aberdeen line.

Ian Budd

Before Arrival: Timber waits to be loaded at Georgemas Junction.





[Right] 37516 and 37669 in charge: The loaded train came to just under 800 tonnes behind the locos.



[Above] Loading on day of departure: Straps are tightened, as more timber is loaded onto the 14 BTA wagons.



[Below] Sunshine and logs: The locos lead their train through the large S-curve south of Kinbrace, crossing the River Helmsdale.



FREIGHT LINES

The ongoing timber trial on the Far North Line has focused all our minds on the need to get as much freight onto rail as possible. There is currently a lot of discussion about how this can be achieved and there are many ideas in play.

Another trial of a new freight flow, this time between Scotland and England, has been running this summer. The Colas Rail train of tankers operates overnight from Aberdeen Waterloo to Spalding in Lincolnshire, 500 miles away. It carries calcium carbonate slurry, originally from Norway, for use in the manufacture of high-quality paper. On arrival in Spalding the product is unloaded and transferred to road tankers for the remaining 25 miles to King's Lynn. Unfortunately the goods sidings there have been closed.

A survey of media reports turned up some other interesting items:

High-Speed Rail and Scotland - a report by Greengauge 21, commissioned by the High-Speed Rail Group, proposes the reopening of the remainder of the Waverley Route and using its link to a reinvigorated Settle & Carlisle Line, partly to increase freight capacity between Scotland and England. It also contains many other radical suggestions, such as adding dynamic freight loops to the West and East Coast main lines, and building new segregated freight lines parallel with the ECML between Newcastle and Peterborough.

Meanwhile, a different approach has been taken by a company called FreightArranger.

Its website states, "FreightArranger is a newly formed business which uses short intermodal trains to move freight within the UK. Formed from the InnovateUK-funded *F3 Project*, FreightArranger has redesigned rail freight within the UK to make it much more widely available to UK-based manufacturers, retailers and pallet networks."

The setting up of the business arises from a recent UK Government-sponsored study. "F3" stands for Fast Frequent Fulfilment. This is an interesting different angle - shorter trains, more (smaller) loading locations.

Currently there are 65 intermodal terminals in the UK, but the F3 study has identified around 650 possible sites, as only short sidings beside a stretch of hard standing are required.

An article in *RAIL* magazine [Issue **894** Dec 19-Jan 20] explains, "This new approach is based on short, fast trains linked to very small terminals, in which containers stand still for no more than a handful of hours."

Looking at another aspect of moving freight away from the roads, there are three companies trying out the use of converted passenger multiple units for items such as parcels. Because the trains are accessed at station platform level it is simple to use roll cages. On arrival these can be transferred to electric road vehicles for local delivery. So far two established companies, GB Railfreight and Rail Operations Group (through their newly-created subsidiary Orion High Speed Logistics) and a new venture, Varamis, are currently converting stock and operating trials. All are planning to introduce services in the near future.

There's definitely a touch of *déjà vu* here for someone who has no difficulty in remembering parcels van trains and Scammell Scarab three-wheel tractor unit lorries! - albeit not electric.

www

Ian Budd

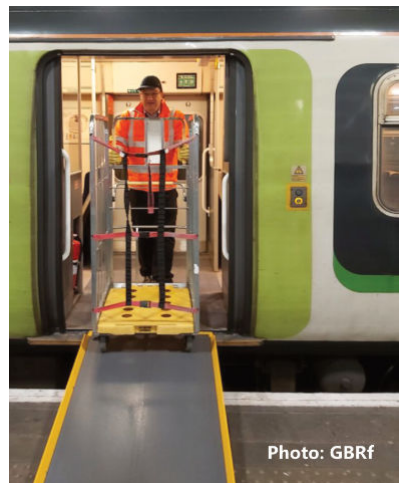


Photo: GBRf

HIE MISSES RAIL EMPHASIS

In the Highlands and Islands Enterprise response of 31 May to the work of the Scottish Government's Advisory Group on Economic Recovery (post Covid-19), convened by Benny Higgins, there is an inadvertent glimpse into the minds of those charged with formulating the document.

On P10 we read the HIE's very brief views on transport. It stresses that "*addressing long-standing transport constraints must also continue to be at the forefront if the economy of the Highlands and Islands is to rebound strongly. Acute issues such as ferry disruption, the fragility of air links and the resilience and reliability of strategic roads can have a significant impact on residents' lives and the operation of businesses. Enhancing growth and productivity also requires reduced journey times from the Highlands and Islands to Scotland's main economic centres. Scottish Government's commitments to deliver the A9 and A96 dualling programmes along with an appropriate network of electric charging points will be hugely important in supporting inclusive growth and aiding recovery in the regional economy over the long term.*"

The next bullet point is concerned with infrastructure investments needed to drive the decarbonisation of transport, and contains the only reference to rail: "electric and hydrogen powered trains."

There is no mention, at any point, of the Victorian railway infrastructure which needs to be upgraded to provide a fast and frequent enough service to achieve modal shift away from road transport.

It clearly didn't occur to the response writer of the organisation, whose declared purpose and priorities are "making our region the best place to live, work, study and invest", that there is such a glaring deficiency in the area's rail network as a single-track-with-passing-places "Main Line". The Highland Main Line joins a large part of its constituency to the rest of Scotland and the UK.

Ian Budd

CO₂ SAVINGS WIPED OUT BY NEW ROADS

| This letter appeared in the Press & Journal on 13 July 2020

SIR, - A report just out by the environmental consultancy, Transport for Quality of Life - using data collected by Highways England - has indicated that the vast majority of emission cuts from electric cars will be wiped out by new road-building.

The UK Government says vehicle emissions per mile will fall as zero-emissions cars take over Britain's roads, but the report says that 80% of the CO₂ savings from clean cars will be negated by the £27 bn planned roads programme.

In a second study, the Green Alliance reported on how best to achieve the UK's climate targets. Road building came out of that as poor value for money, compared to improving broadband infrastructure, cycle facilities, railway and public transport improvements and remote-working hubs.

Both Westminster and Holyrood have indicated they are following a "green recovery" route, but there is no indication this is likely. The Scottish Government still have expensive and environmentally damaging dualling projects for the A96 and A9 on the table. Why is this the case?

If Scotland is going to be seen as a leading figure in the new "green economy", and as the host for the delayed COP26 Conference next year, policies need to change.

If creating jobs and getting people back to work is the priority, the money would be far better used in constructing new hospitals and extending our schools to better cope with social distancing.

When the next emergency occurs, and it will, we have to be better prepared.

Les Bruce, Gamekeepers Cottage, Logie Elphinstone, Pitcaple

TOUGH ON CARBON EMISSIONS

This article first appeared in The Scotsman on 5 June 2020 and is reprinted with permission.

If the coronavirus didn't monopolise all your attention in March, you may have seen that the UK Government published "Decarbonising Transport Setting the Challenge". This document will shape the UK Government's Transport Decarbonisation Plan (TDP) for how the transport sector should reach net zero. This is being prepared in advance of the UK hosting the UN's annual climate change conference COP26 in Glasgow in 2021.

Joe O'Donnell, Head of Policy, Rail Freight Group, warns that England & Wales lag behind Scotland on modal shift

Transport is currently the sector with the highest carbon emissions. As a result, there is a lot of focus on how each aspect of transport can decarbonise and reach net zero. But a detailed focus on how to decarbonise each aspect of transport can risk missing the big picture of how best to reduce carbon emissions of transport overall.

Rail freight has an important role to play here. It is already the best way to decarbonise freight on land over long distances. It emits about 25 per cent of the gases with global warming potential of road freight for the equivalent journey. So, given that there is this huge 75 per cent carbon emission saving to be made today — even with using diesel locomotives — it seems obvious that this should be a central plank of any plan to decarbonise the transport of goods.

However, this is not what is currently envisaged for the TDP. The strategic priorities identified fail to mention rail freight at all — risking rail freight's proven role in decarbonisation falling through the cracks. To avoid this, our response suggests rail freight's inclusion in the "movement of goods" strategic priority and giving rail freight a representative on the new Net Zero Transport Council.

The Government states it will "take on a

leadership role and work closely with other countries to...give a clear signal...that the transition to zero emission transport technologies is really happening". However, the UK has not yet taken that leadership role on the decarbonisation of freight. The EU's Green Deal clearly states that as "a matter of priority, a substantial part of the 75 per cent of inland freight carried today by road should shift onto rail and inland waterways". To be truly world leading on decarbonisation, the UK Government should, as a minimum, match the EU's commitment.

It is disappointing that there is no indication that the Government will state what level of modal shift it wants to see from road to rail and water in the plan. Our response urges the Government to ensure that either the cross-modal freight strategy which will be published later this year or the TDP should set out a target for modal shift and include it within a TDP strategic priority. Achieving modal shift has challenges, but any level of modal shift will reduce carbon emissions and should be pursued. Setting a modal shift target would help achieve this.

England has already fallen behind Scotland in this respect where there is a 7.5 per cent rail freight growth target. The document states that "whilst the Climate Change Act 2008 and the commitment to reaching net zero by 2050 is UK-wide, some levers to cut emissions from transport may be held and best implemented by the devolved administrations" and that the Government will acknowledge "the positive steps already taken towards implementing a clean transport system". However, it does not seem to do so. The steps taken by devolved administrations such as Scotland's rail freight growth target or the availability of the freight facilities grants (withdrawn in England) are not listed as current policies relating to rail freight.

We have urged the Government to ensure that the devolved administrations' policies are clearly reflected in the final text of the Transport Decarbonisation Plan. It would be strange to discuss the plan at COP26 in Glasgow and not make any reference to the policies of the host

country. For the UK's transport system to decarbonise quickly and efficiently, the Transport Decarbonisation Plan must give a clear picture of what is being done in every nation. It should be a document which allows the picture in the whole UK to be easily understood. This will create a better understanding of how the UK is decarbonising as a whole and enable different

nations to learn from what is effective elsewhere. These criticisms should not detract from the many positive things the document proposes for the plan, which is at the start of a consultative process to arrive at the final text. The changes we suggest would ensure that the UK really is leading the world at COP26.

INWARD INVESTMENT IS REASSURING

This article by John Finnie MSP, one of our Vice Presidents, first appeared in the Inverness Courier on 24 July 2020

The news that Highland Council has approved a planning application from Norbord to increase the height of two towers at the Morayhill site is, for the most part, to be welcomed. The development reflects significant investment by the milling firm in the future of the site, increasing production and hopefully ensuring a future for the 130 jobs there as well as hundreds more jobs in the wider Highland forestry industry.

Norbord has been investing in the Highlands for many years now and this latest development provides important reassurance for the future of good-quality sustainable jobs in these turbulent times. Sadly though, the expansion is in some ways a missed opportunity. The expanded capacity of the plant will lead to an increase in trucks and lorries accessing the site. Numbers are expected to rise from 340 vehicles per day now to 378 per day by 2027.

On the face of it that may seem a modest increase but in the face of a climate emergency there is simply no room to expand the use of polluting diesel-powered heavy vehicles. Indeed, standing still is also not acceptable. We need to be doing everything we can to reduce the number of vehicles on the road with the utmost urgency.

The likely increase in HGV use is all the more frustrating when, with a little bit of political will, an excellent alternative could be made available. The site is situated close to the Aberdeen- Inverness rail line and the option of significantly increasing the number of goods conveyed by rail shouldn't be passed up.

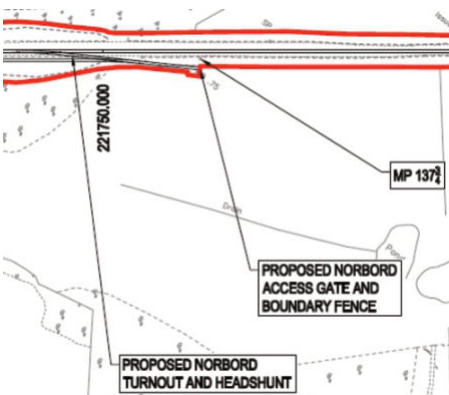
That the company is clearly open to the idea is heartening. It already uses rail freight to move goods to England. I also wrote to Norbord as well as transport secretary Michael Matheson to raise my concerns regarding the likely increase in HGV use suggesting they make more use of rail freight.

I have since been told that Transport Scotland are currently working with Norbord and the rail freight industry to consider options for freight on the Aberdeen-Inverness line.

That is a start for sure, but what is needed is the kind of solid commitment and ambition necessary to really get to grips with the climate emergency. We need to be rapidly moving to a situation where environmentally friendly options like rail freight are the first option rather than something to be explored and considered.

I do not wish to be too harsh on Norbord's efforts.

I have been a vocal supporter of their investment in the Highland economy and their willingness to consider expanding their use of rail freight is positive. But there's no doubt that the climate emergency is real and demands an urgent response.



DUNROBIN TO WEST HELMSDALE

1870 saw the first ever Scotland v England football international, the Married Women's Property Act allowed wives to own property in their own right and, perhaps gaining slightly less public attention, the Duke of Sutherland's railway opened from Dunrobin to West Helmsdale on November 1st.

The third Duke was a very different character to his two predecessors, and he had long taken a deep interest in railways and the way they opened up the areas they travelled through for trade, both locally and countrywide. He was keen for the coal from his mine at Brora to be transported to the markets of the Central Belt, ditto for the fish from the newly established industry at Helmsdale.

The Dunrobin-Helmsdale line was not his first direct interest in railways. He'd been a principal shareholder of the Sutherland Railway which built the line from Ardgay to Golspie, reaching that town in 1868. It was the fact that there seemed pretty well zero chance of any other investors coming in to help pay for the next stage of the railway to the far north in the immediate future which encouraged the Duke to go it alone.

Once the Duke's railway opened he operated two passenger trains a day with most passengers travelling in open wagons. As is well known, the Duke had his own loco and carriages for his personal use. For the next seven and a half months the railway operated completely independently, isolated from the rest of the network. That all changed on 19th June 1871 when the Duke's line was connected to the rest of the system at Golspie.

This was not the end of the Duke's railway involvement by any means. He went on to become the principal shareholder of the Caithness and Sutherland railway of 1874. Perhaps not surprisingly, he later became chairman of the Highland Railway.

Daniel Brittain-Catlin

DINGWALL TO STROME FERRY

The first section of the Dingwall & Skye Railway's branch from Dingwall to Stromeferry opened to goods and passengers on 5 and 19 August 1870 respectively. The construction had been seriously delayed by the objections of a local landowner who succeeded in having the route diverted away from his property - at the cost of depriving nearby Strathpeffer of a railway for the time being. Ironically Sir William MacKenzie died before the opening of the line.



The railway was operated from the outset by the Highland Railway and absorbed into it in 1880. It was not until 1897 that Kyle of Lochalsh, the original destination of the line, was reached.

In a modern context, FoFNL is delighted to have also made a contribution to the Kyle Line by campaigning successfully for the construction of the Lentrán Loop south of Dingwall.

Ian Budd

CHURCHILL BARRIERS 75TH ANNIVERSARY

12 May 2020 was the 75th anniversary of the opening of the Churchill Barriers that link Burray and South Ronaldsay to the Orkney mainland via Lamb Holm and Glimps Holm. COVID-19 caused the postponement of a programme of events to mark the occasion, including the unveiling of a plaque. An article, written by engineer John Andrew and historical researcher Moya McDonald, was published in the Orkney International Science Festival's

One of the many locos used
© Orkney Library and Archive



online magazine *Frontiers*, looking back at the scale of the achievement.

As FoFNL has always regarded Orkney as the 'northern end' of the Far North Line, any items including the use of railways on the islands spark special interest. The full article is well worth a read and can be found at <http://frontiersmagazine.org/75-years-of-the-churchill-barriers/>.

Building the Churchill Barriers was a massive project which took over four years to complete, with a workforce of around 2000 including several hundred Italian POWs. Their arrival early in 1942, changed the nature of the project due to the Geneva Convention prohibiting POWs carrying out war work. Originally planned to block the channels and prevent U-boat attacks on Scapa Flow it became an ambitious plan to build a roadway linking South Ronaldsay and Burray with the Orkney Mainland, changing forever life in these islands.

The following excerpts from the article give an impression of the scale of the project:

"Nearly £350,000 (£16m in today's money) was spent on plant and equipment for the construction of the works. This included twenty-four cranes from 3 tons to 10 tons capacity; nineteen excavators ranging from 3/8 cubic yard to 1¼ cubic yards; sixteen crushers, fifty-one lorries and twelve dumper trucks. The floating plant included two steam-tugs; two steam drifters; a diesel tanker; four launches; a 350-ton hulk and seven barges. There were also the five electrically powered cableways; two at Kirk Sound, east and west and one each at Skerry, Weddel and Water Sounds. The project also involved the laying of an extensive railway network with fifty-eight locomotives of 2-foot and 3-foot gauges and 260 wagons of all classes operating to shift the heavy materials required. There was once ten miles of railway track on Orkney!"

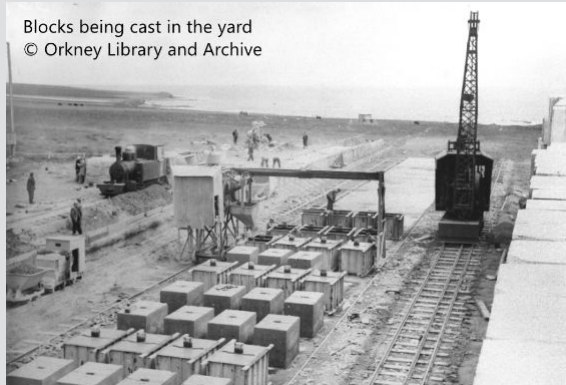
"After 4½ years the work was completed to all intents and purposes by September 1944 and cost approximately £2m (£92m today). They were officially opened by the First Lord of the Admiralty, the Rt. Hon. A. V. Alexander, C.H., M.P., on 12 May 1945, connecting South Ronaldsay and Burray by road with the Mainland and changing life in Orkney forever."

For those interested in Orkney railways, there is a small quantity of rail-related exhibits at the Scapa Flow Museum in Lyness, as featured on the back cover of *FNE 69*, September 2016. The museum is currently closed for renovation, see www.orkney.com/listings/scapa-flow-museum for progress.

[www](http://www.orkney.com)

Ian Budd

Blocks being cast in the yard
© Orkney Library and Archive



DALMORE MYSTERY SOLVED



Photo: Wayne O. Abbott. See www.fofnl.org.uk/fne80.php for larger versions of these pictures.

In the **May** issue of *FNE* we published a fascinating article about the WWI use of Dalmore Distillery as an assembly site for the mines which were to be deployed to construct the Northern Barrage between Orkney and Norway to contain the German Navy.

A branch line was built and various locomotives were seconded from other parts of the UK. Among the photographs we published was a shot of an unidentified Hull & Barnsley Railway 0-6-0T with its number painted out.

One of our members, Ian Watson, is also a member of the North Eastern Railway Association [<https://ner.org.uk/>], and the H & B Railway Stock Fund, which has several carriages and wagons in various stages of restoration.

Ian was a contributing author to the 1972 David & Charles book, *The Hull & Barnsley Railway: Volume 1*. Having gently pointed out an error in the description of the loco - which is now correct on the web version of the magazine - Ian speculated about exactly what it was.

After studying various photos he was sure that it was a G3. These were built in two batches, by different companies. Ian then submitted an article to *NER Express*, the magazine of the NER Association. John Teasdale, the *NER Express* editor, identified the loco as one of the second batch, built by Kitson's in 1908. This he had determined from the shape of the brake-rodding!

At this point, as people homed in on identifying the exact loco, some further detective work was undertaken by John. This unearthed a photo in the

Mick Nicholson collection, taken in 1922, probably at Darlington Works of the NER.

In this photo, showing that the number 146 had been applied, it is easy to see the four studs where an extra ladder had been fitted in front of the nearside front wheel. The cracked state of the buffer beam can also be seen in both photos. The locomotive became LNER J75 No. 2527 on 29 September 1924, during General Repair at Darlington. The last J75 was scrapped in 1939. As Ian Watson says, "All we need now is the name of the H & B driver who went with the engine!"

By way of a postscript, John Teasdale mentioned that he's been unable to identify the 0-4-0ST in the picture next to 146. As it doesn't seem to have belonged to the distillery it may have been brought in to aid construction of the facility...

Does anyone know??

Although FoFNL is not a railway enthusiasts' organisation, I thought this sequel was so beautifully geeky that it had to be told!

[www](http://www.fofnl.org.uk)

Ian Budd



ROYAL TRAIN FROM INVERSHIN

The Duke of Edinburgh boarded the Royal Train at Invershin at 21:30 on Thursday 9 June 1966 to travel to an engagement in Manchester the next day which was his birthday. I am starting to write this article exactly 54 years later. Tomorrow will be the Duke's 99th birthday.

Researchers are led down many interesting paths often into subjects different from the starting point. My starting point was curiosity to know more about Mohammed Ayub who, I believe, was Pakistan's first railway "ambassador" in the North. The article in *FNE* issue 80 summarises his time as Station Master at Kinbrace from 1963 until 1967.

The abstract of his oral history file at the National Railway Museum (NRM) mentions him meeting the Queen Mother and that set me thinking she must have used the line on occasions to travel to her home at the Castle of Mey and I was interested to find out more about that. The article in issue 78 resulted. It eventually transpired that Mr Ayub spoke of meeting Queen Mother, not on the Far North Line but, a few years later when he greeted her off the train at Glasgow Central.

In September 2019 I had planned a visit to the NRM to study their royal train files. To our surprise, it turned out to be the first LNER Azuma working from Inverness, hence another article in issue 79. My time in York was limited and I didn't find out much about the Queen Mother in the North. Hopefully there may be two articles resulting. This is the first to set the scene about royal trains in general and the Duke's trip in particular.

NRM Royal Train Files

The NRM Research Library, or Search Engine as they call it, has many royal train document files, year after year. Inside is the surviving documentation for many different journeys. Much of this covers preparation of the royal vehicles at Wolverton (near Milton Keynes) where they are stabled. Of interest to me also are the traffic notices and other organisational details from Scottish Region HQ in Glasgow.

Preparation of the train at Wolverton was

thorough with each department submitting an "*everything in perfect working order*" assurance note to Geoffrey Tew, the Wolverton Works Manager. For example, he issued a memo on 15 September 1958 that the following vehicles were to be prepared for the 19th to bring the young Prince of Wales back to London from Aberdeen: Saloon 2900 and First Brake 5154. [File G10/58].

Replies are filed from the

Polishing Department

Frame Shop

Tinsmiths Shop

Brake shop

54 Shop [Trimming in perfect order]

53 Shop

Electrical Equipment [Satisfactory]

Brass Shop

Lifting Shop

Wheel Shop.

The Prince of Wales (aged 9) would be travelling accompanied by Miss Peebles and a detective. The coaches were to be added to the regular train at 20:30 which would be hauled by a Class A2 Pacific from Ferryhill Shed. [This would be *The Aberdonian* sleeping car train to London Kings Cross].

The empty coaches were to be worked forward on the working men's train from Wolverton to Bletchley and then to Crewe on the rear of the "7.20" [a.m.?] and then attached to the front of the "10.37" Crewe to Perth. [22:37? The overnight *Royal Highlander*?]. Thereafter it would be a Scottish Region responsibility to get them to Aberdeen.

One way workings of empty coaches between Wolverton and Aberdeen for Balmoral would have been fairly common experiences. I can remember seeing two royal coaches coming back on the rear of the 17:30 stopper from Aberdeen to Perth at Stanley Junction on Monday 19 August 1963.

The Duke of Edinburgh's Birthday Tour 1966

The NRM Royal Train file G7/66 contains LM Notice W.P 175 [three pages of foolscap]

headed

"Journeys of HRH Duke of Edinburgh

Euston to Inverness 6-7 June 1966

Invershin to Manchester 9-10 June 1966

Manchester to Euston 10 June".

Vehicles 45006, 798 and a BG and 5154 were involved.



LNWR No. 5154
Photo: NRM, Shildon - Creative Commons Licence

It would seem the Duke travelled north by other means. The standby arrangements for Monday 6 June were that three first class sleeping berths be reserved on the scheduled SLF coach and one first and one second class compartments reserved in the CK on the scheduled 20:20 from Euston from platform 15. Dinner was to be served and three breakfast trays to be put aboard at Carlisle (01:30/32). The train was to pass Greta Junction at 01:42 but thereafter we do not have the Scottish Region memos. It is noted that Inverness arrival was to be at 08:15.

Meanwhile, all was ready at Wolverton. A neat letter in ink from the Brake and Gas Shop signed by J N Loxley on the 6th to Geoffrey Tew Esq stated:

"With respect to your letter dated 24 May... the vehicles mentioned have been overhauled and tested for brake, steam, gas and hot water services and found to be satisfactory."

These three vehicles [not 5154] were diagrammed to work north from Tuesday 7 June as follows

Wolverton 10:10 ECS with 45006 leading attached to 3A00, the 05:16 parcels ex Stafford.

Arriving at Willesden at 12:42 they would next be attached to 3L13, the 22:30 Euston-Carlisle

parcels with the BG leading. This would call at Crewe from 03:03/04:40 and arrive in Carlisle at 09:26.

Thereafter attached to 3S06 parcels at 17:25. Perth 22:30/01:10 and arrive in Inverness at 04:30 on Thursday 9th. A portable wireless was to be required in saloon 45006 and this would be sent to Wolverton Works prior to 7 June.

Separately, vehicle 5154 was to be worked from Edinburgh at 16:34 on Tuesday 7 June to Perth 18:00/18:23 to reach Inverness at 21:30. This is in the English notes with no further details of the train or trains concerned. The coach would wait for nearly two days for the Royal train movement.

Thereafter power brake 5154 was to be attached at Inverness next to 798 and the gangway end connected. Departure for Invershin was to be at 18:45 on Thursday 9 June.

Cleaning, watering and gassing of the vehicles was to be arranged at Inverness. Interior cleaning would be done by accompanying Carriage and Wagon staff who "will also supervise exterior cleaning". "25 cwt of clean block ice in 9 inch cubes to be supplied to saloon 798 at approximately 5pm on the 9th. However, a manuscript note countermands this by instructing "35 cwts, not in cubes." A full supply of steam heat is to be maintained throughout the journey from Invershin to Manchester.

I suspect that a steam locomotive would have been used from Inverness if it had still been possible. Steam heating boilers in diesel locomotives gave quite a lot of trouble. I believe the Duke was the last member of the Royal Family to be steam hauled in British Rail steam days. This was in February 1967 when his overnight train was pulled from York to near Ripon by Jubilee no 45562 *Alberta*.

WP.175 finally instructs that a current copy of *Radio Times* and a supply of evening newspapers were to be put into the Special Train at Inverness on 9 June. [Was there an evening paper nearer than Aberdeen?] A supply of all national morning newspapers and a copy of *Sporting Life* were to be put aboard at Carlisle on 10 June [around 06:00].

From Invershin to Manchester Exchange

I have not yet managed to discover what the Duke was doing or his whereabouts in the North. Maybe he was fishing on the River Oykel, staying at Skibo Castle or visiting the Duke of Westminster? A search of the Court and Social column in *The Times* reveals that he spent his birthday on the 10th at a Duke of Edinburgh Award council meeting in Manchester and flew back to London.

The empty "Deepdene" Royal Train was timetabled to leave Inverness at 18:45 and to arrive at Invershin at 21:10. There is nothing to say whether it first ran up to Lairg for the diesel locomotive to change ends. 1Z12 was due leave Invershin at 21:30 and arrive in Inverness at 22:55. I wonder whether that will have been the fastest ever passenger service from Invershin to Inverness? Sadly the file does not contain the Scottish Region special notice to give us the intermediate timings. Leaving Inverness at 23:05 it was due to pass Gretna Junction at 05:56 and the type 2 diesel from

the Scottish Region was to work through to Carlisle arriving at 06:07.

From Invershin vehicle 798 was to accommodate the Duke and his Valet and vehicle 45006 a police officer and railway officer Vernon Atkinson of the C&W Department in Glasgow who was to travel as far as Wigan.

From Carlisle a Class 5MT steam locomotive was to take charge and after taking water in platform 4 at Wigan North Western from 08:52 until 09:02 the train was to lie over on the Lowton Curve near Newton-le-Willows from 09:14 until 10:08 (while breakfast was to be served) so that it could arrive at Manchester Exchange (which is actually in Salford) on schedule at 10:30.

The Royal train was then to be worked specially to Wolverton and the names of the rostered guards are given. Presumably it would be held on standby until the Duke had departed by other means?

Richard Ardern

Other Abbreviations:

BCK Brake Corridor Composite

BG Brake Gangwayed coach

CK Corridor Composite [i.e. both 1st and 2nd class] coach

ECS Empty coaching stock

MT mixed traffic [i.e. passenger and goods]

SLF First class Sleeper

Current whereabouts of royal coaching stock mentioned:

Saloon 2900

Built 1959. Royal Family lounge, bedrooms and toilet.

Now at Fawley Hill Railway near Henley. Museum collection of the late Sir William McAlpine

First Brake 5154

1924 LMS rebuild of LNWR vehicle 10070. Staff car with generator in the brake van

Now at NRM Shildon.

www

45006

LMS no 2912 of 1942. Rebuilt 1948. Retained for post 1977 Royal Train. Scrapped 1991.



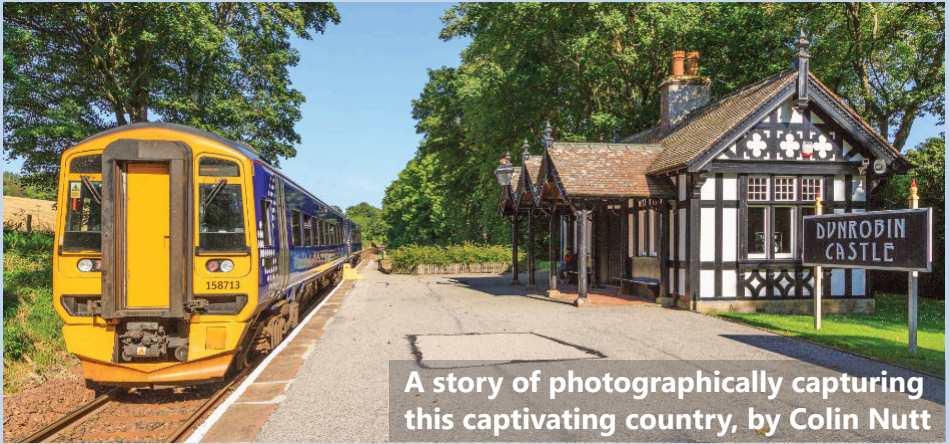
798

LMS 1941 armoured saloon for King George V1. Armour plating removed after the war.

Now in The Engine House at Highley on the Severn Valley Railway.

Previously at the Glasgow Transport Museum.

PICTURING SCOTLAND



A story of photographically capturing this captivating country, by Colin Nutt

- How long does it take to photograph the whole of Scotland?
- Can we make a living out of the resulting pictures?
- When did anyone else last attempt this? (Has it been systematically done by just two people before?)

Once upon a turbulent time . . .

. . . two not-so-young publishers moved to Inverness and set about adapting their skills to the Scottish publishing scene. Seeing a gap in the market for a series of regionally focused photographic books, they set about the task of photographing selected areas of the country. The year was 2007; yes, the year the financial storm clouds were gathering ahead of the catastrophic crash of 2008.

This was not a good year to launch a new business, but the first four books were ready to go to press and a living had to be made. So four books were printed - illustrating Inverness, the Cairngorms, Ross & Cromarty and Edinburgh - and sell they did, despite the mood of the times ('nobody buys books any more' was an oft-repeated comment) and a poorish year for tourism in Scotland. Yet in the face of this rough weather, the fledgling Ness Publishing achieved lift-off.

Against the odds, enough books were sold to keep going and so the next batch, covering another four areas of Scotland, duly appeared in 2009. This was the first 'Year of Homecoming', which helped to make it a better year for visitor numbers, and sales responded accordingly. Shoots of optimism for our future began to appear.

Never one to work without a plan, I had concocted a scheme for covering the whole of Scotland with our *Picturing Scotland* books. We originally envisaged a series of 20 titles, but it soon became clear that would be insufficient to do pictorial justice to Scotland as a whole: some parts that were originally allocated one book needed sub-dividing into two or more. Today the series stands at 40 books, 34 of which are regional, so there is indeed a *Picturing Scotland* book for every part of the country. The other six are on themes such as distilleries and Scotland's wildlife.

Naturally the demands of the enterprise grew. My wife Eithne (a native of Fort William) was increasingly drawn into the business, with a particular talent for telephone sales. Producing four or five new books each year, on top of a growing list of published titles to keep selling,

soon led to clocking up working weeks of well over 100 hours between the two of us. And before long the 'backlist' of published books needed updating and expanding: the first revised editions appeared in 2011.

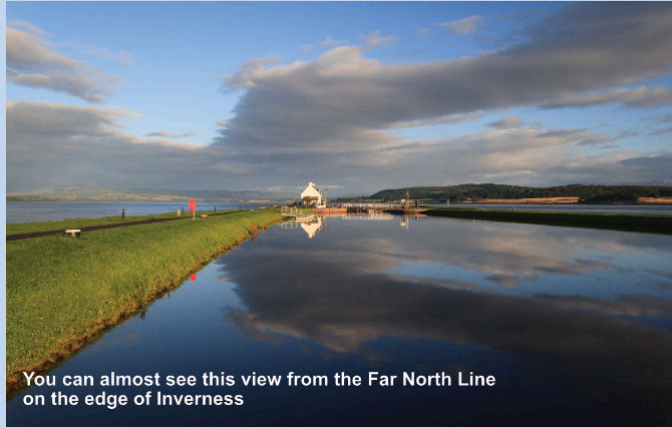
Highlights? 30th April 2014 stands out: on this day, *Picturing Scotland* sales passed the 100,000-copy mark and we published three new books (on Orkney, Shetland and Lanarkshire), which brought us to the point where the series had a book for every part of Scotland. This after just six years trading.

Four-and-a-half years later, sales reached 200,000 copies, meaning that the books had contributed £1million-worth of retail value to Scotland's tourism economy. OK, that's a tiny part of this sector, but we hope and trust that the books are doing their bit in providing ongoing promotion of Scotland: they enable people to 'take Scotland with them' and share it with others, some of whom will then make their own visit. At the time of writing, sales have passed the quarter-million mark.

What do our customers like about them? Firstly, we aim for high production values - good pictures and a connecting 'trickle of text' (as one happy customer put it) that provides a coherent presentation of an area or theme. Secondly, they are the right format for their main market - people on the move around the country - for whom their compact size and good value are ideal. Thirdly, innovative sales and marketing: predominant in this field is the ability to add a customer's branding to the books, meaning their property/venue/business adorns the outside of their copies, adding a promotional dimension to that business, as well as better sales.

In retrospect, looking back at everything that has had to be done, it has been a huge effort! After 13 years some of the statistics are:

- over 150,000 miles on the road
- many more by train - including



You can almost see this view from the Far North Line on the edge of Inverness

the Far North Line

- countless ferry crossings
- 65 islands visited
- about 100 hills and mountains climbed
- at least 3,000 miles walked
- every part of Scotland thoroughly explored
- approximately 50,000 pictures taken

Web: www.nesspublishing.co.uk

FB: www.facebook.com/NessPublishing

INS: www.instagram.com/nesspublishing

Pictures © Colin Nutt



Far North terrain: on the causeway at bottom right the line edges the Dornoch Firth

BOOK REVIEWS

Picturing Scotland Series Colin & Eithne Nutt. Ness Publishing, 2017/19

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

Caithness & Sutherland ISBN 978-1-78818-001-6 £4.99

Ross & Cromarty ISBN 978-1-78818-020-7 £5.99

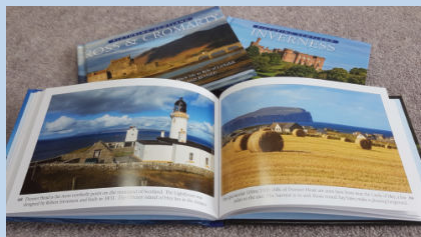
Inverness ISBN 978-1-78818-077-1 £5.99

All books 111pp

One extremely important aspect of the Far North Line is its attraction to tourists who realise that train travel is the best way to enjoy the view. *Picturing Scotland* is a series of 40 books which cover the whole of Scotland. They are roughly postcard size and are therefore ideal for taking with you on holiday for inspiration.

These are the three books that cover the area of the FNL and they give a beautiful insight into what is to be found. The stunning photographs are almost all taken by FoFNL member Colin Nutt, and his wife Eithne.

All the text is in the form of captions beneath each photo, which read as though the photographer is showing you them in person, with fascinating facts dropped in *en route*. Perhaps the best recommendation I can give is that upon receiving the review copies I immediately purchased two more that cover areas of special significance to me!



Ian Budd

A Quite Impossible Proposal Andrew Drummond. Birlinn, 2020

ISBN 978-1-912476-88-6. 274pp. £20.00 [Pub. date expected 24-09-20]

This is a book with a very wide appeal. Railway aficionados will find it fascinating, those interested in politics and social and economic history equally so.

The book begins with a lengthy section giving a vital background to life in the remoter parts of the UK such as Ireland and Scotland at the time of the story.

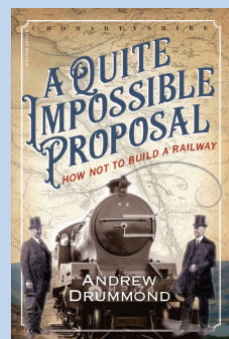
Providing the context of the need for "Better Communications" to north-west Scottish ports is essential to understanding how the desire to build railways came to the fore.

There are some surprising and colourful moments in this introductory narrative. The reader's understanding of present day politics in Scotland will be greatly improved by appreciating some of the underlying attitudes that prevailed when a far away government was challenged - and can still be seen today!

Andy Drummond tells the story in an easy and friendly style, with plenty of humour - sometimes causing this reader to laugh out loud.

More stunning similarities with the present appear once you get into the railway planning details - huge road-building projects were government-funded with "the purse of the British government yawning open for them", whereas for railways the funding had to be done with private capital "which introduced an element of danger and excitement; or, for the avoidance thereof, the heavy hand of caution."

The author concludes with some thoughts about the same area in the 21st century. Many of his comments about transport priorities could have been penned by FoFNL.



Ian Budd

ST VALERY REMEMBERED

The WWII murals in Invergordon Station, took on a special significance on Friday 12 June.

The murals commemorate the Battle of St Valery-en-Caux in 1940, which resulted in losses of 1000 soldiers killed and 4000 wounded. Around 10,000 were taken prisoner and marched from the Normandy coast to POW camps in Poland. The battle was fought by the 51st Highland Division, which included the Seaforth Highlanders.

The fighting at St Valery came a week after thousands of British troops had been evacuated at Dunkirk, and is often referred to as the "forgotten Dunkirk". The 51st was left in France to fight for eight days after the end of the evacuation, until it was overwhelmed by the larger numbers and superior fire power of the German forces.

At 10:00 on the morning of 12 June this year nearly 500 pipers across Scotland and around the world played the march, *The Heroes of St Valery*, from their homes or at small ceremonies. The march was written by piper Donald MacLean from Lewis, who was captured at St Valery.

Simultaneously several formal ceremonies were held at St Valery and around Scotland, including at Inverness (twinned with St Valery), Dingwall and Tain.



www

Ian Budd

AUTUMN COMES

Autumn leaves! At this time of year our thoughts turn to the massive problem of 'leaves on the line'. Every year Network Rail sends its 61 'leaf-busting trains', which clean the rails and lay adhesion modifier, all round Great Britain. Each autumn these trains cover a total of over 1.4m miles.

Scientists in the University of Sheffield have been studying the chemical process involved in turning autumn leaves into an unbelievably effective lubricant. They have discovered that the reaction between pulverised leaves and the iron rail surface produces a precipitate of iron tannate.

The next stage is to find a way to remove the tannins from the leaf coating on the rails. Experiments showed that a significant increase in friction coefficient would be achieved. The research paper concluded that "interventions can be designed to target the specific reactions or chemicals".

Recently RSSB (Rail Safety and Standards Board) hosted a webinar at which the Adhesion Research Group (an RSSB sub-group) described four different rail-cleaning techniques currently being evaluated and/or tested. These are Dry Ice (Cryogenic), Electrical Plasma Jet, Laser and Water. Scotland's Railway has already run both Plasma and Cryogenic trials, and is looking at bringing the Laser system to trial next Autumn.

The ideal solution would be on-train equipment which would remove the need for special trains which also take up valuable timetable paths.

For the Far North Line this might eventually mean that the problem of leaf residue will be solved much more cheaply. Currently, in the absence of leaf-busting trains, the work is done, as needed, by Network Rail *SandRover* road-rail vehicles, leaf fall teams and traction gel applicators (TGAs) on the track at vulnerable locations.

It will be interesting to see the outcome of all the experiments - let's hope this major headache for train operators can soon be treated.

Ian Budd

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CALEDONIAN CANAL SWING BRIDGE AT CLACHNAHARRY

The train for the Far North Line leaves Inverness Station. The passengers are off for an adventure on a journey of varied scenery from the pastoral lands around the Firths to wild Sutherland and the quiet silence of the Flow Country before arriving at Thurso and Wick. But the train is slowing down – what is happening? – is there something wrong? Then it slowly crosses the swing bridge over The Caledonian Canal. There is plenty of time to look out of the window. There might be a ship in the locks to the left or to the right another waiting in the Beaully Firth to enter the sea lock. Then onwards to the right are the houses of the quaint village of Clachnaharry. After passing under the road bridge the train accelerates and the wide vistas of the Beaully Firth open up.

Railway swing bridges are not unique. There is another that works in a similar fashion to the Inverness one at Banavie, near the southern end of the canal on the Fort William to Mallaig line. The earliest railway examples are in East Anglia at Reedham over the River Yare and at Somerleyton over the River Waveney. When the railway constructed the line from Norwich to Lowestoft in the 1840s, there was a need for wherries, tall sailing ships used in the Broads and other places in England, to continue

despite the railway with their business of conveying goods and passengers. The present bridges date from 1905 when they were rebuilt as the line was doubled, and new signal boxes constructed to control the bridges. Unlike the Caledonian Canal examples, the whole operation of opening and closing is controlled from the box, so the signalman does not need to go outside.

The swing bridge over the Caledonian Canal is between the sea lock at the entrance from the Beaully Firth and the two locks leading up to the Muirtown Basin. The canal at this point is 120ft wide and 18ft deep. The replacement bridge of 1909 is like the original. Built on a skew of sixty-five degrees, two hog backed wrought iron plate girders, 126ft long, pivot on a platform built out from the east bank. The span over the canal is 78ft with a shorter balancing arm of 48ft.

There used to be a station at Clachnaharry, the pretty former fishing village on the west side of the canal which closed in 1913. In the past, railway workers lived in the village including signalmen, one of whose duties was to open and close the swing bridge. Even in the modern days of radio signalling, opening and closing the bridge is still a manual job carried



out by staff from the adjacent signal box, the only working one left north of Inverness. When the bridge needs opening for shipping to pass, the signalman first obtains permission from the Inverness Signalling Centre which controls the whole line. He then manually unlocks the bridge with large old-fashioned keys on locks on the levers and he can then release a positioning bar. He leaves the signal box with the keys that he uses to release the bridge before crossing it to enter a small shed attached to the seaward side of the bridge. From there he operates a control panel to swing the bridge. The decking is hydraulically lifted clear of the approach rails and then lowered in order to swing to one side. The operation takes around twenty minutes. In the

past, instead of the control panel, they opened the bridge by turning a handle that was situated out of doors on the east side of the bridge. This older method was quicker than the present arrangement but must have been very unpleasant for the signalman in bad weather.

This eccentric contraption provides an interesting spectator experience for pedestrians on the towpath and vessels using the canal. Two signalmen share the work week about. The canal, especially in the summer months is busy with craft avoiding the stormy passage through the Pentland Firth, so the requirement for a swing bridge is not likely to disappear any time soon.

Anne-Mary Paterson

SCRUBS SUPPLIES BY SCOTRAIL

This item appeared on the ScotRail website on 27 April 2020

NHS staff in the Highlands will receive a vital donation of sanitary clothing, thanks to a volunteer group and the help of ScotRail.

The train operator transported 30 bales of fabric which will be made into hospital scrubs for NHS staff in Inverness, Caithness, and Elgin by volunteer group, NHS Scotland for the Love of Scrubs.

The material was loaded on to an off-peak service from Glasgow Queen Street to Inverness on Friday, 24 April.

NHS Scotland for the Love of Scrubs has more than 300 volunteer machinists across the country who have been making NHS approved standard scrubs and donating them to hospitals in need.

The charitable organisation was created by Mirka and Maja Jankowska of **Mirka Bridal Couture**, Holly Baxter-Weir of **Fabric Bazaar**, and Clare Boyle after discovering on social media that there was a shortage of scrubs in the NHS.

More than £41,000 has been raised in public donations to buy fabric and sewing materials for the volunteers, with more than 1,000 sets of scrubs made and delivered to hospitals so far, ensuring social distancing is maintained.

David Simpson, ScotRail Operations Director, said:

“I’m delighted that ScotRail has been able to support NHS Scotland for the Love of Scrubs – it’s a truly wonderful cause.

“By transporting the scrubs on ScotRail services free of charge, we hope that it will save on transport costs and allow the volunteers to spend more money on materials to make more of this vital equipment.”

Holly Baxter-Weir, Organiser at NHS Scotland for the Love of Scrubs, said:

“We’re really thankful for ScotRail’s help in distributing this fabric, as well as other supplies we need to allow us to continue to support the NHS.

“This delivery has saved us enough money in courier fees to make another 43 sets of scrubs, which is really just incredible. It makes such a difference and allows our fund to stretch further.”

DIVERSIONS

Photos: Sandy Colley

The Carmont derailment on 12 August closed the Aberdeen-Dundee route, resulting in unusual workings.



[Above] 800105, the first Azuma to run between Aberdeen and Inverness, seen passing Inverness Airport on 17 August.



[Left] Only a 'diversion' in the amusing sense: Freightliner 66587, colloquially known as "Pinky", real name "As One We Can", on drivers' route refresh trip at Milton of Culloden *en route* from Aberdeen on 28 July.

[Below] 70815 hauling northbound slurry tanks at Cradlehall on the HML on 17 August.

